

Business Case

Investment in Recruitment and Retention of Children's Social Workers in Devon

A Value for Money Proposition

Rationale

The vision of a flourishing, permanent children's social work workforce underpins the service's Recruitment and Retention Strategy. This will deliver improved value for money, improved outcomes for children, and will contribute to the embedding of a restorative practice culture.

Recommendations of the DfE Commissioner

The Commissioner Eleanor Brazil makes two recommendations in relation to recruitment and retention

“Prioritise agreeing a recruitment and retention strategy as part of a robust wider workforce strategy addressing training and development, including coaching for frontline managers”

“Explore regional opportunities for greater collaboration on recruitment”

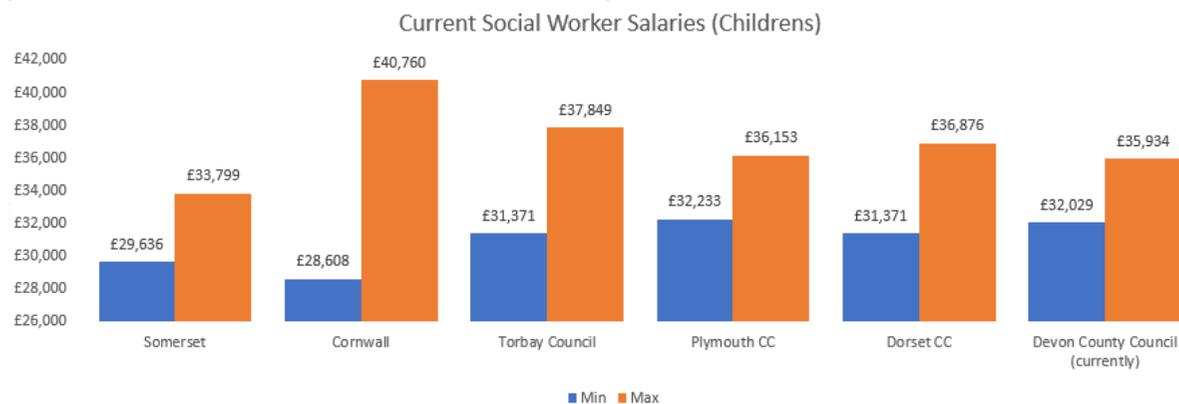
The Commissioner's report notes that social work managers have received market supplements for several years in recognition that their basic salary was not competitive and that discussions about social work workforce investment and development have dragged on for many years. The commissioner urges the Council to act with a pace and urgency, hitherto lacking.

There isn't a great appetite for a sub-regional collaboration on recruitment. The peninsular authorities have all adopted a 'grow your own' approach that they feel has worked well. Swindon Council, having led on regional collaboration for locum recruitment on

behalf of the Region, is leading some work on regional collaboration in permanent recruitment now too. Devon will continue to support regional and sub-regional collaboration

Current Position

The offer to social workers and social work managers has fallen behind that of other neighbouring Local Authorities. This is set out in detail in a report to Children’s Overview and Scrutiny and can be found [here](#) (agenda item 11; Social Work – Workforce Comparison Data).



The table above which compares start/end salaries in June 2020 across the peninsular illustrates this. Devon’s start point is competitive, but we have a non-competitive end point. Post ASYE (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment) social workers are seeing better terms and conditions in neighbouring authorities and voting with their feet.

The list below shows the turnover rate at the end of 2019/20 in each of the peninsular authorities.

- Cornwall 11.06%,
- Plymouth 14.38%,
- Somerset 16.84%
- **Devon 17.7%**
- Dorset 18.76%,
- Torbay 22.94%.

The Devon position has further deteriorated in 2020, in particular in the teams in South and in Mid and East Devon. Torbay revised their terms and conditions this year and we recently saw eight social workers and three team managers move from Devon to Torbay.

Increasing reliance on high cost agency social workers

This is attributable in part to existing turnover but the inevitable corollary of an inadequate Ofsted judgement is increased turnover. This is very costly in financial terms and in its impact on the quality of service for children and families. The changing profile of the workforces between 2019 and 2020 is set out in the tables below, the data is extracted from the HR record system with key indicators highlighted.

	Sept 2019		Sept 2020		Difference (Headcount)
	Perm / FTC	Agency Staff (%)	Perm / FTC	Agency Staff	
Newly Qualified SW	41 (39.81 fte)		17 (16.03fte)		-24 Perm
Social Worker	129 (116.94 fte)	87 (40.3%)	147 (136.91fte)	101 (40.7%)	+32 Agency
Adv Professional	10 (7.75 fte)		9 (7.00fte)	1 (10%)	Same
Independent Safeguarding Reviewing Officer	26 (22.87 fte)	2 (7.1%)	22 (19.38fte)		-6
Asst Team Manager	16 (15.01 fte)		15 (14.87fte)	2 (11.8%)	+1
Team Manager	49 (46.89 fte)	6 (10.9%)	44 (42.23fte)	12 (21.4%)	+1
Principal IRSO	2 (2.00 fte)		0 (1.00fte)		-2
Area Manager	13 (12.50 fte)	1 (7.1%)	11 (10.60fte)	2 (15.4%)	-2
TOTAL	286 (263.77 fte)	96 (33.6%)	265 (248.02)	118 (44.5%)	

2019: 33.6% (96 out of 286) of frontline roles were occupied by agency staff. **2020:** 44.5% of frontline roles were occupied by agency staff (119 out of 266). A 45% agency workforce cannot consider itself to be healthy and flourishing.

The tables below show that the picture in some parts of the service is not problematic. The business case only attacks the roles that are hard to recruit, frontline social work roles, it does not include roles in YOS, adoption and fostering. Managers in the areas where the business case recommends a salary increase are included otherwise the differential between practitioners and managers is eroded.

Adopt SW

	Sept 2019		Sept 2020		Difference (Headcount)
	Perm / FTC	Agency Staff	Perm / FTC	Agency Staff	
Social Worker	34 (30.83fte)	1 (2.9%)	35 (30.23fte)	2 (5.4%)	+ 2
Advanced Prac	2 (2.00fte)		2 (2.00fte)		Same
Team Manager	6 (6.00fte)		6 (6.00fte)	1 (14.3%)	+ 1

Fostering

	Sept 2019		Sept 2020		Difference (Headcount)
	Perm / FTC	Agency Staff	Perm / FTC	Agency Staff	
Social Worker	13 (10.47fte)	2 (13.3%)	14 (10.78fte)	2 (12.5%)	+ 1
Team Manager	2 (2.00fte)		3 (3.00fte)		+ 1
Area Manager	1 (0.50fte)				- 1

Financial Implications

Cornwall has an outstanding Children's Service and their salary range starts low but extends beyond all the other authorities in the peninsular. Torbay's start point is broadly in line with Devon but their end point has been increased significantly, as, like Devon, they are in a very challenged position in relation to turnover. It isn't all about the pay, other Local Authorities contribute to student loans, invest in learning and development, have created advanced practitioner roles to ensure good social workers remain in practice. In Devon, we have had an overseas recruitment strategy, however other Local Authorities, (not in the peninsular) contribute to the cost of leave to remain applications for these overseas workers.

Colleagues in finance have modelled two options (Option one, match Cornwall; Option two, match Torbay) and in each option have included the cost of

- Matching frontline social worker, team manager and independent reviewing officer roles
- Career progression advanced practitioner role
- Apprenticeship Investment.

The modelling assumes a reduction to 10% agency use for vacancies and to 15% agency use for sickness/maternity leave. These are stretching targets but achievable with sustained action.

The detailed financial modelling information is attached as appendix A with a summary table below

Recruitment and Retention Strategy: Options Appraisal

	Option 1				Option 2			
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Cumulative totals	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Cumulative totals
Additional investment	£1,491,000	£127,000	£22,000	£1,640,000	£1,348,000	£101,000	£17,000	£1,466,000
Estimated reduction in agency costs	(£336,000)	(£809,000)	(£149,000)	(£1,294,000)	(£336,000)	(£809,000)	(£149,000)	(£1,294,000)
Net cost/(reduction)	£1,155,000	(£682,000)	(£127,000)	£346,000	£1,012,000	(£708,000)	(£132,000)	£172,000

NOTES to Options Appraisal:

- 1 The models above are based on a target reduction to 10% turnover and vacancy cover and 15% sickness & maternity cover
Sensitivity analysis: If the target reductions achieved are different to those modelled, net costs/(savings) over the three years will vary as follows:

	Reduce turnover and Sickness & Net			Reduce turnover and Sickness & Net		
	turnover and vacancy cover to	Sickness & maternity cover	Net cost/(saving) over 3 years	turnover and vacancy cover to	Sickness & maternity cover to	Net cost/(saving) over 3 years
Cornwall	15%	15%	£637,000	10%	10%	£57,000
	20%	15%	£925,000	10%	12%	£202,000
Torbay	15%	15%	£474,000	10%	10%	(£129,000)
	20%	15%	£774,000	10%	12%	£20,000

- 2 Models assume implementation date of 1 April 2021 with costs and savings profiled over a three year period

Alternatives

1. Do Nothing

This option has the benefit of reducing the pressures on the Council's budget. The cost of the strategy was included in the pressures reported to LG8 and Children's Services met the challenge of a 50% reduction in pressures, while including this. The balance of agency/permanent is deteriorating and is unlikely to get better under this option. This option would not meet the Commissioners expectations, and the capacity to maintain improvement with such a high dependence on agency staff for frontline social worker roles would be very uncertain.

2. Model a much more modest proposal

This option introduces an advanced practitioner role to arrest any further loss of experienced staff and thereby strengthen the opportunities for staff loyal to Devon. Work on this has been modelled and the estimated cost is £108,000. However, extracting this sum from the whole, will not address the wider social work retention issues, give the development roles needed or come close to meeting the Commissioner's expectations. In this option we would not be guaranteeing savings on agency costs so the differential between the cost of this option and the net cost of matching Torbay, would not justify the option.

3. Re-model Option two to reduce the net cost from £172k to a more acceptable figure

The balance of risk in relation to achieving the agency reduction is likely to shift in this model and, as the attractiveness of the offer reduces, we could see the anticipated reduction in agency use become less achievable and the agency costs could increase

Risks

There is likely to be a challenge from other parts of Children's Services who are not included in the enhanced rate on the grounds of equal pay. Part of the delay in addressing the social worker workforce challenges in Children's has been the consideration of harmonisation across the Council of all social worker's terms and conditions. Colleagues in Adult Services are likely to feel aggrieved at any widening of the gap between their terms and conditions and those of some of their colleagues in Children's Services. Of course, with a high reliance on agency staffing at the frontline, colleagues in other roles in the Council, will be very well placed to apply to transfer into these frontline roles.

The market drivers for the enhancement are clear in the data which shows our excessive reliance on agency staff in some parts of the service but not in all. It is not unusual in other parts of the country for Local Authorities to offer differential rates of pay to different groups of social workers in hard to recruit posts. The Council's employment lawyers have advised that there could be some challenge regarding the differences in pay and this is being explored through HR.

Recommendations

Do nothing is not an option, and the more modest proposal is not recommended, that would be a case of 'spoil the ship for a haphazard of tar'

The net cost difference between options one and two (matching Cornwall or Torbay, respectively) is not so great as to be regarded as a deal breaker, either option would give a very substantial boost to the likelihood of a permanent workforce, which is a much better use of the Council's resources. In the context of the budget pressures facing the Council, and following robust debate at

LG8, I would recommend the match to Torbay rather than Cornwall and to include the cost of career progression which has been the focus of a great deal of careful work between the service and HR, but to exclude other initiatives (payment of leave to remain applications, student fees and so on). The option proposed is a powerful, affirming communication to a workforce that has struggled most because of its reliance on agency social workers.

The measure proposed, coupled with robust, active and better streamlined advertising, recruitment and on-boarding, will reverse the current trend towards increasing agency use and will enable the service to move swiftly to a position of not more than 10% 'vacancy' agency social workers and team managers.

Other considerations

The service has drafted a recruitment and retention strategy which will ensure recruitment and retention is prioritised. The wider strategy looks at workforce development, supervision, progression as well as targeted recruitment .

The Council, in its Ofsted Recovery Investment, allocated resource for workforce development including coaching for Team Managers. This is one-off investment. Existing resources will be sufficient to cover the costs of staff development, however the targeting of investment for staff development and the measurement of impact will need to be more robust than it has been hitherto.