

Transformation Scoping Paper

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Directorate:	Children's Services
Service Area:	Retention payment to retain Children's SWs

1. TRANSFORMATION OVERVIEW

Background

Delivering children's services safely and effectively is a key challenge across local government.

Since our last inspection in 2018, nationally and locally communities are recovering from the Covid Pandemic and are living in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis, all of which will see many more adults parenting in adverse circumstances and further impact on Children's Services in Barnsley

A recent review of the Children's Social care and Early Help has highlighted significant workforce pressures and some variability in the quality of practice.

To support the service through a journey of improvement, a Development Programme will be put in place that will identify short term and longer-term activities to drive sustainable change, improve quality of practice and compliance and keep children and young people safe and supported.

Summary of Proposal

In July 2021 a paper was presented to Cabinet seeking the endorsement of additional temporary staffing capacity for children's social care, whilst a review of children's social workers caseloads took place by senior leaders.

In December 2021 a subsequent paper was submitted to SMT seeking agreement for both a welcome payment and one-off retention payment to children's social workers. This was as part of a workforce recruitment and retention proposal for front line children's social workers and was proposed as part of the workforce strategy approach to both attract new staff and retain existing staff. It was anticipated that this would in

turn address high caseloads, caused in part by high social worker turn over and staff absence.

The decision by SMT was to endorse a welcome payment for all new staff however the request for a one-off retention payment was rejected based on equity among all staff, including adult services social workers, and affordability.

To compound issues, staff were made aware that a proposed one-off payment was to be requested at SMT and when this was refused it further reinforced staff feeling undervalued and demoralised. Recovering from this has been difficult and is still revisited by staff now in discussions with managers as they reflect over the last 12 months of working in Barnsley.

This paper seeks to revisit this decision within the context of continued workforce challenges in some key areas of front-line practice, poor morale among children's social workers, and as a result of this, the ongoing risk of poor social work delivery as a result.

Approval is sought to implement a one-off retention payment of £2,000 for front line social workers in some areas of front-line practice. This discreet payment would be for those staff who currently present a significant flight risk. This will complement other retention activity that is currently being undertaken with children's social workers in the borough.

Retaining staff will provide much needed stability for children, support to reduce children's social work caseloads, and provide capacity to respond effectively to rising demand from children and young people in need of help or protection and care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the approach to retain key staff in the Joint investigation and Assessment Teams, Children and Young People's Service including Disabled Children's Service and Children in Care Teams is approved through the incentivisation of a one-off retention payment of £2,000, these being child and family social workers in areas of highest pressure.

INTRODUCTION

Senior Leaders are familiar with the current staffing crisis in the children's social workforce. This has been fuelled by a post pandemic and cost of living crisis which has seen a rise in complexity and demand for help. This is both a regional and national issue. With less social workers entering the profession and more exiting, we are currently experiencing a chronic work force crisis.

Data published by the DfE in May 2022 shows that of the 3,630 social workers nationally that left permanent local authority social work roles in 2021, 77% left children's social work altogether and 23% moved to agency roles.

In Barnsley, between May 2020 and July 2022, 106 of the 249 members of staff in children’s social care left work, of whom, 83 resigned their posts altogether.

In a very recent staff survey 44 Respondents (51%) responded “yes” or “maybe” to the question asking whether they were considering leaving in the next 12 months and better pay and conditions was the number one reason cited (16, 31%) followed by workload (9,17.6%).

Table 1 below demonstrates the turnover and churn of social work staff. There are currently 149 social work roles in Barnsley of which 74 staff are in front line social work roles i.e., Assessment (9) Children and Young People’s Services (45) and Disabled Children’s Team (12) and Children in Care (8)

It is clear the highest leavers are in front line practice.

Table 1

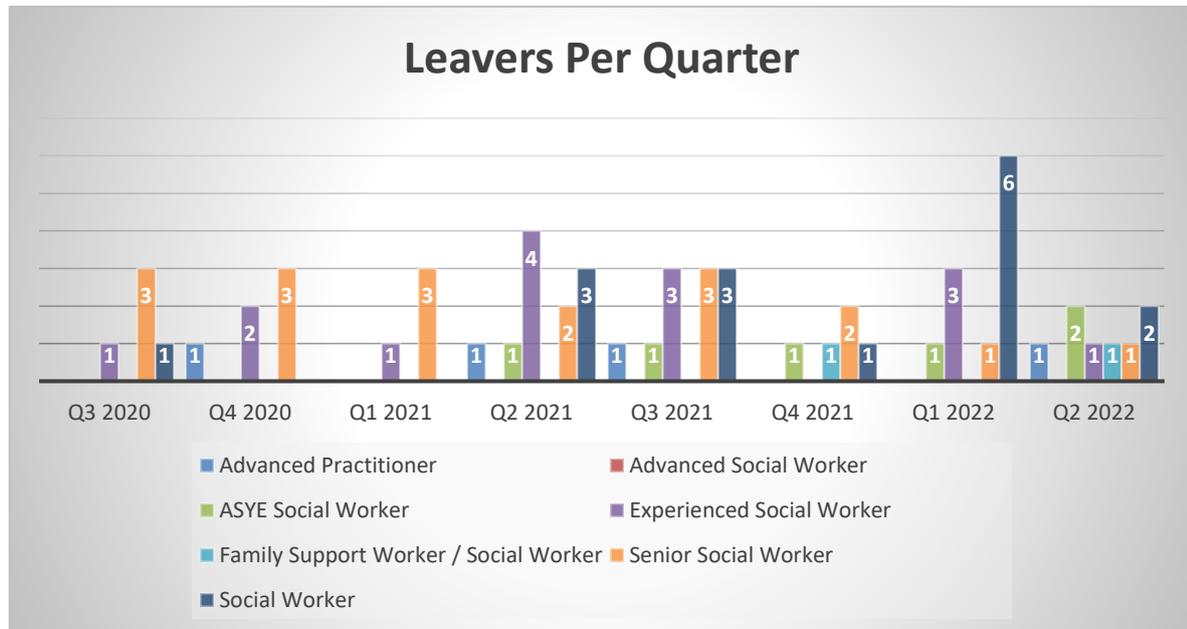
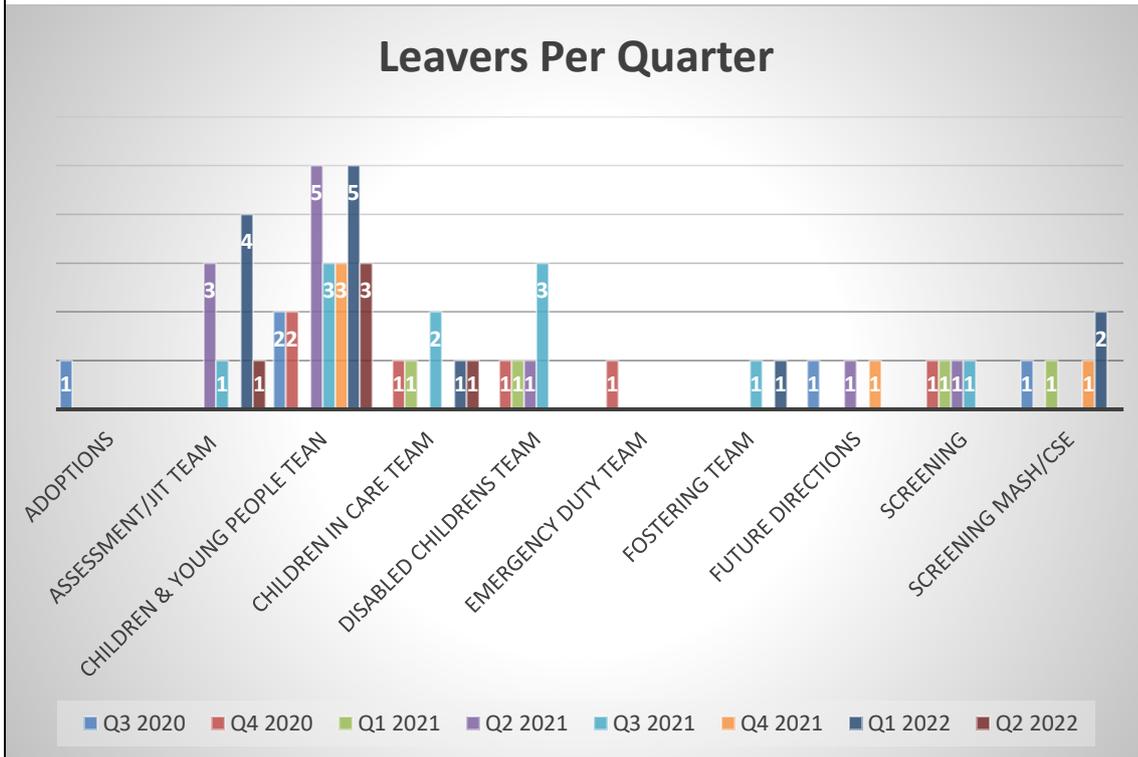


Table 2.



There are a number of factors that are compounding the pressures in children’s social work at this time. These include:

- High Caseloads: recent case load data (September 2022) confirms 5 workers have caseloads of between 30 to 33 and 21 staff have between 25 to 29 cases. Of note, average caseloads across the region are 18.
- The absence of a well-articulated and effective practice model or practice standards has meant staff have been working with no established framework for practice leading to inconsistency and uncertainty.
- Staff have all too often experienced poor induction and poor-quality supervision due to the current pressures and availability of managers. As a result, staff have not felt sufficiently valued or sufficiently invested in.
- High sickness levels as a result of the current issues in the CSC workforce; it is unsurprising that sickness absence across the service has been high with the top three reasons for long-term sick leave between January 2020 - August 2022 being anxiety, stress and depression (41 staff members)

Creating the conditions for success is now critical. Significant attempts are being made to recruit social workers into the service. We continue to offer a “Golden Hello” payment of £3,000 to all new social workers recruited. This policy is showing early signs of gaining traction and is currently unique in the region. We can evidence that since the introduction of the Golden Hello we have recruited 17 new permanent staff.

We recover any payment made where staff who receive this then leave; this applies to 3 of these 17 staff and is in line with our recruitment and retention policy.

PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

Barnsley Council and the Children's Social Care and Safeguarding Service has been historically an attractive employer for any qualified or newly qualified children's social workers.

The growth of the agency market, which currently remains unchecked and unchallenged, has often meant social workers are working alongside colleagues who are paid at a significantly higher hourly rate than themselves. The current hourly rate for an experienced BMBC children's social worker is £19.58 compared to an agency worker paid at £35.00.

Whilst we recognise the need for agency staff at the moment it comes with an inherent risk of alienating existing staff in key roles.

Existing non-funded retention activity that is underway includes:

1. Increasing face to face contact and visibility between front line staff and Senior Leaders to ensure staff feel listened to and valued
2. Roll out of our revised supervision model and practice standards
3. Galvanising senior leaders and Member support for Strengthening Children's Services through additional staffing, new Practice Model, training and development programme and new Development Hub, alongside ASYE academy
4. Strengthened pathway to swift emotional and mental health support for any staff through the Wellbeing offer
5. Recommissioned OHU service that can act swiftly for all staff
6. Continued commitment to the Barnsley Social Work Apprenticeship Scheme to enable some of Barnsley's current cohort of family support workers to enter social work practice directly

Options to retain Children's Social Workers

Existing permanent, qualified, frontline case-holding children's social workers will receive a one-off payment of £2,000. This scheme will ensure relevant, permanent front-line children's social workers based in social work teams, have received the payment, to support their retention and create stability.

This will be repayable should those that receive the payment leave within two years of receiving the payment in line with the recruitment and retention policy.

Alternative Options

The current level of children's social work caseloads, together with conditions in the employment market have made it imperative that further action is now taken to ensure a safe and optimal level of caseloads for social workers to ensure that children are adequately safeguarded.

From the viewpoint of our statutory responsibilities, to do nothing in relation to this issue would not constitute a sustainable option for supporting and protecting vulnerable children and young people, including looked after children.

Links to Corporate Priorities

- Healthy Barnsley - People can access all the care and support they need, at the right time and in the right place.
- Enabling Barnsley - Our council is modern, inclusive, efficient, productive, and high performing

Anticipated Objectives & Benefits

- Retention of social workers in key roles
- Increased stability
- Positive reputational impact and staff morale

Implications

- Potential negative response from other social workers in less demanding areas

2. PROJECT SCHEDULE

What are the provisional milestones / timescales?

Key Milestone	Start Date	Completion Date
Payments to be made once the full staff team have been scoped	Payment to have been made by December 2022	

3. RESOURCES

Provide details of any anticipated resources required (IT support, office space, Project Manager, Project Team, specific skills, investment etc.)

Resources	Why Required	When Required
Project / HR	To map eligible staff	
Comms	Comms to all staff to advise of this decision including unions	

4. EFFICIENCIES

What efficiency with the transformation deliver – minimum expected is 10%

Efficiency	Estimates (£)	
Reduced agency costs due to low turnover of staff		

5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Provide any further summary information regarding urgency, dependencies, constraints, enablers, assumptions.