

Child and Family Services Response to the staffing crisis in the social care workforce

This plan is in direct response to a combination of factors that have led to the service being placed under considerable and sustained pressures that risk it being unable to meet its statutory responsibilities and regulatory requirements. There is an increasing likelihood that risk management for children will be compromised as social workers in the frontline area teams become overwhelmed with the responsibility of having to manage their workload across all levels of need and demand.

Swansea Child and Family Services is facing severe recruitment challenges in its frontline area social work teams. The shortage of adults and children's social workers is acknowledged as a UK-wide issue. The vacancy rates in the three area social work teams are currently 30%, with this set to increase by the end of the calendar year.

Whilst there have always been challenges it is evident that the global pandemic has impacted further on the ability to maintain a stable workforce who are responsible for case managing our most high risk and complex children in the service.

Staffing is now at a critical point in the three area teams, and despite consistent attempts to recruit this has been to no avail. A recent social worker advertisement attracted 2 candidates. Only one was shortlisted and appointable in interview but subsequently declined the job offer (remaining in an alternative agency job). A recent senior social worker advertisement attracted no candidates.

One of the consequences of the high vacancy rates in these teams is that the majority of the practice leads are carrying caseloads, resulting in them not being able to provide the right level of support to social workers in their team. Alongside this, the teams are struggling with the implementation of WCCIS, and this has been exacerbated by the recent system failures following a national upgrade in October.

It is proposed to offer market supplements to the social workers and senior social workers in the 3 locality social work teams in supported care planning, offer a retention payment to the team managers and practice leads in these teams, move all newly qualified social workers to the top of grade 8 and create 8 fixed term family support worker posts.

Family support workers will be assigned specific tasks to support the social work teams. Eight fixed term family support posts will be created, to add to the 8 existing posts in the area social work teams. This would significantly alleviate the pressure on social workers and strengthen their capacity to undertake meaningful work with children and families to avoid the escalation of need. This will ensure social workers are afforded the time to prioritise work on the high risk and complex cases open to the service and ensure children are safe and their outcomes achieved.

Whilst there has been difficulty recruiting into social work posts (permanent and agency), it is evident during recent advertisements for three vacant support worker posts in Child and Family there was in excess of 30 applications.

Child and family support workers whilst not qualified are able to undertake a number of key tasks within the case managing team which support social workers to prioritise the work they are required to complete as qualified workers.

It is proposed to introduce the changes from 1.10.21. The Head of Service, Principal Officer for Care and Support and Principal HR Officer met with Union representatives on 22.11.21. A meeting with staff is planned to take place on 25.11.21.

Julie Davies
Head of Child and Family Services

22.11.21