

Title of report: Workforce Report

Meeting: Children and young people scrutiny committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 22 February 2022

Report by: Senior HR & OD Business Partner

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Workforce stream of the Children's Services Improvement Plan - Phase 1, including an overview of workforce data.

Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

a) review the information provided and determine any recommendations it wishes to make.

Alternative options

1. The Committee could choose not to review the information provided in this report. This option is not recommended as the report is provided to ensure that the Committee is sighted on progress of the Workforce stream of the Children's Improvement Plan and the workforce data provided. Reviewing this information will enable the Committee to determine any recommendations it wishes to make.

Key considerations

2. Between 2018 and 2021 a series of critical external events occurred that raised justifiable questions as to the effectiveness of Herefordshire Council's children's services. This culminated in a critical judgement in April 2021 from His Honour Justice Keehan and consequently the Council received a non-statutory improvement notice from the Department for Education in May 2021.
3. Ofsted subsequently conducted a focussed visit to children's services in July 2021, which identified the following three areas for priority action:
 - Address inconsistent and variable social work practice to ensure that children are the focus of assessments, planning and interventions;
 - The frequency and effectiveness of case supervision and the monitoring of children who are subject to child in need and child protection planning; and
 - Shortfalls in case-holding capacity for social workers, including newly qualified social workers, to allow them to respond effectively to children in need of help and protection.
4. The Council committed to delivering sustained improvement of children's services and good outcomes for the children and young people of Herefordshire, supported by the development of the Children and Young People Strategic Improvement Plan.
5. The Strategic Improvement Plan identifies 'developing a skilled and stable workforce' as a key enabler to achieving the council's vision and ambition for children's services. 'Workforce' is therefore one of the five work streams of the Improvement Plan, with its priority areas of focus being:
 - Workforce capacity and development;
 - Employee engagement; and
 - Retention and recruitment.
6. This report provides a progress update regarding the Workforce stream of Phase 1 of the Children's Services Improvement Plan, supported by an overview of workforce data.
7. The workforce programme remains flexible, whilst delivering on the Phase 1 priority areas, to accelerate improvement in the most important and impactful areas, for example recruiting agency workers to vacant posts in order to create capacity.

Key workforce issues

- Social workers continue to feature on the UK national shortage occupations list.
- Difficulty attracting experienced social workers
- Regional recruitment challenges (permanent and agency) due to Herefordshire's location on the fringes of the West Midlands, bordering Wales and Gloucestershire.
- Reliance on agency workers to cover vacancies (including management roles) and the resulting impact on stability of the workforce.
- Impact of recent national, high-profile child protection cases resulting in increased referrals which compounds the workforce issues we are already experiencing.

Workforce stream Phase 1 activity

8. The strategic outcomes for the three priority areas of the Workforce stream during Phase 1 are as follows:
 - *Workforce capacity and development* – that we are able to deliver safe and effective services that deliver good outcomes for children and families.
 - *Employee engagement* - that staff are engaged in the improvement programme and turnover and sickness are reduced.
 - *Retention and recruitment* - that (a) stability of the workforce will be increased, handovers between key workers of children's cases will be significantly reduced and (b) children will have fewer key workers through their case progression and therefore will develop stronger relationships.
9. The Workforce stream activity to date is summarised in Appendix H. At this stage of the improvement programme, the workforce is still settling and most of the Workforce stream activity is either at the implementation or bedding-in stage, with the workforce data mainly reflecting that through fluctuations month-on-month. We anticipate that the impact of this activity will be visible through trends in workforce data within the next 2 to 3 months.

Workforce data

10. Integral to workforce planning, development and measuring the impact of the improvement activity under the Workforce stream is the need to have a clear picture of the current workforce data for the service (see appendices). Some observations from the workforce data contained in the appendices to this report are outlined below.
11. As the quality of workforce data held by the Council improves and new reporting mechanisms are developed (e.g. through the new recruitment system that Hoople Ltd are due to implement this spring), the use of that workforce data will also improve. Whilst workforce reports can be produced from the current HR system, the reporting function is not as advanced as it could be, and so this does impact upon workforce data reporting and analysis capabilities.
12. Appendix A shows the workforce profile for the C&YP directorate as at 29 January 2022. It sets out the age, gender and ethnicity profile of the directly-employed workforce and breaks this down into service and role levels. In summary, the percentage of social workers aged 20 – 29 (25%) is 8.75% higher than the percentage of staff in that same age group within the C&YP directorate as a whole (16.25%), whilst 29.63% of Team Managers and Senior Practitioners (including Managing Practitioners) are aged 50 and over. The C&YP workforce is predominantly female (86.25%) and, from the information obtained, the majority of employees identify as White – British (65%).
13. Appendix B shows the workforce establishment as at 29 January 2022. Five temporary teams have been brought in to provide additional capacity for the improvement activity, with a further 2 temporary Assessment teams on the way. Some of these teams will definitely be in place for a finite period whilst proposals are being put forward to retain others beyond 31 March 2022. The number of permanent employees in the Safeguarding and Family Support Service has remained fairly stable during January 2022 whilst the number of agency workers has increased as a result of covering unfilled posts and bringing in additional capacity. Almost half of social worker employees in the C&YP directorate have been employed by the council for under 2 years (49.12%).

14. Starters, leavers and turnover data for the six full months from 1 September 2021 to 31 January 2022 is shown at Appendix C. In summary, 5.0 FTE new employees joined the directorate in social work roles between 1 November 2021 and 31 January 2022, compared to 7.81 FTE employees in social work roles who left the directorate during that same timeframe. Resignation was the main reason for employees leaving the Safeguarding and Family Support Service over the six month period. Monthly employee turnover for those in social work roles has not yet stabilised, with a decrease one month being proceeded by an increase the following month between 1 September 2021 and 31 January 2022.
15. Appendix D summarises the retention and exit interview process and themes of feedback obtained from those interviews between 29 September 2019 and 31 January 2022.

Additional areas of work to highlight

16. The below table provides an overview of the key additional areas of work that we wish to highlight, which extends beyond the scope of Phase 1 Workforce stream activity.

Topic	Activity
Increased number of referrals impacting on workload in the Assessment service	Temporary, additional capacity has been agreed and is being brought in to give those in the Assessment Team time away from the duty rota for a period of four weeks to allow them to focus only on current work, and no new allocations. The objective is to clear the backlog and give the service the opportunity to progress work effectively, whilst focussing on the timeliness and quality of assessments which has a direct impact on service performance. The additional capacity is taking the form of 2 temporary duty teams for a period of 3 months with a clear remit and phased exit plan.
Support for Newly Qualified Social Workers	Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) are currently allocated to social work teams upon their appointment to the council, in the same way as experienced colleagues. Having identified that this does not offer the levels of protection from caseloads and the consistency of support that we desire for our NQSWs, the proposal has been put forward to move to a position whereby NQSWs are considered supernumerary to the establishment from 1 April 2022. If agreed, NQSWs would sit within the Social Work Academy upon appointment, as opposed to being allocated to social work teams, in order that they have a level of protection from caseloads and that we are able to consistently provide them with quality support.
Recruitment and retention of quality, experienced social workers	<p>A range of activity is underway to support the recruitment, retention and development of quality, experienced permanent social workers. This is set out at Appendix H.</p> <p>In respect of agency social workers, there have been some challenges over recent months in</p>

	<p>recruiting and retaining quality, experienced workers. There are various reasons for this, not least that social workers are a shortage occupation nationally so agency workers are in high demand and that the geographical location of Herefordshire means it borders with counties which are not part of the West Midlands Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding agency pay rates.</p> <p>In January 2022, the council secured a temporary exemption from the MoU for all social work roles with a view to increasing our competitiveness in the market.</p>
'Growing our own' workforce	<p>As part of growing our own workforce, we plan to start recruiting to social work apprenticeships in 2023 when the workforce is more stable in order to provide the best possible support to those apprentices.</p> <p>We are also working to provide a clear career pathway for those looking to develop in social work and associated roles. A draft, outline job family framework has been developed and work is underway to finalise this ready for approval and launch. The job family framework will form the basis for career pathways and will ultimately be linked to the service's learning and development offer.</p>
Employee benefits, including wellbeing	<p>The council already offers a range of employee benefits, including those that support wellbeing. For example, The Orchard platform, Employee Assistance Programme, occupational health services including counselling and physiotherapy, and trained Mental Health First Aiders and Bullying and Harassment Advisors.</p> <p>Based on feedback received from the C&YP directorate workforce, we are also in the process of procuring Headspace (a well-known mindfulness / meditation app) for staff use, together with some resilience workshops which will be tailored to meet the needs of the C&YP workforce.</p> <p>In terms of other benefits, our workforce has also told us that they would like to benefit from a lease car scheme, particularly those in social work roles. The council is therefore currently carrying out soft market testing with a view to offering a lease car scheme later in 2022. It is important to note that there are several scheme options and that, whilst procuring a scheme is a relatively standard process, its implementation is not straightforward due to the various considerations e.g. payroll, insurance, etc. This</p>

	offers some context about the implementation timeframe.
Car parking	The workforce has told us that they would like better access to car parking, both when working from Plough Lane office and when carrying out visits in the county. As a result, we have raised awareness of the existing provisions of business passes and season tickets. We have also put forward some recommendations for aspects of the corporate staff car parking policy which we feel should be given further consideration based on employee feedback.

Measuring impact

17. The impact of the workforce activity outlined in this report and the appendices is being measured through the programme management of the Improvement Plan, quarterly monitoring of our workforce profile and supporting data, and – importantly – through gauging the feedback we receive from our existing workforce about their experience working within the directorate and the Council.

Community impact

18. Developing a skilled and stable workforce in children's services will ensure delivery of the 'community' objectives set out in the Council's County Plan 2020 - 2024. Having the right workforce in place will enable us to ensure all children are healthy, safe and inspired to achieve; and that care experienced children and young people are well supported and make good life choices.

Environmental Impact

19. Whilst this decision will have minimal environmental impacts, consideration has been made to minimise waste and resource use in line with the Council's environmental policy.

Equality duty

15. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
16. The Council's human resources policies pay full regard to the Council's responsibilities as set out in the public sector equality duty.

Resource implications

17. There are no specific resource implications arising from this report.

Legal implications

18. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Risk management

19. There are no specific risks arising from this report.

Consultees

20. Not applicable.

Appendices

Appendix A: Workforce profile

Appendix B: Workforce establishment

Appendix C: Starters, leavers and turnover

Appendix D: Retention and exit interviews

Appendix E: Draft Retention and Recruitment Framework

Appendix F: Draft 'Our Ambitions for our People 2022 – 2025'

Appendix G: Glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report

Appendix H: Overview of Workforce stream Phase 1 activity

Background papers

None.

Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

Governance	Joanna Morley	Date 10/02/2022
Finance	Louise Devlin	Date 11/02/2022
Legal	Claire Ward	Date 10/02/2022
Communications	Alex Floyd	Date 14/02/2022
Equality Duty	Carol Trachonitis	Date 11/02/2022
Procurement	Mark Cage	Date 11/02/2022
Risk	Chris Jones	Date 10/02/2022

Approved by	Darryl Freeman	Date 14/02/2022
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