
SUFFICIENCY OF SOCIAL WORKERS, QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. This report focuses on Children's Services in Darlington. It reports on the current situation in relation to the sufficiency of social workers to offer a good service to Children and Families, the qualification profiles of social workers and whether the advanced skill levels are currently sufficient.

Summary

2. Sufficiency of social workers within child protection is a national issue. Authorities across the country have seen a decrease in social workers applying for permanent posts and an increased dependency on agency social workers to ensure adequate staffing. This is particularly evident for frontline social work teams carrying child protection and assessment cases. Darlington is in a similar position although, continues to invest in social work posts with an additional six posts built into the budget from 1 April 2016. We have developed a recruitment and retention plan for 2016/2017 which includes the development of a new post of advanced social worker which has a competitive salary to attract experienced social workers to the authority. Caseloads have been reduced as a result of investment in social work posts.
3. It is recognised that there is a direct correlation between effective and knowledgeable managers and the retention of social workers. Darlington has introduced a Front Line Managers training programme which is due to be evaluated by Reconstruct at the end of September 2016.
4. The qualification profile of social workers is appropriate. However, we need to attract social workers with more substantive experience than is currently the case. It is anticipated that the introduction of the advanced social work role will assist in addressing this issue. Darlington has a particular strength in comparison to other local authorities in the area in respect of the number of practice educators available to student social workers however; the experience of these social workers needs to be further embedded in Darlington's own training programme for staff.

Next Steps

5. It is recommended that:-

- (a) The Recruitment and Retention Plan is implemented;
- (b) There is continued monitoring of staff turnover and caseloads; and
- (c) Robust data is collected in relation to Agency staff and turnover.

Suzanne Joyner
Director of Children and Adults Services

Background Papers

- (a) DFE Official Statistics – Children’s Social Care Workforce England September 2015
- (b) Darlington Children’s Services Health Check 2015
- (c) Darlington Borough Council workforce statistics – various since 2013/14
- (d) Darlington WFD CPD records July 2016
- (e) DFE Knowledge and Skills Statements for Practice Leaders and Practice Supervisors November 2015
- (f) North East Teaching Partnership Bid May 2016

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report concerns workforce issues.
Health and Well Being	This report concerns the health and wellbeing of social work staff.
Carbon Impact	There are no carbon impact implications in this report.
Diversity	There are no issues around diversity this report needs to address.
Wards Affected	This reports impacts on the whole of Darlington
Groups Affected	Children and young people
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework. But supports targets in the Children and Young People's Improvement Plan.
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	This report has no implications for Darlington Perfectly placed.
Efficiency	There are no recommended efficiency savings in this report.

MAIN REPORT

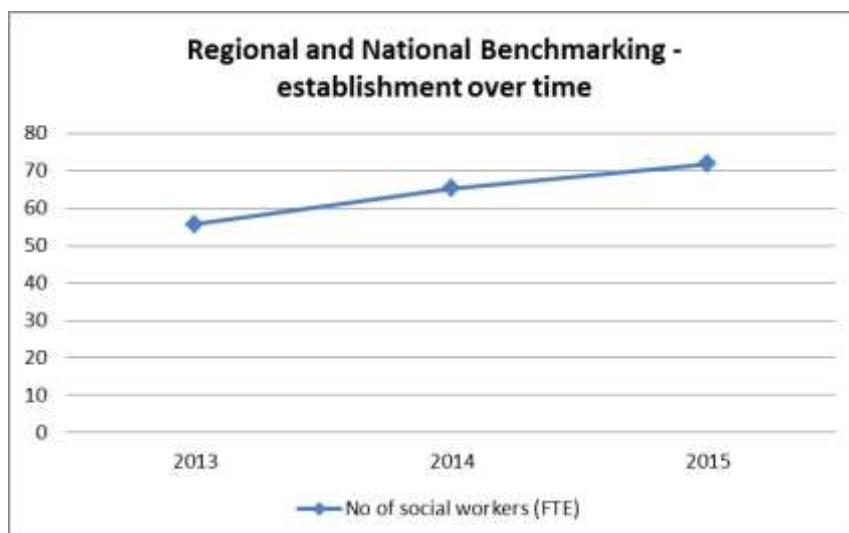
Introduction

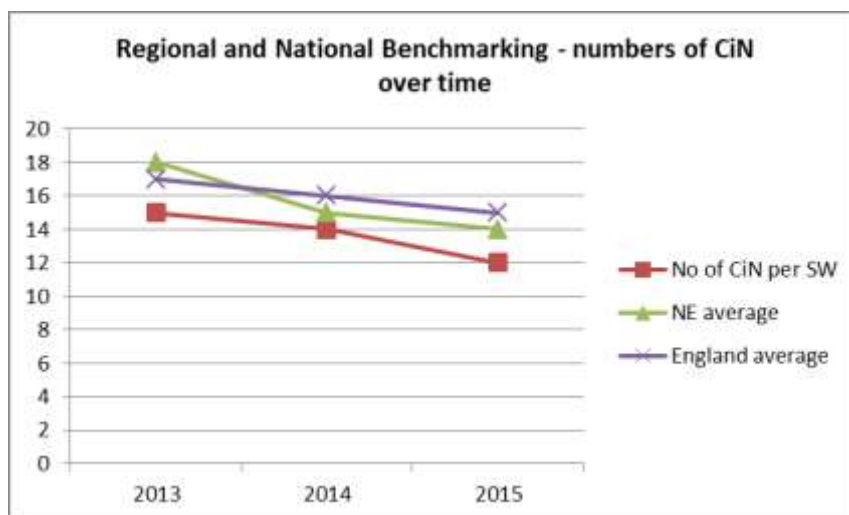
6. The report considers whether the authority has sufficient numbers of case carrying social workers with relevant experience to provide a good service to families. Ofsted reported in September 2015 that 'the service for children needing help and protection in Darlington is inadequate because when children need an assessment, a significant number have to wait too long for their need for support and protection to be assessed.' Ofsted also reported that 'an unequal distribution of workload across social work teams results in some social workers having unacceptably high caseloads. This, together with inexperienced social workers not receiving regular supervision and support has resulted in a failure to prioritise and progress work effectively.' This indicated an urgent need to examine sufficiency and skills. Sufficiency is measured by comparison of current social work staffing levels with National and Regional social work staffing levels; the use of comparator Local Authorities and turnover rates. There is also an examination of current caseloads, compared to the regional and national trends in reduction of caseloads for Children's social workers since 2013. Workforce qualifications and skills and training for first line management will be addressed latterly.

Key Workforce Indicators

Establishment

7. At 31 July 2016, Darlington's children's qualified social worker comprised
- (a) 94 posts (87.27 FTE) requiring a social work qualification (an increase of 6 posts compared to the end of the previous year 31 March 2016)
 - i. 11 Team Managers (11FTE)
 - ii. 5 Independent Reviewing Officers (4.19 FTE)
 - iii. 78 case carrying social workers (72.08 FTE)
 - (b) 7 social work qualified senior managers (Head of Service and Service Manager)
8. This establishment is distributed as follows:
- (a) Front line / Field work services (assessment and safeguarding teams, MASH/CAP) – 50 posts (47.42 FTE)
 - (b) Specialist Services (Adoption and Fostering, family intervention team, looked after children and leaving care, life stages 0-25) – 39 posts (35.66 FTE)
 - (c) Independent Reviewing Service – 5 posts (4.19 FTE)
9. Regional and National comparisons available from the Department for Education Annual Children's Social Work Workforce return for the last three years available 2013, 2014 and 2015 are reproduced below.



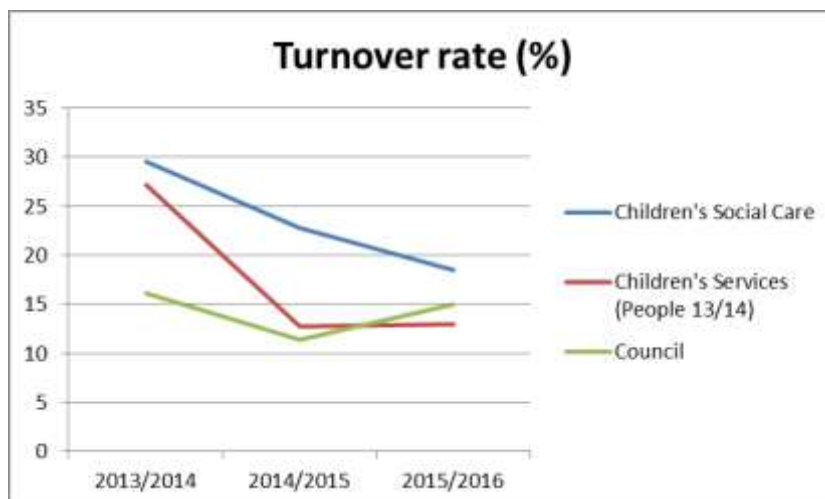


10. Whilst Darlington has consistently had the smallest number of social workers in the North-East region, the 2015 data shows that Darlington has the fourth lowest number of CiN per children's social worker in the region and has consistently remained marginally below the regional and national average.
11. With the further establishment increase in 2016/17 as above, it is reasonable to expect a more significant improvement in these indicators in the next annual reporting period due September 2016.

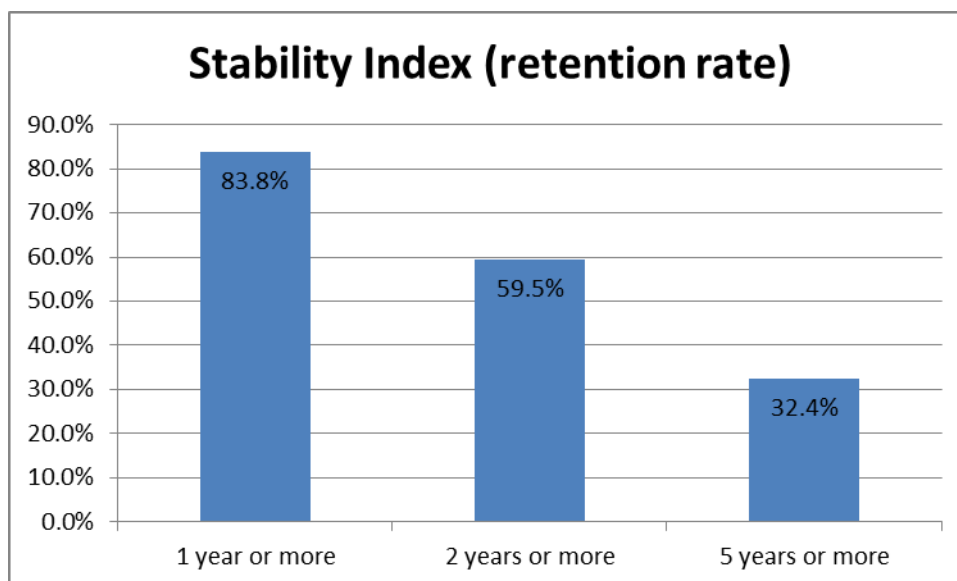
Turnover and Retention

12. The social worker turnover rate at year end 2015/16 (31 March 2016) was 18.44%. This remained higher than the Children's Services overall average of 12.99% and the Council-wide average of 15.02% at the same reference point. Positively however, the local data shows a year on year improvement since 2013/14, when the year-end turnover rate within the children's workforce was as high as 29.51%, indicating a positive downward trend last year compared with the overall Children's Services and Council, which both show an upward trend.

13.



14. To date (31 July 2016) in 2016/17, the turnover rate has shown an upward trend compared to the same time in the previous two years (10.67% at 31 July 2016 compared to 13.56% at 31 July 2013, 8.26% at 31 July 2014, 2.74% at 31 July 2015). Of the six leavers to date, one was a service manager, two team managers (both from specialist services) and three social workers (one from front line services and two from specialist services).
15. During 2015/16, of the 13 employees who left the authority, 9 were from front line / fieldwork services, including 5 social workers with over 2 years post-qualifying experience of which one was a team manager.
16. Whilst the turnover rate has shown some positive signs in the last three years, it needs to be monitored closely for the remainder of the current year 2016/17 to ensure that any dysfunctional turnover is avoided.
17. The stability index (retention rate) of the experienced workforce is reflecting the difficulties in retaining this workforce – at 31 July 2016, the retention rate of employees with 1 year of service or more was 83.78%, however this reduces progressively to 59.5% for employees with 2 years of service or more and to 32.43% for employees with 5 years of service or more.



18. In its totality, the data shows that the area of particular difficulty in retaining experienced social workers is in front line / fieldwork, where there are higher numbers of less experienced social workers and higher instability and turnover. As a result, these areas have been the initial focus of targeted recruitment and retention strategies to date.

Vacancies and Agency Workers

19. At 31 July 2016, the overall vacancy rate was 26.73% and this showed an increase from 20.21% at 31 March 2016. However, whilst the vacancy rates have been significantly higher than the overall average (around 40%), the rate has remained stable since the beginning of the year 2016/17, which is a positive trend in the context of an increase in establishment of 6 posts and the length of time required to appoint to posts at a time including two peak periods of holidays.

20. The overall vacancy rate has been negatively impacted by the unexpected high number of leavers from specialist services, which historically had been the most stable area in terms of turnover and stability of staff. Reasons for leaving are reported; to progress careers in social work and to experience Agency Work.

21. Recruitment efforts are continuing to fill vacancies with permanently employed staff and the success of these is continuously monitored however the full impact will not be known until towards the end of the calendar year, when it is expected that the number of vacancies would be reduced through continued recruitment and appointment process.

22. In summary, at 31 July 2016, the establishment and number of vacancies and agency workers recorded by teams was as follows:

31st July 16								
Team	Total establishment		Established / Fixed Term Staff		Vacancies		Agency workers	
	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE	Headcount	FTE
Team A	9	8.81	3	3.00	6.00	5.81	8.00	7.81
Team B	9	9.00	4	4.00	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.00
Team C	9	7.80	5	4.20	4.00	3.60	5.00	4.6
Team D	10	9.20	7	6.23	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00
MASH/CAP	13	12.61	11	10.61	2.00	2.00	3.00	3.00
TOTAL FRONT LINE	50	47.42	30	28.04	20	19.41	23.00	22.41
Adoption	14	12.13	12	10.64	2.00	1.5	0.00	0.00
Lifestages 0-25	8	7.61	6	5.61	2.00	2	1.00	1.00
Looked After Care Team	10	9.61	9	8.61	1.00	1	0.00	0.00
Specialist Family Services	7	6.31	7	6.31	0.00	0	0.00	0.00
TOTAL SPECIALIST	39	35.66	34	31.16	5.00	4.5	1.00	1
FRONT LINE & SPECIALIST	89.00	83.08	64.00	59.20	25.00	23.91	24.00	23.41
IRO	5	4.19	4	3.19	1.00	1	2.00	1.81
TOTAL ESTABLISHMENT	94	87.27	68	62.39	26	24.91	26.00	25.22
Management (HOS / Service Manager)	7	7.00	6	6	1	1	0	0.00

23. Whilst recruitment to permanent posts continues, sufficiency is maintained through the timely appointment of agency staff and in order to understand impact on practice with children and families, the next step in improving management information regarding turnover as experienced by clients should include developing a system for collecting more detailed data in relation to agency worker turnover and experience.

Caseloads

24. The following table shows the caseloads at July 2016.

Team	18 or Less	More Than 18 Less Than 25	25 or More	Grand Total
CAP	6			6
LATC	6	2	1	9
MASH	5			5
TEAM A	5	2	1	8
TEAM B	6		2	8
TEAM C	6	3		9
TEAM D	7	2		9
TOTAL	41	9	4	54
	75.93%	16.67%	7.41%	

24. In 2013, the caseloads within the Assessment and Safeguarding teams were 25 - 30 children. In 2014, average caseloads had been reduced to 22. In July

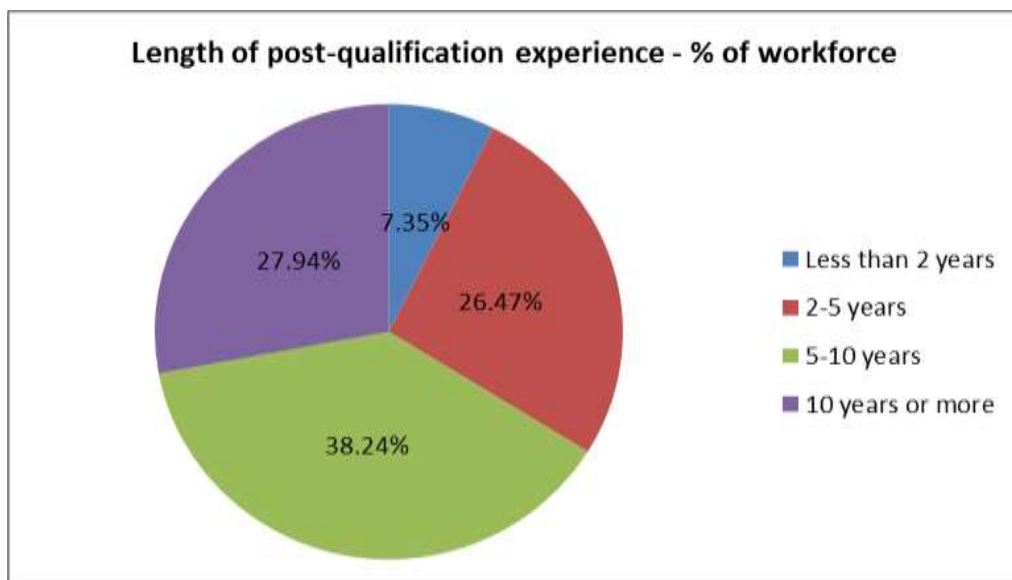
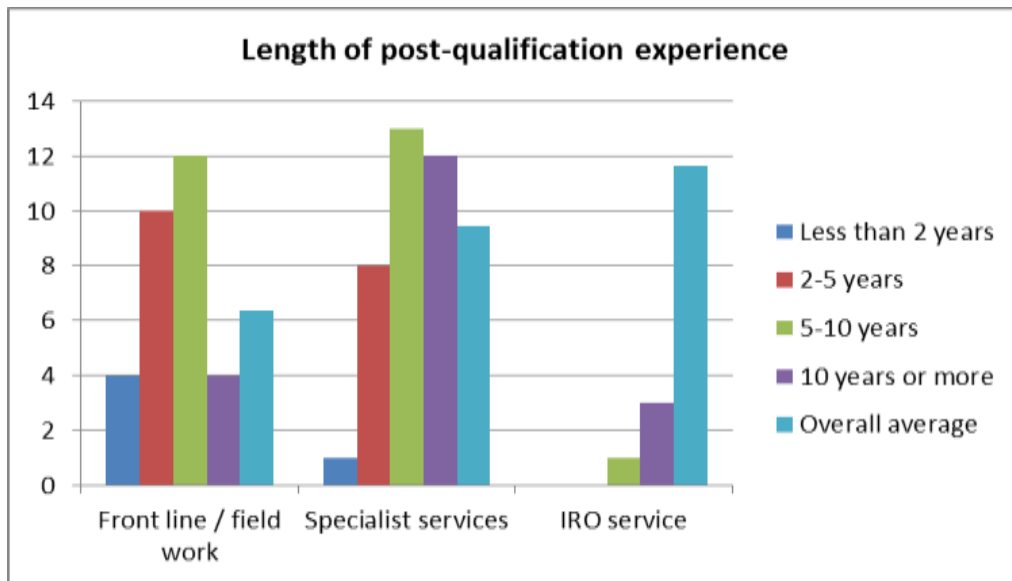
2016, 75.9% of social workers had caseloads of 18 children or less.

25. Throughout 2014 and 2015 Darlington has been proactive in reducing caseloads through early support measures with family workers and specialist family workers being trained to manage increasingly complex, albeit non safeguarding, family situations, developing an efficient front door system, recruiting additional social workers and covering vacancies through agency workers.
26. Measuring sufficiency solely by caseload numbers poses problems since the complexity of a family's situation adds to the time, multi- agency liaison and paperwork required to provide a good service to both parents and children. The most complex situations are often those of child protection which go through a Court or placement process.
27. National evaluations have also demonstrated that the time spent caseload weighting can be onerous within a variety of systems. A national poll of social workers in 2010 revealed that 90% of social workers favoured 'a cap on a maximum number of cases for individual practitioners' (*Mark Hunter Community Care 2010 How do other professions deal with caseloads?*)
28. Darlington is therefore committed to maintaining caseloads to 18 or below over the next year. There is no national caseload level but the levels of caseload do impact on recruitment and retention of staff.

Experience and Qualifications

29. Internal workforce data is gathered on an on-going basis in relation to qualification details of all social workers employed at Darlington Borough Council. The breakdown of qualifications includes 14 Masters degrees, 42 degrees (of which 4 First class, 18 Upper Second class and 13 Lower Second class), 17 Diplomas in Social Work (DipSW) and 1 Certificate in Social Services. This demonstrates that, at a qualifying level, Darlington follows a normal distribution of Degree classifications.
30. At 31 July 2016, the length of post-qualification experience amongst qualified permanent social workers up to and including team managers was distributed as follows:

	Less than 2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	10 years or more	Overall average
Front line / field work	4	10	12	4	6.35
Specialist services	1	8	13	12	9.45
IRO service	0	0	1	3	11.62
Total	5	18	26	19	
% of workforce	7.35%	26.47%	38.24%	27.94%	



Additional Training

31. Darlington Children's social workers have reported high levels of satisfaction with the learning opportunities offered by Darlington Borough Council recorded in the Health Check 2015. 75% of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied. Since September 2015 there has been a programme of Consolidating Good Practice as part of the Ofsted Improvement programme. This has increased the amount of learning opportunities available to qualified social workers.
32. Between March 2011 and July 2016, 41 (52.5%) (employed) social workers have undertaken additional post qualifying modules. These include Consolidation, Achieving Best Evidence, Safeguarding Children and Young People, Practice Education, Contemporary Social Work Practice, Court Skills for Social Workers and Leadership and Management in Social Work. Continuous learning is linked to pay progression in line with the current progression scheme in operation with the Council.
33. Darlington has 18 qualified Practice Educators within the children's workforce who offer 14-16 placements per year, outstripping our regional partners in proportion to our numbers of qualified social workers. This allows Darlington to be seen as supportive of qualifying workers and allows students to experience social work and consider Darlington as an employer of choice.

Retention of Newly Qualified Social Workers

34. 19 Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) were registered on the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) between June 2014 and June 2016. 13 NQSWs successfully completed the requirements of their first year in social work. Four NQSWs have been deferred and 2 left Darlington before completion. A further 3 NQSWs left Darlington within a year of completing.
35. 7 (53%) of the social workers successfully completing the ASYE programme have remained in Darlington for over 2 years.

First Line Managers

36. Of the 11 first line managers, only one holds an accredited management qualification. This is an NVQ L4 in Leadership and Management. Five managers completed the Post Qualifying award in Children and Families Social Work at post graduate level which included elements of management (such as support, mentoring, and supervision of others). Three managers are currently undertaking the Corporate First Line Management Programme and 2 Managers completed these three years ago and have also completed the Corporate Middle

Management Programme. All frontline managers are involved in the Management Programme developed post Ofsted which is due to finish in September 2016 when an evaluation of the programme will be undertaken.

Retention and Recruitment

37. Recruitment and Retention of suitably qualified social workers is a challenge for all local authorities, Darlington has produced a recruitment and retention Action Plan covering 2016-2017.
38. Additional capacity has been agreed as part of the baseline budget from the financial year 2016/2017 to increase the headcount of social workers which will assist in maintaining caseloads at an acceptable level.
39. A new role of Advanced Social Work Practitioner has been created with an attractive salary in order to attract experienced social workers who will not only be case holding but will create additional capacity to enable practice improvement and mentoring to be undertaken. An initial 6 posts have been advertised – three appointments have been made and interviews for the remaining three are imminent and it is likely that all posts will be filled on a permanent basis by the end of September 2016.
40. The current salary for social workers has been benchmarked against the local social care market and will continue to be reviewed to ensure Darlington remains comparable within the region.
41. To support on-going recruitment a micro site has been created including video footage from current social workers sharing their experiences of working within Darlington and an improved suite of marketing materials has been developed. Darlington has also participated in a recruitment fair in Manchester to seek to attract social workers from outside the region.
42. All job advertisements have been refreshed and specific advertisements have been developed to attract high calibre new qualified social workers and returners to social work.
43. In order to support existing social workers an Accommodation Review has been undertaken and the four Assessment and Safeguarding Teams have relocated to an open plan office space within the Town Hall in April 2016. Initial benefits reported have been the sharing of practice, increased peer support, as well as accessibility to managers.

44. Business Support to teams has been increased including a dedicated team clerk. This will be reviewed in July 2016, however early impact of this that social workers report less time on paperwork and filing which releases capacity to work with families.
45. Further mobile devices have been made available to social workers to allow them to work effectively from locations other than their office base including ad hoc working from home if required.
46. Further work is to be undertaken to improve retention including; a review of the current progression scheme to provide appropriate opportunities for professional development and timely career progression, whilst ensuring that progression reflects sustained practice and knowledge development in line with the Performance Capabilities Framework (PCF) and the Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) for Children and Family Social Workers. A review of the current flexi time system which supports effective social work practice will also be undertaken (immediate short term management discretions are available under the current scheme).

Future Skills Requirements

47. The Children and Social Work Bill announced in the recent Queen's Speech is set to drive up standards in Social Work. DfE Knowledge and Skills Statements (KSS) recently published have emphasised the increasing specialisation DfE require within children's social work for the future and the continued measurement and testing of knowledge and ability. A proof of concept trial has been concluded in April 2016 whereby practitioners and practice supervisors have been tested through online exams and direct observation.
48. There is currently a proposal for a consultation on Employer Endorsement and making the tests mandatory nationally. A current DfE target is a fully accredited and tested workforce by 2020. This is likely to impact the numbers of experienced social workers willing to remain in social work, particularly in Child Protection.

Conclusion

49. Darlington is facing similar challenges to many local authorities in the recruitment and retention of social workers. However, action has been taken to address a number of issues, not least the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers. A positive trend is noted in the reduced caseloads over the previous two years and the improved ratio of children to social workers. The increased posts in the baseline budget and the introduction of the role of advanced social

worker are expected to have an impact on the sufficiency and retention of social workers.

50. Sufficiency of social workers within Child Protection is a national issue. Action taken by Darlington has included operational measures cited above and a recruitment and retention plan which includes a microsite, marketing materials, reservation of 4 posts for qualifying social workers and establishment of the role of advanced practitioners within Assessment and Safeguarding Teams. These measures combined with a reduction in turnover in the Assessment and Safeguarding Teams will promote sufficiency and improvement.