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Foreword

As a council, we recognise that the workforce is our most valuable asset, uniquely placed to make a difference to the lives of vulnerable children, young people and their families. In order to create the conditions for keeping children and young people safe, promoting their welfare and enabling them to fulfil their potential we need a highly skilled, experienced and stable workforce, committed to making a difference.

One of the core strands to the Governments transformational reform programme is around having a highly capable and skilled workforce. However, attracting and retaining a sufficiently qualified, experienced and stable workforce is a key challenge facing many Local Authorities and Halton is no different.

We want all children and young people in Halton to have a positive start in life and to be safe. We are committed to 'making a difference' and putting children first and improving services in everything we do. We want the services we deliver to meet the high standards our children deserve. Our workforce understands the vital role they play in the protection of children and are supported in their roles as either frontline workers or managers.

This strategy sets out our commitment to and expectations of the Children and Families Service workforce. Providing the strategic framework for workforce development and setting out our immediate priorities. It should not be seen as an end point in itself and I want us to continue to work together to make Halton a Council you are proud to work for.

Milorad Vasic – Strategic Director, People

Introduction

Halton Borough Council recognises that the workforce is our most important resource. Within the Children and Families Service Department our main focus is to improve the lives of children, young people and families within Halton. This can only be delivered by a confident, competent and skilled children and young people's workforce that works cohesively to deliver the right services at the right time to our children, young people and their families.

This strategy focuses on the workforce within the Children and Families Service Department. Here we set out how we will continue to strengthen our workforce and create the conditions needed for them to flourish and thrive within an innovative, inspiring and challenging environment. This strategy outlines our approach to develop the competencies, skills and knowledge of our workforce to achieve this.

Vision

The vision within Halton's Children, Young People and Families Plan (CYFPF) is:

"Halton's ambition is to build stronger, safer communities which are able to support the development and learning of children and young people so they grow up feeling safe, secure, happy and healthy, ready to be Halton's present and Halton's future"

The Children & Families Service Department is committed to this vision.

The workforce are aptly placed to transform the lives of vulnerable children and young people, working with others to create the conditions that enable them to fulfil their potential and that of themselves. They will achieve this by developing positive relationships and strong partnerships, keeping children safe, secure and happy by working with families to enable them to make positive changes, or by finding the best possible care when children cannot live at home, so that all children thrive and achieve.

National Context

This Strategy has been developed within the context of some national legislation, guidelines and policy, whilst this list is not exhaustive the key ones include:

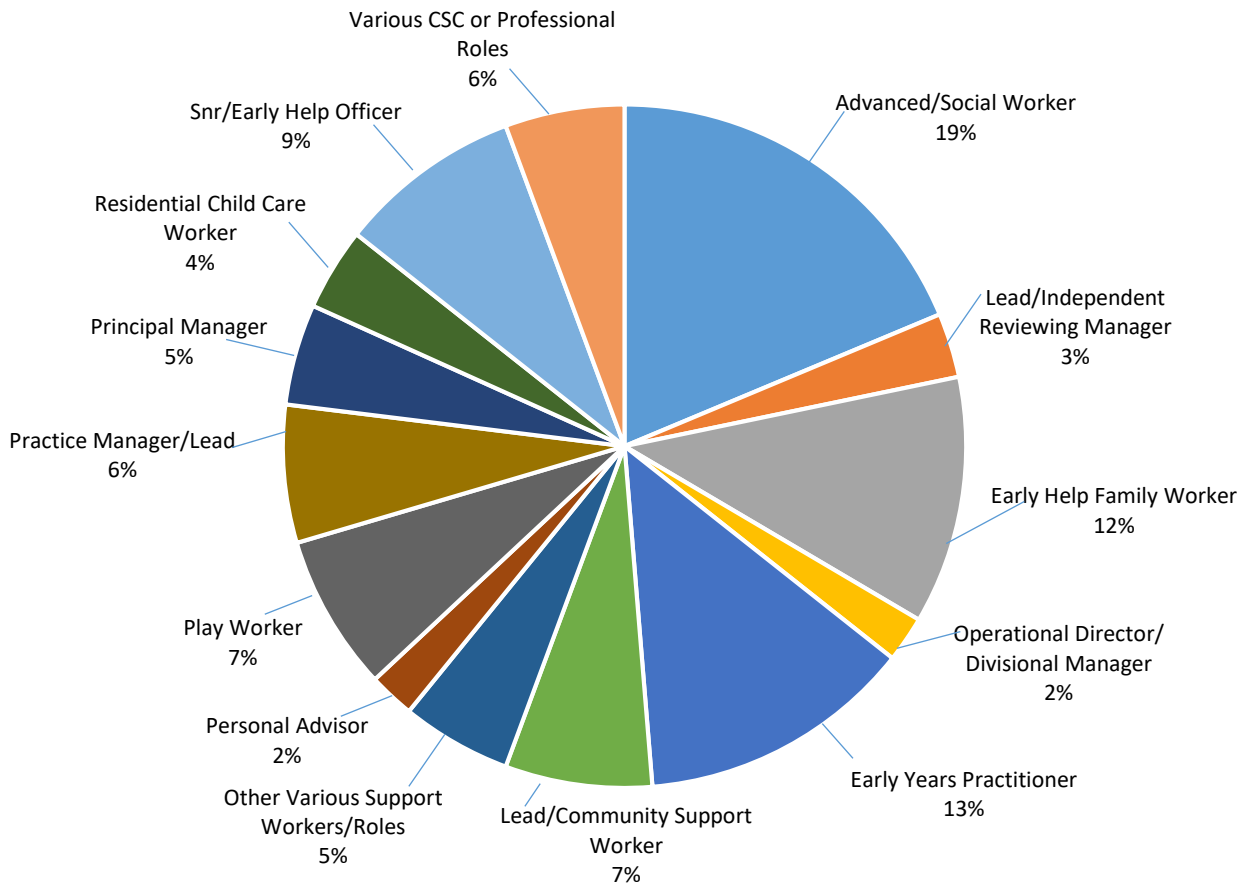
- [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#), published July 2018 updated on the 21st February 2019 to reflect how local authorities should notify the [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel](#) and revised again on the 9th December 2020 to incorporate factual changes in relation to information sharing, homelessness duty and references to domestic abuse. It is statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
- In July 2016 the Department for Education (DfE) published '[Putting children first](#)', setting out its ambition to reform and improve Children's Social Care by 2020. The Department later revising their ambition and timeframe for delivery, to ensuring: "...all vulnerable children, no matter where they live, receive the same high quality of care and support by 2022".
- In January 2021 [The Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) was announced. The government's manifesto committed to review the children's social care system to make sure children and young people get the support they need.
- [Early Intervention: Policy and Provision](#), September 2021, published by the House of Commons Library. This briefing provides an introductory overview of the development of early intervention policies in England and programmes directed at parents and children from conception up to age five years and their evidence-base and their impact.
- [Social Work England Professional Standards](#) The standards set out what a social worker in England must know, understand and be able to do. The standards are underpinned by [guidance](#) intended to support social workers to understand the standards and to uphold them in their practice so that social workers can continue to meet the professional standards and maintain their registration.
- [Ofsted Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services](#) (ILACS) updated August 2021. Regular contact with local authorities is at the heart of this system meaning that Ofsted will have more frequent contact with Halton giving the opportunity to identify any issues of concern sooner enabling the Council to act swiftly to address them.

Who Does This Strategy Apply To?

This Strategy applies to all the staff working within the Children & Families Service Department, as at November 2021 this consists of approximately 238 staff.

The majority of these work across all levels of need, support and intervention either working directly with children, young people and their families or oversee this work.

Children and Families Service, Workforce Snapshot as of November 2021



What We Have Achieved Since the Last Workforce Development Strategy

Key objectives	What we said we were going to do	What we have achieved	What we are going to do next
<p>Recruitment and Retention</p>	<p>To build upon existing processes, skills and knowledge to ensure that the Children & Families Service Department can attract, retain and nurture its workforce</p>	<p>Induction Programme for Social Workers Booklet</p>	<p>Run a pilot induction programme for new starters with a final draft to be produced Autumn 2021. This to be aligned with the Corporate Induction</p>
		<p>Student Social Work Placement Policy</p>	<p>Further update to tie into corporate induction and the impact of Covid-19 on blended placement approaches</p>
		<p>Recruitment and Retention Charter</p>	<p>Updating Workforce Development Strategy and accompanying Charter led by the Recruitment and Retention Development Group</p>
		<p>Foster Care Service: Intensive Placement Support Service</p>	<p>Developing our model of support for family and friends carers based on the successful model within Cheshire West</p>
		<p>Supervision Policy</p>	<p>Looking at a new supervision model incorporating feedback from the CSC ILACS Inspection</p> <p>Supervision workshops have taken place to see what will go into the revised supervision policy. Revised documents to be launched</p>

Key objectives	What we said we were going to do	What we have achieved	What we are going to do next
		Social Work Progression Guidance	Promote monthly drop in sessions to discuss career progression and give support and advice to staff. This will need looking at in-line with restructure of service
Training, Learning and Development	To encourage opportunities for everyone to enhance their knowledge, skills and behaviours in order to achieve a high quality and appropriately trained workforce across all levels of need	<p>The workforce have a varied in-house learning and development opportunities offer delivered through a broad range of training and e-learning (the latter being the primary offer during Covid)</p> <p>Using the outcomes/findings from case file audits the Senior Leadership Team have implemented a range of bespoke training e.g. court skills, nurturing parent</p> <p>Utilising our Research in Practice membership staff have attended Webinars and various CPD offerings</p>	<p>A more structured and comprehensive approach to training leaders and managers is being developed across the workforce</p> <p>Practice Development Workshops have taken place</p> <p>Comprehensive training plan in place to support the new case recording system, 'Eclipse'</p> <p>Part of the revised Supervision Policy is to produce an Annual Development Review bespoke to CSC. This will be overseen by the Quality Assurance Group</p> <p>Promote Research in Practice moving forward</p>

Key objectives	What we said we were going to do	What we have achieved	What we are going to do next
		<p>We have built on the first phase of training on Improving Access to Psychological Therapies and increased the number of staff trained to become Systemic Family Practitioners</p> <p>We have sustained the North West Boroughs Teaching Partnership arrangements with Leeds University to ensure the continuance of the Systemic Family Practice training programme for staff working across all levels of need</p> <p>We have continued to be members of the Cheshire and Merseyside Social Work Teaching Partnership. This partnership supports the development of all social workers within the organisation from students to team managers. As members, for example, we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access a range of CPD • Participate in social work research • Provision of student placements 	<p>Majority of managers have now been trained in systemic practice. Systemic team established to improve our embedding of the practice</p> <p>Waiting for agreement of the next phase of systemic training. This will involve the training of more frontline staff</p>
Leadership and Management	To ensure we have across the Children & Families Service Department the right people, with the right skills and knowledge in the right place at the right time	Acquired key workforce data which informed plans for the service. This included co-locating both Child in Need teams and the Safeguarding Unit, and iCART structure, roles and responsibilities reviewed	Implement new integrated audit and quality assurance framework monitored by the Quality Assurance Group

Key objectives	What we said we were going to do	What we have achieved	What we are going to do next
			<p>Design and implement revised service delivery model leading to a clear and agreed operating model for Early help and Social Care</p> <p>Recruitment and Retention Development Group established to look at recruitment, retention pathway and progression</p> <p>LGA Peer Review to provide independent challenge and support for service improvement</p>
		<p>Social Work Health Check undertaken in 2019. Feedback from the Health Check contributed towards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The development of a new case recording system, 'Eclipse' •Supervision Policy updated •Progression Policy updated 	<p>Implement and embed new case recording system 'Eclipse'</p> <p>Revise the Supervision Policy – implement new supervision model</p> <p>Update Progression Policy in-line with service review</p> <p>Develop an information and communication hub</p>

Our Priorities and Actions

Our overarching aim is to recruit, develop and retain a competent and skilled children and young people’s workforce that:

- ✓ Safeguards vulnerable children, young people and families.
- ✓ Works effectively across organisational and professional boundaries to improve outcomes and meet the needs of children, young people and families.
- ✓ Has the capacity and skills to deliver and work effectively with children and young people, families and carers.
- ✓ Is committed to reflective practice and a culture of continuous learning and improvement.
- ✓ Makes as much difference to the life chances of children and young people as possible.

Priorities and Actions	Factors informing planning	Outcome
<p>1. Recruitment and Retention</p> <p><u>Increase in Workforce Capacity</u> Secure funding and increase capacity in the workforce</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Recruitment and Retention Strategy • Restructure within Children in Need Division • Increase capacity, in the short term, through procurement of a managed service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create capacity and stability in the workforce to enable service improvements • improve decision making and direct case work and where needed will facilitate joint work on difficult cases • Stabilised caseload leading to assessments and plans being updated and children seen within timescales • Increased number of applicants and new starters for social work posts who can then access a high-quality, induction programme embedding core values • Increased staffing retention rate creating a stable and effective workforce • Staff are familiar with our inclusive culture, workplace policies, and behavioural ethics from day one • Staff are engaged, everyone contributes to a shared vision and ambition • More secure relationships formed with children and families, leading to improved outcomes • Staff will have a voice and feel supported, empowered, valued and invested in
<p><u>Retain and Recruit High Calibre Staff</u> Develop Comprehensive Workforce Strategy including training programme to achieve a striving workforce providing the best service they can to children and families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule of Staff Surveys to ensure opportunity for feedback and tracking of improvements and staff wellbeing • Staff voice developed through staff forum and staff development sessions • Clear communication between staff, middle management and senior management • Refreshed minimal training offer • Review support packages to staff including coaching, buddying and mentoring • Build on Local Authority Employee Well-being Programme • Build an inclusive and supportive workplace culture 	

Priorities and Actions	Factors informing planning	Outcome
<p>2. Skilled and stable workforce</p> <p>To build upon existing processes, skills and knowledge and develop a skilled and stable workforce who have the tools needed to deliver consistently good practice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and regulatory requirements • Post Qualifying Practice Standards • Embedded Quality Assurance Framework • Continuing Professional Development e.g. Research in Practice, practice development workshops, leadership and Management programme • Service delivery model (systemic practice) and practice development workshops • Improved supervision • Pilot Induction Programme for Social Workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create stability in the workforce to enable service improvements • Evidence of learning from audits and complaints and its impact on practice and outcomes • Training data and evaluation • Revised Induction Programme for Social Workers aligned with Corporate Induction • Updated Student Social Work Placement Policy • New supervision model • All Social Workers to receive monthly supervision that is increasingly reflective and impactful • Revised service delivery model implemented
<p>3. Career Development</p> <p><u>Social Work Progression</u></p> <p>To encourage and recognise increasing skills and knowledge by providing a clear and accessible progression pathway that enables social workers to develop their skills and knowledge from being newly qualified to being an experienced member of staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) and regulatory requirements • Post Qualifying Practice Standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Progression Guidance in place with robust assessment processes • Workforce stability and retention with increasing experience

Priorities and Actions	Factors informing planning	Outcome
<p><u>ASYE Offer</u></p> <p>To support recruitment and retention and our “grow your own” approach by continuing to strengthen our support for Social Workers that are newly qualified through our ASYE offer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF) • Post Qualifying Practice Standards • Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) for newly qualified social workers and related grant funding requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Plans in place and supporting individual needs • Evidence of 3,6 and 9 month reviews • Support for assessors • Retention of NQSWs • Evidence of reduced caseloads • Effective cycle of quality assurance and review ensuring that ASYE is delivered at a consistently high level
<p><u>Service Wide Developmental Opportunities</u></p> <p>Look for developmental opportunities for staff within the service, balanced with bringing in new talent with fresh ideas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and supporting all of our staff who wish to progress and advance their careers • Ensuring that workers who find a level at which they prefer to operate are still supported and offered developmental opportunities • A mix of growing our own talent and bringing in new people with fresh ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A management development programme providing an opportunity to support the existing group of managers, as well as those identified as aspiring managers • Access to a range of CPD/learning and development opportunities for all staff • Creating long term stability in the workforce through opportunities for progression and development
<p>4. Regional Workforce Development and Partnership Working</p> <p>To continue to work with regional partners through regional Teaching Partnership arrangements to promote and support recruitment, retention and quality, and entry into social work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active member of the Cheshire and Merseyside Social Work Teaching Partnership • Maintain North West Boroughs Teaching Partnership arrangements with Leeds University to ensure the continuance of the Systemic Family Practice training programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to a range of CPD opportunities for staff including practice education training, ASYE forum and practice education forum, bespoke commissioning • Provision of student placements • Revised service delivery model implemented

What This Means for Our Children

