
TITLE: Children and Families Social Work Recruitment & Retention

REPORT OF: Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director Care Wellbeing and Learning

Policy context

1. It is well understood that Social Work is a tough and demanding career that requires people who are highly skilled, resilient and intellectually able. Over the years many tragic child deaths have led to Government commissioning reviews and reforming statutory guidance and legislation.
2. In July 2016 the DFE (Department for Education) published its strategy to transform Children's Services due to ongoing concerns that the reforms of the previous years had not improved the quality of work with children and families. '**Putting Children First**' describes fundamental reform using 'three pillars' the DFE identify as significant in the children's social care system as it stands:
 - **People and leadership** – bringing the best into the profession and giving them the right knowledge and skills for the challenging but hugely rewarding work ahead, and developing leaders equipped to nurture practice excellence
 - **Practice and systems** – creating the right environment for excellent practice and innovation to flourish, learning from the very best practice, and learning from when things go wrong
 - **Governance and accountability** – making sure that what is being done is working, and developing innovative new organisational models with the potential to radically improve services.
3. A significant part of the reform thus far has also involved the DFE and the Chief Social Worker for children, Isobel Trowler, publishing Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for Children's Social Workers (to be known as Approved Child and Family Practitioners) and their Team Managers (to be known as Practice Supervisors) and Senior Managers (to be known as Practice Leaders). The holders of these posts will be subject to an accreditation and assessment process delivered through the DFE over the next few years. Local Authorities are expected to ensure that Social Workers working in the 3 tiers described above are ready for the accreditation and assessment process by endorsing their practice.
4. The Government introduced, and currently supports, two fast track training programmes for would be Social Workers. The first, called 'step up to social work', launched in 2010 is a graduate scheme for those switching career. Evaluation of the programme has indicated that it has generated a group of highly capable and committed new entrants to social work.

5. The second, is called Frontline, launched in 2014 and is based on the Teach First fast track model. High-flying graduates, typically from Russell Group universities are recruited and trained as Social Workers. An evaluation of Frontline in 2016 found that early indicators were 'most positive'. The first cohort of Frontline graduates through their graduate programme has thus far yielded 4 newly qualified Social Workers working their Assessed Year In Practice (ASYE) in Gateshead with a further 5 due to graduate this year taking up ASYE posts in Gateshead from September 2018.
6. Both of these programmes involve partnership arrangements with interested Local Authorities of which Gateshead is one. The quality of practice delivered by the participants and graduates from both schemes is extremely high.

Background

7. At the OSC meeting held in March 17, the Principal Children & Family Social Worker (PCFSW) presented a report, which outlined the difficulties experienced by teams in recruiting and retaining Social Workers in Gateshead. We knew that most Social Workers remain in the North East and move between the region's Local Authorities so in recruitment terms the available pool is a small one. Due to this Gateshead along with the other regional Local Authorities are always going to be vulnerable to local pressures such as the deleterious effects of negative Ofsted judgements. The recruitment and retention allowance was therefore proposed on the basis of a Local Authority benchmarking exercise, taking into account some known and some future anticipated outcomes in the region.
8. To recap, as at April 2016 sixteen (16) Social Workers left the Council's employment during a very short period of time. A rolling programme of recruitment advertising for both newly qualified and experienced staff was put in place due to the difficulties experienced in attracting sufficient experienced staff. Although the appointment of newly qualified Social Workers is helpful in terms of a longer term strategy to 'grow our own' the limits placed on newly qualified Social Workers prevent a full caseload and the allocation of complex cases. Therefore there is a limit to how many newly qualified Social Workers the services can tolerate without the need for additional capacity.
9. In response, Gateshead Children's Services had to rely on procuring experienced agency staff to maintain safe levels of capacity within its Social Work teams and this remains the case.
10. The report also referenced six outcomes to mitigate the difficulties in retention and recruitment. The first of which included a plan to enhance Social Work salaries across the board and align our recruitment processes to the KSS. The report further noted what efforts would be made to make Gateshead an authority where Social Workers want to work and remain. Cabinet approved the recruitment and retention package for Children & Families Social Work that came into force in May 2017 to be reviewed in May 2018.

Current update on the six outcomes

Outcome 1

11. A **competitive, if not higher salary offer, than our competitors based on new job profiles aligned to the KSS standard (see also appendix 1 and 2)**. Since the implementation of the recruitment and retention allowance in May 2017 Gateshead has achieved a much improved position.
 - (i) In **Referral and Assessment** there have been 10 new starters. 3 of who are newly qualified having graduated from the Frontline programme. 2 are previous agency workers who have chosen to leave their agencies in favour of permanent contracts in Gateshead. 3 have transferred from other posts in the authority. The remaining 2 posts have joined us from other Local Authorities.
12. Referral and Assessment lost 2 Social Workers in the period. 1 chose to work for another regional Authority and 1 newly qualified Social Worker (a Frontline graduate) felt home sick and returned to a Local Authority nearer her home area.
 - (ii) The establishment of the new **Complex Child in Need team** (CCiN/Edge of care team) successfully recruited to 11 posts 4 of whom came from other Local Authorities, (1 of whom chose to come from an outstanding authority as judged by Ofsted), while 3 were previous agency staff who chose to leave their agencies in favour of working for Gateshead, and 4 transferred internally, 3 of which were from Safeguarding and Care Planning (SGCP).
13. There has since been 1 Social Worker leave to take up a post in a regional authority.
 - (iii) In **Safeguarding and Care planning** (SGCP) there have been 7 new starters, 3 of which are newly qualified of whom 2 are graduates from the Frontline programme and 4 came from other Local Authorities.
14. Retention in **SGCP** has proved more difficult with 7 leaving but of those 7, 5 have transferred to other posts within Gateshead.
 - (iv) In the **Looked After Team, Fostering and Adoption** retention and recruitment has not posed the same issues. The workforce within these teams has remained stable; of the leavers quoted within paragraph 8, none were from Looked After Children, Fostering or Adoption teams.
 - (v) Similarly **EDT** successfully recruited to their part time vacancy
15. In summary the recruitment and retention policy has successfully secured Social Workers in permanent posts in Gateshead with a markedly lower level of Social Workers choosing to leave the Council. Of the 12 social Workers that left their posts 5 moved internally, 1 retired, and only 6 left the authority to work elsewhere. In the current regional context this is astounding and is a 62.5% reduction in those leaving the Council.
16. However, the difficulties in retaining experienced Social Workers in SGCP remains a challenge, which creates very significant difficulties for the service. There is no doubt that the establishment of the new Complex Child in Need team had an unintentional

impact on the service but this has nevertheless meant a net retention of permanent Social Workers of zero -having lost 7 Social Workers against their recruitment of 7. Additionally, there are 3 social workers who are currently working their notice, who have been offered posts in the fostering and CWD services in other authorities. The service is currently trying to recruit to the 10 posts in total, and it is perhaps telling that there has been no internal interest from Social Workers transferring into the service.

Service area	New Starters	Leavers	Total number of NQSW in Team
	01/05/17 – present	01/05/17 – present	Current
*R&A	10- (3 of which are NQSWs)	2	5
CCiN	11	1	0
SGGP	7- (3 of which are NQSWs)	7 and 3 pending	5
Fostering	0	1 pending	0
LAC	0	0	1
Adoption	0	1 retired	0
EDT	1	0	0
Total	29 (21 new to the Council)	12 (5 remained in the Council and 6 left the Council)	11

* The net gain of Social Workers within R&A has been as a result of reducing numbers of agency staff. That is to say, not as a result of an overall growth in establishment.

Outcome 2

17. **A recruitment process that is in line with the KSS and selection processes that provides a solid baseline assessment of candidates that can pull through into the employer practice endorsement process.**
18. The Ministers plans for the national accreditation and assessment of Children's Social Workers (NASS) has been the subject of major consultation, which ended in December 2017. Crucially, at this moment in time the accreditation is not a mandatory process. The outcome has resulted in a 3 phase approach to roll out.

Phase one (mid 2018) will involve five local authorities to test the delivery mechanism. Phase two (early 2019) will involve work with a further 12-15 local Authorities to build a working prototype to be rolled out nationally. Both phases will be underpinned by analysis from an independent research partner. Phase 3 (by 2020) will be full roll out involving a four stage approach to assessment:

- **Stage 1:** individual social worker practice endorsement by the employer – in the workplace over a period of time
- **Stage 2:** an online assessment of knowledge
- **Stage 3:** an observed interactive practice simulation in a controlled environment with independent examiners
- **Stage 4:** a written assessment

19. The PCFSW in collaboration with Gateshead's HR service has aligned all the Social Work job profiles to the KSS and assimilated existing staff to the 4 main levels- Newly qualified entry level, Experienced Child and Family Practitioner, Practice Supervisor and Senior Practice Supervisor. Recruitment processes are now more stretching for candidates at each level and focus on those competencies identified for each KSS. Regionally Gateshead is the only Local Authority to have done this and in so doing is at the forefront of aligning retention and recruitment to good practice measures. The continuous professional development (CPD) offer has also been aligned to the KSS and is intended to contribute to enabling Social Workers in achieving accreditation once they are ready to be sponsored through the process.
20. Work is ongoing in achieving an Appraisal and Development system, which supports the above for Social Workers with objectives being more closely aligned to the KSS. Similarly supervision and performance management requires strengthening in line with the KSS and is in hand.

Outcome 3

21. **A clear programme of development that can demonstrably attract Social Workers, both newly qualified and experienced, to Gateshead because they will know their practice will be enhanced and developed within an organisation that is prepared to invest in their future development and achieve accreditation.**
22. A specialist training programme to meet the needs of social workers continues to be developed by Workforce Development. The programme includes mandatory training to ensure workers have the opportunity to keep their skills and knowledge up to date and are as efficient and effective as possible. Further training opportunities help workers to develop new working practices and to continually increase their skill base. The provision of a specific training programme shows that as an organisation we are keen to invest in workers. This supports workers to maintain their resilience, meet their occupational standards and achieve the best outcomes for service users, which in turn will contribute to improved retention rates. All training and development opportunities are clearly linked to the Professional Competency Framework (PCF) and the KSS, enabling social workers to strengthen the skills knowledge and experience to progress to the next level of their career.

Outcome 4

23. **A clear progression structure that invests in preparing the talented to become future Practice Supervisors and Leaders.**
24. The need to provide newly qualified social workers (NQSWs) with the support and guidance they need during their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) has been reviewed. During their first year of NQSWs will now complete their ASYE portfolio, which clearly shows their learning journey from the point of graduation to the end of their first year in practice. The portfolio must show the confidence gained and the development of skills knowledge and experience to deal with increasingly complex cases.
25. Workforce Development is working closely with Skills for Care, DfE and managers across CWL to ensure there is clear guidance on the quality of these portfolios. NQSWs are also required to complete the first part of their Post Qualifying Social Work Award, assessed and accredited through Northumbria University. Workforce Development have commissioned an external facilitator who is a qualified social worker, practice educator and social work lecturer, to run a programme of workshop sessions which cover a range of topics designed to support them in completing their portfolio and ASYE module. On successful completion of both the NQSW will be able to move through the salary point. The development of this process will ensure we nurture and support Gateshead's future social workers and promote Gateshead as an employer of choice.
26. Discussions have been held as to the possibility of the creation of an ASYE Hub, which could be headed up by a Consultant Social Worker. However at this time we are not in a position to fund the creation of a Consultant Social Worker post. Notwithstanding, the creation of the ASYE Internal Moderation Panel will go some way to more effectively manage the needs of the NQSWs and to ensure that the policy and practice guidance for supporting NQSWs is adhered to by managers.
27. The authority has a progression policy for Social Workers who have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience as well as academic evidence to move to the role of experienced social worker. The aim of the progression policy is to ensure that the social workers who can demonstrate a level of ability commensurate with the role of an experienced social worker are able to progress. Upon completion of a demanding and stretching portfolio of evidence all social workers attend an interview with the PCFSW and a Service Manager from the relevant service to establish their suitability for this role.
28. At the present time there is at least a total of 8 Practice Supervisors, Senior Practice Supervisors and/or Service Managers who are over 55 years of age, of which 3 are over 60. There are a further 10 if Social Workers are included. It would be reasonable to assume that most of the 15 aged over 55 are unlikely to continue beyond their 60th birthday and some may wish to retire early. Succession planning particularly at senior management level is becoming a growing priority for Gateshead.
29. The additional levels of practice supervisor and senior practice supervisor will enable those Social Workers who want to remain close to practice to do so. Gateshead is also supporting a second cohort of Gateshead frontline managers to attend the

Firstline leadership programme provided by Frontline, which is partly designed to identify and prepare the senior leaders of the future in Gateshead.

30. The continued partnership with Frontline and 'step up' also plays significantly into Gateshead recruitment and retention policy of growing and retaining our own. Our aim is to have recruited at least 20 Social Workers from the two programmes by 2020.
31. Gateshead is also looking to introduce the Social Work Apprenticeship programme across CWL, this can be funded through the Apprenticeship Levy and again aligns with the aim of developing our own social workers. The DfE have suggested the programme will be available from September 2018, however local Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) still have a lot of work to do in developing and validating the programme. As an authority it will be necessary to identify the funding needed to create social work apprenticeship posts and to identify suitable candidates.

Outcome 5

32. **Caseloads that are manageable and allow for quality Social Work, whereby risks are appropriately assessed, and proportionate responses provided; helping to manage needs “down”, and preventing them from escalating up.**
33. Caseloads continue to be carefully monitored and overseen by managers and leaders at all levels. There is a caseload weighting system in place that seeks to measure activity as well as the numbers of cases held by Social Workers. There are peaks and troughs in numbers and activities. The newly established CCiN team will enable up to 100 CiN cases to be held and worked where previously these would have been held by SGCP. An additional 5 agency staff, (above establishment) have been utilised to manage demand within SGCP and R&A which has meant that demand is currently just within acceptable parameters. Average caseloads across the entire children's Social work workforce currently sit at 17 per worker, although this is a very crude measure of activity and doesn't take into account the experience of individual workers, complexity of case or FTEs.

Outcome 6

34. **A unique selling point that is rooted firmly in Social Work and appeals to the hearts and minds of our existing Social Workers and those who we seek to recruit.**
35. As part of the Council's recruitment and retention policy it has been agreed that children's social work needs to identify a preferred overarching practice model or framework for the delivery of interventions with families. Frontline's framework is Systemic Practice and the same framework is being utilised by the CCiN team. It has therefore been agreed as sensible for this model framework to be rolled out across Social Work and ultimately extended to include staff working within the Early Help services. Frontline delivered two conference workshops in Gateshead to help us understand the principles and see the practice advantages, which further cemented our resolve that this was an appropriate model. Discussions are ongoing with potential providers with the aim of running a short pilot as a proof of concept.

Appendix 1

Job Title	Salary range	R&R allowance	Salary range (Including R&R allowance)
AYSE Child and Family Social Work Practitioner. Appointed on Grade I with a bar point @ top of Grade I (scp 37)	£30,153 - £32,486	None	£30,153 - £32,486
Experienced Child and Family Practitioner Grade J	£32,486 – £35,444	5%	£34,110 - £37,216
EDT Experienced Practitioner Grade K	£35,444 - £38,237	5%	£37,216 - £40,148
Practice Supervisor Grade K+1	£36,379 - £39,177	15%	£41,835 - £45,053
Senior Practice Supervisor Grade L	£38,237 - £41,025	15%	£43,972 - £47,178

Appendix 2

Neighbouring LAs benchmarking for Children's Social Workers

Below is the current salary ranges as at 1 October 2017:

Local Authority	Salary
Durham	£26,556 - £35,093
Hartlepool	£25,951 - £35,444
Middlesbrough	£24,964 - £31,601
Newcastle	£27,394 - £35,093
North Tyneside	£25,951 - £33,437
Stockton	£25,951 - £37,306
Sunderland	£28,485 - £37,306

RECOMMENDATION

Committee is asked to:

1. Continue to champion the work undertaken by the Council's Children's Social Workers.
2. Note the content of this report.
3. Agree to receive regular reports from the Children's Principal Social Worker regarding the progress of work against the six outcomes articulated above.

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