



Serving You

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 SEPTEMBER 2022

WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Report from: Donna Marriott, Assistant Director for Children's Services
Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People
Author: Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer and
Lisa Morgan, HR Business Partner

Summary

Social work recruitment and retention remains the priority for Children's Services. This paper provides an update on recruitment and retention and sets out the challenges currently facing Medway.

1. Budget and policy framework

1.1 It is within the Committees terms of reference to review matters related to Children's Services and it is requested that Members review the information laid out within this report.

2. Background

2.1 In January 2020 the Council made a significant investment in Children's Services, increasing the establishment across the service by an additional 25fte. Whilst there was a noticeable improvement in the recruitment and retention of staff following the realignment in January 2020 this position is starting to regress since coming out of the pandemic in 2021.

2.2 Nationally and regionally there is a shortage of experienced social workers and like some other local authorities Medway finds it difficult to recruit to social work vacancies. Our biggest challenge remains recruiting permanently to social worker positions. The lack of stability will impact on the sustainability of improvements and one of our key improvement objectives is to have a stable and competent workforce.

2.3 The market for agency social workers continues to increase in competitiveness leading to a limited supply of experienced social workers. This is not unique to Medway and is also the experience of many other local authorities.

2.4 The DfE children’s social work statutory return for 30 September 2021 highlighted the ongoing concerns in relation to the market –

- The number of children and family social workers leaving during the year was up by 16% compared to 2020 and the highest number in the last 5 years.
- The vacancies across the sector at 30 September 2021 was up by 7% from the previous year and the highest number in the last 5 years.
- The number of agency workers at 30 September 2021 increased by 3% compared to the previous year.

2.5 Medway continues to prioritise social work recruitment and is continuing to work on different work streams to improve recruitment and retention.

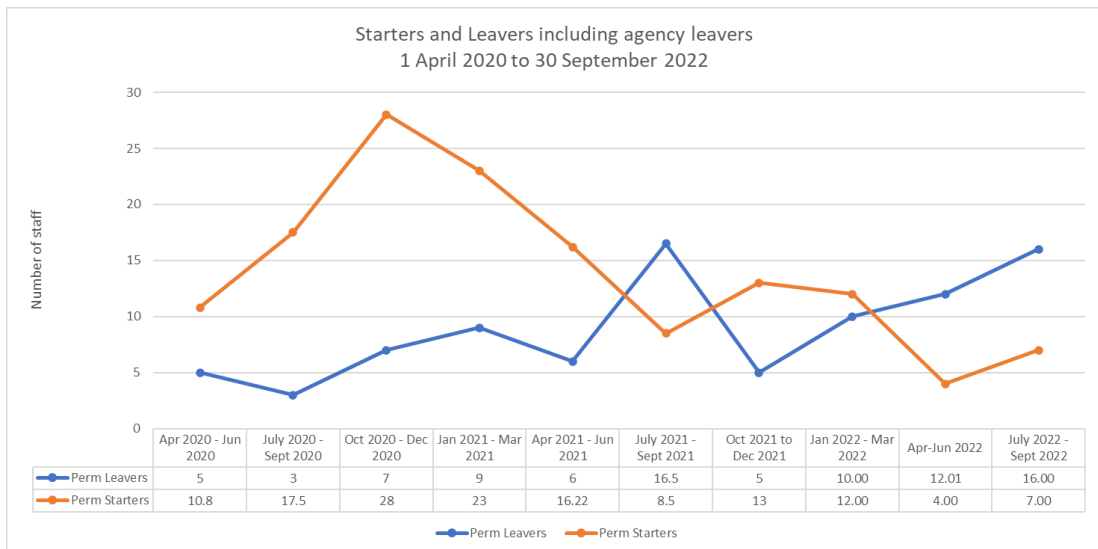
3. Staffing position

3.1 The table below sets out the agency and perm staffing for the period 1 April 2020 and 31 August 2022.

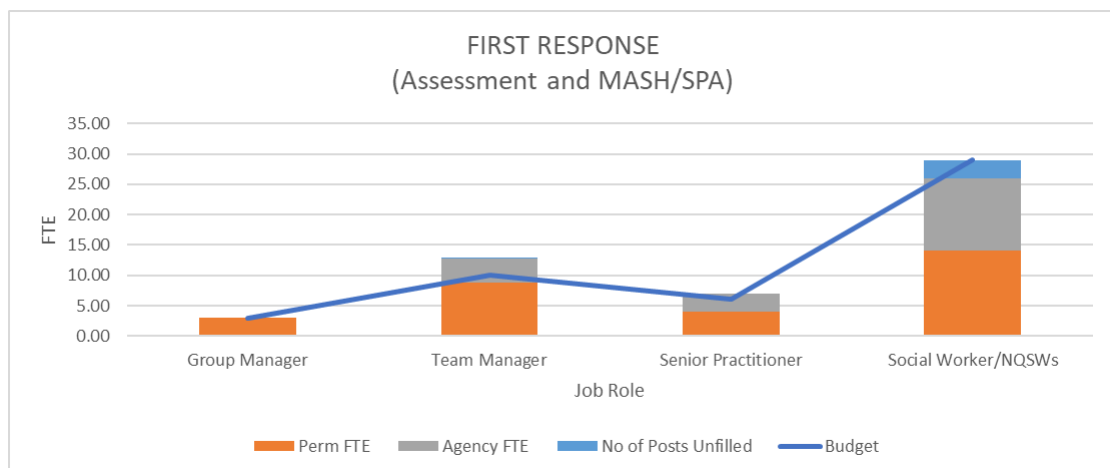
	1 Apr 2020	1 Apr 2021	1 Apr 2022	31 Aug 2022
Number of social work roles occupied by agency staff	86.82 fte (38.47%)	44.00 fte (18.16%)	54.50 fte (21.28%)	59.31 fte (23.78%)
Number of social work roles occupied by perm staff	138.48 fte (61.36%)	198.34 fte (81.84%)	201.64 fte (78.72%)	190.14 fte (76.22%)
Number of vacancies	92.30 fte	41.69 fte	61.93 fte	81.77 fte

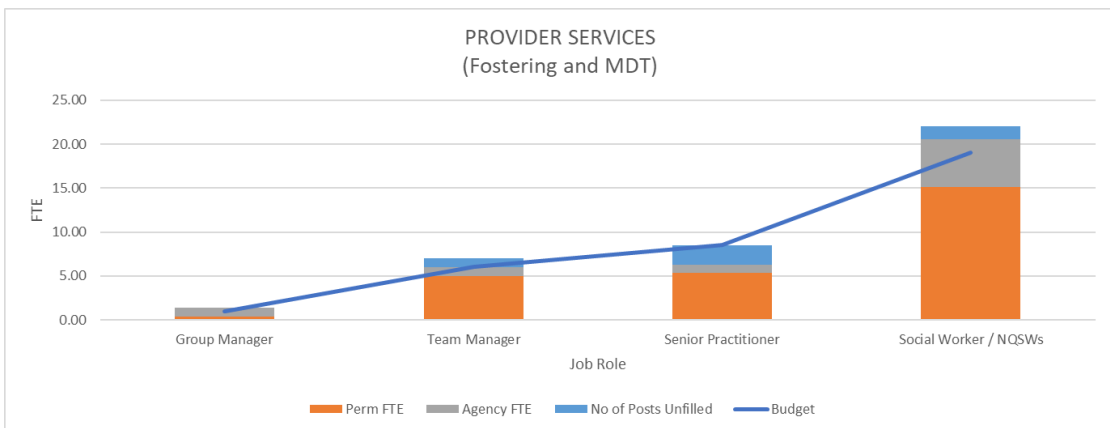
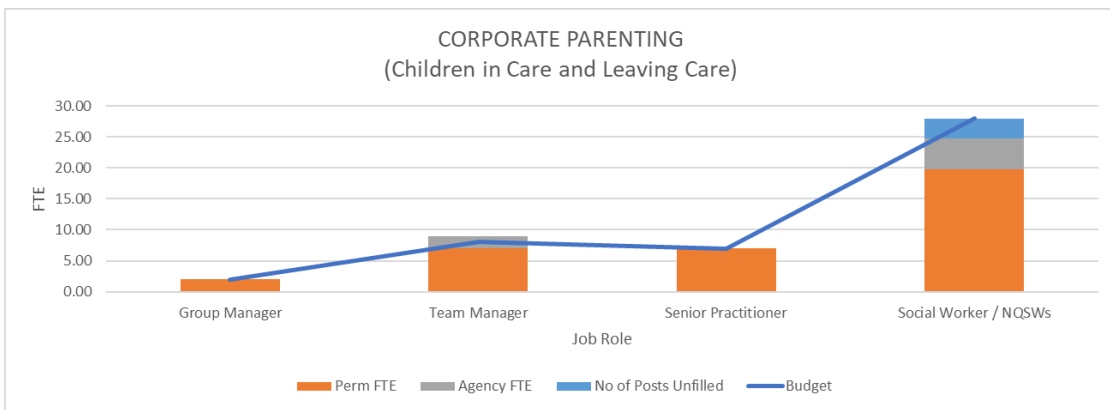
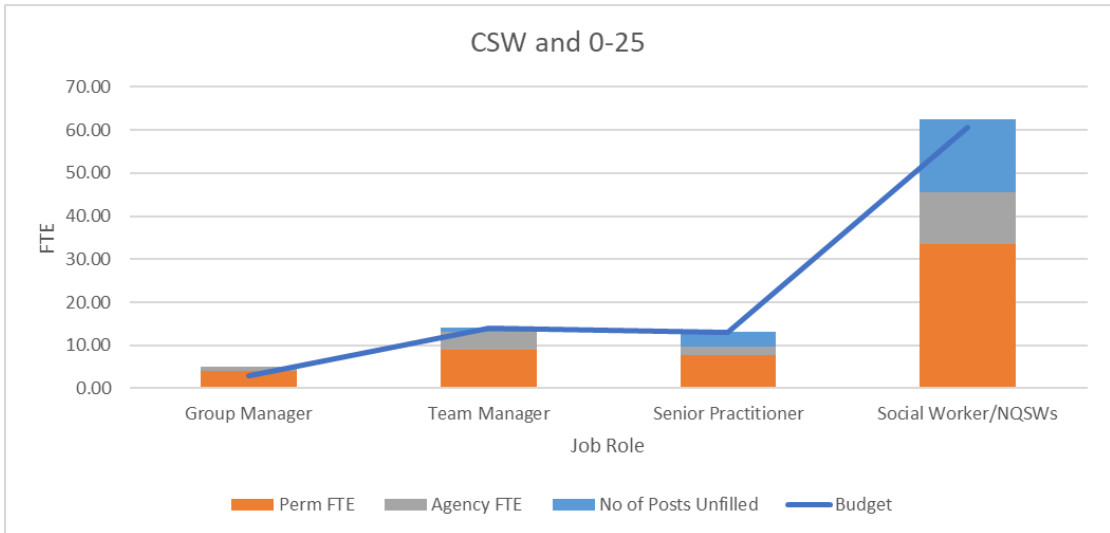
4. Starters and Leavers – Permanent workforce

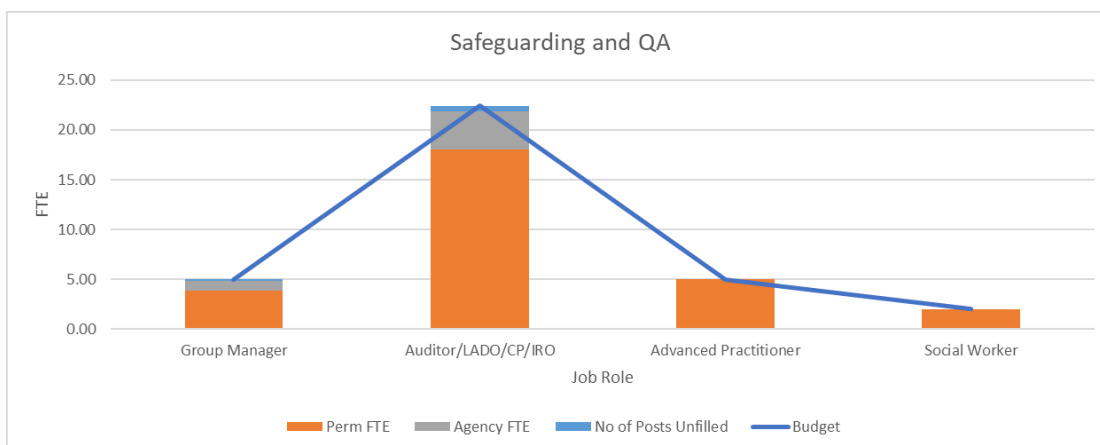
4.1 The total number of permanent leavers has increased since January 2022 compared to the previous years. Furthermore, there has been a significant decline in permanent starters. Both factors together with a shortage of experienced agency workers is impacting the stability of the workforce resulting in unfilled posts. Since April 2022 there has been an overall net decline of 17 social workers. See chart below.



- 4.2 As at 31 August 2022, 33.08fte social work qualified posts remain unfilled across the service.
- 4.3 A survey undertaken over the last three months into the factors impacting on recruitment and retention highlighted that the highest factors contributing to turnover were pay, workload and career progression opportunities. An action plan has been agreed to address as many of these areas over the next few months.
- 4.4 The impact of staffing on the separate teams is set out in the graphs below







5. NQSW and apprenticeships

5.1 The realignment of Children’s Services in January 2020 included the recognition of capped caseloads for newly qualified social workers in their assessed year of employment and agreed that for every 2 newly qualified social workers appointed one agency worker could be retained for 5 months. This option provided additional capacity but did not support the allocation of cases across teams. A decision was taken that for every newly qualified social worker appointed an agency worker would be retained for 2.5 months.

5.2 Since 2020, the intake of NQSWs has declined. Whilst there was the desire to match the intake for 2019, a significant proportion of the candidates applying for the cohort in October 2021 did not meet the threshold for appointment. It was agreed that with the demanding market we would aim to increase the intake of NQSWs for the next intake in September 2022.

5.3 The table below provides data on the number of NQSWs appointed and the level of retention.

Intake	Number Appointed	Number of leavers				Number still employed in Medway
		0 years’ service	1 years’ service	2 years’ service	3 years’ service	
Oct 2018	13	0	1	7	1	4
Sept 2019	15	2	1	0	n/a	12
Mar 2020	1	0	0	n/a	n/a	1
Oct 2020	7	0	0	n/a	n/a	7
Oct 2021	5	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	5
Sept 2022	13					
Jan 2022 (step up students)	4					

5.4 In collaboration with the University of Kent, Medway also offers a three-year social work apprenticeship programme. Children's Services currently has 3 social work apprentices. Children's Services are considering expanding this programme considering the national shortages highlighted.

6. Agency Workers

6.1 Across the South East, a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) has been in place for some time to help control costs and minimise competition between authorities for agency workers. The South East Region was updated and re-launched in April 2022. All nineteen SE local authorities committed to implementing the new agreement with effect from 1 April 2022. The key terms of the new MoC are to apply maximum hourly pay rate caps for agency social workers and managers and to:

- Adopt a common minimum standard for referencing to help prevent 'recycling' of poor quality permanent and agency workers.
- Use end of placement reviews with adequate information passed back to the agency workers and the agency supplier to determine any development requirements or to cease placing the worker to help to address quality issues.
- To work towards fully implementing the terms of this MoC via all their suppliers, i.e. main contractor and any 2nd tier suppliers.
- Proactively use their agency supply chain as a pipeline for the supply of permanent workers, in addition to direct recruitment. All LAs acknowledge that working as an interim help to build experience and enhances productivity.
- Ensure that permanent and agency workers are clear from the outset of the MoC and how it is being adopted by all signatory LAs and their agency suppliers. LAs and suppliers will provide standardised information on the MoC during recruitment and at induction.
- LAs and all their suppliers (whether providing permanent or temporary supply of workers) to refrain from aggressive 'headhunting' from within those LAs that have adopted the MoC, unless for a promotional role. Some rules of engagement will be developed in discussion with LAs for this purpose.

6.2 Across the South East region local authorities are reporting that the supply of agency workers has dramatically reduced, with those that are available opting to join project teams. This is having a significant impact on parts of the service as posts are unfilled and caseloads increasing for those staff in post. Where we could once rely on agency workers to fill vacant posts this is no longer viable.

6.3 Despite the relaunch and increased rates of pay for agency workers the MoC is coming under significant pressure.

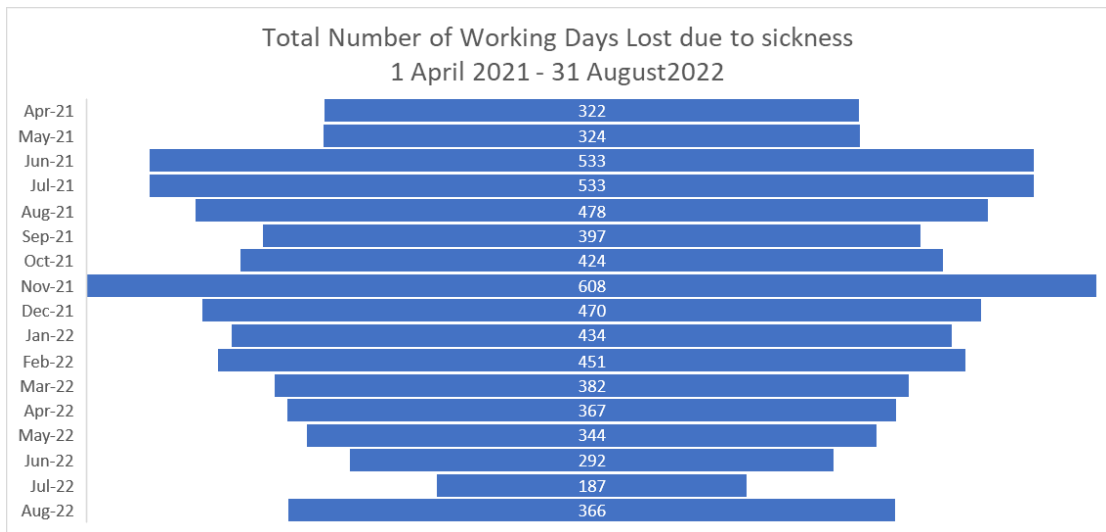
6.3 The new MoC cap for social work posts from 1 April 2022 is shown below -
Team Manager £47.50
Senior Practitioner £42.00

Social Worker £38.00

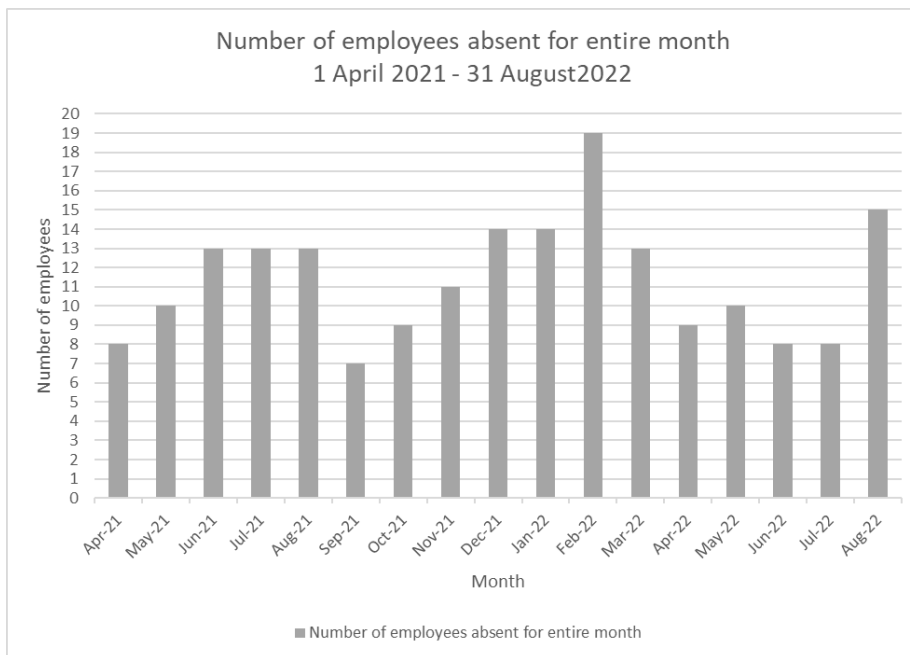
6.4 Feedback from agencies suggest that with an increased move towards a hybrid model of working more agency workers are choosing to work outside of the South East and demand a higher rate of pay as well as greater flexibility.

7 Sickness Absence

7.1 The number of working days lost due to sickness in Children's Services for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2022 is shown below



7.2 The number of employees absence for the entire month in Children's Services for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 August 2022 is shown below



7.3 The average number of days lost per employee for the month of August 2022 is 0.72 in Children's Services compared to 0.44 for the whole Council.

8. Workforce Strategy

8.1 The current workforce strategy is in the process of being refreshed. The impact of this strategy when it was launched in 2020 can be seen from the earlier data included in this report.

9. Advice and analysis

9.1 Recruitment to social work roles in Children's Services continues to be challenging both locally and nationally.

9.2 To increase the recruitment activity to social work roles a new recruitment video has been produced. This will be promoted as part of the jobs page refresh on the Council's website. In addition, a targeted recruitment campaign with the Guardian will be going live in October 2022.

9.3 Salary benchmarking for social work roles in the children's sector is undertaken on a quarterly basis. This has highlighted the need for further investment in the recruitment package to ensure the Council remains competitive in attracting candidates.

9.4 A new cohort of 13 NQSWs will be starting at the end of September 2022.

10. Risk management

10.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. Using the following table this section should therefore consider any significant risks arising from your report.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Failure to meet the needs of children and young people	Not being able to recruit and retain social work staff could lead to an unstable workforce and ultimately would not provide the best outcomes for children, young people and families.	A review of the recruitment and retention of staff had led to an action plan being agreed. These actions will be addressed over the next three months.	High Impact: Critical

11. Financial implications

- 11.1 The high and frequent use of agency social work impacts on the consistency provided to children and families as well as leading to significant budget spend and impact on staff morale.

12. Legal implications

- 12.1 Medway is required to meet statutory functions in relation to work with children and families. The legal implication of insufficient social workers would be a failure on the part of the local authority to exercise its statutory duty to safeguard children.

13. Recommendations

- 13.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the national and regional pressures across the social work sector and the continuing priorities of the service in attracting and retaining staff.

Lead officer contact

Samantha Beck-Farley, Chief Organisational Culture Officer
01634 331463, Samantha.beckfarley@medway.gov.uk

Appendices

None

Background papers

None