

Children and Families Workforce Recruitment and Retention in Leeds

Date: 30th November 2022

Report of: Director of Children and Families

Report to: Scrutiny Board (Children and Families)

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Summary

The Children and Families workforce is at a crisis point nationally, with employers struggling to recruit to posts. For social work and educational psychology this is exacerbated by fewer people choosing to study in these areas over the past few years, with universities across the country showing a decline in numbers joining courses. This is linked to pressures of working in the public sector with increased stresses post-pandemic, the Cost-of-Living crisis and more demand for services.

There are particular challenges in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Within the last 12 months three authorities have had vacancy rates of over 30% for social work staff, putting increasing pressure on the limited pool of staff available and driving up the amount of resource needing to be spent on agency staff to maintain the workforce.

This report provides an overview of the national and regional context facing the directorate as a whole and outlines the actions taken by Children and Families to ensure Leeds continues to support vulnerable children and young people to enjoy good outcomes whilst offering high quality, effective help and protection to children and families.

Recommendations

- a) Scrutiny Board is asked to note the challenges involved with recruitment and retention in relation to the Children and Families workforce in Leeds.
- b) Scrutiny Board is asked to note the ongoing efforts of Children and Families to address these challenges.
- c) Scrutiny Board is asked to decide to either maintain a watching brief of progress against the broader strategy work (similar to the Child Poverty Strategy approach) or focus on elements to incorporate into the work schedule for a more detailed discussion.
- d) Scrutiny board is asked to consider how best to support the directorate in its effort to recruit and retain the Children and Families workforce.

What is this report about?

Context: Social Care, Early Help, Children's Centres and Little Owls Day Care Centres

National context

- 1 The Social Care workforce is at a crisis point nationally, with employers struggling to recruit to posts. The Health and Social Care Select Committee's [report](#) (July 2022) highlights that the NHS and Social Care face the greatest workforce crisis in their history. For social work this is exacerbated by fewer people choosing to study social work over the past two years, with universities across the country showing a decline in numbers joining social work courses. This is linked to pressures of working in the public sector with increased stresses post-pandemic, the Cost-of-Living crisis and more demand for services.
- 2 With more people leaving the children and families workforce than joining, both national and local recruitment and retention is a significant challenge to all local authorities, with the challenges of recruitment and increased demand on services impacting on workloads, as well as staff morale and wellbeing.
- 3 Additional transparency data published by the Department for Education (DfE) in May 2022 showed that:
 - Of the 3,630 social workers who left permanent local authority social work roles in 2021, 77% left children's social care altogether and 23% moved to agency roles.
 - The majority of those leaving had been in the local authority for less than five years.
 - The highest proportion of social workers who moved into agency roles were aged 20-29 (i.e., in the early stages of their careers) (DfE 2022).
- 4 Retention in social work is an increasing concern and nationally, based on annual census information in September 2021, 33.1% of FTE leavers left after less than two years of service, 36.3% left after more than two years but less than five years, and 15.3% left after more than five years but less than 10 years. In 2021, around 60% of children and family social care workers had been in service for less than five years.
- 5 The [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) states that a total reset of children's social care is needed. In the first report of the review, Case For Change looked at the most significant challenges facing children's social care and said that the workforce shows signs of "significant strain" and there is "more to do to recruit, retain and support a high-quality workforce" (DfE 2022).
- 6 Rising demand and rising complexity of demand is mentioned both in the Case For Change report and in a recent Ofsted report [How local authorities plan for sufficiency of accommodation that meets the needs of children in care and care leavers](#) This report also stated that local authorities can find it difficult to meet their sufficiency duty due to issues including "...recruitment and retention of foster carers, residential care workers and other social care and wider children's professionals" (Ofsted 2022).

Regional Context

- 7 The current context within the Yorkshire and Humber region is particularly challenging. Almost one third of Children's Services in the region have been judged by Ofsted as 'Inadequate' (four out of 15). Unfortunately, authorities judged as Inadequate struggle to recruit and retain social workers and consequently they are heavily reliant on agency social

workers. One authority in the region was recently employing over 170 agency social workers, although it has been difficult to obtain a more recent figure as this information is not readily tracked. Having several local authorities in the region in this position means there is a high level of competition for agency social workers. This has resulted in an increase in the cost of agency staff of around 20% in the last two years. Research done within the region has shown mainstream agency social worker earns around £21,000 a year more than their local authority counterparts. When career development opportunities, pension, holiday entitlement and other benefits are factored in the salaries are comparable. Public sector pay has not kept up with inflation over the past 10 years, social workers have experienced a reduction in their income which makes agency work more attractive.

- 8 In Leeds there are 15 agency staff in children's social care, although the number fluctuates. Of those 15, 14 are social workers and 1 is a social work team manager. The team manager is due to move to a temporary role with Leeds in the coming weeks.
- 9 There is a strong reliance on Agency Social Workers nationally and hourly rates have been pushed extremely high due to competition between local authorities. Local Authorities within the Yorkshire and Humber region have been working to address the escalating costs and support retention and attraction regionally. We have signed a Memorandum of Co-operation alongside DCS's from across the region to commit to a maximum hourly rate of pay (£35) for Agency Social Workers, this will be fully implemented by 1 April 2023, having begun in September 2022 for new agency assignments.

Local Context

- 10 When Leeds was judged Inadequate by Ofsted in 2010, the Children and Families directorate experienced significant difficulty in recruiting and retaining social workers. To address this, Leeds developed a comprehensive workforce development strategy that focused on creating the conditions in which social work could flourish. The impact of this strategy was acknowledged in the outcome of the Ofsted inspections, most recently in 2022 (Outstanding). Additionally, the Leeds social work career pathway won the Children and Young People Now award for Recruitment and Professional Development in 2018.
- 11 As of July 2022, there were 378 social work posts across the children's social work teams in Leeds (not including One Adoption West Yorkshire), of which 37 were vacant. That was a vacancy factor of 9.7% compared to a national average of 16.7%. Current figures for Leeds show there were 60 vacant social work posts at the beginning of November 2022, a vacancy factor of 15.9%, still lower than the national average. The increase in social work vacancies is as a result of very few new starters in the period as well as leavers in the children looked after teams, placement team and the child health and disability service. All social workers who left in this period were fully qualified. November is seeing some positive movement however with more applications coming through overall and new starters particularly in the looked after service. Three overseas candidates have been successful and are currently being taken through the onboarding process. There are currently 57 social work students on final placements in Leeds. 19 of the 57 have already applied for, or confirmed their intention to apply for posts in Leeds and it is anticipated that others will apply in the new year.
- 12 The most recent national data shows that the turnover rate (including One Adoption West Yorkshire) in Leeds is one-third lower than the national average (10.1% compared to nationally 15.4%). This is also the case when compared with other authorities rated as 'Outstanding' (10.1 compared to 13.8%). The current LCC figures for September 2022 indicate that turnover has decreased slightly to 9.27%. This is not to say that the workforce in Children and Families is not under pressure. It is important to note that turnover figures

account for staff who leave the local authority not internal moves and promotions and does not factor in vacancies that have not been filled throughout the year and the resultant accumulation of vacant posts.

- 13 The pandemic had a disproportionate impact on children and young people. There has been a national and local spike in domestic violence and abuse referrals to the police and social care and a rise in mental health needs for adults and children. This, along with the increasing number of children living in poverty in the city which has grown 7.3% in Leeds between 2014/15 and 2020/21, the 17th largest increase in the country. This has resulted in more families requiring support from the Children and Families Directorate. In the first week of July this year 630 children were referred for services to the Front Door in comparison to 588 for the same time last year, an increase of 42 contacts for children.
- 14 As of July 2022, there were no social workers with caseloads of 40 or above. There were ten social workers with caseloads over 30, two of whom had caseloads of between 35 and 40. As of November 2022 the picture has shifted, and the highest caseloads have decreased slightly. At the beginning of November there were two social workers with over 30 cases, at 31 and 32 respectively; 26 social workers were managing 25 to 29 cases; and 66 social workers had 20 to 24 cases. All other social workers had less than 20 cases. The directorate continues to monitor caseloads on a weekly basis as part of the wider response, allowing proactive responses to support staff whose workloads are under pressure. Whilst there is a reduction in the highest of caseloads, those social workers who previously had much lower caseloads have begun to increase, for example in the children looked after service.
- 15 Recruitment of residential staff in Leeds, regionally and nationally mirrors a similar picture to that of social workers. To address the difficulties in recruitment significant efforts have been made to promote Leeds to the sector and to encourage applications. In October and into early November an additional 9 residential staff were recruited with a further 7 applications to be considered w/c 21st November. Adel Beck (secure children's home) has made good progress with recruitment and are nearly fully staffed with residential practitioners. Overall, the numbers of staff in residential have increased, a further 25 staff are still needed to fill the structure.

Context: Learning improvement

- 16 The recruitment and retention of school staff rests with Governing Boards and academy trusts.
- 17 According to a survey carried out by the National Education Union (NEU) in 2021, nearly half of all teachers and leaders surveyed do not think that they will still be working in schools in 5 years' time. (NEU 2021)
- 18 The most common reasons for this are cited as a concern for high workload (51%), lack of government trust (53%) and the reduced status of the profession (66%). Data from the Department for Education shows that whilst teacher retention has been steadily improving since 2013, there seems to be a problem retaining those in the early stages of their career; 22% of newly qualified teachers were reported as leaving the profession within 2 years, 33% within 5 years and 29% within 10 years. (NEU 2021)
- 19 As of 19 September, just 12,646 applicants to secondary initial teacher training (ITT) courses this year had been recruited. The DfE's target for 2022-23 is 20,945. The target for physics recruits had been missed by the biggest margin, at 80 per cent. But several other subjects

including Business Studies, Music, Geography and English look set to face shortfalls. (SchoolsWeek 2022)

20 Additionally, job vacancies for non-teaching roles have risen to a record high in 2022, figures from the Office for National Statistics show. Public sector wages have fallen behind private sector wages in real terms. According to the GMB Union, the median hourly wage for teaching assistants in 2021 was £10.46, while the basic hourly wage at high street supermarkets is now £10.50. (SchoolsWeek 2022)

Context: Learning inclusion

- 21 Educational Psychologists (EPs) enable the council to meet its statutory duty to provide advice for Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments. They also provide timely advice and support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), working proactively to shape the best outcomes for those children as they progress through educational settings. At SEND support to ensure unnecessary and costly assessment and/or specialist placements at a later stage is not required.
- 22 There is a national and regional shortage of EPs and the workforce marketplace is extremely competitive in Yorkshire and the Humber. Regional benchmarking in [2019](#) identified Yorkshire and the Humber as having the second highest ratio of EP to pupil with a ratio of 1 EP per 11023 Children and Young People (CYP). This falls well short of the Warnock report's original recommended range of 1 EP per 3000 – 5000 pupils. The ratios are not calculated more specifically than these wider regions, however it is clear Leeds is within a region with a small pool of staff under high pressure. An updated regional picture will be available in January 2023, although it will not be an official survey.
- 23 Qualified teachers of the Deaf are also in high demand. Non-specialist, qualified teachers are employed and train in-house to become qualified teachers of the deaf. This is echoed across the UK; however, it is not standard procedure and it does make Leeds a more enticing employer. This increases the number of available teachers to train and those who are willing to train given greater support through this model.
- 24 Communication Support Workers (CSWs) work with children who are deaf in schools, including resourced settings. They are employed by the local authority to meet statutory duties as set out in EHC plans. The national and Leeds local picture shows that Level 3 + BSL communication support workers are in short supply. Nationally, the pay and conditions do not reflect the level of skill and expertise required within the role. In Leeds, pay is at the lower end of the scale and this leaves the directorate vulnerable to losing out to neighbouring LCCs, especially Bradford and Wakefield, where the pay and hours are more commensurate with the level of qualification and skill.
- 25 Monthly recruitment data (AEP) shows that public sector recruitment of EPs has fallen by a third (33%) between 2015 and 2017, from 476 to 321, which continued into 2018. 93% of LAs said that they were experiencing more demand for EP services than could currently be met.
- 26 Currently there are 37 employed posts within the EP team in Leeds. Of these, there are 6 Full-time equivalent (FTE) vacant EP posts. However, when looking across the other posts and including variations to contracts this rises to a total of 10.9 FTE posts not filled. These posts are statutory and not subject to a recruitment freeze, and it is the national shortage that is primarily responsible for the difficulty in filling them. Over the previous academic year 4

EPs left the team and in addition a reduction in hours from current team members of more than 1 FTE.

Recruitment and retention strategy and actions: Social Care, Early Years, Children's Centres and little Owls Day care centres

Market research

27 Research has been undertaken to understand what other local authorities are currently offering in terms of salary and retention in relation to Social Work posts; this benchmarking will be undertaken on a regular basis to ensure the service understands what is being offered regionally and nationally to social workers in terms of incentives both financially and in terms of the working environments. The service has already begun to consider what an enhanced package could look like and take action, for example an offer of an advance payment on mileage costs has been made to all social workers and a pilot will be starting this year to provide electric pool cars to social workers. The pilot will begin with two cars in the first instance with a view to increasing numbers if successful.

28 Branding and Attraction for social work and residential services

- Leeds City Council Jobs Site - work was completed to add a [Children's Social Work Section](#) to the LCC recruitment site, which has allowed for a better promotion of careers and opportunities to prospective candidates.
- A social media campaign was developed in-house and run in early 2022.
- Online pre-application events have been tested.
- Additional advertising routes have been reviewed and updated including the use of sector specific outlets, Social Work Matters and Community Care.
- Collaborative work with Adults and Health recruitment, with a focus on unqualified roles.
- Opportunities to maximise attraction through the sharing of the Ofsted Outstanding messages and use of the Child Friendly Leeds Logo.
- The Children's Social Work Service alongside Adults and Health attended the most recent Community Care Live Event in October 2022 to advertise our roles as well as facilitate a workshop on relational practice in social work. The event was extremely successful and has resulted in interest from over 20 social workers from outside the city. A day is being organised to invite all interested social workers to get a full understanding of the work and opportunities in Leeds, interviews will also be held for anyone who would like to apply for opportunities in Leeds.
- A task and finish group is now in place, specifically to drive and implement changes to the recruitment of residential staff. An action plan has been developed by the group. Changes that have been implemented include a change to the response when an application has been received. Fortnightly recruitment and selection events are being held to bring applicants into the service quickly as well as immediate telephone calls when an application is received. The service has actively marketed the service to any agency staff who work in Leeds residential homes and there is current exploration around the use of recruitment consultants. The application pathway has been reviewed beginning with the initial google search through to making an application, as a result of the review, the pathway has been refined and modified.
- Senior managers in both social work and residential regularly attend recruitment fairs, community events and local universities and higher education providers to promote roles within the service.

Workforce recruitment and Retention

29 There are a number of strands to this work:

- Increase in social work assistant posts to the structure to undertake a support role which releases social work capacity and contributes to efforts around reducing social work caseloads.
- In addition to a number of temporary social work assistant posts, the social work service is currently recruiting a number of agency social work assistants to undertake roles such as transporting and escorting children and supervising/supporting family time, further supporting social workers and building capacity in the service.
- Expansion of Advanced Practitioner numbers to increase practice support and development, therefore providing the opportunity to increase the number of social workers with less experience that can be recruited. This has also provided an opportunity for internal progression and more attractive posts for external recruitment.
- Engagement with the Social Work workforce to understand their needs and aspirations and how these can be supported. In particular, seeking an understanding of the expectations of placement students and the newly qualified cohort; this is critical, given the national context outlined above of social workers leaving the profession early in their careers.
- An analysis of leaver rates has been undertaken and will be continually reviewed to identify the extent of turnover. This has been significant at times and is compounded by the regional and national issues outlined above in relation to the difficulty to recruit social workers. The themes that have been identified are linked to work/life balance and career progression or change. A small number of social workers have recently moved to CAF/CASS who have been recruiting. Some social workers have chosen to leave the local authority and work for agencies and others have sought promotions within the directorate. This accounts for the increase in vacancies from July as mentioned in paragraph 11.
- There is an ongoing review of recruitment experience to understand how effective the recruitment process is and what barriers may be impacting on people's ability to apply for positions. As a result, a streamlined process has been developed utilising CV's and covering letters. This process is now also taking place in residential services who are already seeing an uptake in applications as a result. There is already a rolling program of social work recruitment which is now also being mirrored in residential services.
- Additional recruitment training has been given for interviewing panels, such as Safer Recruitment and Inclusive Recruitment, with a focus on increasing numbers of available BAME panel members.
- Recruiting from abroad-the social work service is actively seeking potential applicants from abroad and will be working alongside adults and health on their program of overseas recruitment. Three candidates have recently been successful and are now going through the onboarding process a further four have contacted the service to express and interest in working for Leeds social work service.
- Opportunities for digitisation or automation of time-intensive processes are being explored e.g., IDS colleagues are using Power Automate to develop apps that will facilitate easier processing of payments for mileage claims.

Communication and Engagement

30 The senior leadership have undertaken a programme of communication and engagement events and provided other opportunities to all staff within social work teams to better understand and address their concerns, frustrations and experiences. There has been communication with all teams to cover the issues raised and how they will be addressed.

Further detail on this area is found in the later section entitled 'what consultation and engagement has taken place?'

Staff health and Wellbeing

- 31 The health and wellbeing of social care staff is of the utmost importance and the pandemic has amplified the need for robust and innovative support for the wellbeing of social care staff. All social workers have monthly supervision. In Leeds there is a comprehensive supervision framework which includes a specific focus on wellbeing and development. Alongside regular individual supervision, group supervision also takes place in teams. All newly qualified social workers (ASYE) have mentoring support from Advanced Practitioners and all social workers in their ASYE have a clear training and development pathway that has been established over a significant period. During the pandemic a support pathway was developed for social workers in their second year of practice. Funding has been secured to run this program in 2023.
- 32 Stress Risk assessments are offered where individuals feel their mental health may be affected and advice is sought from Occupational Health where appropriate. A service wide risk assessment is being completed to ensure a consistent and comprehensive offer for all social work staff to manage workload related stress and pressure.
- 33 Social workers have told us that returning from maternity leave can be a time when they most need support. The principle social worker has begun piece of work to understand what else is needed for this group of staff to ensure they have the support they need and opportunities for a positive work/life balance.
- 34 All staff are encouraged to access the council's comprehensive employee Safety, Health and Well Being support offer, including [Vivup Employee Assistance](#), [Mental Health First Aiders](#), [Financial wellbeing toolkit](#).
- 35 Social work team managers have also been affected by workloads and demands, combined with the availability of workforce and resources and the impact of national cost of living pressures. The social work service has developed a specific peer supervision space for team managers, currently being piloted in the East of the city and moving to the South this month. The space allows time for peer reflection and support. In addition, a program of restorative practice action learning sets has been rolled out for managers and leaders in the social care service.
- 36 Lone working can be particularly concerning for social workers and whilst the social work service follows the Council's lone working policy an up-to-date risk assessment is being completed to ensure staff safety in these circumstances.
- 37 Staff across Social Work teams have all been offered the opportunity of a one-off mileage advance which in effect brings their payments to being in advance rather than in arrears. This is to support with the difficulties that they were expressing around the cost of travel. A large number have taken up the offer and this has been paid in November's salary.
- 38 A group of social work staff including Social Work Assistants, Social Workers and Advanced Practitioners meet on a 6-weekly basis with the Chief Officer Social Work to consider new and innovative ways to retain and recruit staff but also to ensure the needs of social work staff are understood and acted upon in a timely way.

39 The Chief Officer, Social Work also meets with all Social Work Assistants on a quarterly basis again to listen and respond to emerging needs of the particular staff group.

Next Steps: Social Care

Recruitment marketing campaign

- 40 There is an expansion of work already being undertaken and commitment to develop further links in our communities, and with educational establishments and partners. This also supports our Equality Diversity and Inclusion priorities, making sure our workforce is more representative of those communities.
- 41 Proposals are being developed and considered around the engagement of an external agency for a directorate wide marketing campaign with a national reach for professional and senior roles. Additionally, Leeds participated in the Community Care Live social work event in London in October, to attract more applicants to work in the city. Routes into applications are being tracked to measure success.

Sessional Workers

- 42 Sessional worker opportunities are being created and hours offered to sessional workers already employed by LCC in other roles that require enhanced Children's DBS are being maximised. The opportunities for sessional workers are for appropriate tasks e.g., transporting children. This frees up work capacity of social workers and gives enhanced Children's DBS colleagues an opportunity to experience some of the social care working. This builds sufficiency and resilience into our system as well as attracting possible future social workers.

Enhanced packages and benefits

- 43 To supplement the above, a series of options are being explored in relation to the enhancement of packages and benefits, with a focus on retention and the cost of living.
- 44 Once the initial offer is agreed, packaging and rebranding outlining all available benefits will be done to support attraction and retention.

Workforce planning

- Leaver intelligence – understanding why individuals want to leave is critical to the longer-term work and development needed to sustain and retain our current talent. Exit interviews will be promoted in the priority areas to seek to engage with those staff choosing to move on to better understand why. There have been 117 completions of the leavers survey in the directorate over the last 18 months. The most often sighted reason for leaving the local authority is work/life balance followed by opportunities for career progression.
- Grow Your Own - Exploring further options to develop the talent pipeline for the future in terms recognising and developing the talent already within the LCC workforce alongside encouraging new routes of access into the Directorate and providing opportunities for career progression.
- Focus on the promotion of flexible working for all staff to ensure everyone has a positive work/life balance wherever possible. Specific work is being undertaken to support those staff returning from maternity leave.
- Higher Education – developing the links already in place with local and regional higher education with a focus on quality placement provision and attraction of staff to unqualified roles.

- Student workforce - Exploration of paid employment within C&F environment whilst studying
- Career Pathways – development of clear career pathways for current and potential staff to be able to see the options available to them for progression and how they can be achieved.
- Development – Clear, fair and consistent development plans and opportunities.
- Focus on Increasing Diversity – a golden thread through all the above is to maximise opportunities to increase diversity at every level. In 2020, the Department of Health and Social Care developed a Workforce Race Quality Standard (WRES) pilot with Leeds and 16 other Local Authorities. In Leeds, the WRES pilot is jointly led by Adults & Health and Children’s and families. The aim of the pilot is to develop an action plan utilising the 9 WRES metrics and support staff in both directorates with development and tackle issues of racism.

Safeguarding

- 45 Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people is one of the most important responsibilities, if not the most important responsibility, of local authorities. It is for this reason that Children’s Services are the most regulated area of the Council and subject to robust external scrutiny by Ofsted.
- 46 Despite the challenges, Leeds continues to have a robust response to safeguarding and supporting children and families. Social Workers in Leeds are doing an outstanding job in a very challenging environment and it is recognised that although the Leeds position is better than the national picture in several areas, it remains challenging and will likely continue to be. Recognising pressures and challenges within the service, a recent [decision](#) approved the investment of £1.4m to build service capacity, improve outcomes for children and reduce pressures on the children’s social work service associated with increasing demand. In addition to enabling recruitment to 29 additional posts across the service through this investment, the report notes the intention to develop ‘invest to save’ business cases in respect of: The Kinship Care Service, to support the promotion of family group conferencing, to enhance placement stability and reduce statutory intervention; and the Leaving Care Service, to support the growth of the service to meet forecast increases in demand, such as high birth rate cohorts entering adolescence, which has an impact on looked after numbers and, subsequently, care leaver numbers. In this way, we are seeking not only to respond to current challenges, but to anticipate future pressures in the service and to equip it to meet these.
- 47 The most recent Ofsted inspection of Leeds Local Authority Children’s Services, was carried out between 21st February and 4th March 2022, with the report published on 9th May 2022 (see Executive Board [report](#) of 22nd June 2022). Ofsted inspectors rated Leeds City Council ‘outstanding’ for the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families; ‘good’ for the experiences and progress of children who need help and protection; and ‘outstanding’ for the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers. The overall rating was therefore ‘outstanding’. The nature of the inspection was extensive; a total of seven Inspectors and one Quality Assurance Manager spent two weeks - or 308 hours on-site. The inspection also included discussions with senior leaders; team managers and service delivery managers; practitioners; parents/ carers/ family members; foster carers; young people; education colleagues; and multi-agency partners. Despite the outstanding judgement resulting from this thorough and rigorous inspection, the Council is not complacent in its approach and will ensure that crucial aspects of support and action remain in place, now and moving forwards, with a focus on ensuring that at the next inspection our judgement for children in need of help and protection will improve from good to outstanding.

- 48 The work of Leeds is recognised nationally, with Leeds continuing to drive sector-led improvement. The Leeds Relational Practice Centre (LRPC) was set up to lead on sector led improvement work with the DfE and partner LAs. Since 2016, the LRPC has:
- Contributed to local and national reform and learning that has helped Leeds to two 'Outstanding' ratings from Ofsted and improvements in the partner local authorities supported by Leeds.
 - Worked with over 90% of local authorities through improvement partnerships and learning programmes
 - Led the Leeds element of the DfE's £84M Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Programme, working with six local authorities over five years.
 - Led the Leeds work as a 'Partner in Practice' on sector led improvement partnerships – working with 20 local authorities, which has resulted improved Ofsted ratings, culture and leadership, workforce development, recruitment, retention and morale.
- 49 The Executive Board Member for Children's and Adult Social Care sits on the Local Government Association National Board for Children and Young People. More recently, the Chief Executive of the Council, Tom Riordan, has been selected to join the Children's Social Care National Implementation Board to deliver the recommendations of the Care Review. Both appointments reflect the national recognition and the role Leeds plays in national improvements in the sector.

Little Owls Recruitment Strategy

- 50 Recruitment and retention within the Early Years/ Childcare sector was problematic pre-COVID, both locally and nationally, and this has intensified significantly as settings begin to work through their COVID recovery plans. On average, after being shortlisted, a third of candidates withdraw prior to interview, a third are either unsuccessful or withdraw after being offered the post & only a third of the original applicants are appointed. The management team actively attempt to follow up any who withdraw, however, having worked throughout the pandemic, Leeds is now faced with a fatigued workforce where staff morale is low and some employees are now under increased pressure. This is worsened due to the economic climate, with some staff seeking secondary jobs in order to manage household bills or reduce their hours as they can no longer fund their own childcare costs. To attract candidates to join the Little Owls workforce, a recruitment strategy is underway, as follows:
- **Approval obtained for a rolling recruitment programme:** Managers apply vigilance to the portal to ensure any new applications as looked at as soon as they land, followed by prompt shortlisting & interviewing – many people apply for several jobs simultaneously so the aim is to get in first with a job offer.
 - **Attendance at any recruitment events in the City or in neighbouring local authorities:** Managers attended the 'Apprentice unlocked' event at Saltaire where 12 candidates undertook an assessment for the child-care apprenticeship programme. They also attended Leeds City college apprenticeship fair where we attracted 20 candidates interested in the apprenticeship programme. Additionally, managers also attend sessions at the University to speak to prospective childcare candidates to outline the role and benefits of working for LCC.
 - **Recruitment stall in St Johns shopping centre:** Weekly presence at the St Johns shopping centre resumed from w/c 3 Oct – 26 Nov 10am – 3pm each Thursday & Friday for the Autumn term. Last term, the stall attracted a good deal of interest, mainly potential candidates for the apprenticeship programme but some qualified candidates too. So far, the service attracted 30 expressions of interest for the apprenticeship programme (all passed to

the College for assessment) & four expressions of interests for the qualified posts (these have all been offered an interview & so far only one has responded).

- **Advertising:** In addition to the usual advertising routes, the service is now advertising posts on the Day Nurseries website enabling potential candidates to upload their CV & forward to us. Advertising on the Little Owls Facebook pages has also become part of the strategy.
- **Recruitment open evenings:** The private sector appear to have success with recruitment open evenings and plans are now underway to hold monthly open evenings in various Little Owls settings to attract candidates and provide them with information on the benefits of working for LCC. Colleagues from the Job Shops will be in attendance to support potential candidates to apply for posts.
- **Childcare Apprenticeship programme:** In partnership with Leeds City College, the little owls service have established a successful childcare apprenticeship programme which has been running for several years. There are 10 x apprentice posts recruited to that started in October. The next cohort is being advertised this month, November, in time for a January 2023 start, targeting school leavers.
- **Childcare level 1 taster sessions:** To support young people in education and attainment as well as support future recruitment and retention, service managers are planning to support Leeds City College level 1 childcare students in a taster visit into settings. The main idea of a taster is for students to gain an insight into what working in childcare looks like and to explore local employers within the industry and get an idea of potential future opportunities.
- **Wellbeing action plan:** to support staff with sickness, improving attendance & to increase morale the service is prioritising the importance of providing well-being support for the workforce & a robust well-being action plan has been developed. All staff are encouraged to access the VIVup service & Leeds are working in partnership with the NHS Leeds Recovery college enabling staff to access their wellbeing offer which offers a range of short- and long-term training/support sessions with a focus on self-care, compassion and resilience building.
- **Internal transfer protocol:** In response to the impact of the current economic climate and the needs of staff who have caring responsibilities at home, the service now offers all vacant posts out as internal transfer opportunities to the existing workforce prior to the recruitment process. Understandably, many staff are wanting to work closer to home to reduce travel costs/ travel time etc. and staff welcome the option to transfer elsewhere.
- **Flexibility protocol:** All staff are employed to the service rather than individual settings and where cover is needed. The first option is therefore to seek to deploy staff to different settings rather than requesting agency cover. Where agency is requested, it is worth noting that the agencies are not always able to provide staff and are facing similar recruitment challenges.
- **Flexible working policy:** Service managers are to support flexible working requests wherever possible to support the retention of staff in our workforce. Staff often request to work term-time only rather than all year round to help with their own childcare arrangements, while maternity leave returners often want to reduce their days/ hours to have a better work/life balance.
- **4 day working week pilot:** The service is piloting a 4-day working week offer to some of our workforce. This model is used by the private sector & is attractive to those staff who like the idea of having 3 days off per week or who have caring responsibilities outside of work.

Youth Work Recruitment Strategy

51 A comprehensive review of Youth Work in Leeds took place and was concluded in April 2021. One of the key principles that was ratified by the Executive Board was that Youth work should be delivered by a professionally qualified workforce with the right mix of skills and experience to be able to effectively support groups of young people that face the most significant challenges.

- 52 The LCC Youth Service workforce continues to be on JNC (Youth & Community) terms and conditions. To comply with JNC (Y&C) requirements all Youth Workers must hold a recognised Level 3 Youth Work qualification.
- 53 Throughout the Covid pandemic, the service worked hard to support other statutory services. Many Youth Workers volunteered to move across to Children's residential services and have since made the positive decision to remain in those roles permanently.
- 54 In addition to this, over the last two years, other Youth Workers have moved to new roles or retired. Therefore, the service now has a significant number of vacant posts.
- 55 It is essential that the service has sufficient Youth Workers to deliver the core offer, but despite implementing an ongoing campaign it has been unable to successfully recruit sufficient qualified Youth workers to the vacant posts. This reflects the national picture of the shortage of skills in the Youth Work sector: According to statistics provided by the National Youth Agency, youth services have been cut by 73% since 2010 and annual spending has dropped by almost £1 billion. As a result, understandably fewer people, are choosing to pursue a career in Youth Work. Leigh Middleton, NYA Chief Executive when commenting on priorities for Covid-recovery stated that "4,500 qualified Youth Workers have been lost from the frontline, and there is a shortfall of at least 40,000 adult volunteers leaving the youth sector in a dire situation" (NYA website, September 2021)
- 56 To address this challenge, the service has flexibly used existing vacant Youth Work posts on the staffing structure to establish several temporary Youth Worker in-training posts. This approach will enable people with experience of working with young people in a community setting, that do not hold the required qualification, to apply. Once in post, these workers will be fully supported to work towards the Level 3 Youth Work qualification and once they have successfully completed this training, they will move into qualified Youth Worker posts.

Learning Improvement Recruitment Strategy

- 57 The DfE has published a strategy to address the issues of recruitment and attainment nationally. It has prioritised the following:
- Reforming how teachers are trained.
 - Reducing teacher workload.
 - Providing all new teachers with a specially designed 2-year programme and mentor support to help them develop the expertise needed at the start of their careers.
 - Developing of specialist qualifications, which improve the skills of teachers wishing to stay in the classroom or prepare others for leadership roles.
 - Improving the process of applying for teaching.
 - Making it financially beneficial for graduates in shortage teaching subjects to enter the profession.
- 58 The recently introduced Teaching School Hubs are the DfE's main conduit to delivering the Recruitment and Retention strategy. They deliver school-based Teacher Training, the Early Careers Framework, the specialist and leadership National Professional Qualifications, the Appropriate Body Service for new teachers and Continuing Professional Development for

education staff. In Leeds, the two main providers of the service are the Leeds Teaching School Hub run by TGAT and the North Yorkshire Teaching School Hub run by Red Kite.

59 The recruitment and retention of staff rests with the Governing Boards of schools and academies. The Learning Improvement Team supports governing bodies with this function by:

- Supporting Governing Boards (through the School Improvement Advisor team) to recruit Headteachers in maintained schools.
- Providing an induction and support package for new Headteachers, co-ordinated through the Headteacher Support Team but in collaboration with a wide range of LA teams.
- Providing CPD and training opportunities for education staff through its traded consultant team.
- Signposting schools to training and development for education staff with appropriate external providers, e.g., Leeds Trinity University.
- Enabling education staff to undertake their role effectively through targeted newsletters and bulletins
- Facilitating a range of educational networks, such as the Leeds Learning Partnerships and Families of Schools, as well as contributing to a range of partnership networks across the city, for example attending Teaching Hub meetings and Headteacher and Governor networks.
- Maintaining the Headteacher Support Service which offers advice and guidance to leaders in the city.
- Providing an LA link between a range of key stakeholders, such as DfE Regional Directors, Trade Unions, Diocesan Directors, HR and finance.

The Local Authority also plays a role in signposting schools to training providers in the city e.g.

- Leeds Trinity University provides Higher Level Teaching Assistant training and the National SENCO Qualification training
- Leeds City College offers a 'Supporting Teaching and Learning' diploma

60 For LCC to meet its statutory responsibilities with current and projected numbers of EHC needs assessment requests, several workforce proposals are being considered:

- The employment of Educational Psychologist trainees to the LA from year 2.
- Increased numbers of assistant Educational psychologists to support key priorities and statutory responsibilities.
- A proposed retention plan for the existing workforce with regards to Health and Care Professional Council (HCPC) fees, which will add to our commitment to ensuring manageable caseloads.

Conclusion

61 Whilst Leeds is not immune to the workforce issues that are being experienced across the sector, the Children and Families directorate are determined to meet these challenges. A range of actions have already been taken and more are planned.

62 Leeds City Council recognises the important, valuable and complex role social workers, schools staff, learning inclusion staff and support colleagues play in supporting the most vulnerable children and young people in the city to enjoy good outcomes. The progress that Children and Families has achieved since 2010 is a result of the commitment and hard work of staff and ensuring that they have the tools and support that they need to deliver best practice. The authority remains committed to creating the conditions for success.

What impact will this proposal have?

63 The information set out above recognise the challenges and pressures on the children's services nationally and locally; recognises the plans and actions taken to mitigate current impact and future pressures locally; and provide assurance in relation to outcomes for children and families.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

64 The arrangements set out in this report are focussed on delivering the vision, outcomes and priorities set out in the Children and Young People's (C&YP) Plan. Proposals address the C&YP obsessions to safely and appropriately reduce the number of children looked after and deliver outstanding social work and support for vulnerable children and young people.

65 The approach to investment in children's social work services is designed to support the transition from the Covid pandemic, to continue to improve outcomes for children and, to reduce continuing pressures.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

66 The Executive Member for Adults and Children's Social Care and Health Partnerships and the Executive Member for Economy, Culture & Education are regularly briefed on the challenges, and recommendations and actions taken to address them, and recognise the potential challenge in recruiting to the roles to be established.

67 Unions were advised of the decision to enhance resource within the service and welcomed the proposals. They have said that "... as the demands on services are rising and, with the Cost-of-Living crisis, only likely to get worse. The investment is welcomed."

68 Managers and service delivery managers in the service were consulted on the detail of proposals to increase the workforce; and staff within the service were made aware of and were supportive of the proposals to increase capacity within the service.

69 Directorate leadership have encouraged staff to share their experiences by providing listening forums. We have communicated the actions above to all staff in an email sent out by the Director and Chief Officer on 13th June, encouraging social workers to share any concerns. The Chief Officer has undertaken listening sessions and there is a planned schedule for the Director to meet students, social workers, social workers in their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYEs) and attend team managers forums.

70 Further to this, a communication from the director in October was sent to all social work staff acknowledging the current cost of living crisis and responding to issues raised. Amongst these were calls for greater flexible working, and more information around new starters and current vacancies - to which information was provided. Car mileage had also featured heavily as a concern for staff faced with high fuel prices over the summer. In response a one-off advance car mileage payment was agreed, which was offered to all Social Workers, Senior Social Workers, Social Work Assistants, Advanced Practitioners and Team Managers within the Social Work teams. Further information was given around current vacancies. Through

regular “You said, we did, we will” communications such as this staff will be kept up to date and their concerns addressed in an open and honest way.

71 The Principal Social Worker also meets with all social workers in their ASYE when they first start letting them know her role in supporting them, linking leaders to practice and encouraging communication. The Principal Social Worker also spends time working from area offices speaking to social workers about their experiences and has monthly meetings with the Interim Director to raise awareness to any issues raised by social workers and social care staff. The Interim Director and Chief Officer for Social Work have held staff engagement sessions and are visiting area offices.

What are the resource implications?

Human Resources

72 As a result of the challenges described above, caseloads have been higher than originally intended across the service, placing workers under increased amounts of pressure. It is further recognised that if this is not addressed, in addition to the unacceptable impact on staff wellbeing, it will lead to workforce retention challenges, which in turn will add to the pressures described in this report.

73 It is anticipated that implementation of the decision taken in July 2022, together with full recruitment to the existing establishment will continue to bring caseloads to acceptable levels, and progress is evidenced by the reduction of the highest brackets of caseloads between July and November.

Finance

74 As outlined in response to recognising pressures and challenges within the service, a recent [decision](#) approved the investment of £1.4m to build service capacity, improve outcomes for children and reduce pressures on the children’s social work service associated with increasing demand.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

75 The risks to the authority of not delivering a strategy to meet significant increased demand for children’s services across the directorate are legal (in relation to the capacity to deliver statutory duties), reputational (in the form of poor inspection outcomes), and financial.

76 Implementation of the proposals outlined depends upon the successful recruitment to existing and newly established roles. There is a risk that there will be insufficient suitable applicants to fill the roles, however work is ongoing to ensure that roles are widely advertised including extensive social media promotion with paid adverts on multiple channels, targeting audiences as much as possible in terms of, qualifications, experience and diversity. A dedicated children’s social work jobs page has been published, promoting the benefits of working with the service such as flexible working and career progression, and highlighting key vacancies.

77 An additional risk has been identified that the new roles may be filled by existing staff, creating vacancies and pressures elsewhere in the service. This has the benefit of retaining staff with skills and experience within the service and offering both succession planning and routes of progression which demonstrate that we value what our existing workforce offers to Leeds. Any resulting vacancies will be considered and filled in line with the council’s policy and procedure.

78 The delivery of the strategies is a key priority for the Children and Families Senior Leadership and has the support required from relevant directorates and service areas (Resources, Human Resources, Finance etc.)

What are the legal implications?

79 The arrangements set out in this report support the authority to meet its legal duties in respect of Children's Social Work, Learning Improvement and Learning Inclusion, and to provide similar levels of support in the absence of specific legal duties where to do so will further the obsessions, outcomes and priorities set out in the Children and Young People's Plan.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

80 Consideration has been given to several options to both retain and deliver capacity within the available resource. Having considered existing recruitment and retention issues within the service, the arrangements set out within this report are considered to provide the best solutions to the issues raised, providing both capacity and opportunities for professional development within identified services including children's social work.

How will success be measured?

81 The Outstanding rating achieved in the recent Ofsted inspection reflects the successful way in which children's services are delivered in Leeds; in particular, the outstanding judgement for the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.

82 Ongoing success will be measured through the reduction of impacts and concerns set out in relation to the children's social work service detailed above. This will be evidenced by:

- Reduction in caseloads.
- Relevant performance indicators.
- Compliance with statutory timeframes.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

83 Arrangements are in place and recruitment will continue as described above. The officer responsible for the assurances in this report is the Director of Children and Families, alongside staff from across the directorate as part of the Director's sub-delegation scheme.

Appendices

[1. July Exec Board Report on Children and Families Social Care Workforce in Leeds](#)

Background papers

- None.