



Workforce strategy review 2022

Jo Davies, Service Manager (Principal Social Worker) and Cornelia Heaney, Practice Improvement & Workforce Academy

National children and families workforce context.

- There is a national shortage of children and families social workers. In the year to September 2021 5,000 social workers left the workforce, an increase of 16% on the previous year. (DfE)
- National vacancy rates in 2021 were up 7% on the previous year and were the highest number in the last 5 years.
- The number of children and families social workers in employed via agencies increased by 3% .
- Local Authorities and Trusts in the West Midlands are all experiencing difficulties recruiting social workers into their children and families teams, in particular social workers with any amount of post qualifying experience.
- This has resulted in a very competitive employment context where many employers are using additional payments, at the point of recruitment and/or after a period of employment to attract and retain social workers.

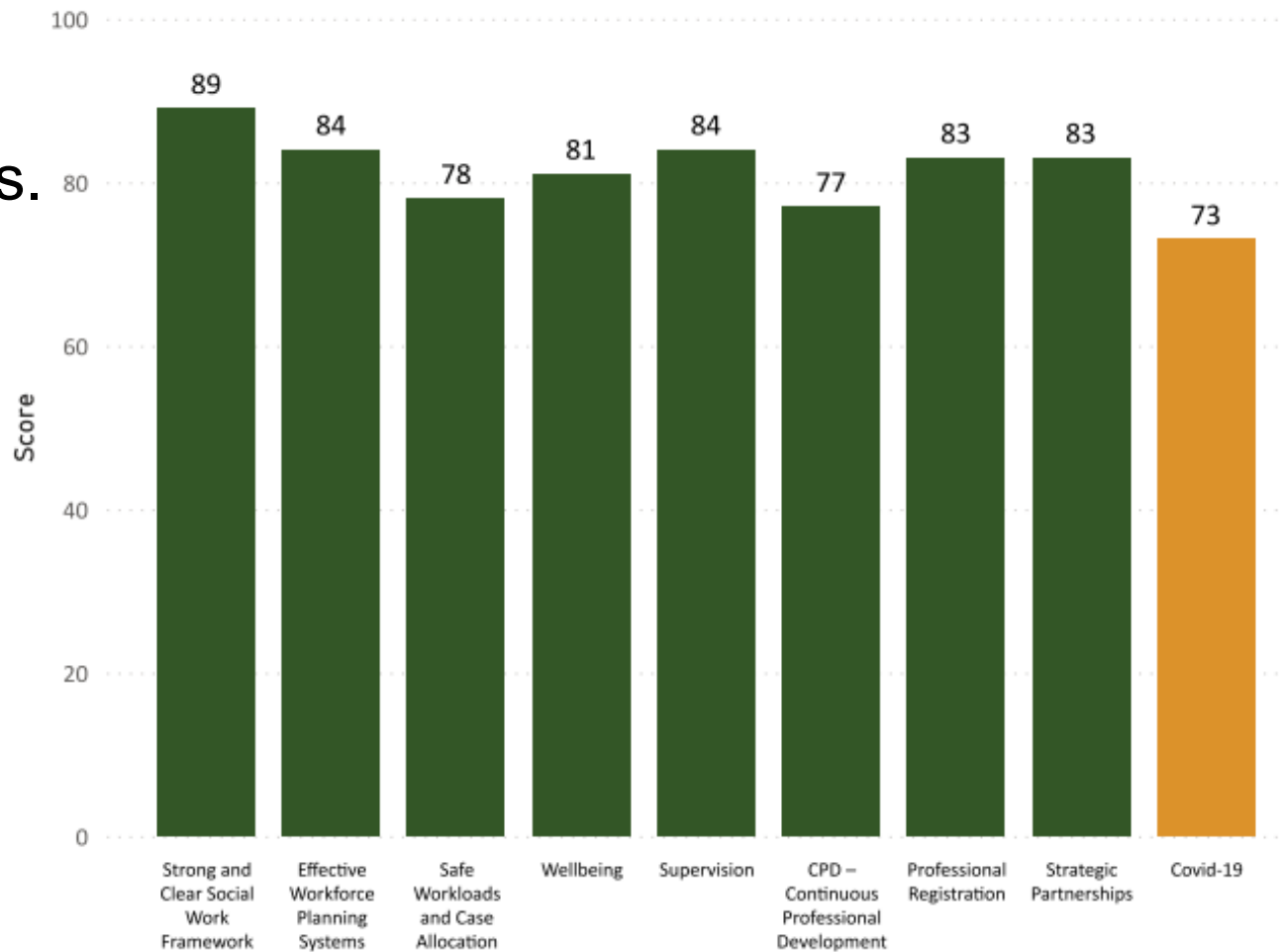
Children & Families Workforce strategy

- The recruitment and retention strategy in Warwickshire Children and Families has been to develop an employment context for social workers which is intrinsically attractive. This has meant focusing on caseloads, professional development, good quality reflective supervision and career development opportunities.
- We have established a Children and Families Academy providing learning and development to all our staff, promote our practice model and support progression through career pathways.
- We have created new career development opportunities for social workers, with a Lead Practitioner role combining social work decision making responsibilities with modelling social work practice, and enhanced Team Leader roles which are at a regionally competitive salary.
- We commissioned a well regarded Children and Families Practice Supervisor development programme (originally developed for commission by DfE) for all our Team Leaders
- We have a strategic group progressing the workforce strategy.

LGA Annual 'Healthcheck' Summary

- The LGA evaluation of performance against the standards for employers of social workers ('social work health check') found that overall we perform well both in absolute terms and also in comparison to regional and national employers.
- Highest scores were for having a strong and clear social work framework and questions relating to availability of support and supervision, these are good results.
- Time, resources and opportunity for CPD was lowest scoring, in the 'amber' band.
- The Workforce strategy agreed last year set out that all staff should be enabled to have at least 5 CPD days each year, but further work is required to ensure managers understand the role they need to play in encouraging and supporting staff to plan useful CPD activities and be released to take part in them.

Survey headlines.



Workforce Snapshot and Comparison 2019-2022

	Warks 2019-2020	Warks 2020-2021	Warks 2021-2022	WM Average	Range from	To	National
Social Worker Turnover Rate	16.6%	26.5%	17.8%	18.8%	9.3% (Shropshire)	29.3% (Sandwell)	15.4%
Social Worker Turnover Mean over 4 years	11%	13.9%	17.1%	17.7%			15.7%
Agency Rate	2.5%	15.7%	8.1%	16.1%	2.5% (Telford & Wrekin)	32.5% (Herefordshire)	15.5%
Vacancy Rate	12.7%	9.25%	9.2%	18.2%	0 (Shropshire)	27% (Dudley)	16.7%
Absence Rate	3.1%	TBC	2.7%	3.8%	2.2% (Shropshire & Walsall)	5.3% (Sandwell)	3.1%
Caseload Average	17.1	16	15.9	16.3	13.3 (Walsall)	23.2 (Dudley)	16.3
5 years +	33.3%	29%	23.9%	38.9%	57.9% (Stoke)	19% (Coventry)	40.3%

HR Performance data: relative successes:

- We have reduced agency use from 15.7% to 8.1% and we are once again well below regional and national averages. (16.1 and 15.5%)
- Vacancy rates are stable and remain lower than regional and national averages: 9.2% in WCC C and F compared with 18.2% in the West Midlands and 16.7% nationally.
- Caseloads are lower on average than last year, 15.9 compared with 17.1 when the snapshot figure was reported to DfE. Although positive, this average mask variation from quarter to quarter and from team to team, we know caseloads have not always felt safe and manageable for individual social workers.
- Turnover of social workers (average over all grades) is 17.1% This is a decrease since last year and 1% lower than the West Midlands average as reported to DfE and based on data from 1st September 2021 though lower than the National average of 15.4%
- Retention of level 2 (ASYE) social workers has improved markedly over the year.

HR data: areas for continued work

- Retention of level 3 social workers has been stable rather than improved and retention of level 4 social workers has decreased.
- The proportion of social workers who are level 2 is 21.5%, a marginal fall from last year and close to our objective of 20%. The proportion of social workers who are level 3 remains 51%, which is much higher than we would like (30%) and the combined proportion of level 4 and 5 social workers is 27.5%, which is much lower than the 50% we are aiming for.
- We are continuing to target recruitment activity on experienced social workers, and we will work with HR to identify additional ways to streamline progression through the social work career pathway to ensure we are fostering home grown experience.

Summary analysis

- Consistent and considerable recruitment effort over the year has had some success in increasing the number and rate of social work recruitment, although there has been less success in recruiting experienced social workers than we would have liked.
- Social media campaigns have been successful in driving increased hits on our jobs page and is a relatively low-cost form of promotion.
- The new Enhanced Team Leader job description has resulted in greater success attracting good external applicants to vacancies demonstrating the importance of ensuring our pay is in line with neighbours' rates.
- ASYE retention has improved significantly, from a low of 77.4% in May 2021 to 87.7% in March 2022, this coincided with the launch of the ASYE Academy.

Analysis cont.

- Our policies on minimum CPD time and good quality induction are the right ones, but responses to the LGA survey ('Social Work Health Check') suggest managers have not heard the message about these being important. We need to promote a management culture of proactively engaging with PDP development of their staff, planning over months rather than weeks to book training and other activities that meet specific learning needs.
- The level 5 posts are a more mixed picture – initial recruitment resulted in less than half being offered to external applicants as opposed to the target of 70%. Feedback from post holders is that they are not yet realising the potential of the role, spending most of their time on case work. They are presumably filling the gap left by a reduction in the number of level 4 social workers in teams.
- Improving retention of level 3 and 4 social workers is required to improve the balance of experience in our teams.

Proposed activity for 2022-23

- *Work with strategic HR colleagues to identify the recruitment support needed by Children and Families to maintain the high level of recruitment activity that has been undertaken this year.*
- *Continue to provide opportunities for experienced social workers to remain in practice and routinely collate information about the implementation of the level 5 role.*
- *Review and launch a streamline progression route*
- *Continued Team Leader progression to an enhanced level, through a centralised assessment process.*
- *Increase opportunities to “grow our own” through social work apprenticeship.*
- *Support 25 Social Workers to relocate from abroad to work in Warwickshire*

Proposed actions cont.

- *Review the development framework for family support workers.*
- *Training and mentoring in the Academy for practice supervisors and aspiring practice supervisors will be offered from the autumn 2022.*
- *An Academy offer for experienced social workers in family facing roles is being developed. This will include links to local universities to access their research and contribute to their social work skills teaching.*
- *An Academy performance dashboard is being developed reporting on ASYE/EPD progression, access to 5+ CPD days a year and other measures.*
- *Promote Letters of Appreciation and 'High Five'. Continue with our annual Children & Families Service Awards to celebrate good practice and outcomes achieved for children.*
- *Continue to promote the taking of a wellbeing day, including volunteering opportunities for teams*



Any questions?



Data sources:

LGA survey of employer standards (SW healthcheck)

[suite of reports](#)

and

HR data: [Full Workforce review report](#)