

## **Up-Date on Actions to Recruit and Retain Social Workers, and the Lessons Learnt from the Targeted Recruitment Campaign**

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of a targeted recruitment campaign to recruit social workers and social work managers, the lessons learnt from the campaign and to provide details of the steps being taken to retain these key workers.

### **Background**

2. There are currently significant recruitment difficulties nationally in respect of social workers, particularly in respect of experienced practitioners, and there are a number of current recruitment campaigns currently taking place in councils across the country.
3. There have been difficulties in recruiting experienced social workers and social work managers across both adults and children's services within the council. Particular difficulties exist in the safeguarding and assessment teams in children's services, and competition for quality candidates in these roles is very high.
4. There have been a number of strategies to recruit social workers and social work managers taking place since December 2012 these have included on-going recruitment advertising on the council's careers website, attendance at careers fairs and a joint targeted advertising campaign for social work recruitment with children's services and adult care operations which ran from November 2013 to April 2014 with some success.
5. However despite this a high number of vacancies still remained and the services continued to be reliant on agency workers in various roles, and the normal turnover of staff in these roles has continued to put pressure on the services and the demand for agency staff.
6. In response to the recruitment difficulties proposals to pay market supplements to specific social worker roles in the safeguarding & assessment and multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) teams were agreed by CLT in June 2014.
7. A recruitment campaign commenced in August 2014, which included details about the payment of market supplements to some roles, and this has been delivered in two phases.

### **Main Considerations**

8. The campaign has included a number of traditional and new approaches, including a more wide scale use of social media in the advertising of the social work vacancies:
  - Phase 1 of the campaign ended in September 2014 and delivered some success in the recruitment of social work manager roles but was less successful in the recruitment of experienced social workers.
  - Phase 2 of the campaign launched on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2014 with the aim of recruiting to social worker and social work manager roles across both children's and adult services.
  - At that stage there were 127 vacancies including 49 social work vacancies in the safeguarding & assessment teams. This was an increase of 27 following the decision

by CLT in consultation with cabinet to recruit additional social workers in these teams with the aim of reducing caseloads, in November 2014. A further 10 vacancies were created during phase 2 of the campaign due to turnover and some effective performance management measures in the services.

- The recruitment marketing during phase 2 has highlighted the investment the council is making in social work resources to reduce caseloads and improve outcomes for children, and this unique selling point (USP) was made very clear in the campaign for roles in the safeguarding and assessment teams in operational children's services.
  - During this phase the campaign was also extended to include opportunities for newly qualified social workers (NQSW) to join the council to provide additional robustness in the succession planning needed, and to prevent future pressures on service delivery.
9. During both phases a number of recruitment marketing activities have taken place, some based on traditional approaches and some based on new approaches including improved utilisation of social media activities to raise the profile of the council. This has included:
- The launch of a new [social work recruitment microsite](#) in October 2014 featuring information about the services, vacancies and videos to showcase working at the council and links to social media sites branded to support the campaign
  - Redeveloped social media sites using new branding and imagery.
  - A week long editorial on the [social care professional network](#) in The Guardian online in November 2014.
  - A range of targeted job listings in The Guardian (online), Community Care and Jobs Go Public together with banner impressions across the social care network in The Guardian and pay per click adverts across a range of relevant blogs using keyword optimisation and recruitment marketing in job search engines (e.g. Google).
  - A [double page advertorial](#) about social care at Wiltshire Council in the Community Care careers and training guide for 2014/15 is and will be available until November 2015 and can be updated again in needed.
  - Representatives from HR and Children's Services attended the Compass Job Fair on 24<sup>th</sup> November in London. This event was a key date in the calendar for social work practitioners and organisations attracted in excess of 1000 visitors. Wiltshire Council also had a seminar slot at the event run by John May (Learning Partnership and Organisational Development Lead)) with the topic of "Using social media to support your CPD". As a result 46 email addresses were collected from prospective candidates and all have been emailed with information about working for the council.
  - A week long editorial feature in [Community Care](#) online in January 2015.
  - A live question and answer session in The Guardian online as a follow up to the week-long editorial in November featuring the associate director for operational children's services and head of service, safeguarding and assessment in January 2015
  - Emails sent to attendees at last year's community care live event to signpost them to the current campaign.
  - The associate director for operational children's services presenting at the Capita Developing the Children's Social Care Workforce Conference in London on 26 March 2015 alongside notable national figures in the field of social work
  - Joining the national Department for Education "Step up to Social Work" campaign in the region and will have an active role in developing a regional approach to recruiting people interested in a career in social work. This involves working jointly with higher education, colleges and universities. Establishing more structured mechanisms to collect qualitative information both at interview and exit stages to feed into service improvements (e.g. why staff are leaving the council, what is attracting candidates to apply)
10. Both services have had recruitment leads in place throughout the campaign and this has delivered efficiencies ensuring there are fewer delays in moving candidates through the process and improved co-ordination of the selection process to ensure duplication is

reduced, particularly where candidates have applied for multiple roles.

11. The services have been working closely with HR to develop efficiencies in other areas of the recruitment process ensuring data about the progress of all candidates and vacancies is up to date, and that managers are kept informed throughout the process.
12. HR now has representatives on both regional and national groups looking at recruitment of social workers and are representing the south west on the national group. The aim is to develop a best practice approach and ensure effective joint working on the recruitment issues that are affecting all councils.
13. Anecdotal feedback from external people and organisations suggests that Wiltshire's position in the recruitment market has improved. Feedback from candidates about the "Wiltshire" offer has been positive and the use of social media in this campaign has had a clear impact on this. The impact of the campaign has also resulted in a positive impact on the number and quality of agency social workers available to fill vacancies pending permanent recruitment, and these are resources that the council will continue to be reliant on until all vacancies are filled permanently.
14. To ensure service is maintained while recruitment to vacant posts continues and to ensure the council are able to recruit the highest quality of agency staff, HR have continued to work closely with Comensura to ensure the agencies supplying these resources are aware of the Wiltshire "offer", including access to flexible working and the technology available to support this.

#### **Recruitment progress (as at 13 April 2015)**

15. The number of direct applications and appointments across both children's and adult services since the start of phase 1 of the recruitment campaign is as follows:

- A total of 459 applications have been received.
- 80 candidates have been offered and have accepted a role.
- 51 of these candidates have commenced employment

In addition:

- 212 candidates have been shortlisted.
- 82 are awaiting shortlisting
- 174 candidates have been interviewed.
- 13 candidates are awaiting interview

16. When compared to the previous social work recruitment campaign (November 2013 to April 2014), these results represent a 50% increase in the number of applications received, based on a current monthly average of 61 applications compared to 40 in the last campaign.
17. In addition 17% of applications have resulted in appointments in the current campaign and in respect of appointments to experienced social worker roles the hire rates were previously 8% in children's services, and 14% in adult social care for these roles.
18. In addition the number of appointments in comparable roles advertised has significantly increased with only 3 appointments to experienced social work roles made during the last campaign compared to 18 so far in the current campaign. In addition 24 newly qualified social workers have been appointed, many of whom are graduating this summer following a targeted campaign directed at colleges from where many newly qualified social workers will graduate this summer.

19. In operational children's services a total 59 appointments have been made but there are still 37 vacancies outstanding, which are predominately experienced social worker roles. This means the campaign has so far filled 60% of the vacancies (this figure takes into account the increase in establishment agreed in November and vacancies created by turnover in the period since the campaign started). Despite this 22 of the remaining vacancies are for experienced social workers in the safeguarding and assessment teams.
20. In adult services a total of 21 appointments have been made and there are 20 vacancies outstanding across a number of roles. This means the campaign has so far filled 51% of the vacancies (this figure takes into account the increase in establishment agreed in November and vacancies created by turnover in the period since the campaign started).

### **Actions to Retain**

21. In addition to the actions already outlined some steps to improve retention of social workers at a service level have also been taken.
22. In operational children's services the outcome of a systems thinking review in the safeguarding & assessment team in the East has resulted in the development of a new service model which will address the need to promote quality time spent working directly with children and families, and reduce duplication within the system. Pivotal to this has been the ability to reduce the travel time and enable remote working in community areas for social workers. The team have trialled 4G notebooks that enable wireless connection in all areas so that they are able to base themselves for part of their time in schools and partner locations. This will also deliver efficiencies in reducing travelling times and costs
23. The model now proposed also recommends that social workers are linked to clusters of schools to improve multi-agency working and to support the early help offer, and deliver further efficiencies in travelling times and costs. The team have been fully engaged with the development of the new model and both quantitative and qualitative data gathered in addition to social workers knowledge and views of their work have supported this.
24. It is anticipated that the actions taken will improve both job satisfaction and aid retention. In addition the increase in the number of social workers will aid the response to increasing demands, and will ensure that caseloads are reduced, all of which will increase staff retention. This in conjunction with the proposed new service model which will promote improvement in quality of service and job satisfaction, and the creative use of IT and direct work with children and families is likely to support the attraction of candidates for vacant roles.
25. In adult social care work is underway to review the role of the social worker in response to the changing demands on the service in relation to the Care Act, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards/Best Interests Assessor work and a significant increase in safeguarding issues.
26. Work to improve the retention of social workers has been progressing on the development of an academy for health and social care. The purpose of WHISC (Wiltshire Institute for Health & Social Care) 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.
27. The Institute will do this by developing clear learning pathways for key roles, including a range of learning and development options, improved support for newly qualified staff including the provision of consistent, high quality support that they will need in their first year of employment to become confident and skilled practitioners and strong links with local higher education (HE) institutions and new partners to ensure a steady flow of high calibre, newly qualified professionals into the workforce. This will also provide

opportunities for senior staff to support HEs with the delivery of degree course content.

## Lessons Learnt

28. The campaign has been more successful than previous ones. This is because of a number of different approaches deployed and a recognition of moving away from traditional recruitment approaches to one that integrates more marketing techniques. As a result a number of lessons have been learnt from this. In summary these are that:

- Ownership from the top down is essential. It is important that a whole service, and in the case of social work a whole council approach is taken and it is not just the responsibility of one person or team within a service, not just the responsibility of one service.
- Communication within the service is key so all staff understand the approaches being taken and can support the messages in conversation with prospective candidates and as part of professional networking
- A single point of contact is available within the service and that greater capacity to support this is made available in HR, to ensure candidates are engaged in the process at the earliest opportunity, and to ensure effective communication and consistency throughout the process.
- Any USP's about the job, service or council are identified at the outset and used to attract interest as a key marketing tool (maximum caseloads of 18 and technology to support efficient working are two examples).
- The employment offer the council is marketing is clearly demonstrated, including the USP's identified, and that information for candidates that would influence their decision to apply is easy to find and in one place.
- The employer value proposition (EVP) research confirmed that the council needs to move away from a branding about lifestyle to one that moved to the workplace, work to develop the EVP and from the campaign suggests that prospective candidates aren't just looking to move to Wiltshire because of the fantastic landscape, scenery and pace of life but are interested in the working environment in the culture and vision of the organisation.
- The use of videos to showcase the working environment, culture and USP's about the services is important, but should be for a maximum of 3 minutes per video to ensure interest is maintained.
- The use of social media to reinforce the USP's is key and the development of a greater presence across social media is now critical, as well as being a cost effective way to market job opportunities. This includes some of the less well known, but growing areas of social media and it is important that the council are engaged in these areas early on.
- The soft information gathered from candidates at interview and staff leaving the council is used to continually feed into improvements.
- Promotion is key; how the council sells the employment offer via the various media, including word of mouth, can positively impact on the reputation and perception of candidates about Wiltshire as an employer.
- The use of analytics and market intelligence is important as this can ensure the marketing is tailored to get the maximum interest and increase.
- There is no difficulty in attracting newly qualified social workers. 24 have been recruited as part of this campaign and steps will now be taken to recruit annually with a campaign targeted at colleges during March each year to ensure the council is able to appoint the most talented students. This will support effective succession planning and the prevention of future difficulties in recruiting experienced social workers.
- Many roles of the council cannot be filled locally and a presence both nationally and regionally is a key to the council being able to attract and recruit talented candidates. Research confirms that current graduates are more mobile when it comes to career progression than previous generations. This requires more innovation in terms of

marketing the employment offer as the competition for jobs is increasing with the council now competing with the private sector for many roles.

### **Next steps**

29. It is essential that the momentum from the campaign so far is maintained to ensure the recruitment continues at a steady pace. The social work recruitment microsite will remain live and all remaining vacancies will remain listed on the council's careers website. In addition a plan to develop phase 3 of the campaign is now underway. This will require further financial investment and resources to ensure Wiltshire's position in this area of the recruitment market remains prominent as a number of other neighbouring authorities also have current social work recruitment campaigns.
30. An annual approach to the recruitment of newly qualified social workers is being developed following the successful recruitment of 24 in this campaign. The launch of the WHISC will support this and this will also support the longer term plan to focus recruitment activities on recruiting newly qualified social workers with the need to recruit experienced social workers being the exception.
31. However the focus is on the current vacancies and the competition that continues for experienced social workers in a market that is shrinking. Wiltshire needs to ensure the marketing continues to showcase the changes that have taken place and are planned to improve social work roles in Wiltshire.
32. A strategic resourcing plan is being developed for approval by CLT which will outline how the council can use the lessons learnt to develop new approaches to recruiting staff across the council.
33. HR staff are being trained in the use of social media, including the development of the knowledge and skills needed to access direct sourcing channels and to contact potential candidates directly via social media, including LinkedIn and other social networks.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

34. Due to the higher than council average percentage of social workers from a BME background within operational children's and adult social care services, further work will be done to understand whether any targeted work can be carried out by way of external promotion. The council's commitment to equality and diversity is clearly articulated through the social care matters website and through all communication where relevant. The recruitment campaign provides opportunities for the council to promote equality of opportunity.

### **Risk Assessment**

35. Whilst the campaign has delivered some success the risk to vulnerable children and adults as a result of the level of vacancies that remain and the on-going difficulties the council is experiencing in recruiting experienced social workers and social work managers remains. This risk means that vulnerable adults and children may suffer harm if steps are not taken to improve the council's ability to recruit.
36. The relatively low number of appointments to experienced social worker roles, and the high number of remaining vacancies in the safeguarding and assessment teams in operational children's services means that the caseloads in those teams remain high, and this is presenting a risk to the quality of children in need work in particular. Consequently there is significant risk of reputational damage to the council and significant risk to individual children during this period as a result of reduced capacity for qualified social workers to undertake statutory child protection work. Strategies to further mitigate this and to ensure

that the recruitment campaign is sufficient to improve the position will continue to be considered.

### **Financial Implications**

37. An initial budget of £200k was set aside to pay for the current recruitment campaign, and the significant investment in developing the social work recruitment microsite, social media and the wide scale marketing of roles in various online media means that this budget has now been spent. No further investment is needed in the development of the systems to support this marketing however, it is currently estimated that up to £100k extra investment may be required to fund the campaign for the next 6 months.
38. The further actions planned will continue to be closely monitored, and any recruitment initiatives not delivering the required results will be stopped to avoid any unnecessary expense.
39. Collaborative working with regional and national partners will continue to be developed to identify opportunities for more joined-up and efficient ways of working (e.g. regional careers fairs to attract candidates into the southwest).

### **Legal Implications**

40. There are no legal risks associated with the actions being taken or planned other than those outlined in the Cabinet report dated 22 July 2014 and titled "Payment of Market Supplements to Social Workers and Social Work Managers"

### **Conclusion**

41. The investment that has been made in developing the new approaches, as well as the in the recruitment marketing for the campaign, has delivered some success and has certainly improved the results in recruiting to roles in social work when compared to previous campaigns.
42. As a result it is now important that the momentum from the campaign is maintained to build on the success so far and that the lessons learnt from the campaign are used to develop new approaches in the way the council recruits to other "hard to fill" posts, and in the business as usual recruitment activities.
43. A number of lessons have been learnt from the use of new approaches and a strategic resourcing plan being developed will now outline the actions needed for the council to build on this.

### **Recommendations**

44. It is recommended that Staffing Policy Committee note the contents of this report.

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