

Update on actions to recruit and retain social workers

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the committee with an update on the actions being taken to recruit and retain social workers, and to provide details of the significant progress made since a recruitment campaign commenced in August 2014. The report also outlines the actions planned to sustain the improvements made.

Background

2. The council has a statutory responsibility to provide adult social services and children's social care, and one of the council's three priorities in the Business Plan 2013 – 2017 is to protect the most vulnerable in Wiltshire's communities. Social workers and social work managers have a key role meeting the statutory responsibilities, and in delivering that priority, which means being able to recruit and retain high calibre staff in these roles is critical to delivering the principles and actions that will ensure that we meet this priority
3. In 2014 there were difficulties in recruiting experienced social workers and social work managers across both adults and children's services within the council, with the most significant difficulties within operational children's services, especially in safeguarding and assessment. The ability of the council to recruit and retain was being driven by recruitment difficulties nationally in respect of social workers, particularly in respect of experienced practitioners, and this position was reinforced by the number of recruitment campaigns taking place in councils across the country which meant that competition for these roles was, and continues to be, significant.
4. As a result a new recruitment campaign, which developed a new approach to attracting candidates to social work roles, commenced in August 2014, and has been delivered in three phases. Previous reports to Staffing Policy Committee have provided updates on the progress of the first two phase of the campaign.

Actions taken during 2015/16

5. Building on the actions taken August 2014 to March 2015 (detailed in the Staffing Policy Committee report on 6 May 2015), a third phase of the social work recruitment campaign was developed which started 1 April 2015 and ended 31 March 2016
6. Financial investment in this phase was adjusted resulting in a 50% reduction compared to 14/15 to recognise the changing nature and intensity in activity needed for the 3rd phase of the recruitment campaign.
7. This phase has been characterised by a reduction in the number of experienced social workers needing to be recruited to and a continuing reduction in numbers of agency workers on assignment, particularly in operational children's services. This has been due to a combination of factors:

- the success in recruiting to social work vacancies in previous campaign phases and the consequent reduction in number of vacancies being carried forward into Phase 3
 - the targeting of newly qualified social workers (traditionally not hard to recruit to) to support the development of 'Pods' for newly qualified social workers in operational children's services during Phase 3 (see paragraph 15)
 - the introduction and successful implementation of recruitment and retention programmes under the WHSC (Wiltshire Institute for Health and Social Care), namely 'Return to Social Work' and 'Grow our Own' and;
 - the work to integrate adult care operations with health through the development of 'clusters' as part of the Better Care Plan
8. During phase 3, and based on the media performance from phase 1 and 2, it was essential to target media which had performed well during previous phases to achieve maximum results and alongside this complementary in-house marketing activity was developed.
 9. A range of recruitment marketing activities took place during this phase and included sponsored features, editorials together with 60 enhanced/targeted job listings placed across The Guardian, Community Care and Indeed and adverts on Facebook.
 10. In addition the use of social media across LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and more recently Instagram has been increased using in-house knowledge and skills that have been developed during the course of the whole campaign. In addition the number of blogs from social work staff promoted via all social media channels and accessed through our careers website, have been developed and this has included a student undertaking the council's [Step up to Social Work programme](#).
 11. A number of changes have been made on the council's careers website (jobs.wiltshire.gov.uk). From November 2015, a 'recruitment spotlight' was developed on the homepage for social work, making it easier for viewers to be directed to specific information about working for the council and latest job vacancies on the social care microsite.
 12. Phase 3 of the recruitment campaign has also provided an opportunity to develop strong links with the military. Recruit for Spouses, a locally based company supporting partners of military personnel to find work were commissioned for the first time to advertise and promote social work jobs as part of the council's on-going commitment and work with the armed forces. In addition (British Forces Resettlement Services) Tidworth Careers Event in September 2015 was attended by HR & OD to promote social care careers.
 13. The Wiltshire Institute of Health & Social Care (WHISC) has also been further developed during this phase. The purpose of the WHISC is to help attract, recruit, develop and retain health and social care professionals across the county, in order to improve outcomes for our service users. As part of WHISC a social work career pathway has been mapped out and promoted involving both principal social workers and HR & OD, and a number of programmes have now been implemented including:
 - **Return to Social Work:** a scheme to attract qualified social workers who have been out of practice for more than 2 years or who have qualified and never practiced who need to re-register. A successful return to social work coffee morning was held on the 1 November at County Hall where "returners" were able to find out about practicing social work in Wiltshire and a total of 36 enquiries were made and has resulted in 7 social workers of varying degrees of experience

under the scheme being placed across adults (4) and children's (3) with a further 4 to be placed in operational children's services.

- **Step up to Social Work:** a national funded initiative by the Department for Education (DfE) providing a 'fast-track' route to qualified social work status for those with a first degree. Wiltshire is one of 4 local authority partners in a regional Step Up Consortium led by Dorset County Council. 5 students have been placed with the council (3 of whom were Wiltshire Council employees) and will complete the programme June 2018.
- **University of the West of England (UWE) social work student bursary scheme.** This bursary scheme was developed by Wiltshire Council as a way of providing a further route for social work students resident in Wiltshire into a social work career with the council. The council is currently supporting 6 bursary students, however due to financial constraints this scheme will finish in 2017.

14. To improve attraction and retention a new workforce model has been introduced in operational children's services and has seen the increase in permanent establishment and the reduction of temporary agency staff. This model centres on the creation of 'pods' within teams consisting of 4 newly qualified social workers to 1 aspiring manager. The aspiring manager is a new role created specifically for this workforce model and is aimed at experienced social workers looking for their first step into management; the Pods create a supervised and mentored environment by which aspiring managers can manage 4 newly qualified social workers in their first year in employment, and to gain their first management experience and to support their career development.

Campaign results

15. Phase 3 delivered significant success; up until March 31 2016, 73% of all vacancies in operational children's services and 80% of all vacancies in adult social care operations were filled. This equated to 123 appointments and 38 vacancies remaining in operational children's services with 10 of those in newly qualified social work roles within safeguarding and assessment and 53 appointments and 13 vacancies remaining in adult social care operations with the majority (11 in total) in adult care locality and CTPLD teams. These figures take account of both turnover, and the increase in establishment in operational children's services during the period of the campaign.
16. Phase 3 also saw a reduction in the number of agency workers (particularly in operational children's services) and the development of sustainable models of recruitment and retention through various initiatives and activities outlined in paragraphs 7 - 14.
17. In operational children's services there was a reduction of £333,918 and in adult care operations there was a reduction of £158,722 on agency expenditure across all social worker roles for 2015/16. The reductions in agency expenditure on social work roles are part of an overall reduction in agency expenditure across the council which decreased by £1m during 2015/16.
18. The most significant impact during phase 3 was in relation to retention. Turnover rates in operational children's services reduced from 21.1% at the start of the campaign in August 2014 to 12.2% at the end of March 2016, and were as low as 7.2% during one quarter. There was also been a similar improvement in retention for adult social care operations with a 5% reduction in voluntary turnover in the same period (14.8% to 9.8%).

19. Whilst these figures will be subject to the normal variances that affect turnover in a 12 month period (increases usually occur in the last quarter of a year – January to March) this does provide some reassurance about the stability of the workforce in these services.
20. Added to this is the fact that improvement in retention has been particularly prolific in relation to qualified social workers, with 89.5% retention in these roles in operational children's services and 87.5% in adult care operations during 2015/16. In safeguarding and assessment, retention is even higher at 94.1% during this period and when compared with the retention rate for experienced social workers across operational children's services as a whole (91%), the figure is 3% more. This confirms the positive effect of the recruitment campaign as voluntary turnover is reducing in all cases and the retention of staff (especially experienced social workers) is high.
21. Further progress has been made since 1 April 2016 with continued success in recruitment to social work roles in operational children's services. A further 31 appointments have been made, although the expected seasonal increase in turnover in the quarter ending 31 March has resulted in a further 22 vacancies. Overall there have been 183 vacancies since the start of the campaign, against which recruitment activity has been taking place, 154 appointments have now been made and there are 29 vacancies remaining. Currently this means 85% of vacancies have been filled in these services.
22. In adult care operations 12 of the vacancies left at 31 March have now been removed and have been replaced with 10 new vacancies as a result of the review. Since 1 April 2 appointments, bringing the total number appointments since the start of the campaign to 55, and there are 9 vacancies remaining. This means that 82% of vacancies have been filled in these services.

Next steps

23. It is important that the momentum that has been gathered from the recruitment campaign to date continues, and this is particularly important as we are aware that other local authorities are catching up in terms of developing their understanding of how to access candidates using non-traditional marketing methods, and are reviewing their employment offer to develop their own "unique selling points" to attract candidates. For example we are aware that Somerset County Council are heavily investing in children's social care and this will have an impact on the available pool from which to recruit, and means the current high retention rates may be difficult to maintain.
24. A desktop exercise to understand the competition from other local authorities (local and national) has been carried out to ensure that Wiltshire stays ahead of the market to attract high performing, quality social work candidates. This review found that we still have competitive advantage, particularly in the area of safeguarding and assessment with an 18 caseload promise (which reduces to 16 for ASYE) and a clear career pathway now developed as part of the WIHSC. It is therefore essential to ensure that the expectations of candidates, in terms of the current Wiltshire employment, offer continues to be met.
25. The success of the social work recruitment campaign to date has given the council the skills, knowledge and experience to develop a blueprint to continue the campaign with less reliance on significant financial investment and external expertise. Using in-house developed skills to focus on targeted media, professional networks and further development of the social media platforms will reduce the reliance and associated

costs of using an external marketing agency, and will deliver financial efficiencies. The strategy for current phase of the campaign is to focus on key roles where there are outstanding vacancies to be filled and to recruit to roles which support the development of new workforce models in children's (e.g. ASYE/Pod development), and those key to the progress of the health and social care integration within adult care operations.

26. Marketing tools to support this new approach are being updated and this includes developing a new "landing page" within the council's a new, branded careers website (launched in May 2015). The current social work recruitment microsite developed at the start of the campaign in 2014 will therefore be 'switched off' from July/August (a quiet period for recruitment) whilst a new social care landing page with revised content based on the microsite is developed.
27. In addition and in conjunction with corporate communications, in-house press releases and other media coverage will continue to promote the council as an employer of choice for social work.
28. Steps to ensure retention rates remain high will continue and this includes further development of the career pathways which will be added to under the WIHSC, which will also support attraction and recruitment.
29. Other initiatives to support recruitment and retention planned include:
 - A DfE funded Teaching Partnership consortium which has been formed in response a new round of bidding for 2 year teaching partnership funding formed by the Department for Education and Department of Health as part of the government's agenda to increase the number of teaching partnerships and raise standards of teaching. The consortium is led by Wiltshire Council and involves 6 other local authorities and 4 Higher Education Institutes or HEI's and represents one of the largest Teaching Partnership consortiums in the country. The consortium intends to draw down £5M of funding into the region. This will significantly support the quality of social work students, the recruitment and retention of high performing social workers for Wiltshire Council.
 - A collaborative approach to reducing social worker agency pay and to improve the recruitment and retention of permanent social workers across the region has been developed through a southwest Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC), which includes 15 top tier local authorities across the region. The MoC has been endorsed by the regional Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and is primarily focussed on developing collaborative approaches in respect of children's social care because of the shortage of permanent experienced social workers and high volume of agency staff being used; there is a commitment to address adult social care at some point in the near future. The MoC launched 21 June 2016.
30. Alongside the planned marketing activities and initiatives to support recruitment and retention further work to gather feedback from those starting and leaving the council will be gathered using exit and entry questionnaires. The feedback gained will enable action to be taken where needed and to keep the campaign going forward relevant and up-to-date.

Financial Implications

31. The cost of the recruitment campaign to date is £300k. This was the budget allocated in two stages; £200k was allocated for phases 1 & 2, and further 100k for phase 3. As outlined in the report continued significant investment in the campaign is no

longer required, and on-going costs will be met from the corporate budget (£150k) held by HR&OD which is for the cost of recruitment marketing for the whole council.

32. Within adult care operations the use of agency staff has been consistently low as a proportion of social work salary expenditure. Therefore the financial impact of not being able to recruit has been that posts have been held vacant and salary budgets have consistently underspent.
33. Within operational children's services it has been necessary to recruit agency staff to fill posts in place of permanent staff. Whilst the budget and establishment in these services has increased over the last 3 years to support lower caseloads, the impact of the recruitment of more permanent staff is to reduce current overspend against salary budgets and reduce the proportion of salary costs met through agency spend. At the height of recruitment difficulties within operational children's services turnover levels were at 25%. Assuming this level had continued it is estimated that additional agency costs of £600,000 per annum would have been incurred if permanent staff had not been recruited.

Conclusions

34. There has been significant progress made in recruiting experienced social workers across adult care operations and operational children's services since August 2014 when a new recruitment and retention campaign was implemented.
35. Turnover rates have reduced dramatically and retention rates have improved, and vacancies have reduced across both areas.
36. 85% of all vacancies to date have been filled in operational children's services with 82% in adult care operations. In the context of other local authorities struggling to recruit to social work vacancies, this makes the progress even more significant.
37. The council's overall agency expenditure decreased by £1m during 2015/16. A large part of the decrease has come from operational children's services (decreased by £333,918) and has predominantly come from the reduced use of agency social worker roles (all levels) where spend reduced by £270,380.
38. Whilst it is important to maintain the momentum gathered during the campaign the level of success so far means that investing at the same level and running an intense recruitment campaign in the same way would no longer give the council value for money. The knowledge and skills developed within HR&OD will now be used to develop the new approaches to source candidates and to market vacancies and the blue print for recruiting developed as part of the social work campaign will now be extended and used to support all recruitment activity across the council.
39. The campaign going forward will focus on key roles where there are outstanding vacancies to be filled and to recruit to roles which support the development of new workforce models in children's (e.g. ASYE/Pod development), and those key to the progress of the health and social care integration within adult care operations. Initiatives to support recruitment and retention will also continue and the social work career pathway will be further developed through various programmes under the WIHSC and the creation of a regional Teaching Partnership which will increase collaboration, deliver efficiencies and improve standards and quality of social work practice.

Recommendation

40. It is recommended that Staffing Policy Committee note the progress of the social work recruitment campaign to date, and the steps taken to improve recruitment and retention in social work roles across children's and adult services.

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