

Performance Scrutiny People

Date:	26 th March 2024
Subject	Recruitment & Retention
Purpose	The purpose of the report is to update Scrutiny as requested on the current position of workforce recruitment and retention in Social Services.
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This report was prepared after consultation with:

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Background

Recruiting and retaining a suitable workforce is one of the most significant challenges in local government with vacancy rates in some public sector areas being reported as rising sharply. The ability to attract and retain talent is critical to maintaining a skilled workforce capable of delivering quality services to our communities. The Council employs a workforce of around 5,800 employees, to a fulltime equivalent workforce of around 4,600 employees, largely female based, at approximately 77 percent. This includes school-based staff. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the recruitment and retention issues faced specifically by Children's Services, Adult Services and Prevention and Inclusion, as well as work being undertaken to support the ongoing challenges.

Attached to this report are a series of appendices with the data for each of the service areas. The following data is a snapshot of the more detailed information included in the appendices.

- The overall headcount for the Directorate is 1,151, with 907.92 FTE posts.
- The turnover rate for the past 12 months is 11.73%, with 150 starters, 135 leavers and 185 recruitment campaigns.

- The average length of service for employees is 9 years and 64.64% of contracts are permanent.
- 56.17% of contracts are part time, 42.37% of contracts are full time and 1.45% are job share contracts.
- 86.97% of the workforce identify as female, 12.95% identify as male and 0.09% of the workforce chose not to specify their gender.
- The 35-44 age bracket has the highest number of employees (29.19%). 5.65% of the workforce are aged between 16 and 24 years and 2.69% are aged over 60 years.
- Over the past 12 months, there have been 1,949 instances of sickness absence with 21,392 working days lost. 72.34% of return-to-work interviews were completed within 7 days of an employee returning to work and 460 wellbeing meetings were held. The most common sickness absence reason for days lost was emotional illness (39.49%).
- 33 employees took a period of maternity leave during the 12-month period from 1st January to 31st December 2023. 6 (18%) of these employees were based in Adult Services, 19 (58%) of these employees were based in Childrens Services and 8 (24%) of these employees were based in Prevention and Inclusion.

Recruitment and retention overview

The recruitment challenges in all areas of social care are well documented in the media. Vacancy rates are concentrated in particular teams, notably the Safeguarding Hub, First Contact, Child Protection, Case Managers, and residential staff across all our homes. However, there are issues across every area of the directorate and recruitment is to some extent a struggle with social workers, family support workers, occupational therapists, residential workers, youth workers, domiciliary care staff, early years staff, whenever and wherever posts are advertised.

There are a range of reasons for the recruitment and retention challenges:

- Competition from other local authorities
- Competition from other organisations in the public and third sector, for example overall salary rewards are higher in equivalent health posts and the nature of the work is sometimes perceived as more attractive in the voluntary sector
- Agencies for temporary staff offering significantly higher rates of pay and better working conditions with e.g. guaranteed caseloads
- A reduction in the numbers of individuals opting to train in social care
- Uncertainty related to immigration and the ending of protected status of certain posts
- High rates of staff leaving for career changes because of the work pressures and stresses.

None of these challenges are specific to the social care workforce in Newport. Staff are actively working with colleagues regionally and nationally to build towards a robust workforce for the future. This work is in tandem with steps being taken within the Council to ensure our support for staff, the opportunities we offer and the broad range of rewards are all attractive for our current staff as well as those we seek to recruit.

Options and Considerations

There are a number of key contributors to recruitment and retention in local government.

1. Salary and rewards

All Council job roles, approximately 600, are evaluated using the Council's job evaluation scheme. This scheme awards points for different elements of the role. The job evaluation scheme places all our jobs into a 'rank order' of jobs based on their point score. The nationally agreed pay structure then sits alongside the rank order of jobs, and pay values attributed to each job evaluation using scoring bands. The need to have an equality proof and analytical job evaluation scheme means it is not, therefore, possible to easily amend pay values of jobs, once they are set, to meet external factors or demands.

What can be done to support pay issues?

Nationally there is recognition of a squeeze on public sector pay with consensus that the national pay structure needs reviewing to ensure it can keep up with important legislative requirements around the national living wage increases and professional discipline expectations.

Locally, the Council has very limited ability to increase its pay structure, as pay is set nationally. Any review of the job evaluation outcomes for our roles and redrawing our pay bandings, would add several, if not tens, of millions of pounds to our pay bill. Redrawing our pay structure also has the potential of causing regional issues - if Newport increased its pay structure, it may perpetuate pay issues for the region and create an even more competitive environment within the public sector and not just private sector. Currently the Council have a mix of paying slightly more or less for jobs across our region.

The Council will continue to review job roles as and when opportunities present, to ensure they best capture the role's profile and ensure appropriate job evaluation scores are attributed and ultimately pay reflects this.

With regards to Social Worker pay benchmarking with neighbouring Local Authorities, the following was found:

Local Authority	Pay Range (ordered by lowest starting salary)
Caerphilly	£36,648 - £39,186

Torfaen	£36,648 - £42,403
Blaenau Gwent	£38,223 - £42,403
Newport	£39,186 - £43,421

There are varying patterns in all areas of salary in social care. While social worker salaries in Newport are favourable when compared with immediate neighbours, other factors influence the choices of individuals. At times Local Authorities opt to attract staff with a range of inducements, for example honorarium and additional increments. In addition the work within Newport, because of the demographic, is described by the Inspectorate as “different” to our neighbours. Being a city, the mobile population, the diverse backgrounds, the age profile, the location all contribute to a very particular set of challenges.

2. Labour Market

The UK's decision to leave the European Union in 2020 (Brexit), has had an impact on employment in the UK, although the full extent of the impact is still somewhat unclear. Brexit has led to a decrease in being able to rely on immigration for important roles in the UK. Ultimately, this has resulted in a smaller pool of employees for UK employers to draw from and has led to shortages of staff in some areas. Since Brexit the public sector has seen an impact on its workforce, with labour shortages nationally and for care workers there has been a noticeable impact. There is a growing concern that we are likely to see a further reduction in the availability of care workers with the introduction of changes to immigration legislation. Whilst the Council and our partners in domiciliary care are less dependent on staff from overseas, we are aware that neighbouring large LAs are very reliant on this workforce and recent changes are likely to have a domino impact on our care position.

3. Agency staff

Traditionally, the Council has plugged gaps in recruitment processes with agency workers, and largely still do, however our agency providers have noted difficulty over the past months in providing appropriate resource to the Council, as they experience their own challenges in securing temporary workers. The use of agency workers in Social Services has a significant cost implication. This year in Children’s Services there has been a large overspend on agency staff, in order to plug the gap in staffing residential placements. Work is ongoing to mitigate this overspend but staffing aligned with the placements challenges means there is likely to be a continued need for agency residential staff.

Over the past year, Children’s Services has been part of national development, to ensure the cost of agency social workers is managed without excessive charging. The Association of Directors of Social Services has supported this work, and the early indications are that it has positively impacted on the cost of agency social workers and inhibited the move of social workers from Local Authority posts to Agency roles. Working in this way is undoubtedly a positive development and may have learning for other areas of recruitment and retention across the sector.

4. Recruitment

The Council's recruitment process is aimed at identifying, attracting, and hiring suitable candidates for available jobs. Ensuring the Council has effective recruitment processes is critical to the success of our services. Recruitment is directly linked to the quality of the workforce and overall Council performance.

The majority, if not all of recruitment advertising is undertaken through online channels using various external press, directly relevant to roles advertised and appropriate social media platforms. All Council jobs are always put on the Council's recruitment website. For Social Services posts we use 'We Care Wales' and for a small number of posts we use 'Community Care'. We Care Wales is a national website developed by Social Care Wales, with a range of promotions and services for working in social care.

The Council recognises that it needs to be more representative of the population it serves, and recruitment strategies have already begun to diversify and target specific communities and demographics. The Council is now actively engaged in a number of face-to-face recruitment activities across the city, to meet hard to reach communities and to bring in new talent from those communities. Over the last few months, the Council has attended city wide recruitment events, showcasing the Council's offering and encouraging diverse applicants to register their interest in joining our organisation. In social care it is vital to have a workforce which is representative of the local community.

A number of other activities have taken place, and will continue, to understand our new starters' journey with the Council and learn from those experiences. The Council has reviewed its exit interview strategy, to ensure we are better aligned to be able to analyse job and organisational issues, but also reflect on positives and harness these. Our job descriptions are reviewed by managers prior to advert, to ensure they are fit for purpose and promote the Council as an employer of choice.

It is more important than ever that a prospective employee sees the Council as an employer of choice and is able to see how they can fit into the organisation and carry out a role to the best of their ability. In selecting employees, a number of our services now recruit on a values-based approach, as opposed to traditional interview questions and techniques. This has been a very useful tool when establishing new residential homes, when we have needed to build whole staff teams with a wide range of skills and experiences.

In the majority of the roles in Social Services, staff are required to engage directly with children and adults, individually and in groups. Homeworking can be used for the times when staff are engaged in administrative tasks or some meetings. Across the Directorate many staff now combine some homeworking with the service delivery face to face elements of their roles, as well as time to directly engage with colleagues and partner agencies. The flexibility of this type of working is viewed very positively by staff. Some of the advantages of home working include:

- Increased productivity as output from employees working from home often improves due to fewer interruptions than in the office.

- Greater engagement, commitment and loyalty from employees who value being able to work from home.
- Wider choice when hiring due to being able to recruit from a larger pool of talent because of where potential employees currently live may be less of a factor in whether they apply.
- Potential for a wider range of talent and innovation.
- A homeworking policy helps the carbon and green agendas, by cutting down on commuting.

Ultimately, alongside providing our current workforce with the opportunity to work flexibly, this policy also helps us become an employer of choice and flexible in our approach, which can help attract and keep talented staff.

The Council recognises that employees may require flexibility around their working patterns to suit their own personal circumstances. The flexible working policy has been updated to include the option of employees requesting a change in work location, arrangements or homeworking. The policy is supported by the new Homeworking policy. As an existing policy with amendments around homeworking, the normal process for agreeing requests for flexible working will continue.

5. Organisational Development Activity

Employee Benefits

The Council has a number of employee benefit schemes in place including car purchase schemes, cycle to work schemes, high street discount card, technology schemes, discounted leisure facilities and the ability to purchase additional annual leave, alongside an already attractive leave arrangement. As part of a review in 2022, the Council introduced a new pension additional contribution scheme. The shared cost additional voluntary contribution scheme is a supplementary pension scheme to that of the Local Government Pension Scheme and allows additional savings to be made for retirement. A number of staff have attended webinars to find out more about the service and sign up to the scheme continues. To support our employee demographics, and in line with building our new People Plan, a review of our employee benefits offering is underway and has identified some initial areas for further scoping. A review will take place of our offering around family friendly policies and enhancing and developing in these areas. To support our family friendly approach, last year, our new normal review introduced the option for all eligible staff to formally request to work from home on a regular basis alongside other flexible arrangements, such as changes to working hours and working patterns, on a permanent or temporary basis and, for all eligible staff, access to a Flexitime Scheme. Many of our staff continue to benefit from flexible and hybrid working arrangements and all requests for changes to working arrangements are considered, in line with the Council's policy.

Career Development

The Council offers a number of learning and development opportunities to all its employees, through a centralised learning and development directory. Areas of this learning are mandatory, whilst other areas are optional and intended to develop and nurture our

workforce. The central learning opportunities focus on organisational need and learning, whereas employees and managers will discuss more service specific learning and development needs and agree what training or development is required to support this. The Organisational Development Team will also support services, with service specific learning and development activity.

The Council has invested in a number of strategies to support its talent management approach over the last few years with programmes such as:

- Stepping up to management – for those developing and aspirational staff who want to get a taste of what it's like to work at that next level and receive some management support to help with their aspiration.
- Emerging leaders programme – for the last few years the Council have identified and retained a number of identified critical leaders and developed these into roles for the future. This was supported through working with our partners at the University of South Wales. Those who have successfully completed the programme have applied and been successfully appointed to senior roles with the Council.
- Shadowing schemes – encouraging team members to request an opportunity to shadow colleagues, to support their development needs and get a taste of other areas they may be interested in.
- Coaching & Mentoring – staff are developed and trained to ILM level 5 coaching standard to be able to support other colleagues in their roles and provide mentorship. A coaching network, to lead and direct the Council's approach to coaching, has been established.
- Inclusive Leadership – with a more and more diverse city, staff have attended training to understand inclusive leadership and build their understanding and approach. Training includes awareness of unconscious bias in recruitment and recognising different needs.
- IOSH Managing safely – to support our staff in their management responsibility for health and safety – whether staffing, buildings or service led, the Council has committed to delivering mandatory health and safety training to all our managers. This important health and safety training role out is ongoing.

Outside of the centralised corporate learning and development activities there are a number of service specific activities that support our workforce needs. Within Social Services, there is a continuing student social worker placement programme, with a view to supporting university study alongside working in our Social Services workplace environment. The Council successfully appoint individuals from the scheme each year as newly qualified social workers. This is a useful way to “grow our own” staff.

Staff Engagement & Wellbeing

As the Council continues to navigate through challenging times, it's more important than ever to keep our workforce engaged and motivated. Line manager activity is critical in supporting staff engagement. The type of general day to day management activity required to support engagement includes:

- Regular Feedback: Providing regular feedback to staff is a really effective way to improve engagement. Regular feedback can include constructive feedback, praise and recognition, and opportunities for growth and development. It is helpful to formally capture this through the iTrent check-in process. All employees have regular check ins, and these are extended quarterly for managers.
- Staff Supervision Reviews: For Social Services staff, supervision of the work undertaken is crucial to ensure effective case management. Staff supervision reviews and management decisions are entered on the Social Services electronic case management system WCCIS.
- Employee Wellness: Continuing to make use of our newly embedding wellness opportunities can help to improve engagement and productivity. It is recommended that support is sought from the Health & Safety team, to support employee wellbeing.
- Flexible Work Arrangements/New Normal: Providing flexible work arrangements, such as hybrid working, can help staff achieve better work-life balance, reduce stress, and improve engagement.
- Recognition Programs: Our recognition and benefits program is an effective way to show our employees that their hard work is valued. Recognition programs can also be internal to teams. Our previously named values awards will support this later in the year.
- Career Development Opportunities: Providing employees with career development opportunities such as mentorship, training, and education opportunities, can help to increase engagement and retention.
- Team meetings/ Office Days: Having invested in hybrid activities with meeting rooms available in most areas, every team should expect to have team meetings with an opportunity to catch up with colleagues regularly. The regularity and arrangements may vary to suit service needs, but staff feedback because of New Normal remote working makes these more important than ever. Staff break out areas are also important in the new normal developments, vending facilities are now available in main reception and will be reviewed for usage and considered in other areas. The previous staff canteen area is now available as a breakout space for rest and relaxation.
- Team Building Activities: Team building activities can help to encourage a sense of unity and belonging within the team. Activities can be as simple as team lunches or more elaborate events such as team development workshops. These are for services to develop as and when appropriate.

It's important to note that not all engagement options will be suitable for every team, and it will be necessary to assess what will work best for teams. It is recommended that service areas review employee engagement activity in their management teams and determine which options will be most effective for their team's needs.

At the most senior level, engagement activity includes the Chief Executive holding regular staff focus groups and engaging with staff directly, with feedback and actions being supported wherever possible. Senior engagement is cyclical and is summarised as below:

Annual Cycle to senior engagement 2024

Date	Activity	Detail	Leads
January/February	Directorate Roadshows	Whole Directorate meeting to discuss Council wide development	Director & Heads of Service
April/May	Service Area Roadshows	Service area business/ Council wide developments Lead into Staff Conference	Head of Service
May (prior to staff conference)	Staff Survey - Values	Lead into staff conference and discussion about values	Chief Executive/OD
June-August	Staff Conference/Awards	Communicate Corporate Plan Develop our Values Celebrate success	Chief Executive/ Directors
November/December	Service Area Roadshows	Service area business Lead into Staff Conference	Head of Service

Social Services has a well-established pattern of regular events. These now include Prevention and Inclusion. As well as sharing core information, the events are an opportunity to learn about other areas of service delivery and open up opportunities for shared working and celebration.

In addition to the above activity, the Council holds quarterly 'Newport Manager Network' meetings, where the Chief Executive chairs a network of senior Council staff from Service Managers, Heads of Service and Directors. This is an opportunity for the Chief Executive or Directors to update on Council priorities whilst also inviting guest contributors to the meeting on important and relevant topics.

Employee Voice Groups

Employee voice groups allow our workforce the opportunity and channels to share their opinions, ideas, concerns, and suggestions about workplace issues that affect their daily work and overall job satisfaction. Over the past few years, the Council's employee groups have grown in number and in influence. Our groups include; Pride staff network, Diversity Network, In-NCC (disability group) and Climate change network. These groups form part of

the Council's strategic equality plan and climate change plan in ensuring employees voices are heard and considered in developing strategic and operational activities.

Improved employee voice helps to foster a sense of ownership, involvement, and engagement among employees, as they feel valued and recognised for their contributions. This, in turn, leads to higher job satisfaction, motivation, and commitment to the Council. By giving employees a voice, the Council aims to support and reduce turnover and absenteeism, by creating a positive work environment where employees feel respected, supported, and included in decision making.

The Council also fully commits to working in partnership with our Trade Unions and recognises that partnership working is critical to the successful delivery of a number of our workforce strategies. Our Trade Unions meet with members of our Cabinet at our Employee Partnership Forum (EPF) on a quarterly basis, for strategic matters. EPF brings together all our Trade Union colleagues in a consultative forum with officers from HR to engage in, and help steer the direction for workforce matters and will regularly focus on recruitment and retention matters.

Employee Wellbeing

Employee wellbeing refers to the physical, mental, and emotional health and happiness of employees. Ensuring good wellbeing is an essential aspect of the Council's success and can lead to several benefits, including increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and presenteeism, improved mental health, improved employee engagement and job satisfaction and creating a positive workplace culture. The ultimate outcome from ensuring employee wellbeing is positive is increased productivity and retention, whilst also boosting our employee brand/employer of choice and attracting new talent.

The Council changed its approach to managing staff absence from a traditional management of attendance approach, based on sanctions, to a more holistic, supportive approach with the aim to promote and support employee wellbeing, therefore delivering a positive work environment which enables our employees to flourish and reach their full potential, rather than issuing sanctions based on the number of days or instances of absence.

The Wellness at Work Policy has been in place since January 2022 and focuses on aiming to keep employees well in work. This is done in a number of ways:

- **Wellbeing check-ins** – an opportunity for an employee and their manager to discuss health or wellbeing concerns in an informal or formal environment, utilising our employee and manager self service portal, iTrent, to capture discussions and outcomes.
- **Wellbeing support plans** – these can be accessed by an employee who feels they need more support to keep them in work, or through a wellbeing case discussion to identify the employee's needs and any reasonable support that can be provided by the Council.
- **Wellbeing referrals** – managers or employees can request for further support in managing an employee's health and wellbeing which could include health and safety interventions (stress/work role assessment), HR&OD support, occupational health appointments or support from external agencies.

- **Wellbeing case discussions/support meetings** – these are meetings where the employee and manager will be joined by relevant parties including HR, H&S, Unions, occupational health and any support agency, to identify further support and agree a support plan if necessary.

Our Wellness at Work approach has seen positive benefits in a number of areas. Further work is continuing to ensure all our managers are engaged in the approach, to supportively manage employees to be in work.

6. Newport Social Care Workforce Development Team.

Social Services receives the Social Care Wales Workforce Development Grant from Welsh Government. The total grant is £415,509 per annum. A small team is employed to deliver against the various requirements of the grant. The focus of the team is specifically for the workforce development for social care. This includes qualified and unqualified staff across Social Services Teams in Adults and Childrens Services, Residential staff across adults and children's homes, OT's, Early Intervention and Prevention.

The team delivers the following activities to enhance the recruitment and retention of social workers:

- Pre-qualification and post qualification training of social workers
- Placement arrangement and facilitation of student social workers
- Support in house practice educators with placements
- Part of the University Partnership meetings and Panels
- Facilitate and support staff to access the consolidation of practice supporting with placement and assessment
- Facilitate and support staff to access the Practice Assessor Programme
- Commission external Practice Educators for placements that cannot be supported in house
- Manage the Sponsorship offer for unqualified staff to access the Social Work degree through the Open University
- Post qualifying 1st year in practice programme/workshops for newly qualified staff.

The team directly provides the following training for all staff in Social Services

- All Wales Induction Framework for Health and Social Care (AWIF)
- Safeguarding Training – Refresher and full day – generic
- Manual Handling (2 day foundation and competency refresher)
- First Aid (3 day Generic) and refresher
- Paediatric First Aid for Foster Carers
- Positive Behaviour Practice for Foster Carers
- Person Centred Recording and Reporting
- Team Teach for Residential staff
- Positive Practice for Supporting Adults
- Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence
- Promoting independence – Adult Services
- Mental Capacity Act – introduction

The team also commission required training from external sources, across a range of areas of work.

7. National and Regional initiatives

Staff at all levels are actively involved in a number of national and regional initiatives. Social Care Wales are pursuing a range of activities to promote social care roles. Employees from Newport have been part of some of the promotion activities and assisted with case studies. The WeCare Wales website and campaigns provide information and advertise all social care posts. The portal gives guidance as well as acting as a mechanism to advertise posts and highlight jobs to those interested. WeCare is increasingly a Wales wide “go to” site for those seeking information about social care training and vacancies.

The primary social work training opportunities are through the Universities including the Open University. Social work staff in Newport offer support to students from courses through placement opportunities and participate in sessions as part of the courses to assist with the theoretical aspects of the course and links with practice. There are links with all the key University providers. In the same way Occupational Therapy staff support students with placements throughout the year.

Over the past year 20 of the 22 Local Authorities have worked together with a Memorandum of Understanding to manage the amounts paid for agency social workers in Children’s Services and how Local Authority social workers move to work in the agencies. The work has undoubtedly slowed the flow of social workers to agencies and ensured a ceiling on the charges. This work is currently being evaluated with a view to continuing and expanding the remit to Adult Services social workers and then residential agency staff.

Regionally the Gwent Workforce Development Board is supporting recruitment and retention initiatives across the five Local Authorities and the Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. Work has been undertaken with shared work with the schools and colleges as well as recruitment drives. There are challenges in this arena because of the differences with social care and health remuneration and reward schemes.

Conclusion

As the report outlines there are a number of contributing factors that impact the Council’s ability to recruit and retain suitable employees across Children’s, Adults and Prevention and Inclusion. The Council will continue to make best use of the resources it has available and the pay arrangements in place, to support service delivery. Outside of pay, there are a number of important workplace interventions that can be implemented or developed further to ensure we are promoting the Council as best we possibly can, as an employer of choice, and bring in and retain exceptional talent.

The national and regional challenges have a significant impact on our workforce capacity. Senior officers will continue to work with colleagues to support national and regional initiatives and ensure the needs of Newport are fully represented in those discussions.

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Recruitment Policy
Strategic Equality Plan
Workforce Plan
Corporate Plan
Employee Handbook
People Plan