

**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL**

**REPORT**

TO: Social Work Committee	Subject: Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers - Member/Officer Consultation Exercise
FROM: Director of Social Work	
DATE OF COMMITTEE: 24 May 2001	
REPORT AUTHOR: M Fegan	
REF: MF/AB	

**1 CONTENT AND PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To advise Committee of the findings of the Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers consultation exercise which was established by the Convenor of Social Work, and to seek approval for the recommendations contained within section 6 of this report.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The committee report "Social Work Recruitment" which was presented to Social Work Committee of 25 January 2001 advised of significant difficulties being experienced nationally and within the Council in relation to the recruitment and retention of qualified social workers.
- 2.2 The report noted that there were currently 44.5 vacancies for social workers within the Department, 25.3% of that establishment.
- 2.3 It was noted that whilst social worker recruitment was a national difficulty, and now receiving national recognition, the accumulated social worker vacancies within North Lanarkshire has created additional difficulties in respect of retention of staff.
- 2.4 In view of the impact of the vacancies on the Council's ability to meet its statutory responsibilities, the Convenor established the group to obtain the views/ideas of key staff regarding the recruitment and retention of social workers.

**3 CONSULTATION**

- 3.1 Four separate consultation sessions were established with representatives from the six area teams based on the following sub-groups.
- Child Care
  - Community Care
  - Criminal Justice
  - Social Work Operational Managers
- 3.2 There was full discussion within each session and evidence of wider consultations within teams being tabled at the meeting as well as the personal perspectives of participants.

#### **4 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK**

- 4.1 There was a high level of consistency in respect of issues tabled and solutions proposed across all groups, including those from the management representatives.
- 4.2 It was noted that the majority of recruitment and retention issues raised were interwoven. Some matters will require to be addressed nationally, others can be revised within the Council.
- 4.3 Whilst a vast number and range of issues were tabled during the consultation process, they fell into the following categories.
- professional image
  - pay and conditions
  - professional environment
  - vacancies/stress
  - general recruitment and retention
  - communication

#### **5 RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION -ACTION PLAN**

- 5.1 The difficulties of recruiting and retaining social work staff has now assumed increasing national significance and a number of key agencies are co-operating to address the matter.
- 5.2 Any action initiated will not resolve the current difficulties within the Council in respect of social worker vacancies nor will they resolve the Council's ability to meet its statutory responsibilities. They will however, start to improve the environment within which staff operate, will prioritise key areas of activity and should make the Council an attractive employer.
- 5.3 Whilst pay was identified as an important issue, other issues were identified which had as much significance in the recruitment and retention of staff. Many of these related to professional management such as workload management and supervision of staff. In addition, some financial recognition for key staff who do not wish to be managers but who carry additional responsibilities was proposed.
- 5.4 The appendix attached to this report provides a summary of issues raised, recommendations provided by staff, action already implemented by the Council as well as key proposals to address the recruitment and retention of social workers within the Council. These include proposals for senior practitioners to be created.

The review will require that the Department consult with Central Personnel and with the trade unions regarding grading and other issues and it would be hoped that a report could be brought to next Social Work Committee on 23 August 2001 of the findings of the proposals.

- 5.5 The Council should also actively support any national campaign to address the social worker recruitment issue.
- 5.6 The Department is also developing a Human Resource Strategy.

**6 RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 The Committee is asked to:
- (i) Request the Director of Social Work to bring forward proposals regarding the grading and enhancements to staff in line with section 5.4 for early implementation.
  - (ii) Request the Director of Social Work review the matters raised during the recruitment and retention of social workers consultation exercise, take necessary action and report progress to a future Committee for consideration.
  - (iii) Remit the report to the Policy and Resources (Personnel) Sub Committee for consideration.
  - (iv) Otherwise note the content of the report.



**Jim Dickie**  
**Director of Social Work**  
**1 May 2001**

For further information on this report please contact M Fegan, Head of Social Work Services  
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**NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT**  
**RECRUITMENT AND RETENTIONS OF SOCIAL WORKERS**

## 1.

<b><u>TOPIC</u></b>	<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FROMSTAFF</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION TAKEN/PROPOSED</u></b>
Professional Image <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• poor professional image</li> <li>• no recognition of positive achievements of social work</li> <li>• local authority practice not considered <b>an</b> attractive field</li> </ul>	Improve professional image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• matter raised with ADSW/COSLA</li> <li>• improve links with colleges/universities</li> <li>• links with schools to be developed</li> <li>• pro-active local public relations strategy being promoted/developed</li> <li>• promote positive achievements</li> </ul>

## 2.

<b><u>PAY AND CONDITIONS</u></b>	<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FROMSTAFF</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION TAKEN/PROPOSED</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved pay required but not sole solution (cf ??McCrone)</li> <li>• Council has less attractive conditions of service in comparison to other authorities eg car leasing, entitlement to annual leave</li> <li>• poor working environments affect staff morale</li> <li>• excessive overtime worked, unable to be accommodated within one day's flexi.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consider enhanced gradings for increased responsibilities</li> <li>• promotion of family based personnel policies (e.g. Council Creche)</li> <li>• need for more flexible contracts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• consider senior practitioner status</li> <li>• consider enhancements to make key responsibilities more attractive to staff e.g. fieldwork teacher</li> <li>• consult with personnel services regarding conditions of service</li> <li>• pay and conditions likely being pursued within the national review of social worker recruitment</li> </ul>

3.

<u>PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT</u>	<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	<u>ACTION TAKEN/PROPOSED</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• growth in government policy, national standards and increasing legislation</li> <li>• increased accountability/increased complexity of tasks (e.g. sex offenders)</li> <li>• public expectations which exceed resources available</li> <li>• need for increased specialisation</li> <li>• need for ongoing training, but not given priority over operational requirements</li> <li>• cover for vacancies and absence causes increased workloads, burnout and turnover</li> <li>• need for good supervision and support</li> <li>• quality of work deteriorates/ vulnerability increases</li> <li>• increased administration and IT requirements</li> <li>• seniors too overworked to provide proper support/need management training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• need for workload management system</li> <li>• need for workload to be prioritised</li> <li>• need review of social worker establishments in light of increased demands</li> <li>• supervision policy in place</li> <li>• review administration for social workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recruitment of temporary social work assistants to alleviate demands</li> <li>• new reception services teams will allow for increased specialisation and assist some management of workloads</li> <li>• workload management and priorities paper being developed</li> <li>• supervision policy being reviewed</li> <li>• additional admin supports being recruited</li> <li>• in house management training being reviewed</li> <li>• in house training strategy being reviewed</li> <li>• review social worker establishment</li> </ul>

<b><u>VA 1 ISSUES/STRESS</u></b>	<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAFF</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION TAKEN/PROPOSED</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>constant reprioritisation of complex work because of vacancies creates stress, increases sickness absence, increases staff turnover</li> <li>increased demands reduces quality of work, creates vulnerability</li> <li>too much overtime having to be worked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improve efficiency in replacement cover</li> <li>optimise workload</li> <li>improve recruitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>priorities and workload management policies being developed</li> <li>use of social work assistants to support social workers; plus use of agency and sessional staff</li> <li>review of social worker/social work assistant remits</li> <li>free managers workloads to provide support to staff (not to carry cases)</li> <li>ongoing recruitment campaigns being progressed</li> </ul>

5.

<b><u>GENERAL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF STAFF</u></b>	<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAFF</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION TAKEN/PROPOSED</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>promote local authority social work as a positive career</li> <li>promote specialisation</li> <li>reward key practitioners who carry additional responsibilities but do not wish to be managers</li> <li>actively promote career/professional qualifications for existing staff/value staff</li> <li>review conditions of service where possible</li> <li>too much overtime interfering with family life</li> <li>improve training opportunities for management training for senior staff</li> <li>within North Lanarkshire, poorer conditions generally for staff than those which exist in other locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>further develop links to colleges, universities and schools</li> <li>provide quality fieldwork placements</li> <li>consider enhancements for key remits</li> <li>consider financial enhancements to recruit newly qualified staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consider the creation of a number of senior practitioner posts</li> <li>consider introduction of trainee/sponsorship schemes</li> <li>further develop personal development plans</li> <li>consider enhancements for key areas of activity e.g. practice teachers</li> <li>policy of exit interviews introduced</li> <li>further develop training opportunities for first line managers in particular</li> <li>consult with Personnel regarding conditions of service</li> </ul>

## 6.

<b><u>COMMUNICATION</u></b>	<b><u>RECOMMENDATIONS FROM STAFF</u></b>	<b><u>ACTION TAKEN/PROPOSED</u></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the need to review the existing system of communication was highlighted as a number of staff were unaware of the initiatives developed to address vacancies within the Department.</li> <li>• further develop system to enable an exchange of ideas from “bottom up and vice versa”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• staff meetings</li> <li>• across authority meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• review existing communication strategy</li> <li>• new structure will provide opportunity to introduce cross authority care group development days</li> <li>• reintroduce staff newsletter/promote use of intranet</li> </ul>