

# Children's Social Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2018 – 2020



## Contents

<b>Why we need a Strategy</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction	3
Purpose of Strategy	3
Training and Development (including Signs of Safety)	4
Priorities for 2018-20	5
<b>Priority 1 - Recruitment</b>	<b>6</b>
Recruitment Principles	6
Recruitment and Retention Task Group	6
Total Reward Package	6
Recruitment Payment	7
Student Sponsorship Scheme	7
The Route into Social Work	7
Teaching Partnership	7
Step up to Social Work	8
Recruitment and Selection Process	8
<b>Priority 2 - Retention</b>	<b>9</b>
Retention Principles	9
Retention Payment	9
Professional Fees	9
Practice Standards	9
Induction and Supervision	10
Reflective Practice	10
Resilience and Wellbeing	11

Training and Development	11
<b>Priority 3 - Caseload Management</b>	<b>12</b>
Caseload Management Principles	12
Managing Caseloads and Improving Practice	12
Risk Mitigation Strategy	12
Cases at the Right Level of Need	13
Intensive Support to Children in Need	13
<b>Priority 4 – Career Development</b>	<b>14</b>
Career Development Principles	14
Career Development	14
ASYE Programme	14
Progression Year 2 Programme – leading to Grade 9	14
Grade 10 Progression and Advanced Practitioner	15
Management Development Opportunities	15
<b>Delivering on our Priorities</b>	<b>16</b>
Action Plan	16
Governance	16
<b>Measuring Success</b>	<b>16</b>
Quantitative Measures	16
Qualitative Measures	16

# Why we need a Strategy

## Introduction

Working with children, young people and their families is one of the most important and rewarding jobs - the right person can make the biggest difference to their lives. That is why Cheshire East has set itself a standard to attract and retain high calibre social care professionals to our front line Social Work teams supporting our most vulnerable children and young people.

## Purpose of the Strategy

The purpose of this document is to set out Cheshire East's approach to recruitment and retention. The strategy has been developed via a Recruitment and Retention Task Group under the leadership of the Children and Families Social Care management team.

This strategy serves to meet some of the key recommendations detailed in the Service improvement plan that ensures **a fully resourced, permanent, and highly qualified and competent Social Care workforce**. At a time when there is a national shortfall in qualified and experienced Social workers, this strategy sets out how we intend to make Cheshire East the employer of choice in this region and to be the *very best* – 'Where Social Work Works'.



By being the *very best* we want a workforce that is confident and competent that puts children and families **first**.

**Putting Children and Families First** is about really listening and understanding what our children and young people need and responding appropriately to provide the best possible **Service**:

### OUR VALUES

This requires **Flexibility**, which means us all adapting quickly to changing circumstances and learning together from our experiences.

**Innovation** is about us being creative in our thinking and the way we approach our work and challenging convention where this no longer seems appropriate.

Taking personal **Responsibility** is at the heart of our values in delivering what we promise, and ensuring efficient use of resources, whether this is our people, funding, processes, information or technology.

Bringing this together is **Teamwork**, respecting and working well with others to collectively achieve the best outcomes for residents and communities.

These are our Council's values and the values that we expect from our Social Care Workforce. Cheshire East has also embarked on a major programme to transform the culture of the Council. **Working for a brighter future – together**, will create a place where staff are proud to work, where people from across the organisation feel valued, trusted and supported and understand their role in achieving the council's visions. We shall ensure that our strategy provides sufficient resource, is flexible and responsive enough to the changing demand, to respond to the needs of children and young people within our service.



## Training and Development (including Signs of Safety)

There is an established training offer that is in place to meet the needs of individuals and our organisational priorities, as well as the children and families that we work with. The training and development programmes are underpinned by the **Workforce Development Strategy** and aligned to the professional capabilities framework, knowledge and skills statements, as well as professional standards from the regulatory body. The programme of training is well embedded across the organisation to support career development for every level of practitioner, ensuring they have the opportunity to progress.

Our training pathway has been devised in a way that supports the consolidation and advancement of key skills and knowledge to strengthen the workforce and improve outcomes for children and families. We draw on a range of methods of delivery in addition to formal training and masterclass seminars, but also through our links with the North West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership, our own LSCB, in addition to our corporate membership of Research in Practice.



**Signs of Safety** has been adopted as a whole service approach to working with children and families, and staff are being supported through a rigorous training package to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to work within the approach. The training provides guidance for how to build relationships with families and work effectively with them to improve the lives of children and young people. The Signs of Safety approach includes specialised training, ways of working and tools for capturing the views of children for social workers and other staff supporting children, young people and their families. We are adopting the approach in order to invest in the quality of our social work practice, ensuring that we have the right structures, support and tools in place to enable use to always put children and young people first and ensure children are safe.



Regular supervision and personal development plans contribute to measuring the impact of training and inform ongoing needs as well as identifying deficits in practice knowledge.



## Priorities for 2018-20

Cheshire East has the following four key priorities:

**Priority 1:** to recruit sufficient permanent high quality staff with suitable qualifications and experience

**Priority 2:** to retain existing employees by supporting them to carry out their roles effectively, and by ensuring that our total offer for new and existing employees is competitive within the market place

**Priority 3:** sustain manageable Social Worker caseloads

**Priority 4:** career development through student placements, progression to Advanced Practitioner and Manager Development Programme

This strategy sets out the proposed approach in 2018-20 under each of the priority areas.



## Priority 1 - Recruitment

To recruit sufficient permanent high quality staff with suitable qualifications and experience, in 2018-20 we will:

- Increase our exposure in the market place through social media and the internet, targeted advertising on WM Jobs and Greater Jobs, and via the Teaching Partnership
- Continue to use and develop our microsite to promote recruitment opportunities
- Ensure there is a targeted programme of recruitment
- Launch a further student sponsorship scheme to target Crewe where recruitment remains more of a challenge
- Develop the recruitment and selection process to focus on critical factors such as values and resilience
- Re-join the Step-Up to Social Work Programme

### Recruitment Principles

The principles applied to a holistic approach to recruitment are:

- All opportunities for engagement with potential recruits will be explored
- The first point of contact with Cheshire East will be a professional and informative experience
- The recruitment process is swift and timely
- Young people form a part of the decision making process
- A targeted programme of recruitment is adopted

### Recruitment and Retention Task Group

A Recruitment and Retention Task Group is now well established, which is chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care and comprises senior managers from across the Council including Workforce Development, HR and Communications. The Group is responsible for the implementation of this strategy and will review whether:

- Our approach to recruitment and whether it is achieving the required results
- The information provided to potential applicants is attractive and informative
- The working rewards that we offer potential recruits are competitive with the market place and whether we can offer more
- The first point of contact with Cheshire East Council is professional and efficient

### Total Reward Package

As part of our recruitment strategy we will continually review our total reward package. The basic salary offer is comparable or greater compared to other authorities, so we will promote those aspects of working rewards that set us apart from other employers, to include ASYE and retention payments, targeted incentives to assist in recruitment to Crewe and other staff benefits such as a green car schemes, bikes scheme, child care voucher schemes, Employee Assistance Programme, Relocation Package and Car Allowances.



## Recruitment Payment

A Recruitment Market Supplement will be paid to those who are appointed as Grade 9 or 10 Social Workers in the Child in Need/Child Protection in Crewe and who remain there for two years. It will be paid in one instalment of up to £3,000 on successful completion of a probationary period. Part-time recruits will receive a pro-rata payment. The payment is subject to normal deductions.

## Student Sponsorship Scheme

We will strengthen our relationships with our partner universities by offering students a route into Cheshire East both during their period of learning and following graduation. This scheme, which was launched in 2014, will provide opportunities for up to four students who will be based in our CiN/CP Team in Crewe. The number of opportunities to be offered will be reviewed each year.

## The Route into Social Work

We will develop and expand our exposure to potential applicants by increasing our coverage and publicity of our offer to the social work workforce. A microsite setting out our offer and commitment to social workers has been developed and is the first point of contact; use of the Register Interest Button generates either an email or telephone response to enquiries within two working days. An improved process of selection that includes the participation of our young people has been adopted to ensure that we only recruit those workers who are passionate about improving the outcomes for our children.

## Teaching Partnership

Cheshire East is a partner in the North West Midlands Teaching Partnership. The Department for Education introduced Teaching Partnerships to help improve the overall quality of practice, learning and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) amongst trainee and practicing social workers. Funded by the government, Teaching Partnerships have been created to develop and support high standards of work and education by building stronger links between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and employers (Local Authorities). The Partnerships involve a highly collaborative relationship, with the curriculum being jointly developed, delivered and owned.

Students within the partnerships benefit from a curriculum that is relevant to and informed by social work practice – equipping them to be good social workers going forward. They also benefit from practical statutory placements. Meanwhile, fully qualified social workers get access to many more CPD opportunities and have the opportunity to share best practice via the Partnership structure.

Teaching partnerships offer a great opportunity for working together to invest in the highest standards of social work education and practice. They provide the chance to ensure that we have more good placements available for students, more support for practice educators and more input from practising social workers and people with lived experience in educating social work students.



## Step Up to Social Work

The Step Up to Social Work Programme has been widely used by authorities in the region and we will be re-joining it as part of our ongoing efforts to attract the best candidates into Cheshire East; this particular scheme allows graduates from other professions such as teaching to fast-track their social work qualification.

## The Recruitment and Selection Process

The recruitment and selection process has been improved and streamlined following the introduction of Cheshire East's on-line recruitment platform, and ongoing development work, to ensure a smooth and efficient route into Children's Social Care.

Recruitment will continue to be improved by promoting Cheshire East's exposure in the market place through social media and the internet, targeted advertising and the Teaching Partnership; we will also look for opportunities to publicise our work in the social work press and websites and by entry into national award schemes where appropriate.





## Priority 2 - Retention

To retain existing employees by ensuring they have the right skills, equipment and support to carry out their roles effectively we will:

- Continue to uphold professional standards, giving clarity and full understanding of the expectations and requirements of social workers
- Provide greater opportunity for peer and manager support around practice and professional standards
- Support our Social Workers in their assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE)
- Maintain a programme of professional development to support our ASYE Social Workers progressing to experienced social workers, and create opportunities for career progression through the Advanced Practitioner route to Team Manager.
- Cheshire East has adopted **Signs of Safety** as our operational model and training has been embedded throughout the service; this will give workers a clarity of purpose and an increased sense of the 'Cheshire East way' of doing things

### Retention Principles

The principles applied to a holistic approach to retention are:

- A quality first day experience followed by thorough induction
- A comprehensive programme of training and support including Signs of Safety
- Practice expectations are communicated and understood

- Regular quality supervision, with the emphasis on reflective practice
- A clear and transparent career path progression
- Appropriate caseloads for the level of experience
- Systems to support flexible working
- Opportunities for reflection and open discussion
- Career and succession planning
- A culture of reflection and learning through the use of Exit Interviews and staff surveys

### Retention Payment

A retention payment will be paid to those who are working in the roles of Team Manager or grade 9 or 10 Social Workers in the CiN/CP or Cared For Children & Care Leavers teams. A fixed one off payment of £1,000 will be paid with normal pay on the anniversary of appointment and is subject to normal deductions. A £1,000 Retention Payment is also paid to ASYE social workers who progress through panel to their second year of employment.

### Professional Fees

Any cost over and above the first £50 to register with the relevant social work regulatory body will be paid by Cheshire East.

### Practice Standards

Practice Standards play a vital role in making Cheshire East a great place to be young, where children and young people are happy, healthy, safe, and have opportunities to enjoy life, learn and develop. In order to achieve this all practitioners, social workers and managers have clear guidance regarding their roles and responsibility as professionals; and

that there is a consistent approach to the social work task across all teams and a clear expectations for practitioners, social workers and front line managers which they can measure themselves against.

The HCPC (Health and Care Professionals Council) provides Social Workers with a framework within which to operate alongside standards of conduct as a reference point, in conjunction with the PCF (Professional Capabilities Framework) and the Knowledge and Skills statements recently introduced by the Department for Education, as part of social work reform agenda looking to raise the standards of practice within the Social work profession. These continue to be the point of reference for our Social Care workforce to ensure a highly professional and competent workforce is able to deliver to the children and families of Cheshire East.

## Induction and Supervision

Induction and Supervision policies and procedures are reviewed to ensure that they are current and fit for purpose and available to the entire Social Care workforce, including agency workers. Managers will ensure that newly qualified Social Workers have appropriate caseloads during the induction period.

## Reflective Practice

Opportunities for reflective practice and shared learning that considers the needs and views of our children and young people are available to all Social Work professionals through team meetings and group supervision using Signs of Safety.



## Resilience and Wellbeing

Cheshire East understands the importance of providing support and resources to promote resilience and well-being. The World Health Organisation defines wellbeing as:

**‘A state of mind in which an individual is able to realise his or her own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.’**

Resilience helps us to maintain our wellbeing in difficult circumstances and situations.

Cheshire East Council is a Learning Organisation and is committed to providing a range of support and guidance to ensure that staff are able to seek the appropriate level of support, should they need to. It is important to recognise that building effective relationships with others at work are the cornerstones of your working life and investing time in developing these connections will support and enrich you every day. We have a service available for all employees through the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) – which is a free and confidential advice and support service available to all employees and to their household members. The service is provided to include:-

- General information
- Legal information
- Telephone counselling
- Face to face counselling.

This will act as first point of contact for employees to get immediate assistance on a range of matters that may be of concern to them both on a professional but more on a personal level. Children’s Social Care

regularly seek feedback through the use of supervision, the annual staff survey as well as through practice forums to ensure that the workforce feel supported and are receiving the appropriate levels of support.

## Training and Development

A programme of mandatory training including Signs of Safety is well embedded as is the training for ASYEs. The Workforce Development Strategy reports on the activities supporting our Social Care workforce.





## Priority 3 – Caseloads

To sustain manageable Social Worker caseloads we will:

- Reflect the level of experience of the worker
- Robust auditing of cases and Performance Challenge to ensure that every child is being managed at the appropriate level
- Ensure our partners are delivering intensive support to children in need
- Family Support Workers in the teams to support Social Workers.
- Ensure that the Placement Support Team offers additional support to vulnerable children and young people, including those at risk of being cared for.

### Caseload Management Principles

Cheshire East's caseload management principles are:

- Robust Team Manager oversight of Social Worker caseloads through supervision and Performance Challenge
- Caseloads will be managed at an acceptable level
- There will be continuity of key worker and transfer points will be kept to a minimum
- There will be a planned handover when a key worker leaves
- Support will be available from a range of sources including advanced practitioners, team manager and senior managers
- Comprehensive auditing process in place, including practice coaching of Social Workers and their Managers

### Managing Caseloads and Improving Practice

Ensuring that Social Workers have manageable caseloads is a key priority for the service and is a key driver for determining our recruitment and retention strategy. Continuity of key worker with capacity to respond appropriately is directly influenced by the level of case work held by each professional. Reducing turnover will serve to ensure that continuity and capacity is maintained to acceptable levels which will improve the experience of the young person and their family.

There is a culture of continuous improvement in Cheshire East through high quality reflective supervision, group supervision using Signs of Safety, and a comprehensive programme of auditing which includes consultation with children and their families. Fostering a sense that people are doing a good job and celebrating positive interventions through our quarterly Practice and Performance Workshops also supports worker retention.

### Risk Mitigation Strategy

The risk mitigation strategy, developed in 2014, will continue to be used. This sets out the standards and expectations to be followed in the event of a Social Worker leaving. This includes re-allocating the case under the same Manager, ensuring that the outgoing member of staff completes a detailed transfer summary and chronology that is signed off by the Team Manager and that every case is audited to agree next steps. It also sets out the role of the newly allocated Social Worker.

## Cases at the Right Level of Need

One of the key ways of ensuring manageable caseloads is to ensure that cases are 'stepped down' appropriately. Regular analysis of Child in Need (CiN) cases will be carried out to identify those that can be 'stepped down'.

## Intensive Support to Children in Need

Our partner service strives to achieve positive sustainable outcomes for families with children aged 0 to 19-years-old who are identified as Children in Need. A holistic, whole family approach is provided, based on improving outcomes for every child through developing strong relationships and including staff training in The Prevention and Intervention Programme.

By using strength-based interventions, the service seeks to strengthen the family unit, instigating change where possible and necessary to reduce factors contributing to concerns around risk and need.



## Priority 4 - Career Development

To ensure that career pathways and opportunities for development are available to all staff that seek them we will:

- Offer a wide range of student placements, including a sponsored programme to select the best possible candidates for the Crewe team
- Continue to develop our already well regarded ASYE programme
- Support social workers to progress through the grades from ASYE to Advanced Practitioner
- Look for developmental opportunities for staff within the service, balanced with bringing in new talent with fresh ideas
- Identify and support aspiring managers including those who want to progress towards the positions of Independent Reviewing Officer and Child Protection Conference Chairs

### Career Development Principles

Cheshire East's career development principles are:

- Creating long term stability in the workforce through opportunities for progression and development
- An unswerving commitment to Equality of Opportunity and fighting discrimination
- Identifying and supporting all of our staff who wish to progress and advance their careers
- Ensuring that workers who find a level at which they prefer to operate are still supported and offered developmental opportunities

- A 'mixed economy' of growing our own talent and bringing in new people with fresh ideas

### Career Development

Cheshire East Council is committed to developing the careers of its social workers through learning and development opportunities, including vocational and academic routes, which allow social workers to demonstrate their professional progression within the Professional Capabilities Framework (PCF). A clear Social Work Career Pathway has been established enabling progression from ASYE (Grade 8) to Grade 9 and 10 and Advanced Practitioner.

### ASYE Programme

A comprehensive Induction to Children's Social Care is offered to all new staff including experienced Social Workers, Team Managers and Service Managers. In addition the Principal Social Worker has a specific remit of supporting social workers on the ASYE programme and facilitating networking sessions to respond to identified needs.

### Progression Year 2 Programme – leading to Grade 9

This programme is available to all social workers on completion of ASYE and is also relevant to more experienced workers joining Cheshire East who have not yet 'progressed'. The programme offers access to further learning and development activities including a University taught module and involves completion of a portfolio to demonstrate readiness for progression to Grade 9.





## Grade 10 Progression and Advanced Practitioner

The opportunity to achieve progression from a grade 9 to grade 10 social worker and Advanced Practitioner is linked to achievement of a Post Graduate Diploma in Applied Social Work Practice (or PQ Specialist Social Work Award/PQ Child Care Award/BAAF Award under the previous PQ Frameworks) and Practice Educator status, alongside demonstrable practice competence at an enhanced (Grade 10) level.

Eligibility to undertake the PG Diploma is informed by the Performance Development Review process and all social workers are encouraged to aspire to this level of practice.

## Management Development Opportunities

The manager development programme provides an opportunity to support the existing group of managers, as well as those identified as aspiring managers, Independent Reviewing Officers and Child Protection Conference Chairs to ensure that they have the key knowledge and skills to assist with the rigour that is expected within this role. The underpinning qualification for the programme is an ILM Level V Award in Leadership and Management.



## Delivering on our Priorities

### Action Plan

The priorities and actions set out in this strategy will be incorporated into the Recruitment and Retention Plan and will be regularly reviewed by the Senior Children's Leadership Team.

### Governance

The Recruitment & Retention Group will provide the initial governance to oversee this strategy, with performance reporting and impact to the Senior Children's Leadership Team and the Corporate Parenting Committee every six months. The recruitment and retention of social workers is an essential part of the Council's business and our challenges in this regard have led to its inclusion in Cheshire East's Corporate Risk Register.



## Measuring Success

The success of the strategy will be measured based on a range of quantitative and qualitative measures.

### Quantitative Measures

- Reduction in maximum Social Worker caseload
- Reduction in average Social Worker caseload
- Reduction in the number of agency workers occupying permanent posts during 2018.
- Number of ASYEs completing first year
- Number of ASYE progressing to Grade 9 during 2018
- Number of Grade 9 Social Worker progressing to Grade 10 and Advanced Practitioner
- A reduction in turnover in 2018 amongst Social Workers, compared to 2017
- Number of Social Workers on aspirant manager scheme

### Qualitative Measures

- Staff Survey
- Staff feedback, including exit interviews
- Feedback from parents and children collected at children in need, initial child protection case conference, child protection case review meetings and at case closure







**Cheshire East**  
**Where social work *works***

[www.cheshireeastjobs.co.uk](http://www.cheshireeastjobs.co.uk)

