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**SUFFICIENCY OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES SOCIAL WORK WORKFORCE**

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**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update in relation to actions taken to improve the social work workforce within Darlington Children's Services.

**Summary**

2. Since the last report to the Scrutiny Committee in September 2016, significant progress has been made in relation to improving the sufficiency and stability of the Children's Services Social Work Workforce.
3. As at 30 September 2017, the overall vacancy rate is 17% - this shows a significant improvement from 29% at the end of October 2016.
4. A continued approach to maintaining manageable caseloads (currently no more than 18 children per social worker) and promotion of this as a unique aspect within ongoing recruitment campaign has ensured seven experienced external appointments made to posts up to Team Manager in the last three months, which has had a positive impact on the vacancy rate.
5. The workforce drive has also encouraged appointments of 10.94 FTE agency workers into permanent posts across the Assessment and Safeguarding teams, Children's Access Point Team, Looked After Through Care Team and Independent Review Team. This has reduced the agency rate (% of agency workers covering vacancies adjusted for outstanding converters) to 16% as at 30 September 2017.
6. All agency workers appointed to permanent posts have in excess of four years post-qualifying experience, with an average of over seven years (social work teams) and over 26 years (IRO team). This has a positive impact on the level of post-qualifying experience in teams, in particular in the front line social work teams where the average post-qualifying experience has increased by one year since October 2016 (see Appendix 1).
7. Specific actions taken during recent months include:
  - (a) A social media campaign via Community Care, aimed at promoting Darlington as an employer of choice for social workers
  - (b) Changes to the flexi-scheme, based on feedback provided by staff, affording more flexibility to social workers
  - (c) Roll out of revised career progression scheme to all social work teams

- (d) Introduction of a recruitment and retention scheme for social workers in front line teams, identified as difficult to recruit.
8. Examples of the key areas of progress in recent months include:
- (a) Permanent appointments made to all vacant senior management posts (two Heads of Service and two Service Managers) to ensure consistent leadership and support is provided to the workforce
  - (b) Three new experienced social workers appointed to the Looked After Through Care team
  - (c) An experienced Team Manager appointed to Assessment and Safeguarding
  - (d) Four newly qualified social workers appointed from the cohort of Step Up students undertaking placements with the Council - in line with the Council's strategy to stimulate and develop its own supply of good quality social workers.
  - (e) A number of agency workers converting to permanent contracts (see paragraph 5 above)
9. The Council aims to continue efforts to promote Darlington as an employer of choice for experienced social workers and to monitor and pro-actively enhance the total employment offer available to social workers at Darlington (including pay and other benefits, financial and non-financial) to ensure that the expected improved stability of the permanent workforce is achieved and sustained.

**Suzanne Joyner**  
**Director of Children and Adults Services**

### **Background Papers**

- (a) DFE Official Statistics – Children's Social Care Workforce England September 2016
- (b) Darlington Borough Council workforce statistics – various since 2013/14

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.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The improved stability of a social care workforce will have a positive impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers as they will have consistency in those involved in their care.

## MAIN REPORT

10. As at 30 September 2017, the qualified children's social work workforce (not including senior managers at service manager and head of service level) consists of 85.1 FTE funded establishment, of which 14.6 FTE are vacant posts (vacant posts exclude those posts to which an appointment has been made subject to pre-employment checks and start date). A more detailed workforce summary as at 30 September 2017 is included at Appendix 1.

### Recruitment

11. A drive to promote Darlington as a place to live and work has continued as staff took part in a Compass Social Work Fair in Birmingham in March 2017. This was combined with an advertorial feature in COMPASS guide 2017, circulated to over 25,000 social work professionals across the sector, which clearly outlined the improvements achieved within the services to date and promoted Darlington as an attractive employer of social workers.
12. Continuing the drive to promote Darlington as a place to live and work, Children Services led a regional initiative aimed at promoting the North East as an attractive place for experienced social workers to relocate to. In collaboration with other Local Authorities in the region, Darlington attended the May 2017 Compass Social

Work Fair in Manchester representing the region as a whole to encourage social workers from outside the area to 'Put Your Heart into Social Work' in the North East. Building on the success of this initiative, the same presence is planned at the COMPASS Job Fairs in London (November 2017) and Birmingham (March 2018).

13. In addition and as part of the regional drive, a further initiative to target experienced social workers is being planned via Community Care and their 'Live' social work conference events which take place twice a year in September and March.

## **Retention**

14. Building on the introduction of the new Integrated Children's System Liquid Logic in October 2016, agile working is being rolled out across the Children's Workforce. Upgrades have been made in respect of IT equipment, allowing social workers to actively work with children and their families from within a range of settings.
15. The review of the flexi time scheme arrangements was completed and a revised policy was agreed corporately. The revised policy was based on and incorporated feedback from social workers. The scheme has been rolled out to all teams and is providing the social workers with increased flexibility and efficiency in managing working time, as well as improved satisfaction in relation to their working environment.
16. The social worker progression scheme was reviewed and a new revised scheme was implemented across all teams from 1 April 2017. The changes to the scheme resulted from feedback received from staff and the revised scheme gives social workers and managers more accountability for their own practice development whilst making it easier to recognise talent and utilise the existing resources more effectively.
17. A Recruitment and Retention Payment Scheme for social workers was introduced from 1 June 2017 in front line teams identified as difficult to recruit. The scheme has been fully rolled out and all existing staff currently eligible for the scheme have taken up the offer. This is expected to improve the stability of the workforce significantly over the next two years. The scheme is monitored and reviewed on an on-going basis to ensure that its availability remains relevant to the areas of recruitment difficulty and within budgetary constraints.

## **Agency Workers**

18. It is recognised that agency workers are likely to remain (short term) part of the workforce and as such it is important to continue the efforts to improve the quality and timeliness of appointments.
19. The processes for selecting/appointing agency social workers have been strengthened to be consistent with those applied in the recruitment of permanent employees.
20. The management information regarding agency turnover and experience has been developed and as a result we are now able to report on length of engagement and

length of post-qualifying experience of agency workers to support quality of services provided to children and families.

21. Regionally, a task and finish group was set up by the North East Workforce Development Group (led by Darlington) to address ongoing issues relating to the costs and quality of agency workers. The work of the group has culminated in a number of recommendations which are summarised for agreement in a Memorandum of Understanding which will lead to improved and consistent management of the quality and cost of agency workers across the region. Additionally, whilst agency workers remain part of the workforce, the regional approach is expected to have a positive impact on stability and continuity.
22. The rate of agency social workers covering vacancies as at 30 September 2017 has reduced to 16% of establishment (excluding maternity covers or additional temporary capacity). This is a significant reduction from 32.1% as reported in the annual DfE Data Collection 2016 which provides annual benchmarking.

### **Caseloads**

23. The case load average of 18 children for individual social workers is monitored by managers with effective systems in place to address the number of children against the number of families to ensure the worker can undertake work in a measured and timely manner focussing on outcomes for children.

### **Training and Staff Development**

24. Training and Staff Development has continued to be an essential element of Darlington's journey towards continuous improvement. Building on from training programme, 'Consolidating Good Practice' in 2016, staff have engaged in bespoke training 'Aiming for Excellence' that supports and responds to Audit findings, as well as listening to the opinions of staff and managers regarding their views on the training that is needed (via Leadership Forums / Children's Services Forums).
25. Some of the 2017 headline training areas recognised via Training Needs Analysis and Audits include:
  - (a) Signs of Safety – Training and Implementation
  - (b) Leadership, Management and Supervision development
  - (c) Effective writing and case recording
  - (d) Listening to Children / Voice of the Child
  - (e) Chronologies – consistency/quality/best practice
  - (f) Assessment and Analysis Training
  - (g) Communicating with Children Training
  - (h) Working with Boys, Men and Fathers Training
  - (i) Care and Permanence Planning – SMART Training
26. A new 'Introduction and Induction' tool has been designed to support Children's Services. The tool brings together key information to a central, easy to access repository. It ensures processes, policies, practice and standards are in one place, in an easy to follow format for new and existing staff. This will give standardisation

and consistency to the application of policy and process into practice across the service. The tool is available for all staff via the Intranet.

**Key Workforce Indicators**

**Establishment, Vacancies and Agency Workers**

1. At 30 September 2017, the social worker establishment, vacancies and agency workers recorded by teams was as follows:

**WORKFORCE SUMMARY AS AT 30 SE**

Teams include QSW posts up to and including Team Manager

	Establishment (FTE)	Employed		Vacancies (FTE)		Agency workers		Comment	
Team A	7.43	6.24		0.19		4		maternity cover 1.81 FTE - TM post counted against Team D maternity leave  AP maternity cover is 1 FTE against 0.81 FTE so 0.19 supernumerary	
Team B	7.61	5.61		2		3.6		maternity cover 1 FTE substantive TM acting up to Service Manager - not counted as vacancy but covered by agency worker	
Team C	8.6	3.61		4.99		2.8			
Team D	8	5.22		2.78		4.8		1 FTE agency worker to convert to permanent contract	
<b>TOTAL ASSESSMENT &amp; SAFEGUARDING</b>	<b>31.64</b>	<b>20.68</b>		<b>9.96</b>		<b>15.2</b>			
			<b>VACANCY* RATE</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>AGENCY* RATE</b>	36%	<b>Agency rate as percentage of workforce in situ</b>	42%	
					adjusted for converters	33%			
<b>LOOKED AFTER THROU</b>	<b>8.61</b>	<b>7.61</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>5</b>		Team is fully staffed with the exception of TM. Four agency workers agreed as supernumerary capacity to be retained until December 17 <b>Personal Advisors:</b> 3 FTE establishment, 0.7 FTE supernumerary	
			<b>VACANCY* RATE</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>AGENCY* RATE</b>	12%	<b>Agency rate as percentage of workforce in situ</b>	40%	
<b>TOTAL SAFEGUARDING</b>	<b>40.25</b>	<b>28.29</b>	<b>VACANCY* RATE</b>	<b>10.96</b> <b>27%</b>	<b>AGENCY* RATE</b>	<b>20.20</b> 31%	<b>Agency rate as percentage of</b>	42%	
					adjusted for converters	28%			
First Response	9	5.85		1		1			
CAP	5.61	4.61		1		0			
<b>TOTAL FIRST RESPONSE</b>	<b>14.61</b>	<b>10.46</b>		<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>			
			<b>VACANCY* RATE</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>AGENCY* RATE</b>	7%			
<b>TOTAL FRONT LINE</b>	<b>54.86</b>	<b>38.75</b>		<b>12.96</b>		<b>21.20</b>		maternity cover 1.81 FTE agency worker converting 1 FTE other supernumerary 6.81 FTE	
			<b>VACANCY* RATE</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>AGENCY* RATE</b>	24%	<b>Agency rate as percentage of workforce in situ</b>	35%	
					adjusted for converters	23%			
Placements and Adoption	10.12	9.93		0.19		0		1 employee completing ASYE in this team holds substantive post in Team A	
Life Stages 0-25	8.61	9.61		0		4		1 fixed term ASYE additional to establishment, agency workers agreed as supernumerary capacity to be retained until December 17	
Early Help	6.31	5.91		0.4		0		establishment includes one post funded by Adults	
<b>TOTAL SPECIALIST</b>	<b>25.04</b>	<b>25.45</b>	<b>VACANCY* RATE</b>	<b>0.59</b> <b>2%</b>	<b>AGENCY* RATE</b>	<b>4</b> 0%	<b>Agency rate as percentage of workforce in situ</b>	14%	
<b>IROs</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>VACANCY* RATE</b>	<b>1</b> <b>19%</b>	<b>AGENCY* RATE</b>	<b>2.6</b> 50% 19%	<b>Agency rate as percentage of workforce in situ</b>	50%	
					adjusted for converters			1.51 FTE agency workers converting to permanent contract subject to pre-employment checks	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>85.1</b>	<b>66.8</b>		<b>14.6</b>		<b>27.80</b>			
			<b>OVERALL VACANCY RATE</b>	<b>% of permanent establishment</b>					
								17%	
			<b>OVERALL AGENCY RATE</b>	<b>% of permanent establishment</b>	<b>does not include maternity cover or supernumerary capacity</b>				
								19%	
				<b>% of establishment adjusted for outstanding converters</b>				16%	
				<b>% of workforce in situ including all supernumerary (adjusted for converters)</b>				27%	
			*vacancies excludes posts to which an appointment has been made pending pre-employment checks and start date						
			*agency rate does not include maternity cover or agreed temporary capacity additional to establishment (4 FTE in LATC and 4 FTE in Life Stages 0-25)						

## Turnover and Retention

- At 31 March 2017, turnover measured 33.82% YTD, which was higher than the previous three years, despite increased recruitment of 20 qualified social workers over the year (compared with 11 qualified social workers in the previous 12



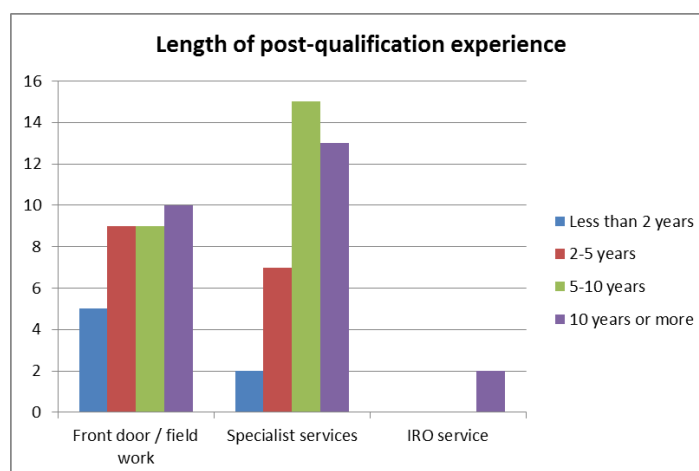
months). This reflected a higher number of leavers, which included a number of leavers pursuing promoted posts in other local authorities and a number of retirements from key management roles.

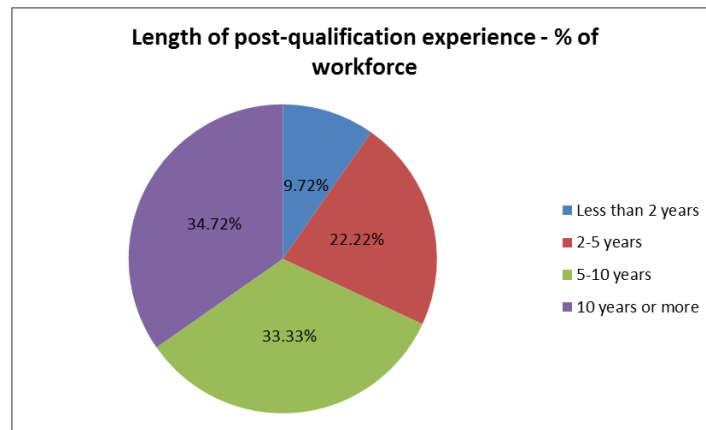
3. DfE Annual Data Collection 2016 (which benchmarks national data as at 30 September 2016) showed an equally high turnover rate of 33.7% YTD. Whilst the YTD turnover rate remains high at 30 September 2017 (27%) reflecting the workforce changes in the last 12 months, it is already showing a downward trend which is expected to continue over the next two years following the introduction of the Social Worker Recruitment and Retention Scheme.
4. Positively, in the last 12 months, the number of new starters (32) has far exceeded the number of leavers (22) and these levels will continue to be reviewed to ensure that the above retention scheme is effective in reducing turnover whilst the efforts to recruit to vacant posts continue.

### Post-Qualification Experience

5. At 30 September 2017, the length of post-qualification experience amongst qualified permanent social workers (including up to and including team managers) was distributed as follows: (overall average in the front line teams shows an increase of just over one year since last reported in November 2016 based on October 2016 figures):

	Less than 2 years	2-5 years	5-10 years	10 years or more	Overall average*
<b>Front door / field work</b>	5	9	9	10	7.97
<b>Specialist services</b>	2	7	15	13	10.21
<b>IRO service</b>	0	0	0	2	17.4
<b>Total</b>	7	16	24	25	9.93
<b>% of workforce</b>	9.72%	22.22%	33.33%	34.72%	
<b>*excluding new ASYE cohort per strategy</b>					





6. The overall average length of post-qualification experience both overall across the workforce and in the Front Door / Fieldwork teams, where the difficulties in recruiting and retaining experienced and qualified social workers have been and remain more pronounced, has recorded an improvement since last reported in November 2016 (figures as at end of October 2016):
- (a) Front door / field work teams – an increase of over one year from 6.34 years (31 October 2016) to 7.97 years (30 September 2017)
  - (b) Overall – an increase from 8.44 years (31 October 2016) to 9.93 years (30 September 2017)
  - (c) Specialist services (which includes the LATC team) – an increase from 9.75 years (31 October 2016) to 10.21 years (30 September 2017). This reflects the difficulties experienced by the team in the last 12 months and the recent external appointments made to the team are expected to have a positive impact on this indicator going forward.
7. Notably, the percentage of qualified social workers with less than 2 years post-qualification experience has reduced to under 10% of the headcount at 30 September 2017 (compared to just under 13.5% reported in April 2017 and June 2017) – this accounts solely for the newly qualified social workers recruited to the establishment in line with the Council’s strategy to ensure an annual intake of 4 NQSWs to grow its workforce.
8. All agency workers appointed to permanent posts have in excess of four years post-qualifying experience, with an average of over seven years (social work teams) and over 26 years (IRO team). The positive impact on the level of post-qualifying experience in teams has been taken into account in the above figures.