

# **REPORT OF THE PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: CHILDREN AND ADULT'S SOCIAL CARE WORKFORCE**

Cllr Nigel Simpson  
Chair of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
April 2023

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Agree to respond to the recommendations contained in the body of this report, and
  - b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until they are completed (if earlier).

## **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee hereby requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and its recommendations.

## **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. At its meeting on 10 November 2022, the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a briefing providing an overview of the children and adults' social care workforce (both internal and external), recruitment and retention challenges and opportunities. It considered the factors influencing current and anticipated demand, funding, and related service sustainability.
4. The Committee received the input of Cabinet member Councillor Brighthouse, the Corporate Director for Children's Services, Kevin Gordon, the Interim Corporate Director of Adult Social Care, Karen Fuller. The Committee would like to thank everyone for their contribution to this item.

## **SUMMARY**

5. The report was introduced by Kevin Gordon, Corporate Director for Children's Services. The social care workforce in Oxfordshire is made up of a combination of people who are directly employed by the Council ("internal workforce"), and those who are employed by care providers ("external workforce").

6. The Council currently employs 811 FTE staff in Adult Social Care and 1,021 FTE staff in Children's Social Care. In terms of those who are employed by the Council's care providers, 14,500 people are working in residential care homes, homecare and day centres. The social care workforce also consists of 1,300 Personal Assistants work in the county supporting people at home. Many unpaid carers also contribute significantly.
7. The challenges for recruiting and retaining staff included the underlying economic factors such as Oxfordshire being an expensive place to live and strong competition from other sectors in a buoyant local labour market in the South East. Social care roles were sometimes perceived to be unskilled jobs with little career progression and relatively low wages were paid for what can be a very demanding job.
8. Covid had an impact generally on people leaving the workforce in the UK and that the increase in vacancy levels in the internal and external social care workforce at Oxfordshire was a widespread phenomenon. A deep dive review of the issues impacting the recruitment and retention of children's social workers had been undertaken this year. In relation to the findings, work was progressing to reduce the demand flow into statutory Children's Services and caseloads were stabilising. There was for now a continued reliance upon agency workers until such time as work demand could be managed.
9. The Council has a plan in place to 'grow your own' social work staffing, with an established Social Work Academy that supports the learning and development for students who wish to enter the social work profession and those who are newly qualified, to experienced practitioners and those aiming to become managers. The Council was able to be quite selective in introducing people into the programmes, including local people and it was hoped there would be longer term retention.
10. An alternative source of experienced social workers was the recent employment of six International Social Workers. It was expected that an additional six would be recruited in 2022/23.
11. Options being looked at in terms of retention of staff included market supplements for hard to recruit to posts, lump sum long-service payments and career break opportunities such as sabbaticals for staff who may otherwise be considering leaving due to stress or burnout. The Council would explore the potential to offer sabbatical leave after 3 years of service for staff in hard to recruit teams.
12. The presentation drew the Committee's attention to the Adult Social Care legislation, 'Build Back Better: Our Plan for Health and Social Care' and 'People at the Heart of Care'. As one of six 'Trailblazer' local authorities, OCC was working with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to trial key aspects of the reforms. It was stated that the work that had been done on the Oxfordshire Way made the Council more resilient than others in terms of responding to the reforms and new ways of working.

13. The Council had in place a programme of activity to support employers in the care market. This included Funding the Care Workers' Charity to enable provision of hardship grants for Oxfordshire care workers and 'New Starter' grants to help people joining the Oxfordshire Care workforce with the cost of starting a new job.
14. The Council was exploring its offer in relation to key worker housing, taking into account the expensive nature of housing being a barrier to recruitment and retention. A group of officers within the Council were reviewing this matter.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

15. The Committee noted that there were specific steps being taken to improve the retention of staff in the internal workforce and to develop a package that could make OCC an employment Council of choice. However significant issues continue to impact recruitment and retention, including: workload (impact of high caseloads on social workers), pay and rewards (competition from other sectors in a buoyant local labour market), and the very high cost of living in Oxfordshire.
16. These factors impact recruitment across the Council and there are many similarities with the Council's difficulty in recruiting employees in other service areas, including for example highways engineers. It was recommended that a Council wide retention strategy was developed to address common issues and improve recruitment and retention across the board.

**Recommendation One: To develop and introduce a Council wide staff retention strategy.**

17. The issue of key worker housing was also discussed. The cost of purchased and rented accommodation remains high locally, making Oxfordshire an expensive place for key workers to settle. The Committee queried whether there was scope for interim housing as had been provided for key workers in the 1960s, noting that key worker housing is effective in reducing housing and commuting costs for key workers.
18. It was noted that there were provisions in respect of Section 106 funding for key worker housing and there was the potential for this to be explored. It was recognised that currently there was a lack of emphasis on partnership working between the County Council and the District Councils regarding key worker housing, and more could be done to develop an Oxfordshire approach to address this issue.

**Recommendation Two: To have a partnership approach to key worker housing with the District Councils, including exploring the potential for Section 106 funding.**

## **NEXT STEPS**

19. The People Overview & Scrutiny Committee will review the published Cabinet response to this report and its recommendations at the meeting of the Committee after Cabinet's response in accordance with part 6.2, 13(f), of the Constitution of the Council.

20. The Committee does not intend to examine children and adults' social care workforce again in this municipal year.

Contact Officer: Marco Dias, Interim Scrutiny Officer  
[marco.dias@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:marco.dias@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Annex: Pro-forma template – response to recommendations