

Children first and at the heart of all we do

Childrens Services Social Care (Social Workers)

Workforce Development Strategy

2021-2023

Helen Ellis – Acting Chief Officer Children's Services

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1. Introduction

Working with children, young people and their families is one of the most important and rewarding jobs - the right person can make the biggest difference to their lives. That is why Dudley MBC will look to attract and retain high calibre social care professionals and support staff to support our most vulnerable children and young people.

We have firm building blocks which give us the confidence and capacity to drive continuous improvement and innovation across the whole system of support for children:

- Leaders know the services well
- The focus of leaders and managers is on listening to staff, as part of the improvement programme
- There is good Multi agency engagement and good partnerships; strengthened by the Multi Agency engagement in the Improvement Board and Dudley Safeguarding People Partnership
- Community inclusion in developing our service to meet the needs of the families of Dudley.
- Our well-regarded and nationally recognised Centre of Professional Practice is driving innovation and quality at the heart of our services

Building from these achievements we will focus on tackling our key improvement priorities:

- Our social care workforce is at the heart of our capacity to achieve outstanding outcomes for children, and we are proud of our staff and their achievements. We will work positively to stabilise and strengthen our staffing arrangements, with an ambition to achieve a complement of 92% permanent social work staff by 2023.
- We will build on the development of our workforce to drive quality of practice.
- We will provide strong and robust Learning and Development opportunities for Managers and Service Leaders to ensure all staff have a confident and competent line manager.
- Our Training Offer will be innovative and developed through Evidence Based Research through local and National Development opportunities.
- We are embracing new systems to increase the worker's capacity to record and develop the Child's Journey through Children's Social Care records.

2. The Aims Of The Strategy

Our vision is that Dudley MBC will become an employer of choice for skilled and experienced children's social workers and Social Care practitioners. This will enable us to have enough high-quality staff to meet the needs of our community. This will be achieved by developing a reciprocal commitment from and to staff who work in this incredibly challenging area. This will include sustainable approaches which combine 'growing our own staff' whilst attracting the best that are available in the open market. Protecting the vulnerable is at the heart of the council's vision and we recognise this group of staff are critical to our success in achieving this aspiration.

The Council's vision is "to be an outstanding Council and lead Dudley from Requires Improvement to Good then Outstanding". To make progress towards our vision, it is vital the Council, as an employer, develops a quality workforce and engages with its employees. The Workforce Development Strategy endorses the Council's vision, forms an integral part of the People Management strategy, builds on the existing policies and seeks to address all concerns that are identified.

By having clear and consistent recruitment communication, people will view the Council as an organisation consistent in its thoughts and actions whilst at the same time portraying a highly professional image. That we are the Children Services to work for in the Black Country. The overriding aims of the Workforce Development Strategy are to recruit and retain the right people with the right skills at the right time and at the right cost to ensure that child and young people have as few social worker's as possible and that a child tells their story once.

To achieve this our Strategic Objectives are:

- To provide a customer focused, first class, cost effective recruitment service
- To build employee engagement and retain key employees within the Council
- To offer and develop our existing workforce various development opportunities

As all authorities are struggling to attract skilled, competent and confident employees to work with children and their families it is important that the Council not only matches what other Councils have in place but that it is seen to be innovative and flexible in the way it attracts and retains employees to ensure good outcomes for our children and young people.

To be effective, there will need to be a cultural shift within the Council that ensures we truly recognise and value high performing employees. A commitment from Senior Management is fundamental in ensuring that we bring the strategy to life.

3. Where Are We Now?

Dudley MBC neighbours eight other Local Authorities, two of whom are Children's Trust. There is a potential risk that the close proximity of our regional neighbours could destabilise our opportunity to retain and increase a permanent workforce. This is in part due to more competitive salaries or enhanced payments offered by other local authorities.

Dudley MBC employs social care professionals and qualified Social Work staff across six service areas. There are some areas of the service that have a high proportion of permanent staff and some areas that have a higher proportion of agency staff and are more difficult to attract permanent staff. The data in Appendix A evidences several teams have high proportions of vacant posts covered by agency staff.

There is a National Workforce Performance Indicator (WF1) that records the number of Social Worker Agency Workers and is periodically reported to the Childrens Services Senior Leadership Team. A number of initiatives have been introduced which include the procurement of three employment agencies to recruit permanent social workers, the use of Social Media for advertisements and involvement in the WM Employers Social Care Pilot to support managers using the Corporate Talentlink System. These initiatives have already had a significant impact on the reduction of Agency Social Workers.

4. How We Will Achieve Our Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1: To provide a customer focused, first class, cost effective recruitment service we will:

- Consider the provision of experienced support staff within Childrens Services to compliment the corporate HR Resourcing Team to undertake Childrens Services Recruitment work and work closely with recruiting managers
- Develop a streamlined recruitment process with clear roles and responsibilities for Human Resources and recruiting managers by utilising the outcomes of the Social Care Express Pilot.
- Create a more engaging and dynamic Recruitment Processes which inspires applicants to choose Dudley
- Build on becoming an employer of choice through the delivery of the new employer brand and recruitment website
- Provide Service Managers information to enable them to work with social workers and team managers to ensure agency staff are aware of the benefits of working for Dudley on a permanent basis and that all agency staff are encouraged to apply for permanent or fixed term employment with the Council
- Identify an individual who can communicate with a potential social worker on the day that their application is received on the Councils Talentlink System
- Attend at least three to four Job events, either internal or external, a year
- Ensure recruiting line managers receive appropriate training in relation to Safer Recruiting, equality and diversity awareness, employment law and selection methods
- Ensure recruiting managers provide positive and developmental feedback to all candidates, thus ensuring all candidates are treated fairly and that the Council fully embraces diversity and equal opportunities.
- Make effective use of existing Technology (for example the HR recruitment system) to deliver significant cost savings, including E-recruitment. Working with the ICT Service to develop a more user-friendly web site and e-recruitment
- Ensure that the employee benefits offered by the council are up to date and appropriately advertised to external candidates
- Complete a recruitment video to demonstrate the working culture and employee benefits of working for Dudley MBC

- Consider extending the recruitment methods including social media

Strategic Objective 2: To build employee engagement and retain key employees within the Council we will:

- Provide a quality first day experience followed by thorough Corporate and Local induction in to Childrens Service
- Provide a comprehensive programme of training and support ensuring that Restorative Practice is embedded
- Provide an opportunity for Staff to meet members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) on a regular basis
- Ensure practice expectations are communicated and understood through role specific practice standards
- Provide regular quality supervision, with the emphasis on reflective practice
- Work closely with managers to understand their skills shortages and develop innovative succession plans to target these areas and where appropriate, develop internal training programmes, utilising the learning offer from the Centre for Professional Practice
- Establish an internal job advertising scheme, enabling employees to apply for roles prior to external candidates and enabling the Council to develop succession plans
- Advocate agile and flexible working with a review of our technical capacity. To include optimising agility through identifying a range of work locations and spaces where the workforce can log in to do their work.
- Ensure social workers have the necessary equipment to fulfil their roles
- Regularly review existing remuneration packages and benefit schemes to ensure we are competitive with other Council's
- Launch an updated Employee Recognition scheme to publicly recognise and reward achievement, including personal and team contributions, and top performers
- Review the feedback from Employee Opinion Surveys to develop future retention strategies
- Ensure staff have access to support from a range of sources including advanced practitioners, team manager and senior managers

- Enhance the Council's internal communications practices to ensure an informed workforce, which has the ability to comment upon and influence policy and practice
- Develop a consistent and effective operation of the staff appraisal scheme which promotes career development and progression
- Have a clear and transparent career progression path
- Work to maintain appropriate caseloads for the practitioner's level of skill and experience.
- Engage staff in opportunities for reflection and open discussion
- Provide a workplace environment and culture where staff are seen, heard, valued and respected and influence positive organisational change. Providing "You Said, We Did" feedback to our workforce to evidence our listening and learning culture.
- Conduct, report and learn from exit interviews

Strategic Objective 3: To offer and develop our existing workforce various development opportunities we will:

- Create long term stability in the workforce through opportunities for progression and development
- Identify and support all staff who wish to progress and advance their careers
- Ensure that workers who find a level at which they prefer to operate are still supported and offered developmental opportunities to specialise in their area of work
- Support qualified staff through the professional accreditation for Social Workers through National Assessment and Accreditation scheme. (NAAS)
- Offer a first class learning offer and professional support from the Centre for Professional Practice
- Offer a first class ASYE programme – a specialised twelve-month programme of work and training to prepare newly qualified workers for the role of frontline practitioner.
- Recruit Frontline students – a specialised route into social work for students who already have a degree. The DfE funds this for twelve months following which the participants go on to enrol in the ASYE programme.
- Offer Step Up to Social Work placements - an intensive, 14-month, full-time programme for trainee social workers. Trainees will work in the local authority, gaining hands-on practitioner experience and academic learning. Successful trainees will be awarded a postgraduate diploma in social work once they complete the programme, allowing them to register and practise as a social worker.
- Offer a programme of “Grow your Own” (Apprenticeship scheme) – Government funded scheme to combine work and training to enable individuals within Children’s services to be able to become qualified social workers and attain other nationally accredited qualifications relevant to their job role and personal development.
- Maintain a programme of professional development to support our ASYE Social Workers progressing to experienced social workers and create opportunities for career progression through the Advanced Practitioner route to Team Manager
- Develop Aspirational leadership skills through Leadership Coaching and Aspire Leadership programmes
- Refresh our Management Development Programme

- A comprehensive auditing process in place, including practice coaching of Social Workers and their Managers
- Develop an Advanced Practitioner Career Development Scheme
- Provide Corporate and Local Management Development Opportunities

5. How will we measure the success of the strategy?

Quantitative Measures

- Children will have less changes of social workers and support workers. This will be informed by key performance data reports and analysis
- Reduced advertising, agency and printing costs
- Evidence the true cost of recruitment and staff turnover and enable Service areas to set realistic budgets to pay for recruitment activities
- Reduction in maximum Social Worker caseload
- Reduction in average Social Worker caseload
- Reduction in the number of agency workers occupying permanent posts
- Number of ASYEs completing their first year
- Number of ASYE progressing to Grade 9
- Number of Grade 9 Social Worker progressing to Grade 10 and Advanced Practitioner
- A reduction in staff turnover
- Number of Social Workers on aspirant manager scheme
- There are more complements than complaints
- Increase in the number of internal promotions
- There will be a month on month increase in the number of good and outstanding audits completed
- Reduction in sickness absence

Qualitative Measures

- Annual health check survey feedback will provide an overview of impact
- Staff feedback, including exit interviews and Practitioner Forum meetings
- Feedback from parents and children collected at children in need, initial child protection case conference, child protection case review meetings and at case closure

The ultimate measure of success is that Dudley get to Good then Outstanding as judged by Ofsted which will evidence that staff are contributing and achieving successful outcomes for the most vulnerable children and families in Dudley.

Approved by:	Date
Directorate Leadership Team (DLT)	18 February 2021
Helen Ellis, Acting DCS	18 February 2021
Shared with:	
Elected member	
Review:	
To be undertaken by the Head of Service, Safeguarding, Practice and Quality Assurance	December 2021

APPENDIX A

Workforce Data

The following table provides data on the current workforce profile for Social Workers:

Section As at February 2021	Permanent Employees	Agency Workers	Vacancies
Children in Care & Resources	22.31	1	2.69
Children and Young People's Safeguarding	0	0	0
Children's Services Business Support	0	0	0
Children's Social Care	44.41	26.5	10.09
Dudley Performing Arts			
Education Outcomes			
Family Solutions	20.5	0	0
Management Team	0	0	0
SEND			
TOTALS	87.22	27.5	12.78