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Leicestershire Procedure for Strategy – Recruitment & Retention

Applies to- All Children

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Children & Families Services Department Recruitment and Retention Strategy

January 2024 – January 2027

1. Introduction

The challenge to recruit and retain a stable social work workforce continues to be an issue nationally and the turnover of staff is being experienced across the country. In common with most other local authorities over the last three years, Children & Family Services in Leicestershire has experienced significant turnover across most teams and an increased use of Agency staff though in 2023 we have started to see the impact of our systematic approach with turnover rates reduced and below the national average.

Working in children's services is extremely challenging. The nature of the work is increasingly complex and focused on the most vulnerable children who have experienced significant trauma. Daily working in situations of abuse and risk, witnessing high levels of distress and trauma may have an adverse impact on staff wellbeing if not recognised and supported systematically as part of a robust retention offer.

In February 2023 the Government published its annual overview of the children's social work workforce. This continues to set out the challenges for social work recruitment with increasing evidence that retention of social workers in posts is difficult with a third of leavers in 2022 in service less than 2 years and 37% in post between 2 and 5 years – an increase of 7% since 2017. Stable home built on Love (2023) recognises the importance of recruitment and retention nationally and sets out its ambition for there to be a valued supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one. Social workers need the time and tools to do their job well and there were specific recommendations for stronger professional training and continuous support throughout a social worker's career and specifically an Early Career Framework

The national picture indicates that the difficulties in recruiting social workers are likely to continue for some years. With our favourable geographic position and strong transport links we will continue to face strong competition from neighbouring authorities.

It is essential that Recruitment and Retention of social workers continues to form a significant part of our children's workforce plans so that children can have opportunities to build trusting relationships over time to bring improved outcomes. This is now set out specifically in the Children's Social Care National Framework published in December 2023 with leaders held to account for the conditions required to support effective practice and ensuring the workforce is equipped and effective both identified as 'Enablers' to achieving statutory outcomes.

Enablers set out in the National Framework:

- Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective
- Leaders drive conditions for effective practice
- The workforce is equipped and effective

Outcomes for children's social care:

Outcome 1: Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need

Outcome 2: Children and young people are supported by their family network

Outcome 3: Children and young people are safe in and outside their homes

Outcome 4: Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes

Each enabler has specific links to practice and responsibilities from senior leaders to frontline managers and practitioners and these are underpinned by 6 underpinning principles :-

- ▶ Children's welfare is paramount
- ▶ Children's wishes and feelings are sought, heard, and responded to
- ▶ Children's social care works in partnership with whole families
- ▶ Children are raised by their families, with their family networks or in family environments wherever possible
- ▶ Local authorities work with other agencies to effectively identify and meet the needs of children, young people, and families
- ▶ Local authorities consider the economic and social circumstances impacting children, young people, and families

Our strategy sets out our vision for how we will provide equal priority to both recruitment and retention of staff. We recognise that our workforce is our greatest asset.

At LCC we have been responsive to national recommendations both in terms of service delivery models but also in terms of reducing administrative burdens with the implementation of an updated Mosaic system, reduced and well managed caseloads and a robust training offer with high levels of responsive welfare support in place.

Our current structure aligns with ambitions set out in both the Stable homes built on Love proposals published in 2023 but also has a strong emphasis on our shared value base and behaviours supporting positive outcomes for our child focused practice as set out in the Road to Excellence and further enhanced in our updated Achieving Excellence through purposeful practice (24-27). This places the Department well in terms of meeting the statutory requirements set out in the National Framework 2023

This Strategy (24-27) aims to continue to set out a robust and systematic process of recruitment including strong pathways to training; alongside strong well embedded retention activity to build an experienced and highly skilled workforce who will be supported to have a long career in Leicestershire and deliver those expectations as set out in the National Framework. In addition, we will review the specific skill mix, roles and responsibilities to match these with children's needs including the role of our alternatively qualified practitioners as we build a workforce for the future .

2. Our Vision

Our vision is to make Leicestershire a 'first choice employer' for skilled and reflective social workers and managers within a workforce of highly skilled Practitioners with skills matched to children's needs. This will include alternatively qualified practitioners who bring expertise into the workforce that enhances our offer to children and families.

We aim to build a strong shared value base across the children's workforce which aligns with the National Framework holding leaders, practice supervisors and practitioners to account with strong support systems underpinning a clearly defined local practice framework to achieve outcomes for children.

This strategy recognises that good social workers are critical to our success in achieving our aspirations. We value our diverse workforce and have embedded our commitment to our We Care Strategy into standard recruitment and retention activity as part of our Achieving Excellence through Purposeful Practice plan (24-27).

We recognise the important role that our workforce plays in delivering our service objectives for children and families locally. A dedicated strategy gives us the best chance to recruit and retain the high calibre staff we need to meet the needs of our most vulnerable children and their families. It provides specific priorities crucial to delivering our vision with clear expectations for how we equip practitioners to do their job effectively in a working environment built on strong shared values and setting the conditions that empower the workforce to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.

The roles within covered by this strategy are:

- Social Worker
- Senior Practitioner
- Senior Social work Oversight Practitioner
- Independent Reviewing Officer
- Team Manager
- Service Manager
- Key worker

Over the next period we will focus on:

- Building an environment that supports and empowers the children's workforce to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families in line with the National Framework.
- Retaining a stable and permanent workforce - only employing agency social workers as a temporary measure when absolutely necessary to fulfil statutory responsibilities – ensuring we have sufficient capacity to support new less experienced members of the workforce and avoiding gaps in the recruitment process linked to anticipated turnover.
- Ensure our workforce is equipped with skills and experience that match children's needs to deliver services that are impactful – reducing unnecessary bureaucracy including best use

of technology, administrative support and careful management of caseloads and good quality regular supervision.

- Implement sustainable recruitment approaches combining 'growing our own' whilst attracting staff available in the open market ensuring a strong competitive offer based on regular benchmarking across locally and regionally

By attracting and retaining a high calibre of social workers and building a strong skill mix into our workforce we can move forwards in achieving our service priorities as outlined in Achieving Excellence through Purposeful Practice.

3. Where are we now?

Since our strategy was launched, we have made some good progress in several key areas:-

Recruitment

We have implemented a range of activities to strengthen our recruitment including:-

- A centralised programme of advertisements and panels for all posts across our grades of Social Worker, Senior Practitioner and Team Manager.
- Programme of improved visibility for our adverts including social media, Indeed and LinkedIn.
- Implemented a robust ASYE assessment centre process attracting newly qualified social worker
- Developed a strong 'grow your own' approach with a well-established apprenticeship programme.
- Implemented a strategic partnership to recruit social workers from abroad which has significantly impacted on our ability to fill social work vacancies

Retention

We recognise that workers make the decision to stay or leave by weighing up a range of factors. This is reinforced from the feedback we have received from our staff surveys, annual conferences, exit interviews and staff welfare processes.

We have maintained our efforts to address those more systematic issues associated with support and welfare including caseload management, high quality supervision, pathways to progression and building varied experiences so that staff can build a career with us. This means we have created several initiatives to enhance the experience of our workforce as means to encourage them to remain with us here:-

- Established a strong shared value base set out in our Road to Excellence plan 21-23
- Introduced our workforce development plan (2022) setting out our commitment to staff leadership – enhancing the skills and abilities of first line and middle leaders and a strong career framework for social workers and managers.
- Launched an updated induction booklet and procedure from June 2022
- Worked to enhance oversight to casework, caseloads, and personal supervision with analysis of performance considered monthly in SMT
- Launched the 'We Care' Race Equality strategy 21-24 with each service working to address barriers to promote equality inclusion and diversity in the workforce
- Established our Workforce community principles in August 2022 setting out a strong foundation for supporting staff
- Introduced a targeted ad hoc welfare offer from the wellbeing service in 2022 to respond to stress in the workplace and delivered workshops to identify and prevent burn out based on learning from this initiative
- Introduced enhanced payrates for our Senior Practitioners; additional skills payments for our experienced social worker via retention payment and increased market premiums including for ASYE to build experience in the workforce
- Launched an internal Transfer policy for staff on same job description to transfer between teams (2022)
- Updated our ASYE handbook with a clear offer of support and education for our newly qualified staff's first year in practice in August 2022
- Launched our 'Working with us' brochure (2023) to support recruitment including our offer to encourage agency staff to move into permanent posts.

What have staff told us?

The feedback from the staff survey in November 2023 (170 participants) was positive. Staff were asked, what they enjoy in working for LCC, the responses evidenced that staff feel supported, **'passionate about working with children, young people and families'; 'flexibility good team working', 'being inclusive', 'challenging and rewarding'; 'opportunities for all and the learning and development provided to staff'.**

In asking why they would recommend us an employer to others, the responses were; **'we are trauma informed', 'inclusive', 'career supported'; 'supportive managers and inspirational leadership'; 'wellbeing support is provided and good training is provided'.**

Responses in asking what positive changes staff have seen at LCC, **'better management support', 'writing to the child has further developed and understanding of trauma', 'Family help model improves outcomes for children', 'investment in change'; 'commitment to Equality and Diversity', 'recognition of staff contribution to work'; 'improved integration between teams', 'safe spaces to voice concerns', 'feeling listened to'.**

Impact

Measure (FTE)	2017 (benchmark)	2018	2019	2020	2021	England av. 2022	2022	2023
Turnover rate	18.8%	13.7%	11.2%	8.5%	11.2%	17.1%	18.1%	12.2%
Vacancy rate	19.6%	14%	8.2%	11.2%	11%	20%	18.1%	14.8%
Agency rate	18.7%	17.5%	17.2%	16.7%	16.4%	17.6%	17.5%	19.6%

Our latest analysis of recruitment and retention activity from September 2023 shows significant reductions in both Turnover and vacancy rates for social work posts both below national comparisons. Comparison of advertised vacancies in January 2023 to January 2024 shows the impact of this activity January 2023 - 42 roles with January 2024- 27 roles. This included significant improvement in reductions in vacancies for Senior Practitioners reduced from 21 -4.5 and Team Managers reduced from 4 to 1 post.

4. Aims of the Strategy

There are 2 key objectives which underpin our Recruitment and Retention strategy with 5 key objectives.

- **Leaders drive conditions for effective practice**
- **The workforce is equipped and effective**

This means:-

- **Robust and outstanding Leadership** – enhancing the high support and high challenge approach to build and influence a learning culture that supports effective practice and values our workforce.
- **A strong and visible career structure including career progression**, professional training and Early Career framework including removing barriers to progression in line with our Equality and diversity programmes.
- **Robust and systematic Recruitment** – the right quality of high calibre social workers including a dedicated support to social workers from abroad within our standard offer which reduces our use of Agency social workers to exceptional circumstances.
- **Investment in Retention of our workforce** - Strong emotional and practical support to practitioners including a strong welfare offer. Worker feedback mechanisms help us to be responsive to staff needs and we have a strong competitive offer.

- **High quality support to practice** - building robust and systematic support to practice including supervision, manageable caseloads, skills matched to needs, within a clear practice framework.

From 2024, specific aims of the strategy are to:

- Deliver responses to national initiatives to support innovation in support and retention of a varied children's workforce as set out in Working Together 2023 and the Childrens Social care National Framework 2023.
- Further enhance a robust induction, workforce development and wellbeing support to the workforce as part of dedicated retention activity.
- Better understand and dismantle barriers to progression for our diverse workforce ensuring our talented BAME workers progress into senior practitioners and management, in line with our 'We Care Strategy'.
- Attracting and supporting international social workers to provide a career offer to remain with LCC including enhanced induction and development opportunities so that they are prepared for practice but also make a long term commitment to the service.
- Regularly review regionally and nationally our terms and conditions including continuing our payment of and regular review of the amount of market premium to remain competitive and remain responsive to workforce needs both in terms of hybrid working, work life balance and pay and conditions.
- Significantly reduce the use of agency staff – by using a planned approach to recruitment which anticipates turnover taking recruitment over and above 10% for key front facing posts – SW and Senior Practitioner. This responds to predicted natural turnover of 10% and prevent the need for agency cover built into recruitment processes. Alongside we will review capacity built into the establishment to ensure we can support ASYE and ISW within our structures and prevent reliance on routine Agency use.
- Building strong career frameworks for social workers, managers and alternatively qualified staff
- Provide strong support in terms of reducing administrative burden, managing caseloads and best use of technology.
- Deliver a strong practice framework with clear standards and expectations to enhance job satisfaction within a culture of learning and support.
- Continue our routes in 'Growing our own', through social work apprenticeship programmes and Step up including a Master apprenticeship as part of career pathways across the wider workforce into social work from 2025.
- Increase the efficiency of our recruitment activity to; maximise the potential for excellent appointments, minimise wasted effort and costs, and ensure transparency and inclusivity of process.

- Respond to emerging opportunities including new requirements from national developments including the Social work early Career Framework and the concept of the 'Lead practitioner'

5. Where do we want to get to?

We aim to create a strong diverse highly skilled workforce with the skills and experience to deliver outstanding services to children and their families. This will be measured against the expectations set out in the CSC National framework 2023

Specifically, we will measure our success:-

- Using feedback from members of staff in both national and local surveys and staff conversations including exit interviews
- Evidence from our Quality assurance processes to show the quality of interventions
- Feedback from children and families that we support.
- Measures of attendance at training
- Feedback from wellbeing support services
- Reduction in vacancies and turnover rates with benchmarking against regional and national comparators
- Use of agency staff limited to exceptional circumstances.
- Reduced changes in allocation to children
- Retention rates for ASYE in year 1-3

*levels of planned anticipatory recruitment at 10% in more detail:-

10% of SW - 10 SW posts

10% of SP – 4 SP posts

Kay Fletcher
13 February 2024