

## **Appendix D:**

### **Agency Worker Case Study – Children’s Social Care**

This case study sets out the current need for agency workers within Children’s Social Care and actions taken to date to address some of the underlying issues in order to reduce this.

#### **Types of agency workers**

There are two distinct types of agency workers required:

- Urgent short term need for unqualified workers to provide cover for sickness and other short term absence within residential children’s homes. This is necessary to meet statutory staffing requirements and to ensure compliance with inspectorial requirements from Ofsted. The cost of such placements is relatively low and where possible we use relief staff rather than agency workers.
- Longer term placements for experienced, qualified frontline child protection social workers, team managers, Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Coordinators. It is nationally recognised that there is a shortage of this group of experienced, qualified social workers. The current number of agency social workers provides cover for existing vacancies; shorter term cover such as long term sickness, maternity leave etc and also provide additional capacity to meet sustained increased demand.
- The common perception that 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.

#### **Current position**

- As at 31/03/2014 there were 60 qualified agency social workers, 12 team managers, 2 service managers, 3 child protection coordinators, 4 independent reviewing officers and 2 MASH officers. The total is 83 agency workers. The service also uses a consultant on a day rate through the Improvement Programme to support the transformation of the service. The normal reporting cycle on agency usage is quarterly.
- There are also a number of business support agency workers supporting children’s social care. All these placements are currently being reviewed and where appropriate will be identified as suitable re-deployment opportunities for employees at risk of compulsory redundancy. There are also some posts being covered on a temporary basis whilst the new combined business support arrangements for ASCH & PP and CFCS are implemented later this year.

#### **Context**

- The requirement for experienced workers arose from the significant increase in demand for children’s social care arising from a number of factors, notably increased awareness following the death of Baby Peter and an increase in the number of referrals for children in need during the economic downturn. The number of Looked After Children peaked in July 2013 at 909 and was 867 in December 2013. The

number of Child Protection Plans peaked in April 2013 at 832 and had reduced to 657 in December 2013. Regular reports are received on the performance of children's social care at the Children and Young People's Committee.

- The Policy exchange (2013) produced a report entitled Reforming Social Work which identified a number of themes from across 155 local authorities surveyed. These included high vacancy rates; long term supply shortages of qualified social workers and managers; high turnover rates; low expected working life (approximately 8 years); perceptions of unacceptably high caseloads amongst workers; limited opportunities for promotion.
- 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.
- Agency workers are required to provide a safe service whilst the various transformation elements including the recruitment to the permanent workforce continue. There will be a managed exit from the service as new recruits come on line but nothing will be done to de-stabilise the improvement within the service.

#### **Actions to date**

- A Workforce Development Project was initiated in November 2013 to develop a more strategic approach to the recruitment and retention of children's social care staff. This has initially involved work on our "offer" and promoting Nottinghamshire as a place to work and live to social work staff. Two large recruitment campaigns have taken place involving a wide range of activities including job fairs, new marketing materials and re-branding of the website and re-packaging of the employment offer. This has helped to recruit a significant number of permanent staff - 9.5 fte in November 2013 and a further 29 fte in February 2014. Over time this should impact on the number of agency staff required.
- There are 43 newly qualified social workers in the Children's Social care arena and it is important that these and other qualified and experienced staff are retained. The current turnover rate in frontline social work services is 19%. Work is currently being undertaken to identify the measures which will encourage these employees to continue working for the County Council with a view to developing a retention package. It is recommended that a more detailed report on any proposals is brought back to Personnel Committee once further work has been completed.