

Retention risk tool



The development of an evidence based tool to assess retention



The retention of social workers remains the largest and most costly issue facing almost every local authority across the UK. Community Care has developed a practical method of helping social work employers understand the retention risk of their current workforce and provide some ideas on how to lower that risk.



Methodology

Community Care commissioned Associate Professor Liz Frost at the University of the West of England to undertake a literature review of the published evidence on the retention of social workers, both in the UK and internationally. This review found the most important indicators of satisfaction (rather than dissatisfaction) were:

- **Relationships at work**
- **Supervision information and reflection**
- **Further training**
- **Meaning**
- **Opportunities**
- **Recognition**
- **'Growing your own'**



University of the
West of England

Five themes and 20 key risk indicators



I feel safe	I feel supported and able to do a good job	I feel the organisation values social work	I feel I am growing my skills and abilities	I feel happy to go to work
From fear	Supervision	Organisational systems	Career development	Friendly and helpful workplaces
From blame and shame	Workload	Transparency	Training	Recognition and rewards
From emotional distress	Additional support systems	Pay and employment benefits	Professional autonomy and creativity	Meaning and values
From discrimination	Practice support systems	Senior leadership	Confidence and resilience	Work-life balance

Turning research findings into insight and action



Organisational self-assessment

- An audit of the policies, procedures and data collected by an organisation in the key risk areas
- Allows reflection on how aligned the organisational infrastructure is with the working needs of social workers
- Allows reflection on how the organisation responds to the working needs of social workers



Social worker survey

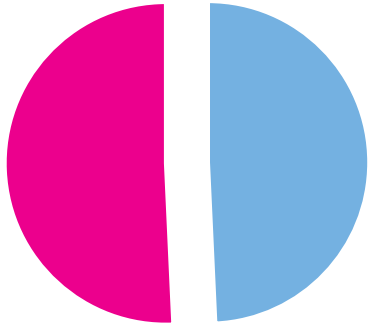
- In-depth survey including a mix of multiple choice questions and open ended questions
- A number of in-depth qualitative interviews to enrich the data
- Reveals the gaps and similarities between management perception and social worker perception
- Allows social workers to explain why policies or systems are or are not helpful
- Allows social workers to suggest potential solutions or methods of increasing effectiveness



Lincolnshire County Council



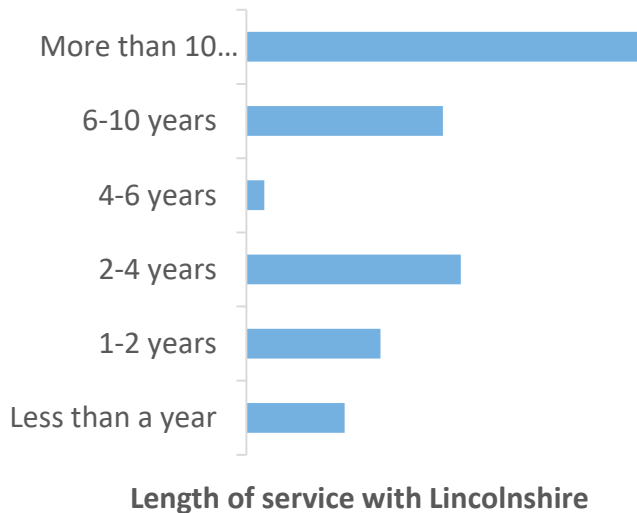
Engagement



Survey demographics



- Survey sent to 274 frontline social workers and managers from a list supplied by Lincolnshire council.
- 139 survey respondents representing just over 1/2 of the workforce.
- 11 qualitative interviews representing 8% of sample.
- More than two-thirds have worked at Lincolnshire County Council for more than two years.
- Largest group had more than 10 years' experience as a social worker.
- 99% were permanent employees.
- 68% were social workers/advanced practitioners.





Hear from Sam Clayton – Principal Social Worker at Lincolnshire County Council

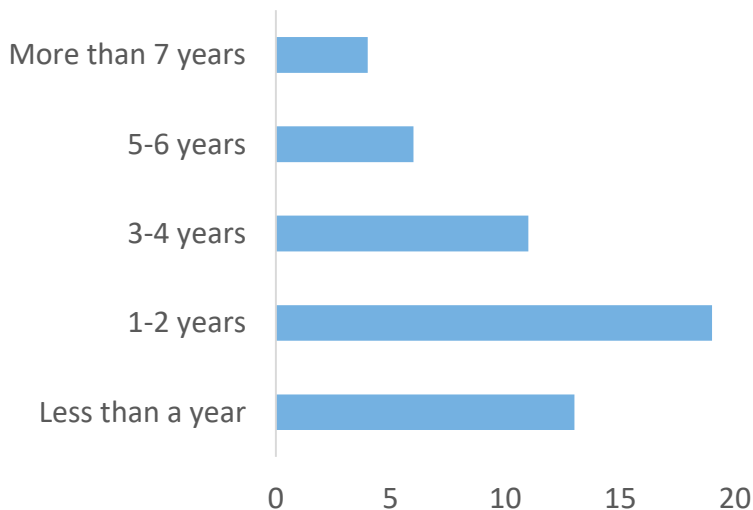
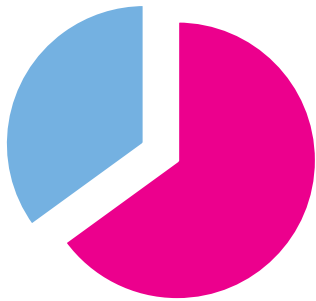




The London Borough of Merton



Survey demographics



- Survey sent to 160 frontline social workers and managers from a list supplied by Merton council.
- 56 survey respondents representing just over 1/3 of the workforce.
- 11 qualitative interviews representing 20% of sample.
- Majority of respondents had been with Merton council for two years or less.
- Majority had more than 10 years' experience as a social worker.
- 80% were permanent employees.
- 60% were social workers or had no management responsibility

NB Two surveys were sent out – one a shortened version of the first in order to improve engagement. The following results are the combined results of both these surveys

Results from the social worker survey



How social workers are experiencing their working lives in Merton

I feel safe	I feel supported and able to do a good job	I feel challenged and excited by my job	I feel I am growing my skills and ability	I feel happy to go to work	I feel I am valued and rewarded
From fear	Supervision	Career development advice	Resilience	Friendly workplaces and supportive colleagues	Recognition
From the media storm	Organisational systems	PDRs	Confidence	Supportive managers	Rewards for achievements
From overload	Fairness	Training	Professional autonomy	No shame culture	Employment benefits
From burnout	Transparency	Additional career building opportunities	Professional creativity	Clear vision and role	Work-life balance

■ Low risk
 ■ Potential risk
 ■ High risk

I feel safe





I feel safe...from overload



Almost one in four (23%) experienced work overload on a weekly basis and a further 40% experienced it every few weeks.



Most recognised there were systems in place to deal with this but only one in four respondents felt these were effective most of the time. There was a recognition the organisation was in a difficult position and was at least trying.



Relatively even numbers of respondents were able to cite both helpful and unhelpful responses to work overload. Helpful responses included being given more time and/or managers holding cases, help to prioritise work, flexible working and increasing the capacity in some teams. Unhelpful responses were largely focused on managers continuing to allocate cases even when it was clear a worker was at capacity.



A third of respondents felt more could be done to help such as not assigning cases when staff are on annual leave or allocating cases based on how likely team members are to challenge it.

Recommendations:

Recommendations included more administrative support to deal with paperwork, allowing some social workers to specialise in areas and take lead roles and ensuring case transfer protocols are managed better and do not lead to short term overloading.

I am now being given more support. I suppose my reflection would be that I have been doing it for two years already, so perhaps more timely support would be helpful.

I do recognise that throughout my career I have put in the extra hours to a job when needed. I do what is needed to get the job done, so I may not always help myself!

I have no doubt that workloads would feel as high in any borough.

Analysis from qualitative interviews



Overload

The issue of overload in social work is a complex one but most interviewees felt Merton tried hard to prevent workers from experiencing overload and to keep caseloads low. While the experience of overload was common most felt it was either not as bad, or at least no worse, than other places. Many attributed overwork to the balance of work in certain roles or teams and/or a lack of planning for changes in roles/teams.



I feel supported and able to do
a good job



Supervision

- The frequency of both case management and reflective supervision is a concern with 44% indicating they experienced reflective supervision once a month or less, and 30% indicating they had case management supervision once a month or less. Nobody reported receiving either type of supervision regularly (ie once a week or more).
- However, the quality of the supervision is generally felt to be very good with the majority finding it helpful compared to unhelpful. Interviewees also highlighted the availability and quality of informal supervision (see qualitative analysis).
- There were a high number of suggestions for improvement but most of these referred to improving the consistency and regularity of reflective supervision.

Recommendations:

Most respondents rated the supervision very highly and felt it was key to improving their quality of practice. Most recommendations were around ensuring all managers were able to provide the same high quality supervision and be able to provide it regularly. This was the case for both social workers and frontline managers.

It would be helpful to have supervision about the cases I oversee as a manager.

There isn't enough time to discuss all the cases and then there often isn't another supervision for a long period.

It empowers me to take ownership of my work and partner with my manager on the best approaches to the challenges I encounter.

Analysis from qualitative interviews



Supervision

Supervision was much prized and taken seriously. Everyone praised the availability of managers and senior staff for informal supervision and practical help.

The reflective case discussion group run by CAMHS was appreciated a great deal and heralded as 'this is what is brilliant in Merton'. However, some noted that take-up was low which then affected people's perceptions of the quality and amount of supervision.

Most rated the reflective aspects of supervision as valuable but did not experience this as consistently available. It was thought of as dependent on either the interest of the manager or instigation from the supervisee.

There was an awareness of supervision guidelines being in place in Merton but many said these were not followed. This was not necessarily a criticism as many appreciated supervision being flexible depending on need.

Supervision from managers who did not know a great deal about the specifics of the work left people feeling insecure but regular supervision from a manager who allowed reflection and knew the territory was seen as empowering and enabling.



What next



- Community Care is setting up a membership group to contribute and share solution focused content on the retention of social workers and other workforce issues. This will be via a linked-in group, Workforce Strategy and Insights, and email newsletters and future events like this one
- If you would like to be part please email: sarah.dennis@markallengroup.com

NB Linked-in connection will then lead to being automatically sent a sign-up form for the email newsletter however this can be subsequently opted-out of <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8657439>