



Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

Social work caseloads and retention

19 September 2017

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Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee requested a more detailed item explaining the action taken to manage social work caseloads and recruit and retain social workers.

Overview

There has been on-going activity over the past 12 months to improve social work retention, which has a direct impact on maintaining manageable caseloads across the workforce.

A number of strategies have been deployed to achieve the above:

Recruitment:

- **ASYE recruitment-** continuation of the ASYE programme which has attracted 78 ASYE's. The ASYE's take part in a 12 month programme which offers them placements in a variety of service areas to build up their knowledge and skill base and ensure they are equipped to case hold child protection and court work after their first year in employment.
- **Bespoke Recruitment-** to attract more experienced social workers for Duty/Fieldwork and Children in Care. This is a recent initiative and has led to the successful recruitment of a social worker who previously worked as an agency worker in Leicester City.
- **Nottingham City Council has continued to support Children's Social Care by supporting the use of agency staff** to cover vacancies in order to ensure there are enough experienced staff to case hold child protection, children in care and court work whilst attempts to recruit qualified social workers take place. This is important since the impact of large caseloads due to unfilled vacancies reduces the ability of staff to do meaningful work, leads to increases in staff sickness resulting in more unfilled vacancies and less staff to manage the casework. Alongside this there are strategies employed to reduce the cost of agency spend. This includes the Memorandum of Cooperation across the region's local authority Children's Services and the fact that some agency staff decide to convert into permanent positions.

In addition a new initiative is being introduced providing a financial incentive for existing staff that attract their “experienced social work qualified friends/associates” to come and work for Nottingham City.

- **Grow Your Own:** joint initiative with Manchester Metropolitan University providing a 2 year Fast-track social work degree course for family support staff wishing to qualify as social workers. NCC will make a small contribution to the fees of each student and the remainder of the cost will be met by the individual through a five-year career development loan. 24 staff from NCC have successfully completed the first part of the course and are participating in this scheme this year. Derbyshire are also partners in this initiative with 4 of their family support staff signing up to the course.

Professor Samantha Baron, who is the Interim of Head of the Department of Social Care and Social Work at Manchester Metropolitan University, commented that: *“Nottingham First was seen as an exemplar of innovative and responsive educational practice which aims to impact on recruitment and retention rates for social work.”*

Manageable Case loads

In Nottingham, retention rates have improved over the past 12 months and the commitment to ensure we have a stable workforce has a corresponding impact on case-holding.

In addition there has been an investment in Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) recruitment to ensure there is capacity within this service to review children subject to child protection and Looked After Plans but also in quality assuring the work, in order for Children’s Services to be reassured that the children of Nottingham are receiving a safe service.

As a result of this investment there are now additional IRO’s in post that can fulfil all of the responsibilities as outlined in the Ofsted report.

Summary- Ofsted Feedback

Ofsted Inspectors commented positively on all of the work NCC has undertaken to recruit and retain social work staff and stated that NCC was now an Employer of Choice.

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