

From: Peter Oakford, Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services
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To: Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee – 22 January 2016

Subject: **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKERS**

Classification: Unrestricted

Previous Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: None

Electoral Divisions: All

Summary: This paper provides an update to Children's Social Care Cabinet Committee on recruitment and retention and provides information on the government's proposed Accreditation Programme for children's social workers and the Memorandum of Co-operation for the South East Authorities.

Recommendation(s): The Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the update in relation to recruitment and retention activity as outlined in this paper and the national and regional developments that will impact on KCC's workforce in the future

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper provides an update on the recruitment and retention activity since April 2015 as well as an update on developments in the government's national approach to the accreditation of children's social workers and the South East Regional Memorandum of Cooperation.

2. Context

2.1 A detailed and comprehensive recruitment and retention plan is in place and is regularly reviewed by the Specialist Children's Services Resourcing Group. Progress against this plan has been good, but the national shortage of experienced children's social workers and the unprecedented increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) continues to impact on recruitment and has meant that the target of 85% of posts filled by permanent staff has not been achieved. In case-holding teams at the end of October 2015, 75.4% of posts were filled by permanent employees (compared to 75% in October 2014) with a further 19.6% being filled by agency staff (compared to 19% in October 2014).

2.1.1 The recruitment activity that has taken place between April and October 2015 is summarised in the table below:

Social Workers	Senior Practitioners	Team Managers
64 applications received (52 external, 12 internal)	42 applications received (9 external, 33 internal)	30 applications received (17 external, 13 internal)
19 shortlisted	38 shortlisted	12 shortlisted
11 offered	9 offered (7 internal, 2 external)	10 offered (9 internal, 1 external)

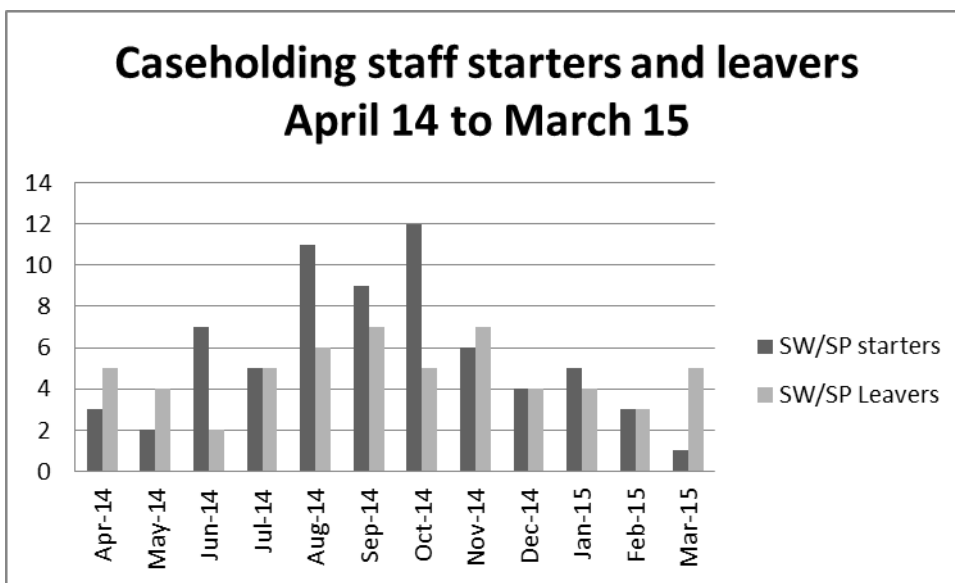
2.2 The key elements of the recruitment and retention activity are summarised below:

a) Targeted advertising for experienced social workers, senior practitioners and team managers has been agreed and planned up to April 2016. This will include targeted on-line advertising, social media, and maximisation of the google search facility to drive potential applicants to our website.

b) Additional retention/market premium payments targeted at staff reaching significant length of service landmarks were implemented from January 2015 and the second tranche of these payments will be made to 32 eligible social workers in January 2016.

d) The new car market premium was implemented in January 2015.

2.3 The impact of the additional payments has not yet been fully assessed but the graphs below show the numbers of qualified workers leaving KCC since April 2014. The first table is for the period April 2014 to March 2015 and the second table for the period starting April 2015.





- 2.3.1 An analysis of the reasons for leaving given by staff is being kept and will be reviewed by the Resourcing Group in March 2016.
- 2.3.2 There is a significantly higher number of leavers in July 2015 compared to July 2014: eight out of the ten leavers in July 2015 resigned for personal and domestic reasons or for new employment. Information gained from managers regarding the reasons for leaving include the re-design of the work of the social work teams, relocation of partners and families and workload.
- 2.3.3 Of the 46 leavers since April 2015, 25 had less than five years' service with KCC. We will be carrying out some further focus groups in February which will include questions about retention, especially given the introduction of the retention market premium in January 2015.
- 2.4 It is important that the other aspects of the recruitment and retention plan are maintained, particularly in relation to supportive, strong supervision, and the continued use of the capability framework which links to professional development, both of which are known to be valued by staff. Recent changes to the capability framework have been introduced to simplify the requirements and enable progression decisions to be made locally.
- 2.5 The ability to attract high quality Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) has continued this year and is fundamental to the underlying importance of planning for the longer term by growing our own supply of social workers. We have recruited 50 NQSWs since August 2015.

3. Children and Family Social Worker Accreditation Pilot

- 3.1 In November 2014 the Department for Education (DfE) published the knowledge and skills statements for the Approved Child and Family Practitioner status for social workers. A KPMG-led consortium is working closely with the Chief Social Worker and the DfE's Social Work Reform Unit to design and test this system.
- 3.2 Kent County Council, along with 26 other local authorities, have been invited to take part in the pilot (proof of concept phase) to develop the new assessment and accreditation process. A sample of Kent's social workers

and managers, including agency workers, have been asked to undertake the assessment to ensure that the process is robustly tested before it is implemented in 2016.

- 3.3 This process will apply to three areas of practice: Approved Child and Family Practitioner (social workers); Practice Supervisors (team managers and equivalent); and Practice Leaders (Assistant Directors).
- 3.4 The pilot will run between January and March 2016 and 1000 social workers will take part in total, including approximately 160 randomly selected within Kent.
- 3.5 There will be three parts to the assessment: digital assessment; simulated observation; and direct observation of real practice.
- 3.6 The assessment will lead to an accreditation, which will be recognised by employers as evidence of social workers skills and knowledge and will provide clarity on the quality of practice that can be expected. It will also set the minimum standards and consistent practice across the country.
- 3.7 As part of the pilot phase we will have the opportunity to feedback on the process itself and the feasibility of applying it to the whole children's social care workforce including agency workers. Whilst it is recognised that high quality practice is fundamental to providing outstanding services, we have to balance this with the evidence required from staff to demonstrate their capabilities and apply this in a consistent and time efficient way.

4. South East Region Memorandum of Cooperation for Managing the Demand and Supply of Children's Social Workers

- 4.1 The Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) is an attempt to work more collaboratively across the South East Region initially, and then with ordering councils, in order to manage the demand and supply of children's social workers.
 - 4.1.1 This has resulted from the continuing difficulties in recruiting permanent staff nationally and regionally. Whilst each council is focused on attraction, recruitment and retention to fill social worker vacancies and leadership roles, success is mixed. Some authorities are experiencing severe service quality issues and their increased recruitment and agency supply activities are affecting the whole supply pipeline. The mis-match in requirements, i.e. over-demand and under-supply, is affecting all local authorities.
- 4.2 The MoC has identified a number of elements outlined below which are design to ensure increased quality of workers:
 - 1. Adopt a common minimum standard for referencing to help prevent 'recycling' of poor quality permanent and agency workers.
 - 2. Use end of placement reviews with adequate information passed back to the agency workers and the agency supplier to determine any development requirements or to cease placing the worker to help to address quality issues.

3. To work towards fully implementing the terms of this MoC via all their agency suppliers.

4. Proactively use their agency supply chain as a pipeline for the supply of permanent workers, in addition to direct recruitment.

5. Ensure that permanent and agency workers are clear from the outset of the MoC and how it is being adopted by all signatory LAs and their agency suppliers. LAs and suppliers will provide standardised information on the MoC during recruitment and at induction.

6. LAs and all their suppliers (whether providing permanent or temporary supply of workers) to refrain from aggressive 'headhunting' from within those LAs that have adopted the MoC, unless for a promotional role. Some rules of engagement will be developed in discussion with LAs for this purpose.

7. Work towards comparable pay rates across the region for agency social workers.

8. Develop a policy designed to discourage children's social workers from moving from permanent to agency contracts. Any children's social worker leaving a permanent contract would not be employed on an agency contract by another authority in the region on an agency contract within six or 12 months (defined period to be agreed). This would not apply to permanent staff moving to permanent roles in other authorities within the region.

9. Develop a regional approach to workforce planning for social workers to forecast and then help to plan to meet future demand.

4.3 As of November 2015 15 of the 19 authorities in the region have signed up to Phase 1 of the MoC. Authorities have been consulted on Phase 2 and agreed that the focus should be on three key priorities:

- i) Agency pay
- ii) Implementing a cooling off period for permanent staff wanting to move to agencies region wide
- iii) Developing a regional workforce strategy

4.3.1 An in-depth benchmarking survey of the pay and conditions of both permanent and agency staff has been completed.

4.3.2 A standard agency referencing template has been agreed which is being adopted by all authorities engaged in the MoC.

4.3.3 Further links have been made with other regions who have developed or are developing their own MoCs. There are strong links with the East of England and London, which is crucial as these are the areas that influence our agency and permanent worker supply.

4.4 Representatives from the service and HR continue to represent the council at this forum and influence the direction of travel.

5. Equality Implications

5.1 There are no equality implications associated with this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications associated with this report.

8. Conclusions

8.1 The recruitment and retention of high quality staff continues to be challenging however it is anticipated that our local agreements will be instrumental in ensuring we attract and retain the calibre of staff that are required within Specialist Children's Services to continue the improvement journey.

8.2 Regional and national developments will have an impact on recruitment and retention activity in Kent and officer involvement in developing and refining these initiatives is important.

9. Recommendation(s)

9.1 Recommendation(s): The Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** the update on the recruitment and retention strategy for Children's Social Workers as outlined in this paper and the national and regional developments that will impact on KCC's workforce in the future.

10. Background Documents

10.1 None

11. Contact details

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