

Cyngor Sir CEREDIGION County Council

REPORT TO:	Healthier Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	3rd July 2023
LOCATION:	Hybrid
TITLE:	Recruitment Challenges in Through Age Wellbeing Services
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To present to Committee an update on the Recruitment and Retention of Social Care staff. To seek feedback on activity to date and suggestions for any other options. And to seek commitment from the Elected Members to endorse working in partnership with Hywel Dda UHB to explore innovative and creative opportunities to provide longer term solutions.
REASON SCRUTINY HAVE REQUESTED THE INFORMATION:	To be sighted on the current challenges and service actions

Context

The Council has a legal duty to provide safe statutory services for those most in need within the communities of Ceredigion. Whilst responsibility for this ultimately lies with the Council's Statutory Director of Social Services (SDSS), there is an organisational responsibility to support the SDSS to ensure these responsibilities are discharged effectively and in a manner that results in a safe service.

The risk of not having a safe service would at worst present a risk to life in terms of service users, and significant financial risk and toll on staff capacity should the council be placed into special measures. Whilst agency staff are used within our social care structures, where recruitment is challenging, the cost of doing so represents value for money given the safe service that they are critical to maintaining. Our agency staff are carefully selected and managed well to ensure the needs of the council and those of our service users are met. As you will see from the information throughout the report, the challenge to recruitment in social care is a national one and one which is likely to remain without a significant focus on the issues from Welsh Government.

Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) inspected our adults and children's services in March 2023. Following a robust inspection, they provided an extremely positive report providing many

examples of the significant good work that takes place every day and citing the strong senior leadership that is in place. They also acknowledged areas for improvement that we presented to them and confirmed that there were no areas of no compliance.

The recruitment and retention of an appropriately sized workforce is one of the most significant challenges facing local government and the public sector in general, with increasing vacancy rates across all areas. As well as explaining the challenges in detail, this report also captures the ways in which the council is being innovative and creative in attempting to respond to them.

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 3,700 employees, to a fulltime equivalent workforce of around 2,600 employees, largely female based at approximately 66 percent.

The recruitment and retention in our Through Age Wellbeing social care services has proved to be increasingly challenging, especially over the past 18 months, post-Covid period. These services employ a workforce of around 700 employees, a full-time equivalent workforce of 500 and a higher than the corporate average female workforce percentage of 74%.

Of these roles 240 are supporting statutory services and vacancy levels in these roles is currently at 45 (19)%, and 21 of these are occupied by agency staff. Of the remaining 460 roles, vacancy levels are at 88 (19%) but only 9 of these are occupied by agency staff, in our residential homes and Enablement team.

The agency staff covering statutory services includes the eight members of the managed team arrangement through Innovate Services. Their appointment was following a procurement exercise and the contract was awarded on an initial 6-month contract, with the option of extensions of up to 6 months in three-month blocks. Whilst this team isn't included in the financial scope of the report, the added value they provide to the organisation and their role in helping to maintain a safe service is clear to see.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the recruitment and retention issues facing these services, as well as outlining the work currently being undertaken to address these challenges.

Financial Considerations

There are several areas within Social Care where external resources have been needed to supplement core staff employed directly by the Council. Not all these areas are within the scope of this report. For clarity this report does not cover either the Statutory Director post (which has already been the subject of separate reporting to Full Council) nor a dedicated Contracted team working in Planned Care as mentioned above, which is a specific commissioned contract (which Members have been already received a separate briefing on).

The remaining areas within scope are Professional Social Worker posts covered by agency resource and Care & Support worker posts mainly within the Local Authority Care Homes (with some use in Targeted Care & Enablement Services). Most data has been taken from a snapshot in April 2023.

i) Professional Social Worker Posts

On the Social Worker posts, there were 21 agency workers covering Social Worker related posts. The average cost was £32k per week and the hourly rates being paid varied from £41.00 to £56.25 per hour. There is clearly an additional cost to using agency workers, however there is a partial offset from the saving from the associated vacant post. There is a typical additional cost on an annualised basis of £20k to £30kpa for using an agency Social Worker:

	Social Worker £'000	Senior Practitioner £'000
Cost as an Employee (with oncosts)	49	54
Cost with Agency (based on 44 weeks)	69	84
Difference	20	30

The additional cost to the Council is the premium paid for an agency worker (noting that they do not get paid if they are off sick or on annual leave nor is any employer pension contribution made) versus the original budget for the post they are covering, plus a wider saving from the level of overall vacancies, as not every single vacant post is filled by an agency.

	Per Week £'000
Gross Saving from 42 vacant posts within Social Care (excluding 3 Business Support posts which are part of Democratic Services)	37
Less Vacancy factor in base budget	-9
Net Saving available	28
Weekly cost of Agency staff (Currently 21)	32
Net Difference / Shortfall	4

The overall total net cost in this area has also further benefited from some grant funding in 22/23 which has been maximised wherever possible (although this is not necessarily re-occurring so should be considered a one-off).

ii) Care & Support Worker Posts

Within Local Authority Care Homes, it is the operational side of 24/7 shifts needing to be filled. The current typical level of usage is a net cost of c. £20k per week, although this varies from week to week depending on operational requirements. Agency Hourly rates being paid for Care & Support Worker roles and Senior Care & Support Worker roles vary from £25.99 to £47.00. The reason for the large differential is the higher end hourly rates cover Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays working.

In this area whilst there is a partial financial offset already included within the net cost per week (as the base budget provides for the core operational hours required to run each Home), it is not as significant as there is no wider vacancy position that assists, because each shift is required to be filled to maintain adequate staffing ratios. The agency cost premium also varies depending on the type of shift being covered – it is at its highest for a basic weekday daytime shift - an 85% premium (£14.03 including oncosts v £25.99 agency), but this reduces to only 11% for a Bank holiday night.

Therefore, there is a significant net cost to using agency staff in Local Authority Care Homes and this is only being mitigated at present through underspends in other parts of Porth Gofal - namely Day Services and Targeted Care & Enablement Services.

Recruitment Issues in social care

Recruitment issues in social care in Wales have been a growing concern in recent years. Some of the key challenges faced in the social care sector include:

1. *Workforce shortages*: There is a shortage of qualified and experienced social care professionals in Wales. The demand for social care services has been increasing due to an aging population, rising complex care needs, and legislative changes. However, the number of people entering the profession has not kept pace with the demand.
2. *Lower pay and poor working conditions*: Social care roles are often associated with low pay and challenging working conditions. Many care workers are near the minimum wage, which makes it difficult to attract and retain skilled professionals. Additionally, the nature of the work can be physically and emotionally demanding, heavy workloads and high caseload, which can lead to burnout. Social workers in Wales often face lower pay compared to other professions requiring similar qualifications and responsibilities. Inadequate pay and benefits packages can deter potential candidates from considering social work as a career or lead to social workers seeking better compensation in other sectors.
3. *Lack of career progression and development opportunities*: Limited career progression and professional development opportunities within the social care sector can discourage individuals from pursuing long-term careers in this field. The lack of clear pathways for advancement and professional growth can make the sector less attractive to potential candidates.
4. *Negative perception of the sector*: The social care sector has often been undervalued and stigmatised, leading to a negative perception of the profession. This can discourage individuals from considering social care as a viable career option, contributing to the recruitment challenges.
5. *Geographical disparities*: Recruitment issues may be more pronounced in rural and remote regions. Limited access to training and job opportunities can make it challenging to attract and retain social care workers in these areas.

6. *Work-life balance and stress*: Social work can be emotionally demanding and stressful. The nature of the work, dealing with challenging situations and providing support to vulnerable individuals and families, can impact the work-life balance of social workers. High levels of stress and limited work-life balance can make the profession less appealing to potential recruits.

Retention Issues in social care

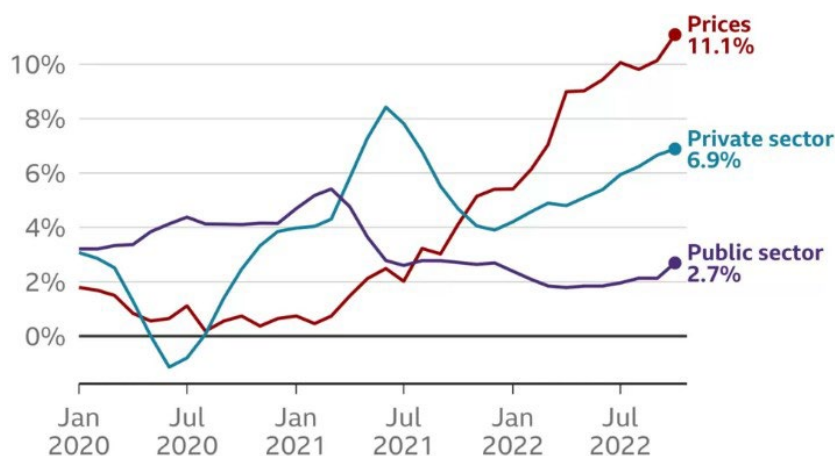
Keeping our employees is as important as recruitment but there are several challenges in retaining our employees. Retention issues in social care are closely tied to the recruitment challenges faced by the sector as set out above. Some of the key factors contributing to retention issues include:

1. *Lower pay and inadequate rewards*: Social care roles in Wales often come with low wages compared to the level of responsibility and demands of the job. Many care workers are paid at or near the minimum wage, making it difficult to retain skilled and experienced professionals. Inadequate rewards and recognition for the hard work and dedication of care workers can lead to job dissatisfaction and turnover.
2. *Challenging working conditions*: Social care can be emotionally and physically demanding, requiring care workers to provide support to individuals with complex needs. The challenging nature of the work, including long hours, heavy workloads, and limited resources, can contribute to stress, burnout, and a desire to leave the profession.
3. *Lack of career progression and development*: Limited opportunities for career advancement and professional development can lead to a lack of motivation and job satisfaction among social care workers. Without clear pathways for growth and development, individuals may feel stagnant in their roles, which can contribute to turnover.
4. *Emotional toll and compassion fatigue*: Caring for vulnerable individuals can take an emotional toll on care workers. Continuous exposure to difficult and traumatic situations without proper emotional support can lead to compassion fatigue and psychological strain, causing care workers to leave the profession.

Local Government Pay

One of the most significant challenges is salary levels in local government. All local authorities are tied into national pay bargaining arrangements, which are not automatically linked to funding from central government. There are also job evaluation scheme considerations across local government which make it difficult to offer more competitive salaries and benefits packages in specific roles. This can lead to a higher turnover as employees seek better-paying positions elsewhere, often in the private sector, and in comparable paying roles but with less work demands.

Comparison of Public Sector pay, Private Sector pay and Price (CPI) increases during up to Oct 2022



Source ONS

There is a project currently being managed by the Association of Directors of Social Services (Cymru) to work towards reducing reliance on agency social workers across children’s social care. It is envisaged that there will be scope to look at the same approach with adult social workers in the future. The project having produced the All-Wales Pledge to reduce the number of agency social workers employed by local authorities. The steps to be taken within the Pledge include not employing social workers who have left local authority employment to join an agency, reducing the hourly pay rate offered to agency social workers to be more aligned with local authority pay rates and to re-negotiate the pay rate of existing agency employees to a lower amount.

ADSS (Cymru) recognise that change has be incremental and there is a need to give local authorities alternatives to using expensive agency solutions. To date there are no obvious solutions coming forward from the project.

However, to sign up to the All-Wales Pledge is an undertaking to stop using agency workers therefore creating is a risk that agency staff will move on to maintain their income. This would place local authorities in a position where there was insufficient qualified social worker capacity to fulfil statutory duties to the community.

The basic salaries paid for social worker roles vary across all local authorities in Wales as each authority will have individual pay polices and banding in place. The differences can be up to £4k for a qualified social worker, when comparing Ceredigion salaries to that of larger authorities. Furthermore, as a recruitment and/or retention tool, local authorities have introduced market forces supplements which has exacerbated these differences with authorities paying between £2k and £6k per annum. Having a national pay spine for qualified social workers would remove the internal market influences currently in place between neighbouring authorities.

Regional picture overview

A detailed review of the current challenges in relation to the social care workforce was completed on behalf of the Mid and West Wales Safeguarding Board (Ceredigion, Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire, and Powys) in December 2022, titled *Analysis of Workforce Risk Factors in Recruiting and Retaining Children’s Services and Adult Services Social Workers*. This review confirmed the inherent difficulties in tackling workforce problems in this sector are both persistent and resistant to remedial action.

The report highlighted some key messages which are consistent and compelling. There were serious workforce risk factors found across the four local authorities in a wide range of areas, including:

- high vacancy levels and difficulties in recruiting to posts such as safeguarding work, in part because of increased workloads arising from issues such as more complex case management processes.
- problems in securing a sufficient supply of social workers at all stages of their careers but especially in roles which involve specialist skills.
- dependence on destabilising levels of agency staffing.
- a high proportion of staff in the upper age range.
- high turnover levels when social workers have completed their post-qualifying period.
- sickness absences often attributed to stress, anxiety, fatigue, or mental health concerns.
- fears about worker burn out and other challenges to their well-being.
- significant upheaval caused by changes in working conditions, especially those which have occurred because of the pandemic.
- increasing demand for services and rising workload levels.
- remuneration concerns.

The review concluded that it was crucial that any improvement plans take into account the work being done at a national level through the Social Care Wales *Social Work Workforce Plan 2022 to 2025*. The plan contains five principles.

“We want to have a social work workforce that:

- *feels valued and is valued.*
- *has the right values, behaviours, knowledge, skills, and confidence to assess care and support needs and provide support when needed.*
- *is sustainable and has enough people to provide responsive health and social care that meets the needs of the people of Wales.*
- *works in an environment where supporting employee well-being is essential so that people and organisations can thrive.*
- *reflects the population’s diversity, Welsh language, and cultural identity.”*

Increasing use of agency workers

On a national scale, the number of social work graduates and experienced professionals entering the field has not kept pace with the demand and therefore the use of agency social worker staff is increasing across the sector. This is reflected in Mid and West Wales.

Over the last six months, and in response to the increasing instability in the recruitment market, local authorities in Wales have been working together to develop a joint approach to the use of agency social workers in children's services.

There is a project currently being managed by the Association of Directors of Social Services (Cymru) to work towards reducing reliance on agency social workers across children's social care with scope to look at the same approach with adult social care.

ADSS (Cymru) recognise that this change must be incremental and give local authorities alternatives to using expensive agency solutions. Of 22 local authorities in Wales there are 20 signed up to an agreement to support the project. The premise of the agreement is to develop and to manage the agency supply chain, improve the quality of staff and regulate pay rates within agency Children's Social Work. The key stakeholders are social care and finance managers, human resources teams, trade unions, agency providers and agency social workers.

Current Position in Ceredigion

The review produced for the Mid and West Wales Safeguarding Board, mentioned above, included reference to evidence-based research undertaken by the Local Government Association on two relevant areas: (a) when Social Workers would stay in local authority employment, and (b) when Social Workers would leave local authority employment. These have been set out in the first column of the two tables below. The second column records the response in place in Ceredigion to either promote the relevant area (in the first table) or to address the issue (in the second table).

<i>There is research that states that Social Workers stay in Council employment when they:</i>	The situation in Ceredigion County Council:
<i>feel valued and supported with good management, good supervision, good initial and post qualifying training</i>	Ceredigion achieves this through a robust Through Age, Wellbeing management structure, which ensures that supervision, reflective practice and training opportunities are available for all social care staff
<i>have a supportive team and colleagues providing advice, expertise, and emotional support</i>	We achieve this through a programme of regular team meetings, team social activities, access to a wellbeing support service and counselling service

<i>have good work-life balance and career progression</i>	The Through Age Wellbeing services have developed team structures and training opportunities that support career progression as well as flexible working opportunities in line with our local policies and procedures
<i>have clear priorities and appropriate caseloads</i>	We achieve this through the Signs of Safety supervision policy focusing on strengths and positive outcomes, regular supervision enables the worker to prioritise and identify clear goals and techniques to manage caseloads
<i>operate in an environment where reflective practice is the norm</i>	Our teams and managers achieve this through individual and group supervision, action learning opportunities and case reviews
<i>have effective administrative back up and IT systems</i>	Corporate systems have been developed to enable access and support from all corporate services including IT and business support
<i>have job security</i>	The Team Ceredigion ethos is promoted across all the services and through regular communications to all staff the aim is to create a 'family' approach reinforcing the importance of job security and being part of the Ceredigion community
<i>have access to flexible working</i>	New ways of working post pandemic has enabled further flexibility for staff working for the council, in addition to existing relevant policies and procedures.

<i>There is research that states that Social Workers leave Council employment when:</i>	The situation in Ceredigion County Council:
<i>referral rates rise</i>	Post pandemic we have seen the number of referrals rise and complexity of cases increase, this is managed through regular monitoring of data and performance and re directing individual staff and teams to support in those areas of greatest need.
<i>individual caseloads increase</i>	we manage this through supervision and case allocation, supporting staff to manage their caseloads effectively and where

	appropriate providing additional staffing resource
<i>the support they've previously received diminishes</i>	Support is consistent and delivered as per previous comments above
<i>the control which they believe they should have over their working lives is reduced</i>	Flexible working has been key in supporting staff in maintaining a positive work life balance
<i>they cannot use their own professional judgement</i>	Staff are supported to work autonomously and use their professional judgement; this is a key requirement within social care practice and is supported through good supervision and management
<i>local policy changes result in reduced allowances</i>	This has not been applicable in Ceredigion
<i>local pay rates are uncompetitive compared with those available nearby</i>	This is an area of concern and is addressed further within the report.

Recruitment and retention initiatives

With the aim of making Ceredigion self-sufficient with a regular supply of qualified social workers the following action are being taken:

- Social work trainees have been recruited to enrol on the Open University (OU) course sponsored by the local authority. Three newly qualified social workers will be ready to commence statutory duties in October 2023, with more students due to qualify in 2024, 2025 and 2026 from the OU program.
- Ceredigion host practice placements to students from other universities to support the qualifying program and expose students the benefits of working for the local authority. There is strong evidence to suggest that student social workers take up employment with the host local authority in which they had a positive experience whilst qualifying.
- Work is at an early stage in partnership with Aberystwyth University to develop a Mid and West Wales Social Work Master's Degree program. Ceredigion and the University are jointly exploring this development with oversight from Social Care Wales. The aim is to commencing delivery of the new MSc in Social Work from September 2025. For course to be viable a minimum of 30 students are required but the required in-practice placements is proving to be a limiting factor. At present, there is only provision for 20 placements (students) and therefore we are contacting other organisations with a view to increasing number of placements so that 30 students can be accommodated.
- Growing our own:
In the five years up to 2022, a successful programme of developing our own social workers has resulted in the following:

- 12 Trainee Social Workers recruited. 5 other employees sponsored on an independent route to qualify as Social Workers. As a result, 16 employed as Social Workers by Ceredigion County Council.
- 5 Swansea University Social Work students completed hosted placements and were employed as Ceredigion County Council Social Workers.
- 80 student Social Work placements provided.
- 22 employees have been supported to undertake a Certification in Higher Education, out of which 9 have continued onto the Social Work degree.

Over the next three years the following are due to qualify:

- 2023: 3 members of staff will qualify as SWs this year. SDSS currently undertaking team allocation process. Cert HE sponsorship (1st 2 modules of SW degree) – hoping to sponsor 3 or 4 employees.
- 2024: 3 members of staff due to qualify (subject to successful completion)
- 2025: 6 members of staff due to qualify (subject to successful completion)

Apprenticeships:

- There is no Social Worker apprenticeship available in Wales. However, we've recruited Health and Social Care apprentices and Youth Work apprentices which provide linked career pathways.

As a part of its employment offer we promote the following benefits to recruit, retain and support the whole workforce:

- Relocation package of up to £8k for hard to fill roles
- Market forces supplement to qualified social workers
- Hybrid and flexible working opportunities
- Access to employee health and wellbeing support
- A clear and robust supervision policy
- Annual appraisals
- Access to a wide range of mandatory and specialist training
- Care First – Employee Assistance Package
- Car leasing and cycle to work schemes
- Lifestyle savings card

Using recruitment agencies for permanent recruitment

Following a procurement exercise we have been working with Sanctuary Personnel recruitment agency to recruit permanent social workers both from within the UK and internationally. Work is currently being undertaken to finalise a 'Social Work Hub' microsite to promote our employment offer. When finished the site will include including blogs, testimonials, lifestyle offer and videos, development support.

- International: Relocation campaigns across Africa, Caribbean, Australasia, the US and other geographical regions. We are adopting a 3-stage process for assessment: CV, Candidate Assessment Form & Interview.
- UK: In addition to the microsite the UK marketing campaign will include the following: Indeed; Social Work News; British Association of Social Workers, Social Work Today, Community Care
- Placement of International Social Worker: As a pilot we have a staff member on a fixed-term contract as a Social Work Assistant who previously qualified as a Social Worker in Hong Kong. To be able to register as a SW in Wales she is undertaking a placement to demonstrated currency in practice in Wales. Subject to SCW assessment/approval she will then be able to register and commence employment as a practicing SW with us.

Outreach

- We've attended careers fairs, job centre days, and supported We Care Wales campaigns - both regionally and nationally
- Promoted employment opportunities across the Through Age Wellbeing services to Aberystwyth University Students
- Virtual information sessions held with Swansea University students

Current recruitment campaigns

We have revised our candidate attraction material to improve the marketing of our brand and employment offer which has seen the following developments:

- Developed 3 'showcase videos' for the purpose of sharing on our socials, careers site, info sessions etc: (i) Lifestyle (ii) Mixed testimonials (iii) Case Study. These have been shared as part of sponsored campaigns on our social media channels achieving over 75,000 reach. In addition, there are weekly 'non-sponsored' awareness raiser posts shared on our social media platforms.
- Social Work Week campaign: videos of the Chief Executive and Statutory Director of Social Services recognising the value of social work and social workers, social work teams introduction and gratitude posts on Facebook and LinkedIn
- Staff testimonial quotes shared on our social media platforms
- Social Work Online Info Session campaigns x 2 (led to 1 successful appointment)
- Additional marketing: radio advertising, road side banners, British Association of Social Workers (BASW) listings, Sponsored Indeed advertising
- Vacancies promoted to all Universities that deliver SW courses
- Following poor response to traditional recruitment methods appointed SOLCAE to undertake executive search for CLO Porth Cynnal vacancy

Conclusion

Addressing recruitment and retention issues requires a multi-faceted approach. It includes improving pay and working conditions, investing in professional development and training, promoting the value and importance of social care roles, focussing on improving job satisfaction, employee wellbeing, promoting a positive and supportive work culture, and implementing targeted recruitment strategies to attract and retain social care professionals in Wales.

Collaborative efforts between the government, social care providers, educational institutions, and professional associations are crucial in finding sustainable solutions to these challenges. Additionally, addressing the underlying recruitment challenges and improving the overall perception of social care as a valued and rewarding profession can also contribute to better retention rates.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed?

No

If, not, please state why – Report for information only

Summary:

Long term:
Recruitment of key staff is the aim to provide a long-term solution to the current difficulties

Integration:

Opportunities for integration are continually explored.

WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS:

Collaboration:

A collaborative approach is taken in developing the strategy for OT provision which is overseen by the Though Age Wellbeing Board

Involvement:

N/A

Prevention:

Prevention is a key focus of the service

RECOMMENDATION (S):

1. To note the current position about the important use of agency workers within our social care services.
2. To note the activity already taking place in responding to the challenge of recruitment in this sector.
3. To provide feedback and suggestions of any other possible solutions to the recruitment challenge.
4. To endorse Officers working with partners in HDUHB to explore creative and innovative opportunities to provide longer term solutions.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION (S):

N/A

Reporting Officers: Audrey Somerton-Edwards and Geraint Edwards

Designation: Interim CLO Porth Cynnal, CLO People & Organisation

Date of Report: 19 June 2023