

**Report To:** **Resources And Governance Overview And Scrutiny  
Committee: Human Resources Sub-Group**

**Report Of:** **Director Of Children's Services,  
Director Of Adult Services And  
Head Of Personnel**

**Date:** **12 January 2010**

**Subject:** **Social Worker Recruitment And Retention**

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## **1. PURPOSE OF NOTE**

- 1.1 To update the Sub- Group on initiatives and measures being taken to support the recruitment and retention of Social Workers in the Children's and Adult Services Directorates, including:
- i. Management of temporary staffing arrangements.
  - ii. Long term strategies and actions to stabilise the permanent workforce through attracting, recruiting and retaining quality social workers.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Nationally, the role of social work and Social Workers has under close media and public scrutiny, particularly in light of widely reported cases in a number of other authorities. The current media attention on social work and recent child deaths has created a climate of heightened anxiety and lack of public confidence within the profession. It is against this backdrop that Central Government have become committed to refocusing social work practice and development and to raise the status of social work as a profession.
- 2.2 This is borne out of the findings of the DCSF and DoH 'Social Work Task Force' who visited Manchester in March 2009. The Social Work Taskforce has now produced its final report, "Building a Safe, Confident Future," which reasserted the close linkage between Adults and Children's social work, highlighting common processes and roles across the services and emphasising the importance of adopting the "Think Family" approach in casework. The report also specified that the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers is not an issue which is unique to Manchester, but one which affects all authorities. A number of recommendations were made to support the strategic development of social work for the future, which are summarised in paragraph 8 of this note.
- 2.3 While a number of the recommendations for national reform across the social work workforce are being implemented as part of Manchester's Transforming Social Work Programme. The Taskforce report confirmed that Manchester is travelling in the right direction and implementing the recommendations that the

Government highlight as being crucial to improve the consistency and quality of delivery of a social work service. However, there are a number of factors unique to Manchester which heighten our local challenges.

- 2.4 The position in Manchester is quite distinct, given the demography and breadth of social and regeneration issues facing the city. A high urban density combined with significant levels of unemployment makes Manchester the fourth most deprived local authority district in England. In turn, such distinct social issues pose greater challenges for Manchester's Social Workers and impact on the Council's ability to recruit and retain high quality Social Workers.
- 2.5 It is against this background that the Directors of Children's Services and Adult Services have recognise the importance of having high quality, motivated Social Workers who can effectively manage demanding casework. The recruitment and retention of high calibre, qualified Social Workers is therefore a high priority for both services.
- 2.6 In November 2009, Children's Services received their first unannounced Government inspection. This confirmed many of the issues that were identified in self-assessments whereby strategies to drive improvement have been put in place. The Inspectors confirmed that much work remains to be done, however, it is evident that the Council recognises the issues and has put a range of measures in place to address them.

### **3. USE OF TEMPORARY STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS**

- 3.1 Members have previously raised concerns over the high level of vacancies and the use of temporary staffing arrangements in both Children's and Adult Social Care teams. The stabilisation of the permanent social work workforce has been one of the main priorities for both Children's and Adult Services.
- 3.2 In September 2009, the assignment of social workers in Children's Services and Adult Services was 204 and 197 respectively. Children's Services had 120 permanent staff and Adult Service 175 permanent staff in post, the remainder of posts were vacancies or covered by staff from agencies. This was unsatisfactory in terms of both continuity of casework management and getting a stable workforce in place. In response, each service was supported by Personnel in implementing a six week rolling recruitment campaign. Central to which has been the opportunity to appoint agency staff into permanent posts by following an appropriate appointment process. The tables at out at Appendices 1 and 2 demonstrate this progress.
- 3.3 Whilst this approach has succeeded in increasing the number of permanent appointments, there is still nevertheless a significant amount of work to do around presenting social work as a career option where each service is confident that it can attract, recruit, retain and develop a workforce which is committed to a social care career with the City Council. The remainder of this report sets out the broader approach which each service is now developing.

#### **4. INTEGRATED APPROACH**

- 4.1 Whilst each service has its own priorities, it is recognised that many of the issues raised are common across Children's and Adult's services. Therefore, an integrated approach to the transformation of social work workforce development and practice has been adopted with the priorities to be delivered in a joined up way. This approach will support the delivery of the common themes identified, whilst enabling specialisms to be addressed and facilitate seamless delivery of social work services to districts, localities and neighbourhoods.
- 4.2 The establishment of the Children's Services Social Work Redesign Board and a Joint Social Work Workforce Development Steering Group reflects the commitment from both services to drive the transformation of social work within Manchester. The Redesign Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services and consists of executive members and senior management. The Steering Group is led by Workforce Development and Personnel Officers from each service.
- 4.3 At present, the main areas of focus are:
- i. The development of district, locality and neighbourhood working.
  - ii. Identifying common approaches to recruiting and retaining high quality social workers to ensure stabilisation of the existing workforce.
  - iii. Establish employment schemes to secure the future supply of world-class social work workforce from within Manchester's communities whilst enhancing the employment offer to Social Workers.
  - iv. Build staff capability and capacity by developing career pathways and supporting employee development whilst increasing motivation and morale.
- 4.4. The final report of the Social Work Taskforce proposed that social workers would need a licence to practice and that employers should not be solely responsible for the licensing and assessment. Therefore, a wider collaborative approach needs to be developed by organisations; although the responsibility for education and training of social workers primarily rests with universities and employers, many other sectors have a part to play.

#### **5. RECRUITMENT**

- 5.1 The introduction of the district, locality and neighbourhood staffing structure ensures that all districts have consistent baseline staffing levels. This model enables each service to develop a more effective, efficient approach to service delivery based on need whilst providing the capacity to develop the Think Family and neighbourhood working approach leading to improved outcomes for Manchester residents.

- 5.2 Since September 2009 each service has made significant progress in reducing our reliance on the use of agency staff as demonstrated in the attached tables. The six week recruitment programme and a drive to offer permanent roles to agency staff has resulted in only 8% of social workers being currently covered by agency staff in Children's Services. The use of additional agency staff above permanent establishment is intended to reduce to zero by January 2010.
- 5.3 However, many of these appointments were newly qualified Social Workers which makes the development of supportive mechanisms to oversee and protect inexperienced Social Workers a high priority for both services. It is therefore critical that effective supervision and development processes are in place. For that reason, the Advanced Social Work Practitioner and Senior Social Worker roles have been developed in order to assist with the day-to-day supervision and management of teams.
- 5.4 In line with this, measures need to be put in place in order to attract experienced Social Workers. The Social Work Task Force are driving the development of social work to be viewed as a Masters profession by recommending the creation of an Independent College of Social Work and the introduction of a Masters in Social Work practice to improve leadership in the profession.
- 5.5 In response to the national shortage of Social Workers, a local partnership has been established with Manchester College and a Social Work Apprenticeship scheme primarily targeting unemployed Manchester residents and young people aged 16 + is due to be piloted in 2010.
- 5.6 Similarly, partnerships with the local universities have been established to ensure that each service can attract a consistent supply of high quality newly qualified Social Workers. As part of these local partnerships, alternative career routes and methods have been identified to support people in gaining a valued career in social work. The exploration of creating a new post, deemed social work support officer assists this by providing an entry-level apprenticeship route into social work. In addition, we are committed to developing our social work workforce through the use of secondments of experienced care managers and family support workers to complete the social work degree.
- 5.7 Work has also been on going to market the image of the social work profession as a positive and valued career option. In November 2009, a twelve-month rolling campaign titled "Great Social Workers are Made in Manchester" was launched at a national social work career's event held in the city, in order to promote social work as a career choice, and to attract more Manchester residents into social work. As a result, each service has received numerous enquires about social work positions, these will all be followed up.

## **6. RETENTION**

- 6.1 Staff retention was also highlighted as main area of concern within the social work workforce as consistency in service provision is paramount when

supporting children, families and the vulnerable. In order to examine the reasons behind turnover, areas of employee dissatisfaction have been identified whereby working conditions; heavy caseloads and notions of a blame culture were common areas of concern for Social Workers.

- 6.2 The physical work environment experienced by many Social Workers has been raised at the Asset Management Board Meeting and continues to be an area where more work needs to be done. However, the relocation of teams within district and locality teams has led many teams being relocated to new sites or renovated buildings. It has been noted that improvement in working conditions and facilities has increased staff morale.
- 6.3 In Children's Services, the First Response Service was introduced to improve the customer experience and manage expectations from the point of contact through to referral. As a result, the number of contacts received by Social Workers has been reduced by 70%. Additionally, flexible and mobile working arrangements have improved working conditions as most Social Workers have been issued with laptops, which enables more work to be undertaken away from the office and within communities.
- 6.4 In Adults Services, the introduction of the Reablement Programme has also been effective in reducing caseload with 50% of users not requiring a further service and 30% requiring a less intense service. This was reflected in the annual Care Quality Commission Performance Assessment which graded Adult Social Care in Manchester as performing well in all areas. In line with this, both services have improved mechanisms and developed high quality training that has enabled managers to provide stronger support and supervision for their staff.
- 6.5 The Exit Interview and Questionnaire has been redesigned in order to understand issues in retention. This new process will ensure that exit interviews are completed face-to-face in a meeting between the manager and leaver to discuss and capture reasons for leaving. This information will be used to develop further approaches to reduce staff turnover.

## **7. DEVELOPMENT**

- 7.1 Career progression and employee development have also been prioritised as part of the transformation of social work workforce development and social work practice across the City.
- 7.2 Following development of new career structures for Social Workers in Children's Services and Adult's Services, routes for development and progression have been simplified. Career pathways have been identified in both Adult's and Children's Social Work, highlighting the potential for cross service pathways and clearer routes into the management structure.
- 7.3 The introduction of this framework provides a more structured, supportive and developmental approach to career progression providing greater opportunities

for employees to climb the career ladder and progress into management or senior roles.

- 7.4 The 'Grow your Own' approach has been promoted within services to provide support for staff undertaking the social work degree programme. Development opportunities have also been promoted to strengthen skills and experience to aid internal career progression. As a result, out of 27 Advanced Practitioner roles, 24 have been filled through internal appointments. The final report of the Social Work Taskforce emphasises the importance of having a national career structure so experienced practitioners can progress in front-line roles as well as management.

## **8. FUTURE CHALLENGES**

- 8.1 Whilst significant progress has been made in modernising social work practices and the employment offer in Manchester, there is still much to do. Over the forthcoming twelve months, further work will be undertaken to develop and focus on recommendations made in the final report of the Social Work Taskforce. This will include:
- i. Meeting regularly with Social Workers to assess ways of improving working environments, staff facilities and non-financial incentives.
  - ii. Monitoring the effectiveness of both recruitment processes and the marketing campaign to ensure we maintain a supply of Manchester residents choosing social work in Manchester as a career.
  - iii. Monitor and improve the quality of social work supervision and continue to reduce the average caseloads.
  - iv. Work in conjunction with training providers to develop routes into social work including apprenticeships, graduate recruitment schemes and 'return to social work' schemes for former Social Workers.
  - v. Consider what needs to be in place to support Social Workers to meet the requirements of the new national 'license to practice' and that progression routes are in place for high quality, specialist practitioners which do not remove them from frontline practice (Social Work Taskforce Final Report).

## **9. CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 Overall, the initiatives put in place in both Adult and Children's Services have led to a stabilisation in the permanent social work workforce. In addition, a solid foundation is being put in place to establish social work in Manchester as a valued career option with quality management support and practices and a range of non-financial incentives in place. Work in each of these areas will be continually prioritised in order to ensure improvements and achieve long-term goals. In line with this, aspects of this paper will be reviewed in light of the Task Force findings.

- 9.2 By continuing to work together, the City Council is able to provide a better quality of service to Manchester's communities embracing a "Think Family" and neighbourhood focused approach to social work practice. Workforce planning and recruitment initiatives will remain challenging for Manchester, however, with the development of apprenticeships, career pathways and development opportunities each service has a strong platform in place to ensure a quality stable permanent workforce for the future.

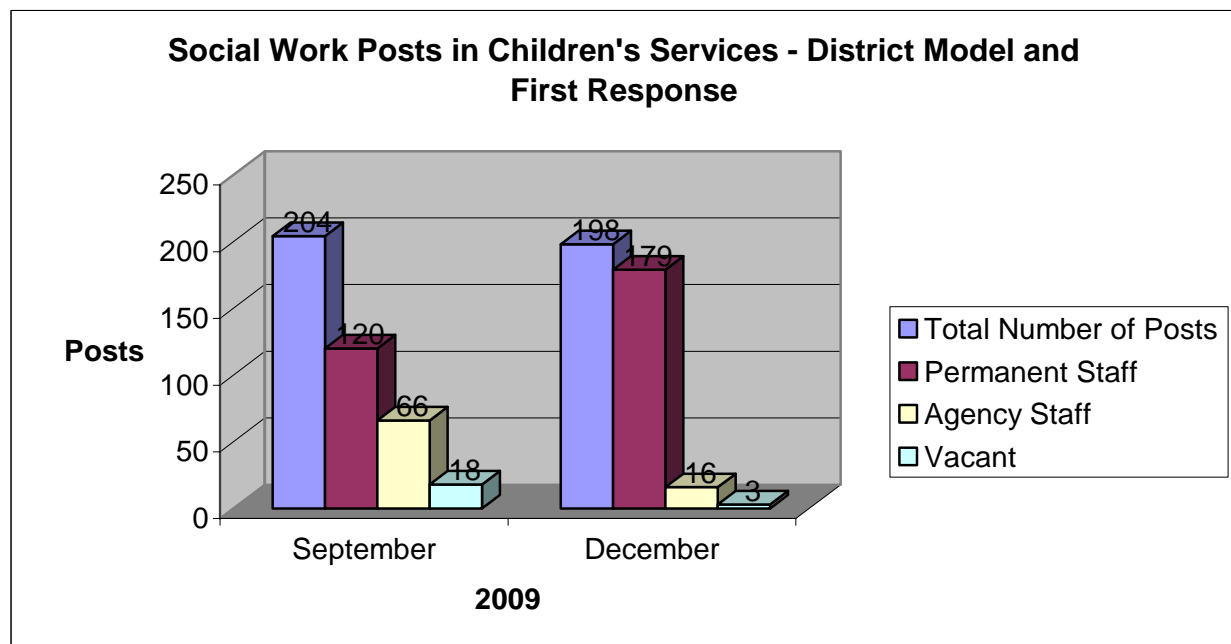
#### **ATTACHED AS APPENDICES**

1. Social Worker Assignments for Children's Services: September – December 2009.
2. Social Worker Assignments for Adults Services: September - December 2009.

## APPENDIX 1

### SOCIAL WORKER ASSIGNMENTS FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2009

	1 September 2009	7 December 2009	Variance
Permanent Staff	120	179	59
Posts filled by agency staff while recruiting to posts	43	3	-40
Vacant	18	3	-15
Long term sickness (agency covering)	1	3	2
Additional Workload (agency covering)	12	3	-9
Secondments (agency covering)	7	4	-3
Maternity leave (agency covering)	3	3	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>-6</b>





## APPENDIX 2

### SOCIAL WORKER ASSIGNMENTS FOR ADULT SERVICES SEPTEMBER – DECEMBER 2009

	1 September 2009	7 December 2009	Variance
Permanent Staff	175	186	11
Posts filled by agency staff while recruiting to posts	9	18	9
Act Ups (agency covering)	0	4	4
Secondments (agency covering)	6	1	-5
Additional Workload (agency covering)	7	1	-6
Total	197	210	13

