WIRRAL

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Thursday 1 February 2024

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 an updated version on 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 remainder of its course. 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.

The Strategy will continue to 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.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

a. Endorse the progress made to date on the Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025; and,
b. Agree to receive a further update on progress at a future date.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

1.1 To ensure that elected members are briefed and have oversight on the progress towards implementation of the Social Care Workforce Strategy.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 Do nothing: It is important that there is appropriate and effective monitoring of strategies and plans to provide assurance that progress is being made.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 The Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022 – 2025 was approved by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in January 2022. The Strategy 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 identifies five key priorities to drive change and improvement over a three-year period.

3.2 Following approval of the Strategy, a robust governance framework was put in place. This involved the establishment of a Social Care Workforce Strategy Board, chaired by the Assistant Director for Children and Families and consisting of key representatives from the Practice and Performance Improvement Teams, HR and Social Care. Several sub-groups were also established to lead on the specific priorities within the Strategy.

3.3 Nationally, regionally and locally in children's social care we continue to see an increasing shortage of newly qualified and experienced children's social workers. Local authorities across the country are experiencing an 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.
Statistics published by the government from 2021 found that there was a 16% increase in the number of children and families social workers leaving to that of the year before and this was the highest rise in the last five years, and this resulted in a 7% increase in vacancies.

3.4 In May 2022 the most recent independent review of Children's Social Care was published. It allowed for the Government to provide an initial response to how they plan to develop a more detailed response over the coming months to the problems the sector is facing, including which recommendations it wishes to take forward. There was also a focus on the impact of agency work and the report found that whilst some level of agency work is arguably inevitable in any front-line profession, the rates in children's social work are inexcusably high at 15.5%, double the rate of adult social care (Skills for Care, 2020; Department for Education, 2021c). Workforce data

shows that around 2.6% of social workers moved from permanent local authority employment to agency roles in 2021 alone (Department for Education, 2022c). Once social workers are in agency roles, they are more likely to move around, contributing to the instability children and families experience.

3.5   We have gathered our own internal data since November 2022 to date to inform us on how we compare to those national statistics. Details on staff turnover, sickness and agency rates are included below.

<u>Staff turnover</u> **(September 2022 – October 2023)**
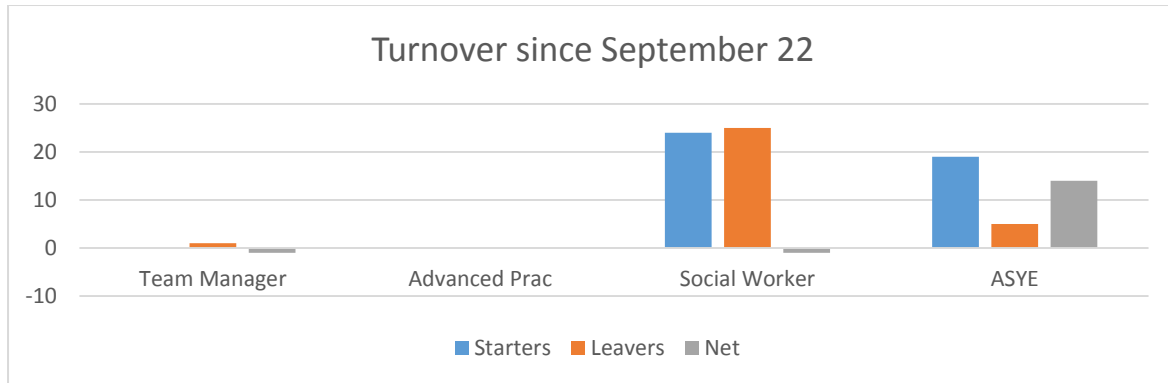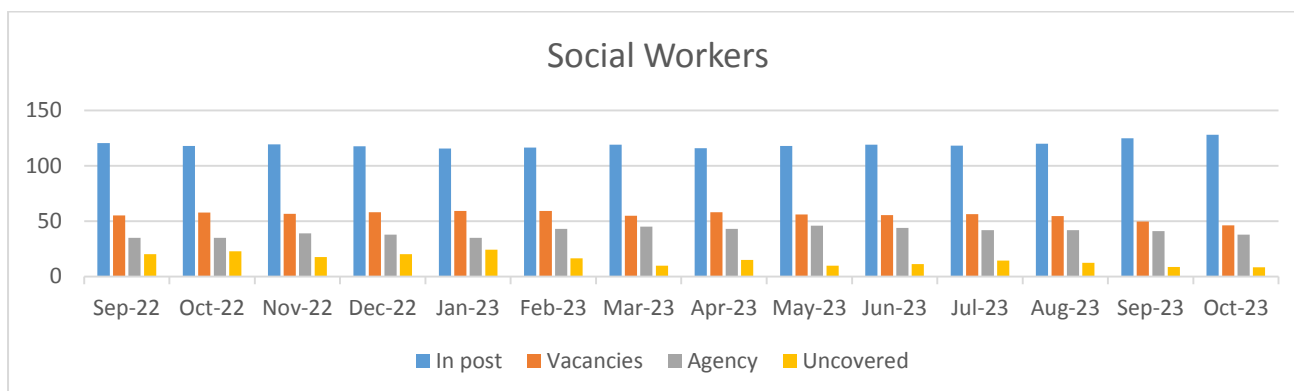

We have included last year's figures below for comparison. This illustrates the impact the Workforce Strategy has had on recruitment and retention and that overall turnover has reduced.
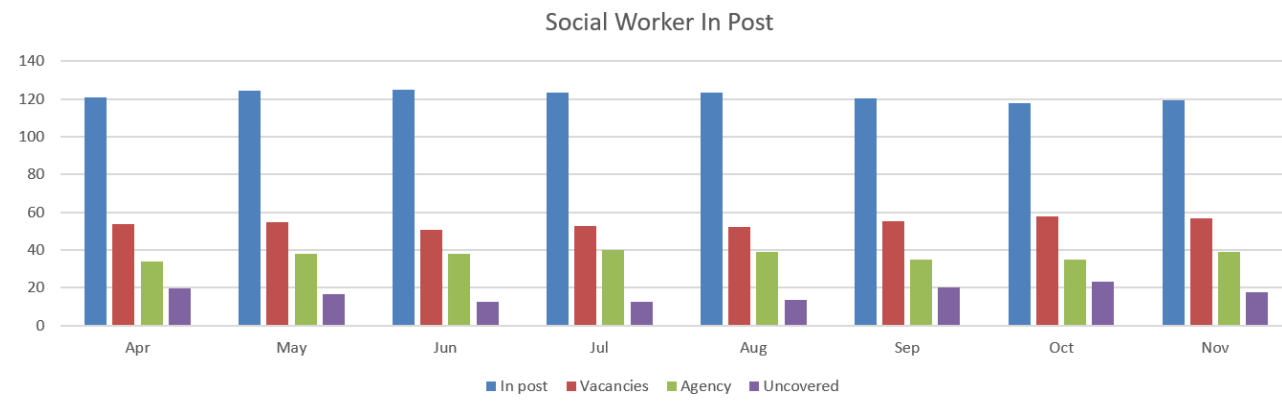
(April 2022-November 2022)
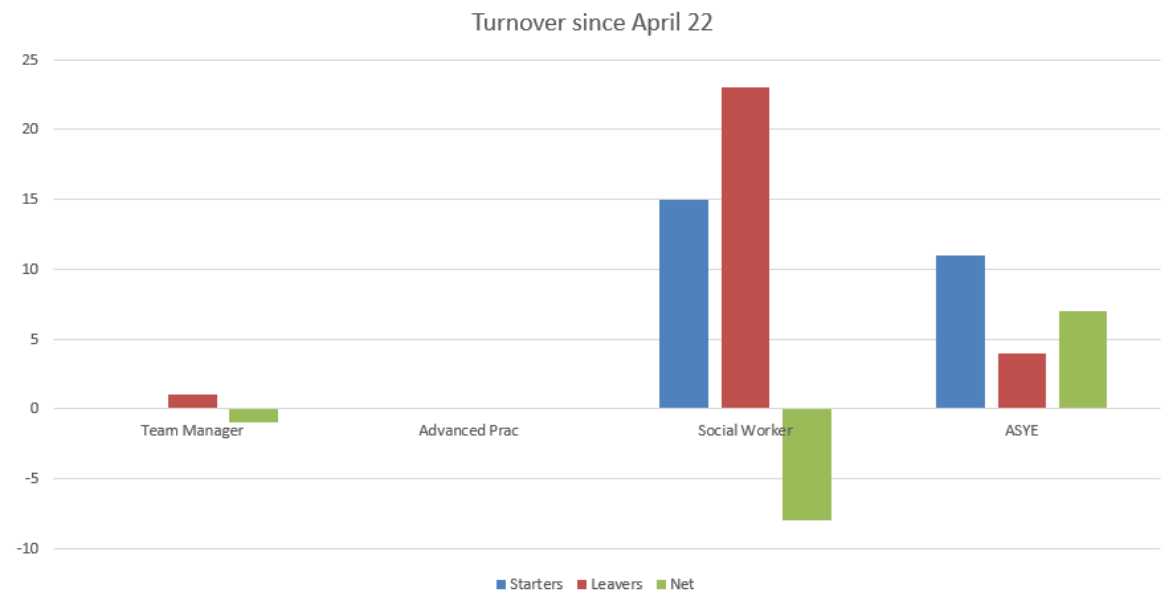
Social workers in post **(September 2022 – October 2023)**

Again, we have included last year's figures for comparison, it suggests that we are moving in the right direction.

(April 2022-November 2022)

Number of agency staff in post **(April 2022 – October 2023)**

Function Name	Service Name	FY 2022/23												FY 2023/24						
		Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Children, Family and Education	Children and Families	53	50	51	48	50	50	48	53	50	51	55	57	52	54	53	49	48	47	45
	Children, Family and Education	3	3	3	3	3	5	5	4	4	3	1		1						
	Early Help and Prevention	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1		
	Education	12	9	8	8	8	8	7	6	6	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	2

A comparison of agency over time for a similar time period is seen below.

(April 2022-November 2022)

Agency

Distinct Employees																						
		FY 2021/22																				
Function Name	Service Name	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov
Children, Family and Education	Children and Families	36	32	30	30	47	50	55	61	47	50	53	51	55	52	52	50	50	50	49	54
	Early Help and Prevention	5	5	4	7	8	7	7	6	5	4	5	5	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	1
	Education	7	6	6	10	11	10	10	10	12	11	11	14	16	13	12	12	12	12	11	11
	Modernisation and Support	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	3	3

Sickness and days lost throughout the directorate (April 2023 – October 2023)

Sickness - FTE days per FTE
Lost Days per FTE

Row Labels	Service Name	FY 2022/23 Total	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Current Total	Projected for April
Children, Family and Education	Children and Families	14.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.4	1.7	1.0	0.8	8.0	13.7
	Children, Family and Education	14.4	1.3	1.3	1.0	0.9	1.2	1.3	0.9	8.0	N/A
	Early Help and Prevention	14.3	1.4	1.0	1.2	1.5	1.4	1.5	1.0	8.9	N/A
	Education	6.0	0.6	0.8	0.8	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.2	7.1	N/A

A comparison of sickness over time for a similar time period this year (previous year is included below) outlines that we are projected to reduce sickness absence by April 2024 by 0.7 days lost per FTE.

(April 2022-November 2022)

Sickness - FTE days per FTE
Lost Days per FTE

Row Labels	Service Name	FY 2021/22 Total	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Current Total	Projected for April
Children, Family and Education	Children and Families	16.0	1.4	0.9	1.4	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.2	9.6	14.4
	Early Help and Prevention	10.8	0.91	0.91	0.99	0.67	0.99	1.13	1.28	1.21	8.1	N/A
	Education	5.0	0.22	0.22	0.12	0.13	0.30	0.24	0.30	0.53	2.1	N/A
	Modernisation and Support	13.1	1.07	1.01	1.49	0.92	1.12	1.02	0.97	0.95	8.5	N/A

3.6   The progress and updates of the priorities outlined within the strategy have been summarised within appendix B attached to this report.

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 continue to 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.

4.0   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.

5.0   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.

6.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 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.

7.3 There has been an increase in the volume of neighbouring local authorities who have received an inadequate Ofsted rating, and this may result in them improving on their recruitment techniques and offering financial incentives. In turn this could see our own social workers encouraged into moving.

7.0 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 activities has resulted in the shaping and development of the priorities outlined in the strategy. Feedback 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.

8.0 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.

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.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Children's Social Care Workforce Strategy 2022-2025
Appendix B Details of progress made for each priority and future plans
Appendix C Branding Update
Appendix D Offer on a page – final version
Appendix E Yonder Update – Capacity Workforce Project
Appendix F ASYE Annual Report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Social Care Workforce Strategy 2019-2021
SWORD survey 2021
SWORD survey 2022

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in accordance with Section G of its Terms of Reference; Committee's functions, incorporating the assessment of outcomes, review of effectiveness and formulation of recommendations to the Council, partners and other bodies, which shall include any decision relating to:

- child protection;
- children's centres;
- education, schools and settings;
- looked after children;
- mental health services;
- safeguarding;

- special educational needs and disability (SEND);
- youth offending services;
- youth services; and
- social and education transport

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date