

Appendix D:

Updated Case Study – Children’s Social Care

1. As reported in May 2014, there continues to be an ongoing need to use agency workers within children’s social care. This case study focusses on the requirement for experienced, qualified social workers as we do not have the same problem recruiting and retaining unqualified workers to provide cover for sickness and other short term absence within residential children’s homes. It remains the case that wherever possible relief staff rather than agency workers are used to cover this urgent, short term need.
2. Longer term placements for experienced, qualified frontline child protection social workers, team managers, Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Coordinators remain in place covering for the following reason: vacancies (42) maternity leave (11) sickness (9) support for newly qualified workers (7) and suspension (1). As previously described, there is a national shortage of this group of experienced qualified social workers and competition to recruit them permanently or secure quality agency worker capacity is challenging. Agency usage is currently at 70 FTE and this figure fluctuates, having been as low as 56 and as high as 80+. An equivalent level of need has not previously been reflected in the ASCH workforce but this may change with the new requirements placed on local authorities by the Care Act and Deprivation of Liberty agenda.
3. A project has been running from November 2013 which has focussed on a strategic approach to social work recruitment and retention within children’s social care and which aimed to promote Nottinghamshire as a positive place to work and live. The primary aims of the project were to seek ways to recruit and stabilise the workforce; reduce agency spend; and to develop an effective recruitment and retention strategy. There have been 107 social workers recruited in this time although a number of these fall into the category of newly qualified and will therefore take up to two years to develop the skills and knowledge to enable them to carry a full caseload. Turnover in children’s social care remains higher than the recognised local and national rates.
4. It has become increasingly apparent that the common perception that social workers sign up with an agency whilst waiting for the “right” permanent role to come along is no longer true in this sector. There are a number of highly experienced workers who have chosen temporary placements over permanent employment, preferring to parachute into Local Authorities to improve services frequently after an adverse inspection by Ofsted.
5. There are a variety of acknowledged reasons for this including significantly enhanced rates of pay; the ability to make an immediate impact and improve the quality of social care in a particular location; a preference to have greater freedom over time at work and location; and the opportunity to work in areas and on projects for a time limited period with the aim of developing new skills and therefore enhancing career opportunities.
6. Children’s social care is engaged in a transformation programme which has implemented a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and realigned teams to ensure the service is better able to meet and manage the current level of demand. This work is ongoing and future developments will include further integration of the Early Help offer.

7. A number of employers have tried to address these nationally recognised issues in various ways and these include the following although the list is not exhaustive:
- Recruitment and retention payments sometimes known as “golden hellos” and “golden handcuffs” ranging from £500 to £3000
 - Overall enhanced rates of pay which sit outside of national pay bargaining including market factor supplements
 - Re-location packages
 - Key worker housing schemes
 - Recruitment referral schemes where employees are paid a finder’s fee for introducing new recruits who are successfully appointed
 - Career breaks and sabbaticals
 - Paid travel to work time
 - Flexible contracts
 - Combining with other employers to sign a memorandum of understanding in terms of aligning agency rates
 - Consideration of geography based payments to attract and retain candidates in hard to recruit to areas.
8. In Nottinghamshire, we recognise there is a potential issue with Team Manager pay for qualified social work compared to some neighbouring authorities and we are considering options in relation to this as the ability to recruit and retain experienced and skilled managers is essential for the safe and effective operation of the service. For the wider children’s social work workforce, we have been researching how to improve our ability to retain qualified and experienced social workers once we have recruited them; including looking at what other Councils have done and the impact of this. An update on progress will be provided to Personnel Committee at a future meeting.
9. Whilst pay is clearly a key feature in attracting good quality social worker candidates and was identified as the main issue in the latest social work health check undertaken in CFCS, it is recognised that there are a number of other factors which determine whether people apply for and stay in jobs in Nottinghamshire and these include:
- Non-pay benefits
 - Training and professional development
 - Team building and development
 - Effective leadership
 - Clear career pathways and progression, including staff rotation
 - Caseloads and wider support in work including business support, IT, office space, car parking
 - Flexible working
 - Approach to resilience and health and well being
 - Supportive management.
10. Agency usage continues to be closely monitored and there is a plan in place to have a phased reduction whilst permanent recruitment continues. Qualified social workers have been provided through the managed service since 1st February 2015 with a significant reduction in the management margin and consistent contractual rates being applied. The margins paid previously ranged between £6 and £11 per hour which has now reduced to £4.50 per hour for all new assignments.