



Tuesday, 4 October 2022

CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGY / RECRUITMENT & RETENTION UPDATE

Purpose of report:

This report provides an update on the Recruitment, Retention & Culture Programme, its aims, scope, activity so far this year and the priorities going forward. The Children's Social Care Workforce Strategy has recently been developed and is included in this report along with an initial thematic analysis of recent exit survey responses. An update on recruitment and retention of children's social care staff with key performance information has been included as well.

Introduction:

1. We know we need to maintain a relentless focus on our workforce to ensure that children and families are supported by skilled and experienced practitioners and while this continues to happen on a day-to-day basis, the outcomes of the Recruitment, Retention & Culture (RRC) Programme are key to enabling and realising the changes needed.
2. A Children's Recruitment, Retention and Culture Workforce Planning Strategy has recently been developed in collaboration with colleagues from HR, children's services operational staff and the CFLL Leadership Team. This is an important strategy as there is a need to form a systematic approach to tackling retention as well as the persistent vacancy gap. We know there is an ongoing nationwide shortage of social workers and therefore a 'where we want to be' plan will need to be formulated to stipulate our key priorities and resources needed to meet our goals. The Workforce Strategy underpins the work that we are undertaking in the RRC Programme with an overall aim to stabilise the staffing levels of our Social Workers but also looking at ensuring that elsewhere in our structures we have the right staff with the right skills in the right positions for more successful results.
3. Following the January 2022 inspection of Surrey's children's services by Ofsted, the inspectors highlighted 6 recommended areas for improvement in the final report. One area highlighted was the need to improve 'the proportion of permanent staff, to reduce turnover'. An improvement plan has been developed

and shared with Ofsted (as reported to the Select Committee at the 6 July 2022 meeting).

4. Recruitment of skilled and experienced social work staff is a national issue, particularly for permanent staff, and is a challenge that is reflected in our staffing of children's services in Surrey. The scale of the challenge – and the importance of it to us achieving consistently excellent social care practice – cannot be underestimated. This report sets out the difficulties we face through the workforce data included below but also shows the significant time and resource we are investing to tackle the problem and the comprehensive plans we have in place.

Workforce Strategy:

5. The development of the workforce strategy was first initiated through individual discussions with the relevant Directors and HR colleagues where they were presented with their workforce data through the following 5 lenses:
 - a. Affordability
 - b. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)
 - c. Geography
 - d. Skills
 - e. Wellbeing
6. These meetings were followed up by a Workforce Planning Workshop facilitated by HR where the Directors and managers at different levels were able to examine the composition of their workforce whilst understanding the key risks and opportunities to look out for. The workshop was guided by the following four 'levers' with exercises focused on knowing when to 'pull' and 'push' these levers.
 - Resourcing – who do we want to bring in?
 - Growth – how will the workforce evolve?
 - Exit – reasonable and unreasonable attrition
 - Retention
7. Discussions were based on the CFLL Directorate's strategy, the [Time for Kids principles](#) and the national picture in terms of what is happening around us that influences the demand for our services, and the wider impacts on our workforce. This also considered the Government agenda for Social Workers. All the information from the workshop enabled us to create the themes for our Recruitment, Retention and Culture Workforce Strategy that are broadly linked to the RRC programme. The approved strategy document is attached here (see: *'Annex A – RRC Workforce Strategy for Children's Social Workers 2022-2025'*).
8. This strategy will support us in dealing with our current workforce challenges and to shape what our social work workforce will be doing in the coming years, how

we need to organise ourselves to deliver these services, and the skills, behaviours and resources we will need to achieve this.

9. It should be noted that this particular strategy is just for Social Workers, as our highest current priority area, however we are developing separate strategies for the different service areas within CFLL working alongside the Directors and their leadership teams. This will eventually be pulled together to create an overall CFLL Workforce Strategy for the directorate, focusing on the key priorities of the medium to long term plans. It is expected that this will be completed in the next 6 months.

Recruitment, Retention & Culture Programme (RRC)

Aims and Objectives

10. Fundamentally, the objective of this programme is to; stabilise, develop, engage and retain the social worker workforce within Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL). The overall aims are as follows:
 - To increase the number of Permanent Social Workers **Recruited** to join Surrey.
 - To increase the number of Permanent Social Workers **Retained** to stay at Surrey.
 - To explore and address the **Culture** at Surrey (Social Workers experiences working for Surrey).
11. In January this year, the programme had been in place for just over 12 months; a renewed focus and change in approach was needed in order to have a significant impact in a relatively short period of time. Several changes were made between January and March including:
 - a) A new Programme Chair was appointed who introduced the RRC Board to the renewed / refreshed 'Purpose' and 'Direction' of the programme that will focus specifically on the level of impact that it can deliver.
 - b) A change to the structure and governance of the programme and the RRC Board.
 - c) Feedback over the previous 12 months was gathered from those involved in the programme as to what has worked well to date vs what could be improved.
 - d) The introduction and resourcing of new Operational Leads, to support the existing Workstream Leads with their work.
 - e) The Time for Kids Principles were introduced to the RRC Board, to be embedded into all workstream planning and activities.
 - f) Each of the Workstream Leads produced revised 12-month plans (short, medium and long term), outlining what they intend to achieve and the impact that this will have.

- g) A renewed focus on communication and engagement to improve visibility of the programme across the CFLL Directorate, through clear and regular progress updates.

Programme & Workstream Plans

12. Since March, each of the 5 workstreams ('Explore' / 'Attract' / 'Engage & Retain' / 'Develop' / 'Succeed') have established working groups with significant involvement from operational services – these groups meet at least monthly and progress the work in between Board meetings. Additional resources are being brought into these groups (and the Board) wherever they're needed. Each workstream is also now providing monthly status reports to the Board setting out what has been achieved (and the impact of that work), the priority activity for the next month and any barriers to progress, to then be resolved by the Board.
13. Revised workstream plans have been developed setting out the planned activity (and expected impact) in the short (0-2 months), medium (3-9 months) and long-term (10+ months). All Workstream/Operational Leads are confident these plans are achievable and have the resources needed to deliver them. These are updated at least quarterly and regularly reviewed by the Board and CFLL Leadership Team to ensure they are on-track, ambitious and having the required impact.
14. A complete overview of the programme is shown on the latest one-page 'Activity & Impact' plan which is attached to this report (see: Slide 8 of the '*Annex A – RRC Workforce Strategy for Children's Social Workers 2022-2025*').

Key Improvements / Changes in Last 6 Months

15. The RRC Board continue to meet monthly to oversee the work of the 5 workstreams. Many tangible changes have been delivered across the programme over the last 6 months and these are summarised below.
- 15.1. Data & Insight:
- a) Resourcing and vacancy tool introduced in April with direct input from all frontline children's services team.
 - b) Clear, accurate and up-to-date picture of the vacancies across services.
 - c) Enabling better forward planning and awareness of future / expected vacancies.
 - d) Alignment of strategic reporting of staffing from HR, Finance, Children's Services.
- 15.2. Connect 2 Surrey (C2S) (a Joint Venture between Surrey County Council and Kent Commercial Services which in February took over from Adecco, as our 'Master Vendor' for agency recruitment):

- a) New Arrangements introduced: Regular C2S & SCC meetings & the use of a tracker to monitor volumes of CVs, interviews & appointments.
- b) Introduced new front-end process where children's services managers can approach agencies directly.
- c) Recent contractual changes (June) expected to improve relationships with agencies.

15.3. Exit Interviews:

- a) Exit interview process launched (countywide) June 2022.
- b) Expectation for all leavers to complete this and early conversations to take place aiming to retain staff wherever possible.
- c) Analysis of findings should give greater insight and help to improve retention in the future.

15.4. Staff Retention:

- a) Social Worker Progression Pathway – implemented from June (first panel this month).
- b) Mentoring programme being developed.
- c) 'Stay Interviews' introduced with all practitioners after 18 months at SCC.
- d) Exploring 'Transfer Scheme' policies for practitioners to move between teams, sabbaticals and improving flexible working arrangements such as 9-day fortnights.

15.5. Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs):

- a) Significant increase in the numbers of NQSWs being recruited for the 2022 cohort – expecting up to 50 in total.
- b) They will be starting as soon as available and joining social work teams initially as Family Support Workers prior to graduating.
- c) We are aware of the additional pressures on Team Managers in supporting large numbers of NQSWs for their first year and are providing extra support (and resources) from the Academy to help.

15.6. Recruitment:

- a) Complete review of adverts, application process and attraction channels.
- b) Total Reward Statements being updated to reflect recent changes – to include a comparison between permanent and locum roles.
- c) Recruitment network group established with representation from all teams/services.
- d) Webinar and open evening booked for September.

16. Further information has been included in this report on the recent changes to the Connect 2 Surrey contract / working arrangements (see paragraphs 42 to 46) and on the Exit Interviews process along with initial findings from the first rounds of interviews (see paragraphs 22 to 29).

17. As part of our ongoing commitment to communicate and engage with the CFLL workforce on the progress of the programme and the changes being made, a recent video (July 2022) featuring brief updates from the Chair and each Workstream Lead is also available – this can be accessed at the following link: [Social Worker Recruitment and Retention Workstream Updates - YouTube](#)

Priorities

18. Over the next few months and into 2023, there are several changes that the programme will be delivering with some projects concluding and others starting up. These include:

- 18.1. Continue the Exit Interviews with leavers, analysing the data on a monthly basis to inform the work of the programme alongside quarterly reporting to CFLL Leadership Team.
- 18.2. 'Locum to Perm' webinars to encourage and support more agency workers to transfer to permanent employment. Organise open evenings and hiring days (alongside Adults Services) starting from September.
- 18.3. 'Stay Interviews' with social workers that have been in post for approximately 18 months to support greater retention and gain further insight into the push and pull factors causing practitioners to leave.
- 18.4. Review effectiveness of pilot process with Connect 2 Surrey, monitor the contract through regular engagements and enhanced reporting.
- 18.5. Update Total Reward Statements with the new pay award and review recruitment attraction methods, processes and training to ensure equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives are reflected.
- 18.6. Develop and launch focused social media campaigns for Family Safeguarding service and Children with Disabilities service.
- 18.7. Investigate and – where appropriate – develop proposals for social worker sabbaticals, 9-day fortnights, wellbeing days, enhanced annual leave.etc to improve retention of social workers.
- 18.8. Finalise the directorate-wide 'Induction Pack' and support services to design service-specific inductions to complete this. Launch the 'onboarding app' and develop further manager guidance materials.
- 18.9. Develop a culture and wellbeing mission statement and action plan toolkit for teams / services to adopt.

- 18.10. Onboard the 2022 cohort of ~50 Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSWs) from September to start their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment. Ensure managers (and teams) are well prepared to support this large cohort of NQSWs this year.
 - 18.11. Review and launch the apprenticeship proposal for a capacity of 4-5 workers each year.
 - 18.12. Continue the Social Work Mentoring Scheme to equip workers for interview (when an ASW/TM role is available) and potential step-up to the new role through progression pathway as well as providing development opportunities for all social workers.
 - 18.13. Incorporate agency / locum data and EDI data into the children's services workforce planning dashboard(s).
 - 18.14. Establish a formal process for regular reviewing of the workforce strategy and workforce planning activity to address new workforce and organisational issues that occur.
 - 18.15. Assess the impact of the Independent Review of Social Care on future workforce planning assumptions and needs.
19. We will also be implementing a role transfer policy to enable a more straightforward and streamlined approach for existing social care staff to transfer into vacancies in other social care teams. We know from talking to social workers that making it easier for them to transfer into other teams will help them to develop their practice, skills and knowledge, while also helping to retain them at SCC instead of leaving the Council to find their preferred role in another local authority. This new offer will help to reduce recruitment and onboarding costs, boost morale by promoting professional growth and development, and retain valued and experienced social work staff in Surrey.
20. Another priority for the programme is to develop our relationships with local universities with social work graduates. We will be meeting with the Royal Holloway University this month aiming to put in place a partnership arrangement to make it easier for newly qualified social workers to take on a permanent role in Surrey. This would include giving guaranteed roles to students that have completed a placement with us as part of the degree, and offering holiday-work roles to graduates that would also give them guaranteed interviews as part of it.
21. The RRC Programme will continue to be one of the highest priorities for children's services. Recruitment and retention of staff is probably our single biggest barrier to delivering consistently excellent services and it cannot be underestimated. We know that in service areas where retention is poor, the

turnover of staff affects children and families' abilities to develop positive relationships that will effect real change in their lives.

Exit Interviews

22. The exit interview process was relaunched on 14 June 2022 by the Director for Family Resilience & Safeguarding – specifically to all children's social care employees. At the time of the relaunch, an initial email was sent to all managers across children's services explaining the rationale and importance of exit interviews, emphasising the need for all leavers to be interviewed and also provided them with a link to complete the exit survey.
- 22.1. The survey includes questions in the following categories:
- a) Your employment
 - b) The Council
 - c) Your directorate and service
 - d) Your team
 - e) Your role
 - f) Reasons for leaving
23. Shortly after this, the exit interview process was also relaunched by HR colleagues across the whole council – including all other staff in the CFLL Directorate.
24. In July, the Director for Family Resilience & Safeguarding followed-up to all children's social care staff with a [video](#) which included an item publicising the exit interview process.
25. The data analysis is currently being undertaken by the HR Recruitment team and will shortly be taken over by People & Change services on an ongoing basis. We will be providing monthly analysis of the exit interview surveys to the Recruitment, Retention & Culture (RRC) programme from now on – along with a quarterly report and discussion at the CFLL Leadership Team. Recommendations from the Leadership Team will be incorporated into the RRC Programme plans.
26. The early findings on 14 September showed that 45 exit surveys from the CFLL directorate have been completed since the process was introduced. This represents an approximately 30% uptake of all CFLL leavers during that time and we are expecting this ratio to increase with more awareness of the process from managers and practitioners alike. (Note: These numbers will differ from the leavers data in paragraph 30 as the exit interview findings represent all staff across the directorate, not just those in social work roles).
27. Initial findings from the first 2-3 months of exit interviews are shown below (see Table 1 and Chart 1):

27.1. *Table 1: Exit Interview Feedback, June-September 2022, all leavers from the CFLL directorate*

| EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTION | YES / AGREE | NO / DISAGREE |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| I felt valued by the Council | 57.78% | 42.22% |
| The Council has a positive working culture | 57.78% | 42.22% |
| The Council offers good benefits as an employer | 62.22% | 37.78% |
| I felt there was a clear sense of direction for the Directorate / Service | 60.00% | 40.00% |
| My line manager was visible and approachable | 84.44% | 15.56% |
| I had regular, helpful and supportive one to ones / supervision | 68.89% | 31.11% |
| There were suitable promotion opportunities for me to apply for | 37.78% | 62.22% |
| I felt valued | 64.44% | 35.56% |
| I had clear objectives and responsibilities | 71.11% | 28.89% |
| I felt my workload was manageable | 66.67% | 100.00% |
| I had a good work life balance | 60.00% | 40.00% |
| Have you ever experienced any bullying, harassment or discrimination at work? | 17.78% | 82.22% |
| Would you consider working for Surrey County Council again? | 80.00% | 20.00% |

27.2. *Chart 1: Exit Interview Feedback*



28. There is some encouraging feedback, but these findings also highlight some areas of concern. The RRC Programme will be reviewing the feedback as a priority and actions allocated to the relevant workstream to address.

29. Where we identify areas of low completion rates, these will be addressed by further communication and engagement with those services. It is important that we get as many leavers as possible to complete the exit interviews in order to ensure we are well informed about the reasons for staff leaving so that we can ultimately take action to address this. Directors have forwarded the exit survey to all Service Managers with their expectations that it should be passed to candidates leaving to complete. We are also working with services, such as Children's Homes, to ensure candidates who don't regularly sit at a computer for their work are still made aware of the survey and passed the link to complete if leaving.

Recruitment & Retention – What does the data tell us?

Turnover and Retention

30. The last reported 12 months have shown a 10% increase in voluntary turnover for the Social Worker (SW) Workforce (i.e. Advanced SW, Senior SW and SW). Previously the turnover within the Advanced Social Worker and Senior Social Worker roles was considered quite high and steadily increasing however our highest turnover is now in our main SW roles (see Table 2). We have had more Social Workers leave than start in the last 12 months. Although we have been able to recruit to vacancies, there are still challenges in relation to retaining this workforce.

30.1. *Table 2: Turnover, starters and leavers*

| | AUGUST 2021 | JULY 2022 |
|---|------------------------|----------------------|
| TURNOVER ALL SOCIAL WORKER ROLES | 20.07% | 30.69% |
| Social Worker Turnover | 15.82% | 31.84% |
| Advanced & Senior Social Worker Turnover | 26.50% | 28.94% |
| SOCIAL WORKER ROLES - LEAVERS | 57 | |
| SOCIAL WORKER ROLES - STARTERS | 47 | |

31. While it is disappointing that we've not been able to recruit to the vacant Advanced and Senior Social Worker roles, it does present an opportunity for our experienced Social Workers to progress into these more senior roles. This links to the 'SW Progression Pathway' (referenced in paragraph 15.4) and the 'Mentoring Scheme' (referenced in paragraph 18.12).

32. As can be seen here, and in paragraphs 33 to 34, our retention of social work staff and the number of social work vacancies we have, has deteriorated over the last 12 months. The recruitment of skilled and experienced social workers is a national issue that is being reflected in our staffing for children's services in Surrey. This highlights the scale of the challenge, the need to do things differently to attract and retain staff, and the importance of our continued investment of time and resources in the Recruitment, Retention & Culture programme.

Establishment and Vacancies (FTE)

33. As of 30 June 2022, we have 149.22 FTE vacancies in the Social Worker, Advanced Social Worker and Senior Social Worker roles (see Table 3).

33.1. *Table 3: Establishment/Vacancy FTE*

| Staff Group | SW Profession | Establishment (FTE) | Permanent (FTE) | Vacancy unfilled by locums (FTE) | Locum filling vacant positions (FTE) | Total Vacancy (FTE) |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| SW Group | Advanced Social Worker | 47.89 | 26.89 | 10 | 11 | 21.0 |
| | Senior Social Worker | 130.53 | 77.73 | 20.8 | 32 | 52.8 |
| | Social Worker | 245.08 | 169.66 | 28.12 | 47.30 | 75.42 |
| | Total | 423.5 | 274.28 | 58.92 | 90.30 | 149.22 |

34. Table 4 shows that we have 117 locums (headcount) and there is a continual need for locums to support Newly Qualified Social Workers/International Social Workers over a set period of time, or simply to cover absences (of which we currently have 25 for a mix of maternity, long-term illness, secondments and cover for NQSWs and International SWs). In terms of reducing our locum

headcount/FTE, we expect to see the real impact of retention and stabilisation in year 3 of the programme, once the new cohort of international and newly qualified workers has stabilised.

34.1. *Table 4: Headcount breakdown (not FTE) - In total there are 117 locum personnel*

| Staff Group | SW Profession | Locum filling vacant positions (headcount) | Agency Backfilling Perm (Headcount) | Total Locum |
|-------------|------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| SW Group | Advanced Social Worker | 11.0 | 4.0 | 15.0 |
| | Senior Social Worker | 33.0 | 6.0 | 39.0 |
| | Social Worker | 48.0 | 15.0 | 63.0 |
| | Total | 92.0 | 25.0 | 117.0 |

Tenure and reasons for leaving

35. There has been a noticeable reduction of leavers within the 4+ years tenure category reducing from 45.35% (in the reporting period up to 31 March 2022) to 37.23% (in the reporting period to 31 July 2022). The most identified reason for leaving remains 'career development'. There has however been an increase of leavers in the 1-2 years tenure category rising from 19.77% to 26.60% in the same reporting periods.

Trends Data

36. The information set out in paragraphs 30-35 is shown visually in the attached Social Worker Trends Dashboard (see: 'Annex B - CFLL Social Worker Trends Dashboard - July 21 to August 22').

Children's Service Social Work Start-Up & Retention Payment Scheme

37. Start-Up & Retention Payments exist for a range of Social Worker roles within children's services. These payments form part of a recruitment and retention scheme effective from 1 October 2020.

37.1. Payments fall into four sections:

- Section A: New Starters in Eligible Roles and Eligible Teams.
- Section B: Agency Worker Transfers to Eligible Roles and Eligible Teams.
- Section C: New Starters in other Children's Service Social Care Teams.
- Section D: Retention Payment for Existing Staff in Eligible roles in post prior to October 2020.

Overview of Section D – Retention Payments (existing staff)

38. In October 2020, 368 staff were identified who started work for SCC before 01/10/2020 and would have reached more than two years' service by October 2022, therefore they were potentially eligible to join the retention scheme. A retention period of 12 months was applied to these payments.

Leavers

39. Of the 368 eligible staff, 49 left before being offered the payment and 2 were promoted to a role which is not eligible; this left 317 staff eligible to receive the payment. On top of these, a further 34 left after being offered the payment.

39.1. *Table 5: Number of workers (by role) that have left their role and not received the retention payment*

| Job Title | Left before eligible date/payment offered | Left after being offered payment |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Advanced Social Worker | 1 | 4 |
| Assistant Team Manager (EDT) | 0 | 0 |
| CP Chair/IRO | 1 | 2 |
| Consultant Social Worker | 0 | 0 |
| CPC/IRO Coordinator | 1 | 0 |
| EDT Manager | 1 | 0 |
| Senior Social Worker | 12 | 5 |
| Senior Social Worker (CAMHS) | 3 | 0 |
| Senior Supervising Social Worker | 1 | 0 |
| Social Worker | 22 (+1 Internal Move) | 15 |
| Specialist Senior Social Worker (CAMHS) | 0 | 0 |
| Supervising Social Worker | 1 | 3 |
| Team Manager | 6 (+1 Promotion) | 5 |

Staff Take Up

40. To date (August 2022) all 317 staff have been invited to opt-in to the scheme. Of the 317 invited to opt-in, 261 have taken up the offer of the Retention Payment. As mentioned earlier, 34 staff have been offered, but left SCC or moved to a non-eligible role (e.g. ASC) and a further 22 have not taken up the offer.

40.1. *Table 6: Eligibility and take-up of retention payment*

| Job Title | Originally eligible for payment by 10/22 | Eligible as of 10/22 payroll and invited to opt in | Opted In | Left SCC/Moved On after being offered payment | Uncommitted to payment |
|-----------|--|--|----------|---|------------------------|
|-----------|--|--|----------|---|------------------------|

| | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|----|----|----|
| Advanced Social Worker | 23 | 22 | 17 | 4 | 1 |
| Assistant Team Manager (EDT) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| CP Chair/IRO | 22 | 21 | 18 | 2 | 1 |
| Consultant Social Worker | 4 | 4 | 3 | 0 | 1 |
| CPC/IRO Coordinator | 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| EDT Manager | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Senior Social Worker | 63 | 51 | 44 | 5 | 2 |
| Senior Social Worker (CAMHS) | 8 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| Senior Supervising Social Worker | 19 | 18 | 18 | 0 | 0 |
| Social Worker | 139 | 115 | 87 | 15 | 13 |
| Specialist Senior Social Worker (CAMHS) | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Supervising Social Worker | 23 | 22 | 17 | 3 | 2 |
| Team Manager | 61 | 54 | 47 | 5 | 3 |

41. Of the 261 staff who opted-in to receiving a Section D Retention payment, only 3 have left during the retention period. While we recognise that a number of these staff will have been inclined to remain with SCC, the rate of turnover is now significantly rising since the 12-month retention that is applied when the retention period has come to an end. For those who were already inclined to leave SCC and therefore have not opted-in to the scheme, we are continuing to make efforts to gather their views on their reasons for non-committal. This is being done with the hope that we can address their concerns directly and to better inform our wider workforce strategy.

Connect 2 Surrey & Agency Workers

42. As referenced in paragraph 15.2, Connect 2 Surrey (C2S) are our 'Master Vendor' for agency recruitment – they took over from our previous vendor on 1 February 2022. Following the start of the contract this year we initially found that

fewer candidate CVs were being sent through, with fewer interviews and ultimately, fewer agency workers being appointed. This was a concern due to the urgent need to fill vacancies with agency workers on a temporary basis and was prioritised by the RRC programme and the Recruitment Team.

43. Following investigation, feedback and consultation with C2S, the CFLL directorate and agencies, we identified four main areas that needed to be addressed to improve the volume of agency candidates; these covered process, communication & reporting, governance & escalation of issues, and agency engagement.
44. New arrangements were introduced from late-April/early-May which included:
- Regular meetings with C2S, the contract manager, workforce team, operational managers and senior leaders where needed. An escalation process was also put in place.
 - All agencies on the framework invited to training sessions, regular drop-in sessions and quarterly forums.
 - Additional administration and recruitment staff at C2S.
 - Tracking system to monitor the orders, CVs, interviews and appointments with a fortnightly reporting dashboard shared with SCC.
45. In addition to these changes, a new front-end process enabling children's services managers to engage directly with agencies has recently been piloted. This pilot has been in place since mid-June and has showed some promising results in the 2 months since it started, with improvements in the numbers of agency workers being appointed to the teams with the most pressing needs to fill vacancies.
- 45.1. In the initial 4.5 months (February to mid-June) of the contract, 50 interviews were organised with agency candidates and 40 vacant roles were appointed to (this also included some Team Managers).
- 45.2. In the 2 months (mid-June to mid-August) since the new front-end arrangements were put in place, there have been 43 interviews organised, 28 offers made and 23 roles appointed to (this is just for Social Worker roles) so we are already seeing an improved performance from C2S. It is particularly positive that of these 23 appointments, many are for 'hard to fill roles' within our Family Safeguarding service.
46. For now, the changes made since June are having a positive impact however there is still room for further improvement in the recruitment of agency workers. We will continue to monitor the new arrangements with regular reporting from C2S and the regular meetings that are in place.

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| Conclusions: |
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47. The Social Worker Workforce Strategy was finalised in August and is helping to inform the work of the Recruitment, Retention & Culture programme going forward. This will support our work to address the current workforce challenges and to identify the skills, behaviours and resources we will need in the future.
48. The Recruitment, Retention & Culture (RRC) programme has been through some major changes since January with the structure and governance of the programme and the resources involved – improving retention of our existing workforce and recruiting the best social workers available are some of the main priorities for children’s services. The increase in resources this year has enabled us to deliver many projects and improvement initiatives over the last few months and the plans going forward are comprehensive and ambitious.
49. Our workforce data shows the challenges we are facing and highlights the difficulties we have historically had with retaining staff. The various changes delivered recently (and those currently underway) are expected to have a positive impact in this area and we expect to see retention figures improve over the coming months however the full effect of the programme may take 2-3 years to be realised. We recognise the scale of the challenge and the difficulties faced across the country but will continue to invest the time and resources needed to tackle the issue. Improving our staffing levels and reducing turnover is one of the single biggest changes needed to ensure children and families can develop positive relationships that will effect real change in their lives.

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| Recommendations: |
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It is recommended that the Select Committee:

- a) Reviews the updates outlined in the report and the progress made to deliver these important changes to support our workforce across children’s services, along with partners, and ultimately – to improve service delivery for the children, young people and families in Surrey.
- b) Agrees to receive a further update on the Recruitment, Retention & Culture programme and the development and implementation of the Children’s Social Care Workforce Strategy at a later meeting in Spring 2023.

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| Next steps: |
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- The Recruitment, Retention & Culture Board will continue to meet each month to maintain oversight and scrutiny of this key improvement programme, to allocate the required resources, to maintain the pace of the work and to ensure risks and issues are escalated and resolved without delay. The priorities for the programme are summarised in paragraph 18 above.

- The Children’s Social Worker Workforce Strategy will continue to inform the work of the Recruitment, Retention & Culture programme and shape our workstream plans and where we focus our effort and resources. This is not a ‘fixed’ document and will be developed as the needs of the service evolve. We are also developing separate strategies for the different CFLL service areas and aim to produce an overall CFLL Workforce Strategy within 6 months.
 - The exit interview process will continue and can now be considered part of our business-as-usual approach when staff leave the Council. We will continue to support this important process providing the required resources to offer one-to-one interviews and to analyse the feedback. Further effort will be made, along with regular communication to teams, to improve the completion rate of exit interviews across the CFLL Directorate as well. Findings from the interviews will be shared with the RRC Programme as required and a quarterly update will be discussed at the CFLL Leadership Team.
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Report contacts

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Sources/background papers

- Ofsted Inspecting Local Authority Children’s Services Guidance published on GOV.UK - [Inspecting local authority children’s services - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/108111/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-guidance.pdf)
- [‘Children’s Services \(ILACS\) Inspection Findings’ report](#) to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee – 6 July 2022 meeting (Item 7)

Annex Documents

- Annex A – RRC Workforce Strategy for Children’s Social Workers 2022-2025
- Annex B - CFLL Social Worker Trends Dashboard - July 21 to August 22

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