

# **People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Achieving consistently good quality practice**

**Outcomes of the Ofsted monitoring visits**

**Measures to further improve recruitment and retention of social workers**



**Northamptonshire  
Children's Trust**

Areas to provide update on:

Achieving consistently good quality practice

Outcomes of the Ofsted monitoring visits

Measures to further improve recruitment and retention of social workers



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Achieving consistently good quality practice for all children, supported by full implementation of the practice model



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# A journey of improvement....



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## **In January 2020, the Ofsted monitoring visit of the 'front door' found:**

- An acceleration of progress at the 'front door' over the last three months
- The quality and impact of assessments remain highly variable. The local authority's model of practice is not embedded within the workforce or fully understood by partner agencies. Frontline managers are not consistently challenging poorer practice. Although audit activity has increased, quality assurance systems remain underdeveloped.
- Senior leaders are focused on recruiting and retaining a skilled and stable workforce, raising standards of practice, and ultimately improving the experiences and progress of all children in receipt of services. Given the scale of improvement needed, senior leaders rightly recognise that it will take time to fully implement their plans and to see their impact.



## **In October 2020, the Ofsted focused visit of children's social care found:**

- Despite unprecedented times due to the COVID-19 pandemic, inspectors found convincing evidence that services for children and young people in Northamptonshire are starting to improve, albeit from a very low base.
- Children's services leaders, together with safeguarding partners, responded quickly and effectively to challenges during the pandemic. Their main priorities were to ensure that vulnerable children, young people, their families and staff were helped and protected.
- Effective actions taken by senior leaders are resulting in tangible improvements to both compliance with statutory requirements and to the quality of social work practice.
- A revised quality assurance framework and the findings from audit activity are underpinning improvements to practice.



## **In February 2021, the Ofsted monitoring visit of children in care found:**

- The stable and committed senior leadership team is steadily achieving improvements in the quality of services for children in care, including for disabled children
- However, the overall quality of the service remains inconsistent and management oversight is not sufficiently robust.
- The vast majority of children have an up-to-date assessment that identifies their needs. Some assessments are comprehensive and help to identify the progress made; this appropriately informs their care plan. However, this is not consistent for all children. Some assessments are limited in analysis and do not consider children's wider needs. Some care plans are not actioned in a timely way and this can result in delays in meeting needs and in achieving permanence.
- Children in care practice weeks, together with auditing and a strong focus on getting the basics right, are all contributing to the quality assurance process.



## **In July 2021, the Ofsted monitoring visit of children in need and child protection found:**

- Throughout the challenges of the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, senior leaders have continued to focus relentlessly on improving practice. This has resulted in tangible progress, which continues to gain traction in improving the experiences, progress and outcomes for children.
- The quality of social work practice is improving in the children's safeguarding and disabled children's teams, although it still varies in quality.
- The practice model is already enabling positive experiences and progress for some children. However, the model of practice is not used consistently across all safeguarding and disabled children's teams.
- However, the frequency and quality of direct work with children to inform their assessments and plans are variable.
- Although improving, the quality of assessments remains variable.
- The quality of children's plans is improving, although it is still variable.
- Senior leaders have comprehensive and thorough oversight of the quality of practice, strengthened by the development of a quality assurance board which is chaired by the chief executive of the trust.



### **In November 2021, the Ofsted monitoring visit of care leavers found:**

- Senior leaders have made progress in improving services for care leavers since the 2019 inspection of local authority children's services in Northamptonshire. However, the quality and consistency of practice are still too variable; senior leaders have realistic and achievable plans for improvement.
- The quality of support provided to care leavers by personal advisers varies.
- The quality and timeliness of written pathway plans have improved since the 2019 inspection
- Safety planning is inconsistent for older children in care and care leavers who are particularly vulnerable
- Improvement plans are realistic and continue to be implemented, with success, despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic
- The comprehensive quality assurance framework provides senior leaders with a clear understanding of children's and young people's experiences, practice strengths and areas for improvement

The Ofsted inspection of NCT's Independent Fostering Agency in November 2021 found it to be 'requires improvement to be good'

## At this time on our journey

Whilst practice remains variable, Ofsted and our own quality assurance activity has identified improvements are being made and some examples of great practice

Our Improvement Plan, reviewed monthly, provides our focus

A strong and stable workforce underpins improving the consistency of practice and we continue to relentlessly prioritise this – more stability has been achieved in managerial posts, we have improved our recruitment and retention offer and are delivering on our conditions for success

We are focused on improving the quality of assessments and plans, informed by the voice of the child and understanding and supporting their individual and diverse needs. More front line managers have undertaken training, coaching and mentoring to support them in uplifting practice

Our collaborative quality assurance activity, including practice weeks with young inspectors, is helping practitioners and managers to uplift quality



# At this time on our journey cont.

We continue to implement and embed our strengths based, child focused practice model to achieve sustained outcomes for children

Our workforce is now better supported with a more tailored continuous professional development offer, access to best practice and research and sharing our quality assurance through our learning hub

Our comprehensive quality assurance activity provides a measure of progress, and we are also focused on ensuring managers are confident and competent in undertaking this





Children, Young People and Families at the Heart of Our Work  
**Northamptonshire Children's Trust**

Home Contents Resources Using this Manual SCP Procedures Accessibility SEARCH

1. Introduction  
2. Supervision Policy  
3. Supervision Framework  
4. Supervision Agreement  
5. Supervision Procedure  
6. Annual Performance Appraisal  
7. Resolving Supervision Difficulties -

### Supervision Policy and Procedure

**SCOPE OF THIS CHAPTER**

This chapter sets out how supervision is carried out within Northamptonshire Children's Trust and applies to all members of our workforce whose role relates to children, young people and family practice.

**RELATED GUIDANCE AND LEGISLATION**

[Research in Practice \(RiP\) Reflective Supervision: Resource Pack \(2017\)](#)

**Northamptonshire Children's Trust**

**Practice Standards for Practitioners and Managers:**

**Improving Outcomes for Children in Northamptonshire**

We have implemented revised

- Practice Model
- Practice Standards
- Supervision Policy and Procedure
- Quality Assurance Framework

So all practitioners and managers have greater clarity on how we work and what the expectations are for quality of practice and support for practitioners



Our practice model

**Northamptonshire Children's Trust**  
Quality Assurance Strategy And Framework 2021/25

# Practice Standards



Signs of Safety is embedded in practice



All children have an outcome focused plan that reflects the assessed level of need and / or risk



Good quality communication to ensure positive engagement



We will work honestly and openly with families and partner agencies



Practitioners use a holistic approach to assessments



Professional development will equip all with the skills and knowledge to perform effectively



Visits are meaningful and purposeful



Direct work will be undertaken with creativity and respect



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# Practice Standards



The workforce receives high quality supervision



Managers provide leadership



Meetings have a clear focus that inform, engage, inspire and achieve progress



Children and families receive the right intervention at the right time



All are entitled to carry out their duties without fear or risk to their own personal safety



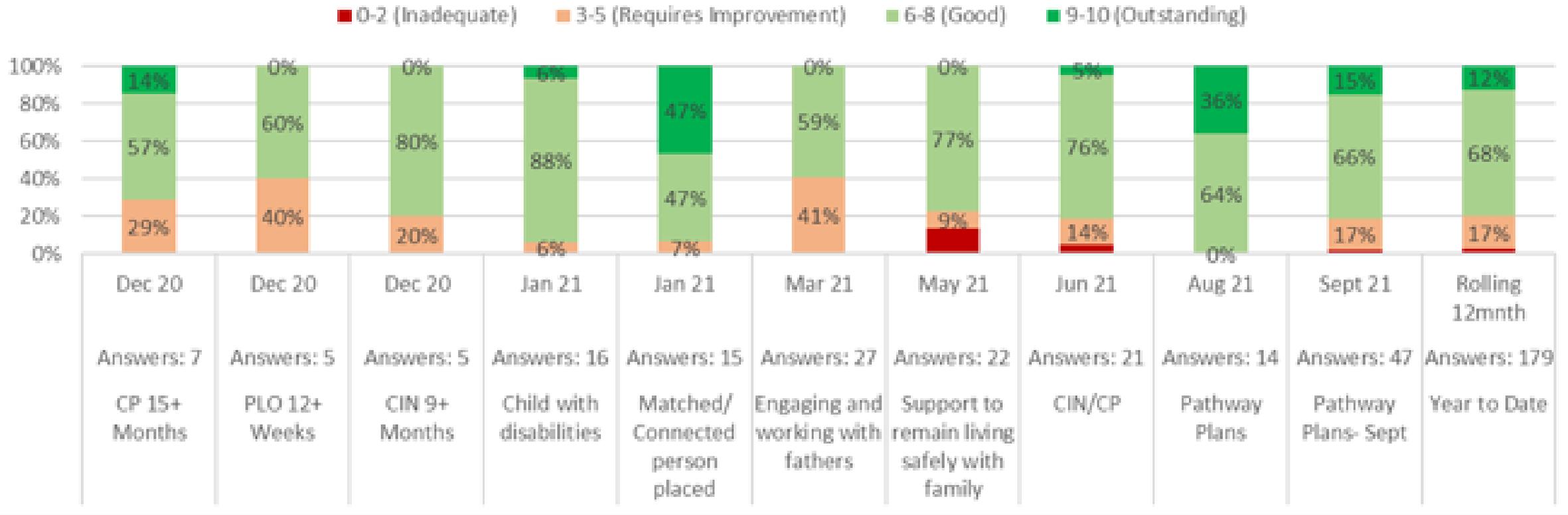
Voice of the Child



Policies and Procedures



## CRPD Gradings Trend - Outcome Improvements



Our at a glance picture of collaborative reflective practice discussions (audits) give us an overall picture of the quality of our practice that continues to improve.



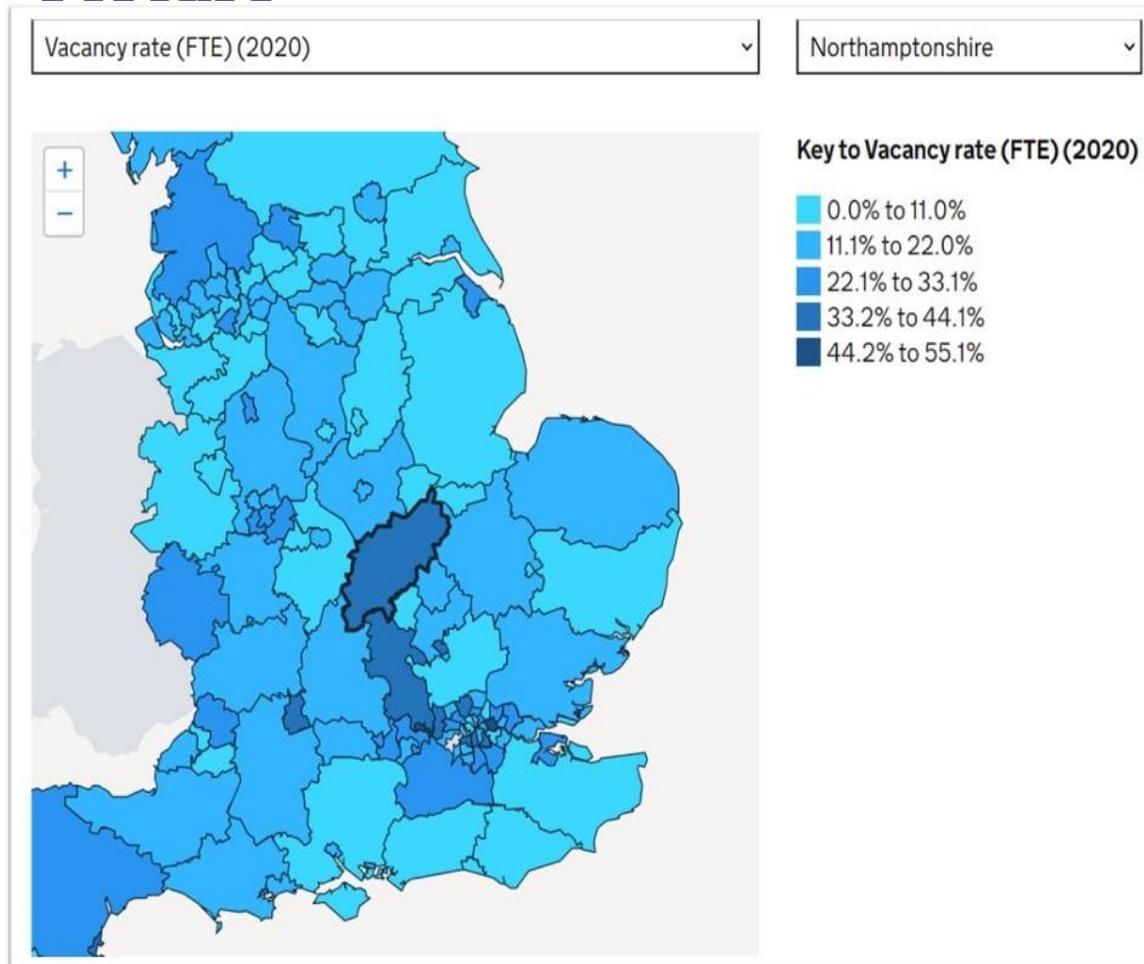
# Workforce Strategy

**Measures to further improve recruitment and retention of social workers**



**Northamptonshire  
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# The Local & National Picture



The data to the left is taken from the National Statistics for 2020  
The data for 2021 is due to be released in February 2022.  
The points under the local picture (below) advise how the picture has changed in the past 12 months.

## National Picture

In September 2020 there were 31,854 children and family social workers in England.

The number of FTE vacancies in 2020 was 6113 (16.1%)

The number of FTE agency workers was 5806 (15.4%)

There were 5,200 FTE social worker starters in the year ending 30 September 2020, a decrease of 12.5% compared to 2019. \*

Demand outstrips supply and nationally all authorities are competing for the same limited resource. Covid 19 pandemic has had a significant impact on workforce and increase in demand/ complexity

## Local Picture

**The social worker vacancy rate for NCT in December 2021 is 22.5%**

**The rate of agency social workers for NCT in December 2021 is 16.6%**

Opus who support NCT, and a number of other authorities in the region, confirm that whilst historically Northamptonshire paid higher than surrounding authorities for locums, this is no longer the case.

Those that didn't previously struggle are now experiencing extreme difficulties on both the permanent and locum side. As such rates on the locum side have been increasing throughout the region.

Great news is that Northamptonshire is receiving higher application volumes which showcases that the activity and hard work on attraction is starting to pay off.



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# Strategic Framework

## Vision

Children, Young People and Families at the heart of all we do  
- in every action we take and every decision we make.

## Our Commitment

(co-produced with children and young people)

What we do today affects your tomorrow, we promise to walk side by side with you

## Outcomes Framework

Live safe,  
be safe

Fulfil  
potential

Develop  
resilience

Enjoy good  
health and  
wellbeing

## Conditions for Success

Processes

Communication

Environment

Culture

Partnerships

Empowerment

People

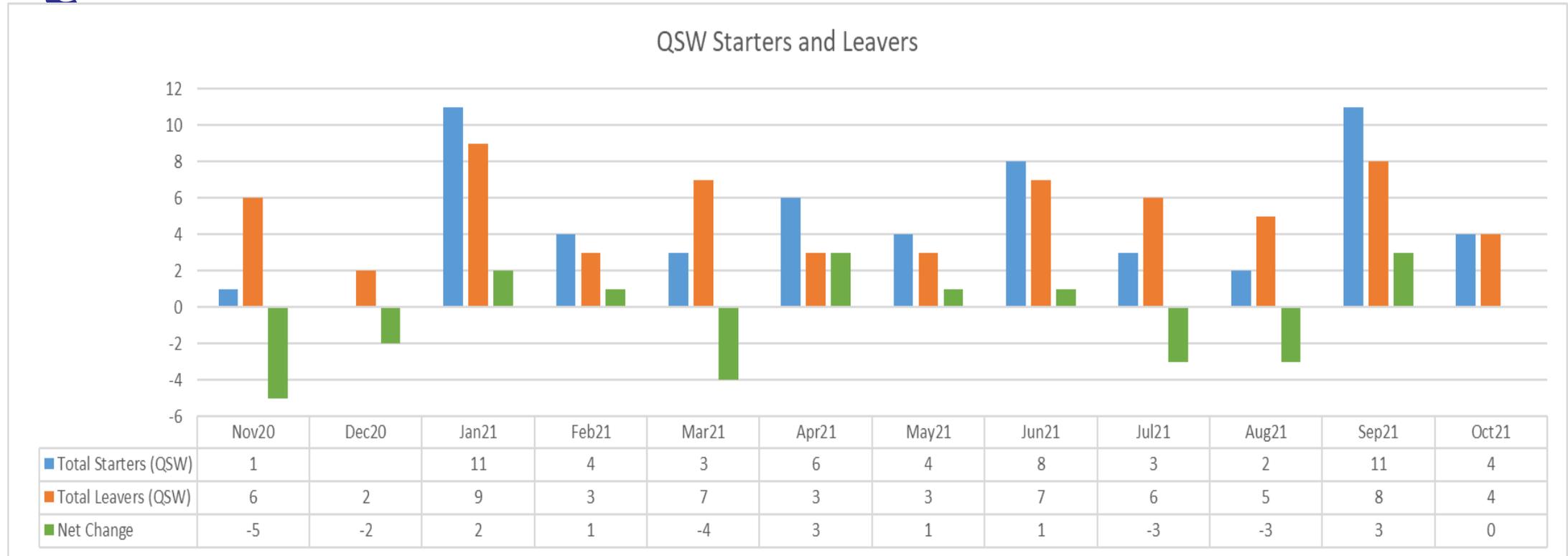
Tools

# What are our priorities?

- Effective Leadership
- Recruit and Retain an Awesome Workforce
- Strong Relationship-Based Practice
- Insightful Quality Assurance and Learning
- Healthy Partnerships
- Robust and Effective Resource Management



# Overall Starters and Leavers- Trend QSW.



# Recruitment - High Level Overview

- 48 new permanent qualified social workers this year
- 47 existing qualified social work moved into new career opportunities within the Trust
- Improved attraction so now more qualified social workers are applying to work for us in Northamptonshire than in any of our surrounding boroughs.
- 4 international workers started since April 2021 and a new cohort of 10 set to join us in May 2021
- 30 ASYEs (assessed and supported year in employment) in the organisation currently who will be completing and moving into Social Worker roles in the next 12 months

## Demonstration of Success Rates:

- CV : Interview = 77% of CVs we receive get an interview.
- Offer : Start = 72% of people we offer to, accept and have started with us.
- For every 5 people we interview we offer someone a new role.



# Workstreams

Improvements to Recruitment and Retention Activity since April 2021 – an overview.



# Measures to improve recruitment and retention

- 'Growing our own' social workers due to the local and national challenges in social work recruitment

*Social work apprentices, Step Up to Social Work students and NQSWs supported by Social Work Academy and learning and development team. Also part of the Front Line programme*

- Support career aspirations and development of current staff.
- Additional temporary capacity / managed service teams are in place to manage the demands the pandemic has created and mitigate risks of increased caseloads in services
- Recruitment to a peripatetic social work team, to provide flexible resource wherever it is required, help to keep caseloads manageable, and achieve more stability across our services.
- Implementation of our '**conditions for success**': changing our culture to being strengths based and empowering; improving processes and systems; and investing in our staff, through our leadership development programme and professional development opportunities (eg Research in Practice programmes).



# Additional routes into Social Work

- NCT host University Student Placements in NCT - currently we have students from University of Northampton, Cambridge, Nottingham and Birmingham Universities.
- Students qualify each year and the Social Work Academy recruit NQSWs three times a year with cohorts starting in January, May and September each year.
- Each team in Children in Care, Safeguarding and Support, DCT, DAAT have NQSW posts within their establishments and NQSWs are placed according to vacancies and ensuring appropriate support and skill mix is in place.
- The Social Work Academy delivers the ASYE programme in partnership with Learning & Development and provides support to NQSWs during this year alongside their teams. The SWA also provides support post-ASYE to aid retention.



# Routes into SW roles – January 2022 onwards.

- **10 Step up to Social Work students** start in NCT on placement in January 2022, qualify April 2023.
- In **September 2022** we will have Frontline Students start in NCT, the number is yet to be decided but **potential 8**. These will qualify in September 2023.
- **3 SW Apprenticeships** currently in NCT, qualify June 2023. They are currently in Safeguarding teams
- **9 NQSWs** started in Jan 21; 13 in May 21 (including 8 Step Up graduates); 14 in Sept 21
- We have a new cohort of **3 NQSWs** due to start in January 2022.



# Future Strategic Direction

- We have reviewed the recruitment and retention package offered for social workers to improve our competitiveness within an employees' market- impact to be reviewed
- Monitor the impact of recruitment campaigns, review and adjusting them as needed
- Broaden our Teaching Partnership, in conjunction with the University of Northampton and West and North Northamptonshire Adults' Social Care to further develop professional development opportunities for our workforce
- Broaden focus on the workforce narrative - consider additional key indicators and areas for improvement.
- Consider existing SLAs with West Northamptonshire Council to support effective engagement of apprentices, university students and ongoing support and training for the SW workforce.
- Retention – Focus on checkpoints for new workers to help improve retention and highlight concerns early.
- Revised models of delivery e.g. reach out to Family Support Workers for better attraction to non SW roles that support delivery.
- Implement conditions for success : improve the quality of learning and practice to enhance the reputation of all parties and attract and retain staff

