

Committee: **Social Service Scrutiny committee**
Date of meeting: **20th January 2022**
Report Subject: **Social Worker vacancy rates in Children's Services, Pay and Incentives**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr. John Mason, Executive Member Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Tanya Evans, Head Children's Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
7.12.21	09.12.21	10.01.22			20.1.22			

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report will provide information on the following:

- The social work staffing pressures being experienced in children's social services;
- What is being done to manage these pressures;
- Comparisons of social work pay scales across Wales in particular Gwent;
- Additional incentives offered to Blaenau Gwent social workers.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 Within children's services there are areas of our statutory services that can only be undertaken by a qualified Social Workers. These areas of work include: -

- Case holding children whose names are on the child protection register (CPR);
- Case holding with children who are looked after;
- Court work;
- Assessment of foster carers.

2.1.2 To give an indication of the level of statutory work required by qualified social workers as at the 30th November we have 76 children on the child protection register, 191 children looked after and approximately 30 cases in the court arena.

2.1.3 At this time the staffing pressures are within the 4 locality teams which provide services to the different areas of Blaenau Gwent. These 4 teams carry out the bulk of the work with children on the CPR, court work and children looked after.

2.1.4 As at the 30.11.21 there is a 41% gap in the qualified social work capacity available in the locality teams. This is due to a combination of social work

posts that we have been unable to recruit to, plus staff on maternity and sick leave.

- 2.1.5 It is important to understand the wider context in being unable to fill social work vacancies. For the last three years, across Wales, there has been a decline in the numbers of students applying directly to the universities to study social work. This has resulted in fewer newly qualified social workers coming into the job market. Whilst the authority has offered to host more than its agreed number of Social work student placements the numbers of students studying are not there to fill them.
- 2.1.6 Childrens services have implemented a 2-year staff vacancy action plan. This comprises of short, medium and longer term actions. The short term actions deal with workload management to ensure we continue to meet our statutory requirements. The medium and longer term actions focus on maintaining our current workforce and growing our own social workers by encouraging and developing non-qualified support worker staff to take up secondment opportunities to become qualified social workers.
- 2.1.7 The authority has a reputation amongst students for providing the best possible support. The investment and commitment to seconded staff has led to the recruitment of 8 newly qualified social workers over the last 2 years, 5 from the 2019-20 academic year and 3 from 2020-21.
- 2.1.8 In addition to increasing secondment opportunities we are exploring recruiting social workers from overseas. Blaenau Gwent successfully did this in the 1990s and many of those staff are still working for the local authority.
- 2.1.9 Due to the national shortage of social work staff it is critical that we do all we can to ensure that Blaenau Gwent is seen as an attractive local authority to work for, not only in terms of financial rewards but the levels of support that are offered to staff when undertaking such a pressurised area of work.
- 2.1.10 Appendix 1 is the advert which is currently used to attract social workers which outlines the additional benefits of working for Blaenau Gwent.
- 2.1.11 Section 6 provides performance information on the comparison of social worker pay scales across Gwent and other part of Wales and the outcome of a recent staff questionnaire.

3. Options for Recommendation

3.1 Option 1

Members are asked to scrutinise the report on social worker vacancy rates in children's services, pay and incentives and contribute to the continuous assessment of the effectiveness of the directorate.

3.2 Option 2

Accept the report as provided

4. **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 Childrens Services response to vacancy rates in children's services links to the following key priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- To intervene early to prevent problems from becoming greater;
- To promote and facilitate new ways of delivering health and social care involving key partners and our communities;
- To put effective safeguarding arrangements in place to protect people from harm.

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1 ***Legal***

There are no legal implications within the report as children services have prioritised the delivery of our statutory functions.

5.2 ***Human Resources***

The Organisational development team have been integral to many of the actions in the staff vacancy plan.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1 ***Performance Information and Data***

Work has been undertaken to benchmark how Blaenau Gwent compares to other local authorities in relation to social worker pay. Appendix 2 shows where Blaenau Gwent sits in comparison to our neighbouring authorities in Gwent. In the absence of a national pay scheme for social work compared to nursing for example, local authorities have it within their gift to set social work salaries. The absence of a national pay scheme can, and has, at points led authorities to battle against each other by increasing social work salaries and providing golden handshakes to new starters. In Gwent the Heads of Service have guarded against getting into those battles as we understand the need to maintain a stable workforce across the region. Appendix 2 shows there is little significant difference in social worker start and finishing salaries across the region.

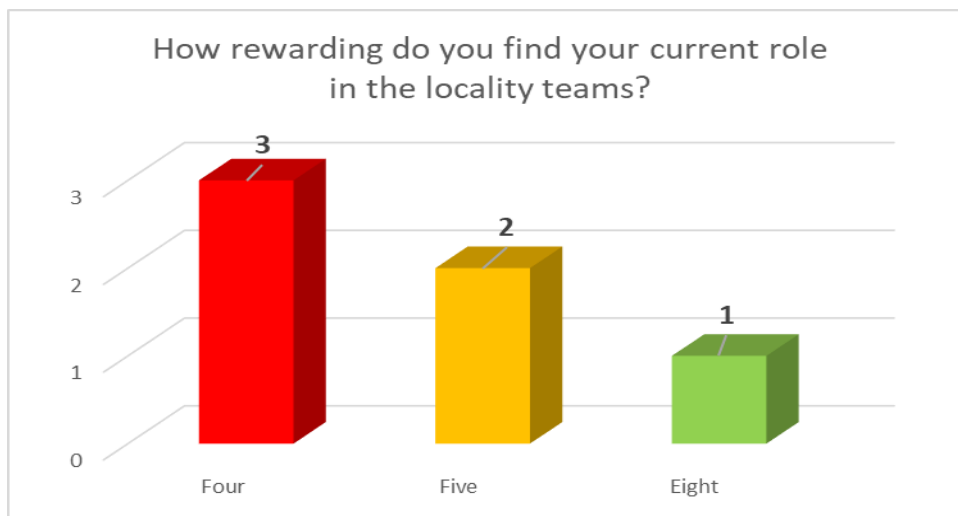
6.1.2 This is similar picture when we look at the wider picture across Wales. Appendix 3 shows this comparison.

6.1.3 Although financial reward is important to staff, it is not the only factor staff consider when deciding which authority to work for. Staff tell us they want job satisfaction, to feel valued in what they do and most importantly feel safe and supported when making what can sometimes be life changing decision for children.

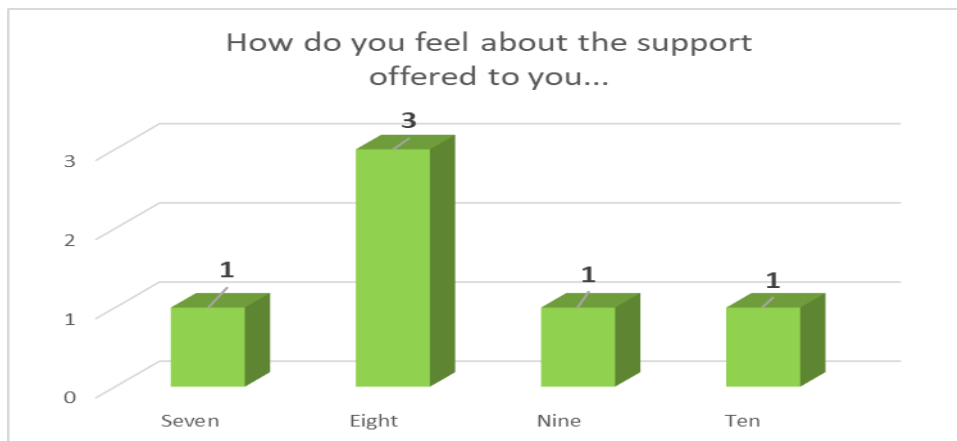
6.1.4 As a senior leadership team we constantly look at ways of ensuring we hear the views of our staff and use these views to improve service delivery.

6.1.5 A recent survey was undertaken with the staff from the locality teams asking them to identify strengths weaknesses, opportunities and threat to the service area. These views have been considered and actions taken forward as a result. The survey also asked 2 questions figure 1 and 2 outline these. Staff were asked to score from 1-10 how they felt in response to these 2 questions. It is clear that staff are not finding the work they are doing very rewarding at this time. However, what they are saying is that they feel very supported which is evidenced by the higher scores. This survey will be repeated in the Autumn of 2022. At this time many of the actions in the staff vacancy action plan should have been achieved. I would then hope to see an improvement in staff finding the work they do rewarding.

6.1.6 **Figure 1**



6.1.7 **Figure 2**



6.1.8 ***Expected outcome for the public***

Reducing the social worker vacancy rate will improve the level of interventions that can be offered by the teams as well as reducing the changes in social workers. This will in turn improve the working relationships that can be built with the public

- 6.2 ***Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)***
There is ongoing involvement with the staff on the actions being taken to address the vacancy rate. There is also ongoing consultation with children families and foster carers about the services and interventions offered by the department
- 6.3 ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***
A 2-year plan has been put in place to address the social work vacancy rates. This will be kept under review on a monthly basis and extended as necessary. Two areas of the plan which will support addressing this issue in the longer term is the continued secondments of staff onto the degree in social work course and recruitment of overseas social workers
- 6.4 ***Preventative focus***
A full workforce will enable the department to continue with it prevention focus on ensuring families stay together and risk is managed with confidence.
- 6.5 ***Collaboration / partnership working***
The shortage of social worker is a national problem. As a result information and practice is shared across Wales between heads of service and welch Government
- 6.6 ***Integration (across service areas)***
Organisational development are well sited on the social work vacancy issues and have been very supportive in taking forward the action plan
- 6.6 ***Equality Impact Assessment***
There is not a requirement for this report to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment.
7. **Monitoring Arrangements**
- 7.1 This staff vacancy action plan is monitored on a monthly basis as part of the children's services management meetings

Background Documents /Electronic Links

- Appendix 1
- Appendix 2
- Appendix 3