

**MINUTES OF THE SCRUTINY TASK & FINISH GROUP:
RECRUITMENT & RETENTION OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

TUESDAY 18TH OCTOBER 2016 AT 6.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor Green (Chair), Councillors; Franks, Keens, Rivers, Rowlands and J. Taylor.

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS: Councillors: Hussain

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor A. Khan

SUPPORT OFFICERS / ADVISORS:

- Angela Claridge – Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer
- Lee-Anne Farach – Service Director, Specialist Family Support
- Tony Fitzgerald – Project Manager, Transformation & Technology
- Matt Hussey – Democracy and Scrutiny Officer – LBC
- Farah Ismail – Senior Consultation Officer
- Maud O’Leary - Service Director, Adult Social Care
- Andrew Williams – HR Business Partner

PUBLIC/ INTEREST GROUPS REPRESENTATIVES:

None this time

		ACTION
9.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (REF: 1)	
	Resolved: Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor N. Ayub and Sally Rowe, Director of People	
10.	MINUTES (REF: 2.1)	
	Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 st September 2016 be taken as read, approved as a correct records and signed by the Chair.	

11.	RECRUITMENT & RETENTION BASELINE DATA (REF: 6)	
	<p>Andrew Williams, HR Business Partner submitted a report detailing the baseline data for Social Workers in both Children’s Services and Adult Social Care and Occupational Therapists. Members were advised that the financial information had been recalibrated from figures used in annual surveys although financial information for Occupational Therapists had been kept separate but had been included in the full costs.</p> <p>He informed Members that the information before them showed a head count at the current time which showed lots of recruitment activity. He added that it was difficult to recruit experienced members of staff, therefore newly qualified and agency staffs were employed, of which the figures reflected this. Also there was a high turnover of agency staff. He went on to say that the figures showed that the real issue the Council faced was recruiting experienced staff.</p> <p>Councillor Franks commented that he had been surprised at the similarity in caseloads between Children and Adult Services (20.6 and 25 respectively).</p> <p>Lee-Anne Farach, Service Director, Specialist Family Support replied that caseloads had reduced marginally in the past 18 months. She added that when a case gets to Specialist Family Support it is at Tier 4 (Protection Register) Tier 1 being school level. Social Workers dealt with a mixture of cases, some easy and others more complex. However, cases could quickly spiral. She went on to say that ideally Social Workers should ideal have a caseload of 15 cases.</p> <p>Councillor Hussain commented that previously Social Workers caseloads had been in excess of 30 cases which was far too high to be effective.</p> <p>Angela Claridge, Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer informed Members that there were lots of agency staff in Occupational Health. She added that the main issue was that local authorities had to compete with Health services such as the NHS who offered more pay. However, Health also relied heavily on agency staff</p> <p>Councillor J. Taylor enquired if both the Council and NHS had looked at the possibility of shared services with Occupational Health.</p> <p>Angela Claridge, Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer replied that the council wanted to work collaboratively with Health.</p> <p>The Chair commented that there had been a spike in recruitment from late 2015 to March 2016. She also added that it would be useful to benchmark market supplements.</p> <p>Angela Claridge, Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer replied that there had been a concerted effort to recruit during that time period.</p>	

	<p>Councillor Franks suggested that the costs for agency staff by neighbouring authorities would be useful.</p> <p>Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer replied that the BBC had put in a Freedom of Information request to all local authorities regarding costs of agency staff. She added that the information should be available for the region.</p> <p>Councillor J. Taylor enquired if the Council had looked at the possibility of training people from different careers into Occupational Therapists.</p> <p>Maud O’Leary, Service Director, Adult Social Care replied that the Council were looking at the possibility of training people from different careers into Occupational Therapists, but would be expensive as it would cost the Council £40k even before an employee started training. She added that the council had tried to work with Health to share services, but it had proved difficult to get generic members of staff as Occupational Therapists in Health worked differently.</p> <p>The Chair enquired whether or not a caseload of 25 for Social Workers in Adult Social Care was manageable.</p> <p>Maud O’Leary, Service Director, Adult Social Care replied that she was reasonably happy with a caseload of 25. However, if a Social Worker was dealing with more complex cases, there caseload would be fewer. She went on to say that the biggest pressure on managers was with waiting lists due to increased demand.</p> <p>Resolved: (i) That the report (Ref: 6) be noted.</p> <p>(ii) That the Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer submit a report to the December meeting detailing costs of neighbouring authorities for agency staff.</p>	
12.	CONSULTATION (REF: 7)	
	<p>Farah Ismail, Senior Consultation Officer tabled the proposed questions for the Recruitment & Retention of Social Workers questionnaire.</p> <p>Members suggested certain changes to the wording of the questionnaire but were overall happy with the questions contained within.</p> <p>The Chair suggested that the following wording be used for the covering Email to the survey:-</p> <p><i>‘As you will be aware, the recruitment & retention of social workers is a national issue, at a time when greater demand is being place on social care services, and when local authority budgets are under increasing strain. Here in Luton we are determined to try and tackle these challenges, even in the face of</i></p>	

external pressures over which we have little control.

As local councillors, we recognise the incredible value of the work you do as social workers, and also the demanding nature of your role. We are keen to find out directly from you how we can continue to recruit and retain high quality teams here in Luton, to support our most vulnerable residents & deliver the best possible outcomes.

The survey we've put together asks questions about your experience of working here in Luton and asks you to tell us what is working well, what the challenges are and what can be improved. It takes about ten minutes to complete, is mostly multiple choice questions (with some opportunity for further comment if you wish) and is designed to be completed anonymously, so nothing you say will be attributed to you. The deadline for completion is xx/xx/xx'

Members suggested that the suggested time to complete the survey should be removed from the covering email as from past experience surveys had always taken longer than anticipated and people would not complete it if it was taking longer.

Resolved: That the changes suggested at the meeting be incorporated into the questionnaire.

13. SICKNESS ABSENCE LEVELS IN SOCIAL WORK(REF: 8)

The Service Director, HR & Monitoring Officer advised Members on the levels of sickness within the social care workforce and specifically addressed absence relating to mental health.

Members the main reasons for absence of Social Workers was as follows:

- Musculo-skeletal – 6.8%
- Mental Health – 14.51%
- Respiratory Conditions – 13.54%
- Medical Procedure – 20.21%
- Gastro-intestinal – 4.08%

She added that although Members had previously expressed concern that one of the main reasons for absence of Social Workers was mental health, although actual figures of 14.51% had shown that this was not particularly high. However, she added that any absence was a concern, and that the Council needed to signpost employees to services available to them to help prevent and cope with sickness.

Members were informed that the Council had a range of mechanisms in place to support staff, these included:

- In-house Occupational Health Team providing intervention work and supporting employee's referrals.

- Employee Assistance Programme provided through AXA ICAS which offers a range of employee wellbeing activities including counselling. Counselling is also available from the Luton Town Centre Chaplains.
- Coaching.
- Stress Policy and stress assessments.
- SW supervision, 1:1s and annual appraisals.
- Other HR policies such as flexible working.
- Range of learning activities aimed at both individuals such as managing their own mental health and line managers supporting their staff who are suffering the effects of stress.
- In conjunction with Public Health colleagues, the Council signed up to the Mental Health Responsibility Deal and Time to Change pledge – demonstrating the Council’s commitment to how the Council thinks and responds to mental health in the workplace.
- Employee Wellbeing Programme – this programme includes a range of preventative measures and seeks to boost employee wellbeing and a healthy lifestyle.
- Signposting to support systems and resources available locally such as the Active Luton and the Luton Wellbeing Service.
- Grievance Resolution Procedure and a Sickness Absence Procedure - both procedures provide employees with opportunities to raise concerns, informally and formally. If there was a widespread view amongst our employees in the social work setting that there are organisational problems (workloads too high, management support ineffective, etc.) you might expect these concerns to emerge.
- Recognised trade unions, including The British Association of Social Workers (BASW), and the capacity for their members to raise their concerns through the employee relations machinery, or informally.

Councillor Rowland commented that it was good that mental health was not as high as expected although she did raise concern that members of staff may not say that the real reason for their absence due to the stigmatisation attached.

Lee-Anne Farach, Service Director, Specialist Family Support that this may be true in the first instance but the true reasons for absence would normally be ascertained eventually.

Councillor Franks commented that it would be useful to have the total number of days absent Social Workers had taken and was this number skewed by a small number of people.

The Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer replied that the average number of sick days by employees across the Council was 10 days, however she would need to collate the data for Social Workers. However, she was aware that there were only two to three long term absences within Social Workers.

Resolved: (i) That the Report (Ref: 8) be noted.

	<p>(ii) That Officers be instructed to undertake a focused communication campaign sign-posting staff to the Employee Wellbeing resources available.</p> <p>(iii) That the Service Director, HR and Monitoring Officer provide Members with the total number of days for sickness absence by Social Workers and Occupational Therapists.</p>	
	<p>(NOTE: The meeting ended at 7.30pm)</p>	