

## **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF STAFF**

### *Report of the Director of Social Services*

Author: John Cooper, Head of Human Resources

Tel. 01992 556349

Executive Member: Julia Price

### **1. Purpose of the Report**

Arising from the Select Committee Work Programme agreed at the meeting of 12 October 2000, Roma Mills asked for a report on the recruitment and retention of staff in the new Adult Care Services Department. Particular emphasis would be given to scrutinising how the recruitment centre was providing for social services and the national position on recruitment.

### **1. Summary**

- 1.1 Vacancy levels for January 2001 in District teams stand at 9% in Mental Health and Learning Disability, 7% in Elderly and Physically Disabled. Vacancy levels in Residential Services are 14% and Day Care stand at 12% and Community Support Teams. This compares with an average vacancy rate in the County Council of 14% and a public sector average of 14.2%.
- 1.2 Though overall vacancy levels are moderate the department is experiencing difficulties in certain parts of the County – East Herts, Stevenage, St. Albans and Hertsmere in particular.
- 1.3 A recruitment strategy incorporating short and long term measures has been produced.
- 1.4 The Recruitment Centre is not yet fully implemented and currently provides staff only for short term vacancies (employment contracts of less than 3 months). Work is in hand corporately to bring full implementation forward that will provide not only staff for long term vacancies but also more comprehensive recruitment and retention data.
- 1.5 Hertfordshire appears to have lower vacancy rates in Adult Services than the average for London and the South East.

## **2. Background**

### Vacancy Levels

Between August 2000 and January 2001 vacancy levels in District EPD have remained steady at an average of 7%. This figure masks local team vacancy rates of 16.45% in East Herts and 21.5% in Three Rivers, for example.

Between the same period average vacancy levels in District Mental Health have fluctuated from 6% in August 2000 to 11% in December, falling to 9% in January 2001. St. Albans, however, has a level of 22% during this period and Stevenage 24.6%.

District Learning Disability have fluctuated even more, from 14% in August 2000 falling to 2% in November and December and rising in January 2001 to 9%. East Herts and Hertsmere had figures of 26% and 23% respectively.

It must be borne in mind that because the teams are relatively small (the largest is 16.67 wte, Dacorum EPD) small actual changes in vacancy levels can affect the percentage figures significantly.

Vacancy rates in Residential Services increased to 15.4% in December 2000, dropping to 14% in January. Day Care dropped to 10.95% in November 2000 from a peak of 12.5% in August, rising to around 12% in December 2000 and January 2001.

Appendices 2 – 7 show the district picture in detail, Appendices 8 – 13 shows the Residential, Day Care and CST picture.

National vacancy rate information is available from a survey carried out by the Employers' Organisation of the LGA last year. It gives some context and shows that the Social Services Department and Adult Services fall below the average for London and the South East of England. However, the picture is not conclusive because the figure for field social workers does not distinguish between children's services and adults. A summary of the survey is attached as Appendix 14.

Some turnover is needed to benefit the organisation and counter stagnation but in key services difficulty in filling vacancies can significantly affect overall team performance, increase levels of stress on remaining staff and is expensive (the average cost of filling a social work professional vacancy is c. £5000 and takes an average of 3 months to complete the process). Maintaining low turnover in residential services is crucial, where target vacancy rates approaching 5% are needed to ensure appropriate cover arrangements without the use of agency staff.

## Reasons for Leaving

Leavers interviews are carried out in the department across a range of employment groups. These show that 29% say they leave for reasons related to their current job, 22% related to the lack of career development opportunities in their current job or better opportunities available elsewhere, 19% because of dissatisfaction with management and 8% as a result of pay and conditions. This is in line with the experience corporately.

### **1. Aiming for Solutions**

#### A Strategic Approach

Adult Care has a Recruitment Strategy (attached as Appendix 1) that has three basic objectives:

1. To fill vacancies with appropriately skilled and qualified candidates quickly and with the minimum disruption to services. This will be achieved through a number of actions set out in the strategy.
2. To reduce the number of current vacancies against establishment. “Auditing” of current staff’s reasons for remaining with the department and their views on the good and the not-so-good points; support in dealing with the pressures of the job are some of the ways this can be achieved.
3. To reduce the unit cost per starter. This is essential when there has been a 46% increase in the County Council’s expenditure on advertising during the first eight months of this financial year.
4. The strategy also identifies action points to address the Department’s Equalities Action Plan. These include target representation levels, positive action in advertising campaigns, community workshops on interviewing techniques and completion of application forms.

The County Council’s Recruitment Centre, run by Manpower, is a key element of the Department’s and the Council’s approach to recruitment and reducing the cost of it.

To date the Recruitment Centre has taken on the supply of staff for short term vacancies. These are vacancies of 3 months or less and they have traditionally been filled through the Social Services Supply Scheme, and over 30 agencies acting as independent suppliers. This has led to duplication of effort and the Recruitment Centre is now a single point of contact for managers who require a temporary member of staff.

The Centre will be taking on long term vacancies within the next few months.

The advantage to the department is in the savings resulting from economies of scale (Manpower is an international company with significant buying power), a

single agency for supplying staff and expertise in using innovative ways of recruiting.

### Exploring new initiatives

There is no shortage of ideas across the department about ways of addressing not only recruitment shortages but also streamlining existing processes and improving retention. Some examples are given below:

#### 1. Providing access to affordable housing.

This is a significant incentive in the South East for attracting staff from other parts of the country and from overseas and for retaining younger staff who want to enter the housing market but have difficulty doing so here. A revised relocation scheme has been introduced corporately offering support to employees moving in to the area.

A bid has also been made under the government's Starter Home Initiative for grant support to allow lower paid key workers (including social workers and residential care staff) who are first time buyers to access affordable housing.

The department's Staff support Officer also provides addresses and contact numbers of agencies and organisations who can assist staff in the search for accommodation.

#### 2. Retention – reducing vacancies

We will carry out an "audit" of current staff (particularly in "hard to fill" vacancy areas) of a mix of high and average performers to assess what they are looking for in their career and what in their case makes the difference between staying and leaving.

Through an occupational health and work/life balance model we will help support staff in dealing with "pressures of the job".

In view of the feedback from exit interviews on job-related reasons for leaving, we will consider whether some jobs need to be reconfigured.

#### 3. Reviewing the employment package

Targeted short term measures are being considered corporately such as market forces enhancements to deal with immediate pressures. These are not sustainable in the long term. Improved work/life balance policies and practices, such as Lifewise, career break schemes, greater access to training and development leading to improved career opportunities in the department and the Council are initiatives that we are pursuing. The review of pay and reward systems will also address recruitment and retention longer term.

#### 4. Connecting with Universities and Colleges

Maintaining and developing our links with universities, colleges and schools is an important recruitment measure. There are two elements to this. Firstly, we will continue to enhance our reputation as a good employer and developer of staff that attracts newly qualified staff. Secondly, we will continue to capitalise on the placements from university that we have in Adult Services (currently 17) by offering suitable candidates jobs in anticipation of them qualifying. The reintroduction of secondments to training by the Adult Care Services, with guarantees of a job at the end of it, are also under consideration.

Linked to this we will review our needs in terms of the ratio of qualified and non-qualified staff. Unqualified Professional Assistants are easier to recruit than qualified Social Workers for whom there is high demand and low supply.

#### 5. Overseas Recruitment

The department is liaising with CSF and Corporate Personnel is exploring the viability of overseas recruitment, in particular South Africa but also Australasia. There are many issues to be addressed in doing this, not least the infrastructure of housing, social contacts and ongoing support and the cost effectiveness of overseas recruitment for Adult Care Services will be considered carefully.

#### 6. **Financial Implications**

Any costs arising from the actions set out above will be managed within the departmental budget in the short term. Longer term corporate and departmental initiatives may require future bids beyond existing budget.

#### 7. **Conclusion**

The overall vacancy situation in Adult Care Services is not serious. However, there are significant shortages of staff in some local district teams and in some residential settings. These must be addressed and it is proposed that a short life topic group look at this and recruitment in the department in more detail.

*Background information referred to by the author:*

Employers' Organisation Survey of SSDs in England 2000