

London Borough of Enfield

[Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny - 10th January 2023]

Subject: Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers

Cabinet Member: Cllr Abdul Abdullahi

Executive Director: Tony Theodoulou

Purpose of Report

1. To provide an update on the work that have been taken to recruit and retain children social workers.

Relevance to the Council Plan

2. SAFE, HEALTHY AND CONFIDENT COMMUNITIES
 - Keep communities free from crime
 - Inspire and empower young Enfield to reach their full potential
 - Deliver essential services to protect and support vulnerable residents
 - Create healthy streets, parks and community spaces

Background

3. This briefing provides a summary of Children and Family's Services activities to recruit and retain children social workers.
4. Enfield Children Services workforce is of central importance in delivering an excellent service to our children and families. There is a commitment to rise to the national challenges regarding the recruitment and retention of Children's Social Workers.
5. We aim to recruit quality staff to Enfield and to develop the capability and competence of workers, in order to offer the best possible service to our children and families.
6. We aspire to have a well-qualified workforce with high levels of job satisfaction, leading to good levels of retention, with clear career development opportunities, managed by effective strong leaders. Building on existing strengths, to develop our training, development, recruitment, leadership and practice in order to develop confident and skilled practitioners. This will result in ensuring the safety of vulnerable children within stable and permanent families and the ability to bring about and sustain change and improved outcomes.
7. Our approach has included focusing on:
 - Workforce recruitment, retention and stability
 - Workforce development

- Leadership and management
- Our work culture

Main Considerations for the Panel

8. *Key issues, challenges, comparative data, costs etc*
9. Stabilising the children's workforce has been a major challenge in recent years, during the height of the pandemic significantly more social workers left the profession than in previous years. Whilst the rate of leavers has decreased there continues to be a trend including newly qualified social workers leaving to join recruitment agencies after completing their first year in a permanent role.
10. By having a stabilised workforce it allows us to build strong, consistent and robust relationships with the families we work with which can make the biggest difference to their overall outcomes. To attract talented workers manageable caseloads and opportunities to develop are high on the lists on what makes workers want to join a local authority.
11. There is a children workforce strategy in place and a newly established children workforce task group responsible for driving the workforce strategy. This group reports to the quarterly People Workforce Group.
12. **Workforce data as of 30 September 2022**
 - No: of children and Family social workers, was 201.20 (FTE) an increase from 184.05 compared to the same point in 2021
 - No: of starters 72.80 (FTE) a significant increase from 34.40 at the same point in 2021
 - Number of leavers was 36.50 (FTE) a slight increase from 34.50 at the same point in 2021
 - Turnover rate was 18.14% reduction from 18.74% at the same point last year
 - No: of agency workers at 30 September (FTE) was 31.30% compared to 28.72% at the same point last year
 - Average caseload (per FTE) was 14.04 a reduction from 17.57 at the same point last year
13. At the time of writing this summary (December 2022), there were 19 vacancies across children and families social work teams.
14. **Our approach to recruiting and retaining staff** - has included reviewing the benefits to working in Enfield. Ensuring that our offer is competitive and effectively marketed to encourage high quality practitioners to apply and stay in Enfield. This has included offering a golden handshake and promoting the opportunity of paid sabbaticals.

15. All social work vacancies are advertised on different job vacancy platforms that are known to be read by the profession. In addition, more targeted action has been undertaken such as recruiting from overseas, attending a job fair and the longer-term strategy of growing our own social workers through our apprenticeship programme.
16. Between April 2022 – December 2022, 48 permanent social workers have joined children and families' services. This includes 20 experienced international social workers (ISW). A second cohort of 10 ISWs have been interviewed and accepted offers, they are expected to join the local authority in January 2023.
17. Our grown your own social work apprenticeship programme currently has eight apprentices with a further four due to start in March 2023. This year we expanded this opportunity to train as a social worker at the council to those who do not work for the council this included local residents. In August 2023, three apprentices will have completed the SW apprenticeship programme. Successful completion of the programme means they will be able to register as social workers, with Social Work England and begin work with us as qualified social workers. We will be working with them to match them to vacancies.
18. Our recent attendance at a national job fair at the end of November 2022 successfully resulted in 31 expressions of interest in joining Enfield. The plan is for human resource to follow up each enquiry.
19. With the success of recruiting staff this year there are now teams where it had been previously difficult to recruit and retain staff that are now more stable, such as the Assessment and Intervention teams.
20. When social workers decide to leave, there are a number of reasons that influence their decision including
 - Other opportunities outside of LBE – becoming an agency worker
 - Work pressures/demands and limited provision of business support
 - Distance from home
 - Unclear social work career progression scheme
 - We have not been satisfied with the quality of their practice and asked them to leave
 - Wanting to move away from front line child protection
 - Childcare/family issues
21. We continue to look at new ways to recruit workers and are moving forward with creative ideas such as The Social Work Hub. This hub approach involves working with a recruitment agency to source permanent social care staff. This initiative has the benefit of speeding the onboarding process and reducing the possibility of applicants going with another local authority.

22. **Development of our workforce is a priority**, - we aim to provide an environment in which social workers are able to develop their practice and career.
23. For our newly qualified social workers we have strengthened their induction by including a Readiness to Practice (RTP) programme. This is a bespoke course over 2 weeks targeted at raising the new starters understanding of what they need to know to undertake the role of a social worker. Since the RTP was put in place in February 2021 a total of 28 NQSWs have completed the course.
24. There is a comprehensive annual learning and development offer ensuring all social workers have access to training that will enhance their skills, knowledge and confidence, between April and December 2022, 444 training places have been taken up.
25. For our experienced social workers there is the opportunity to develop supervisory skills by becoming a practice educator which includes supporting a social work student in placement. Since April 2022 we have provided 15 opportunities to social worker to have a student. Providing this development pathway to experienced social workers allows Enfield to take students from universities and shows our commitment to being a learning environment. By taking on final year students, we aim to recruit and retain as many of our final year students when they complete their studies.
26. Succession planning is part of our longer-term strategy, it is aimed to retain good quality staff and fill vacancies at more senior levels as they become vacant. To support staff stepping up into these roles, a bespoke social work leadership course has been developed. A 10-week programme has been delivered to service managers and a six week programme for Team Managers started in November 2022. Feedback has been positive. These programmes align to the Social Work England practice standards.
27. Listening to staff enables senior managers to understand why they stay or why they may be considering leaving. Listening events regularly take place and are an opportunity for the Director and the Principal social worker to obtain free and frank feedback from social workers. This improves the flow of communication between the frontline and senior managers.
28. **The wellbeing of staff** - is important the pandemic put into sharp focus the need to focus on staff resilience and morale as these can be factors as to why staff may leave. The council's employee assistance scheme is regularly promoted, and staff are encouraged to use the service.
29. Increasing the workforce has brought caseloads down, which reduces pressure. Support and advice is offered by managers and the Principal Social Worker. Celebrating success is a key feature in team meetings as well as creating an environment where social workers feel safe to practice.

30. On the 19th December 2023, the Children and Family's services moved to Thomas Hardy House. The investment into the new hub, brings all teams together in a vibrant modern office. Being together provides opportunities to increase efficiency and better outcomes for families. The new hub location has good traffic links and access to range of shops, creating a desirable location for current staff and an attraction for new staff to work in Enfield.

Conclusions

31. In summary this reports highlights that whilst there continues to be challenges in the recruitment and retention of social workers there have been improvements. There is a workforce strategy in place with a clear focus on short, medium and long term actions aimed to stabilise the workforce and provide the development opportunities that will make Enfield be an attractive consideration to future social workers.

Appendices

None

Background Paper

N/a

Report Author: Angela Bent
Head of Practice Improvement
Angela.bent@enfield.gov.uk
0208 132 0364

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