



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 31 January 2022

REPORT TITLE:	SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2022-2025
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

The report presents the Children, Young People and Education Committee with the Children's Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025.

The Strategy sets out the local authority's strategy and plans for developing and supporting the social care workforce over the next three years. It outlines five priorities to attract, retain and support the development of a stable, talented, and committed workforce which has the skills, knowledge and motivation to improve children's lives. These priorities are:

- Priority 1: 'Growing our own' through recruitment and development
- Priority 2: Support Continuous Professional Development to deliver a motivated and skilled workforce, with an emphasis on supporting staff retention
- Priority 3: Develop high performing social work managers that support a performance management framework that reflects 'high support high challenge'
- Priority 4: Develop new and revised ways of working building on existing strengths to support children, young people and their families
- Priority 5: Communication and change management

Underpinning these priorities is a commitment to developing a healthy working environment that supports a positive emotional health and wellbeing amongst our workforce and enables Wirral Council to be an employer of choice in children's social care services.

Further detail relating to each priority is outlined in the Strategy document, attached at Appendix A as well as relevant governance and reporting frameworks.

The Strategy will work in conjunction with a range of other key workforce strategies and is aligned to the priority and vision of the Wirral Plan. The success in building a strong and stable workforce will secure "brighter futures" for Wirral children and young people – one of the main priorities outlined in the Wirral Plan.

This decision impacts on all wards.
This is a key decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025 attached at appendix A; and,
2. Agree to receive an update on the progress towards implementation of the Strategy in 12 months.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Strategy will enable the local authority to have a planned, co-produced and considered approach to the recruitment, support and development of its children's social care workforce.
- 1.2 The Strategy will seek to address challenges around recruitment and retention of social care professionals, in addition to supporting a healthy working environment thereby mitigating the risks of increasing absence management rates. Whilst this is both a national and local issue, having a clear and transparent Strategy will enable Wirral local authority to be proactive rather than reactive in supporting the workforce to develop consistent high quality safeguarding services to children, young people and their families.
- 1.3 At the heart of supporting families well and safeguarding the children and young people of Wirral, is the social care workforce. These professionals undertake important statutory responsibilities as well as building trusting relationships with families and young people. Their empowerment and development are fundamental to the delivery of a high-quality service which provides effective support to children and their families.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Do nothing: Wirral's previous Social Care Strategy expired in 2021. Failing to have a clear plan for the recruitment, retention and development of the workforce is a risk for the local authority. Ofsted, as the main regulator of social care services, consider that strategic planning around the workforce is essential in improving skills and ensuring there is enough capacity to support children and families well. In addition, as part of their registration social workers are required by Social Work England to demonstrate their Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Furthermore, revised arrangements being introduced in December 2021 by Social Work England will also place additional requirements on social workers to demonstrate their Continuous Professional Development. It is therefore important that there is a robust training and development offer, articulated around a clear priority and vision for the workforce.
- 2.2 Create one Strategy for the whole of Children's Services workforce: The long-term aspiration for the Directorate is to have one overarching workforce Strategy which acknowledges the diverse functionality of the service whilst finding synergies in how all staff are supported and developed. However, the nuances with the social care workforce and the challenges currently presented, requires the need to prioritise this area.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Nationally, regionally and locally in children's social care there is an increasing shortage of newly qualified and experienced children's social workers. Local authorities across the country are experiencing increasing number of vacancies due to several factors including fewer people choosing social work as a career, and

increased rates of social workers leaving the profession. Additionally, social workers don't necessarily seek the job security of local authority employment, often choosing to move between local authorities or more likely to work in the agency market. Whilst many social workers prefer the security of permanent contracts, there is a shift towards temporary work because of the flexibility to choose when to work, where to work, the ability to move swiftly and higher pay rates.

- 3.2 The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the challenges. A recent study by the Department for Education reported a higher number of social workers to be experiencing work related stress, being over-worked and a fall in job satisfaction. Whilst Wirral has benefitted for several years in having a stable workforce, more recently there is greater evidence of staff turnover and instability. This is impacting upon the workforce in managing staff vacancies, an experience gap in only being able to recruitment predominantly newly qualified social workers, and a greater reliance on agency staffing.
- 3.3 Considering this, since June 2021, colleagues from the Children's Services Performance and Improvement Team have been working in partnership with the social care service to co-produce a new workforce strategy for social care. A series of engagement activities have been undertaken with practitioners including social workers, team managers and senior officers to share and discuss the priorities and listen to the views of the workforce. A working group has also been established to lead on the development of the Strategy and consider the findings of the consultation activity. This group will also act as the key governance group for oversight and monitoring.
- 3.4 The Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022 – 2025, attached as Appendix A, sets out how the local authority will attract, retain and support the development of a stable, talented, and committed workforce which has the skills, knowledge and motivation to improve children's lives. The Strategy will also respond to the challenges facing councils in recruiting and retaining the workforce, by thinking innovatively about how to 'grow our own' experienced practitioners who have the right skill set and expertise. The Strategy will seek to address some of the financial challenges for the local authority as well as by reducing the number of agency workers that will both improve stability for children and young people and reduce costs.
- 3.5 The Strategy identifies five key priorities to drive change and improvement over the next two years:

Priority 1: 'Growing our own' through recruitment and development: – The Strategy articulates a clear philosophy and strategic approach to continue to 'grow our own'. This has proved successful over previous years through our ability to recruit Newly Qualified Social Workers, particularly employing Wirral students once they become qualified, in addition to initiatives such as the Step Up to Social Work and the Frontline programmes. Fortunately we have been able to support Newly Qualified Social Workers through a strong offer via the ASYE programme (Assessed and Supported Year in Employment). The plan is to build on this approach through the Social Worker Apprenticeship Degree, a Step into Social work schools' pilot and a student pilot with universities which will seek to attract those embarking on a career in social care. These new initiatives will be underpinned by a clear progression framework and robust support offer from the Practice Improvement

Team to ensure that newly qualified employees continue to stay and build their career within Wirral.

Priority 2: Support Continuous Professional Development to deliver a motivated and skilled workforce, with an emphasis on supporting staff retention: - The Strategy recognises the diverse offer currently available to staff and seeks to build and enhance support where it is needed most. Mentoring and coaching opportunities and enhancing the skillset of practitioners to support each other will be fundamental in supporting retention, particularly considering current hybrid ways of working. New leadership and management development opportunities will strengthen management at all levels.

Priority 3: Develop high performing social work managers that support a performance management framework that reflects 'high support high challenge': Practitioners have identified that they want to be confident that they are performing well and that their systems and tools they use enable them to support children and families in the best possible way. The establishment of a robust performance management framework supported by effective, reflective supervision will provide the foundation for offering both security and support as well as opportunity for critical friend challenge and constructive development and practice.

Priority 4: Develop new and revised ways of working building on existing strengths to support children, young people and their families: - Feedback has identified that some practitioners feel that systems and processes could be streamlined and more efficient to allow for more effective practice. A review of the practice model Supporting Families, Enhancing Futures will help to identify opportunities for further improvements in current practice and process. The 'Build Back Better' funding to support a diagnostic around a 'systemic practice model' will provide further exploration of new practice models which builds on what currently works well in Wirral.

Priority 5: Communication and change management – One of the most important areas for development based on feedback from practitioners related to the need for improved communication between senior operational officers and frontline workers. This was particularly pertinent where plans or proposals were being developed and communicated across the service. Approaches to change management were considered not effective in enabling workers to feel part of the change and involved and consulted.

Moving forward, the Strategy sets out a priority to improve communication, particularly through change management processes. Utilising the skills and guidance from the council's organisational development and Human Resources teams, senior officers in social care will be supported with effective tools and training to improve change management approaches, ensuring that service design principles and key service developments are co-produced.

Underpinning theme: Wellbeing - Insight from surveys and consultations with practitioners has identified that staff wellbeing is a contributing factor to employee retention and high-quality practice. High workload, homeworking because of the pandemic and the pressures of meeting the statutory demands of the role has increased levels of sickness and social workers leaving the authority. This has

subsequently increased pressures on existing employees, further exacerbating stress and poor emotional wellbeing.

To address this, the Strategy seeks to build on the celebration and wellbeing events that have proved successful. The move towards face-to-face events will be a focus for the next two years as well as ways to improve motivation e.g. speakers/TED talks. Whilst the current employee relations offer will continue to be promoted, a feasibility study will be carried out to explore a bespoke wellbeing offer for social workers, shaped around their needs and acknowledging the nature of the work undertaken. A holistic co-produced wellbeing plan will underpin the Strategy – regular review and analysis with the workforce through health checks/Social Work Organisational Resilience Diagnostic (SWORD) survey will ensure this is flexible to meet the needs of employees.

- 3.6 Further development areas relating to the priorities above are detailed in the Strategy document attached at appendix A. Once approved, a planned programme of work will be outlined with SMART actions, timescales, responsible officers and intended outcomes. A set of key performance indicators aligned to each priority will enable robust monitoring. This will also be supported by regular 'pulse' surveys to assess the impact of the Strategy on the wellbeing and views of the workforce.
- 3.7 The Social Care Workforce Strategy Working Group will be the lead governance group for monitoring the progress and impact of the Strategy. This group will report progress to Children's Senior Leadership Team on a regular basis, highlighting achievements and risks where this is necessary and appropriate.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There is no significant additional investment required currently to deliver the workforce strategy. A cost-benefit-analysis will need to be undertaken for each initiative to explore financial implications and balance this against impact. Ultimately this may mean that some programmes do not come to fruition.
- 4.2 A focus of the strategy will be on securing permanent employees into vacant posts to reduce the reliance on agency workers. In this regard, the importance of the strategy implementation is significant in supporting the local authority to achieve a balanced budget. Any investment, therefore, should be considered in the context of any potential deliverable savings.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The local authority has a legal duty to safeguard the welfare of children and young people in Wirral. The Council service is highly regulated and performs several statutory functions. It is obliged to meet statutory timescales and risks intervention and scrutiny from Ofsted (regulator) and the Department for Education if these are not met. The development of a stable, skilled and supported workforce is fundamental to the ability of the local authority in adhering to its legal obligations.
- 5.2 The local authority also has a legal duty to support the health and safety of staff and this includes emotional wellbeing and support.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 The key teams which will have responsibility for implementation of the Strategy include:

- Children's Performance and Improvement Team
- Social Care Practice Improvement Team
- Human Resources
- Organisational Development

6.2 In addition, colleagues from across the Council and Children's Services may also be called upon to assist with specific projects or initiatives. This could include support from Legal Services, Information Technology and Finance providing advice and guidance and assisting in the effective implementation of planned approaches and initiatives.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The previous strategy was not providing direction to inform planning and activity. Initiatives were reactionary and ad hoc, resulting in duplication and little impact. It is important that the local authority provides clear strategic direction for the prioritisation of resource and activity. This strategy seeks to lead the development of a planned, meaningful and achievable programme of activity that can be monitored, reviewed and assessed to understand its impact and effectiveness.

7.2 The workforce challenges outlined are not unique to Wirral. Local authorities across the country struggle to recruit and retain social work professionals. Whilst this strategy seeks to address the pertinent local issues, the national challenges associated with market shortages may continue to be apparent for its duration.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 The strategy has been co-produced with social care practitioners from different fields and specialisms. Engagement and consultation activity has involved:

- SWORD survey with all staff
- focus groups with frontline practitioners
- 1-2-1 discussions with frontline practitioners
- review and discussion at practitioner forums and team manager forums
- review and discussion at team manager conference
- review and discussion at social care workforce working group consisting of Heads of Service and Assistant Director for Children and Families

8.2 The feedback from the engagement activity has resulted in the shaping and development of the priorities outlined in the strategy. Their voice will continue to shape and develop the work programme moving forward. Regular 'check back' sessions will form part of the analysis and evaluation of the impact and outcomes of the strategy.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is attached here.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no significant environment and climate change implications arising from the report. The strategy articulates plans to develop a robust hybrid model of working which will continue to support reductions in Carbon dioxide emissions.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The strategy outlines a strategic approach to 'growing our own' as being a fundamental concept to drive planning moving forward. Initiatives outlined include working with local schools and universities to encourage young adults from Wirral to consider a career in social work. These training and development opportunities can translate into rewarding career opportunities, thus creating new employment for residents on Wirral.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Hannah Myers**
(Hannah Myers, Performance and Improvement Manager)
email: hannahmyers@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix A Children's Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Social Care Workforce Strategy 2019-2021
SWORD survey

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Performance Update – Social Work Workforce Children, Young People and Education Committee	27.10.21