

CHILDREN AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

DATE	31/07/2025
REPORT OF	Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services
SUBJECT	Children's Services Workforce Update
STATUS	Open

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

In the context of our Council ambition, nurturing our children and building their future, and the Council being a great place to work and develop, the transformation of our workforce has contributed to the core priorities within the refreshed Council Plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We recognise our workforce as our most valuable asset and understand the critical importance of having consistent, permanent leaders and managers within Children's Services, along with a stable, permanent front line workforce.

In the context of our refreshed Workforce Development Strategy 2024/27, there has been significant investment and commitment in developing our leadership and management structure, in that we have successfully recruited a permanent, experienced Director of Children's Services (DCS) along with a permanent leadership and management team and we have recruited more social workers since January 2024, than in previous years combined.

We have strengthened accountability and responsibility across functional areas, to ensure management oversight and supervision of practice, and enhanced opportunities for a relational approach, in the context of high support and high challenge. This robust leadership and stable frontline workforce is positively impacting on practice and outcomes for our children, young people, and families.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

This report seeks to update scrutiny panel members on the progress pertaining workforce development across Children's Services and our current structure.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1. In the context of the children's workforce, in the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in 2021, and during subsequent monitoring visits up to January 2024, it was highlighted that there was no permanent leadership team in place at any level, including front line supervisors, which was impacting on the quality of supervision, management oversight, and ultimately on outcomes for children, young people and families
- 1.2. A new leadership team was recruited in December 2023, and one of the first areas of focus for the DCS was on leadership and management across the children's system, and to developing social work capacity and stability. This was progressed through a whole scale review and structure of Children's Services, underpinned by robust change management and recruitment processes. There was also a focus on rebuilding the culture across the workforce, and improving perceptions of North East Lincolnshire Children's Services

2. RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1. Led through the Continuous Improvement Board, chaired by the DfE Commissioner, and through the Council's risk management arrangements, and the Children's Services assurance framework, there has been an ongoing focus on identifying and taking mitigating actions pertaining workforce development as one of our key areas of focus
- 2.2. As we move forwards in our improvement and transformation journey, there continues to be opportunities to drive forward further change, innovation and developments which positively impact on our workforce, our practice and on the lived experiences and outcomes for our children, young people and families.

3. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1. There is dedicated resourcing and communications officer capacity linked to Children's Services which is contributing to enhanced, proactive and responsive communications across the workforce and from an external perspective, including in the context of our amplified focus on recruitment marketing activity.
- 3.2. We continue to promote NELC as a place to work including via social media channels; and there is an ongoing focus on further building relationships with key partners, agencies and organisations across the place of North East Lincolnshire. This is having a demonstrable positive impact on our culture, public perceptions and on recruitment

4. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. The continuing approach to workforce development as one of our priority areas of focus is showing a positive impact on the budget trajectories, in the context of investing to save, and in the reduction of agency staffing costs
- 4.2. A continued focus on workforce development will result in further improvements in the quality of practice, reducing demand and meeting need at the lowest level which will contribute to good financial management and planning

5. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. There has been significant investment in recruiting a permanent Children's Services leadership team, with a proven track record of delivering high quality services, in order to drive forward the improvement journey at pace.
- 5.2. Since January 2024, the Children's Services Workforce has been transformed, and this has been supported by the establishment of a Workforce Board and a refreshed Workforce Development Strategy 2024/27 which sets out our commitment to and expectations of the Children's Services workforce, to achieve:
 - A stable and strong workforce
 - A skilled, knowledgeable and effective workforce
 - Leaders at every levels
 - Effective conditions for the workforce to flourish

- 5.3. There has been, and continues to be a focus on raising the profile of North East Lincolnshire, and on co-producing creative marketing and communication resources to highlight Children's Services as a positive place to work, and on actively promoting vacancies for recruitment. Examples of workforce recruitment and development activity includes the development of range of posters, flyers and films, attendance at events, rebuilding relationships with higher and further education providers, a more focused presence on social media and via word of mouth
- 5.4. There has also been a strong commitment on communicating and engaging with the workforce via a range of mechanisms including whole staff events, team meetings, 121's, drop ins, walking the floor, bespoke consultations and informal events and activities. This is underpinned by a Workforce Engagement and Communication Framework, which reinforces our open and transparent 'family first family feel' culture
- 5.5. As a result of transforming the Children's Services workforce, examples of impacts include:
- People across Children's Services are more likely to recommend NELC as a great place to work, as evidenced by the unprecedented leap in the employee net promoter score from our recent employee survey (from -17 to +14), which demonstrates that we have significantly changed the narrative from people feeling disengaged to more people feeling proud and positive
 - Following significant investment, system leadership and management capacity has been transformed across the scope of Children's Services, with more than 70 permanent leaders and managers being appointed. The Children's Services structure is articulated in Appendix 1.
 - As a result of our consistent and sustained effort, raising the profile of NELC as a workplace of choice, trust building and collaborative approach, there has been unparalleled progress in recruitment activity, which has resulted in 43 social workers being recruited to, with a further 10 onboarding (and a reduction of agency social workers from 90 to 16). We have gone from having one of the highest percentages of agency staff in our workforce to having one of the highest percentages of permanent staff – there is a real buzz around the place. As at end June 2025, we have 8 social worker vacancies, for which we have received 23 applications, of which we are interviewing 11. At 5.74%, the NEL turnover rate is very low compared with 13.8% from a national perspective
 - Through our transformed training and practice development offer, including practice toolkits / practice guides, we have a more skilled and knowledgeable workforce (across Children's Services and the wider partnership), which is positively impacting on practice, leading to improved outcomes
 - As a result of a significantly more permanent workforce, and increased workforce stability, children and families have a more consistent, timely offer underpinned by a much more relational approach which meets need and manages risk

6. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. No impact

7. MONITORING COMMENTS

- 7.1. This report does not contain recommended changes to policy or resources (people,

finance or physical assets). As a result no monitoring comments have been sought from the Council's Monitoring Officer (Chief Legal Officer), Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) or Strategic Workforce Lead.

8. WARD IMPLICATIONS

8.1. All wards impacted

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1. None

10. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

10.1. Ann-Marie Matson, Director of Children's Services

APPENDIX A: Children's Services Structure



1.01.02 NEL CS
Leadership Team Stru