

Staffordshire Social Care
Workforce Strategy 2022-2027

Engagement Summary Report



Key Messages

- Current social care employees responding to the survey reported high levels of job satisfaction and advocacy, with the overriding reason being that they enjoyed what they did – something positive to build on.
- Despite this, organisations still reported major challenges in recruiting staff, and some difficulties in retaining staff. This was substantiated by almost 20% of survey respondents working in the sector suggesting that they might be leaving their role or the sector within the next 12 months.
- Work-life balance, the ability to make a difference and pay were the most important factors to the survey cohort; yet pay and work-life balance were also two areas where they were least satisfied – suggesting potential factors to look at to drive up job satisfaction.
- Pay and benefits appears to present the biggest challenge for both recruitment and retention.
- Beyond pay and benefits, the most frequently cited ways from survey responses to improve working in the sector were; better expense payments including mileage, and improving training and progression opportunities. Some local organisations have introduced successful initiatives around these challenges that we could learn from and further develop.
- Successful initiatives do not always have to be costly; through simple cost-free methods such as saying thank you, and introducing an employee of the month, some responding organisations felt they had made staff feel more valued and, in turn, improved retention.
- Linked to staff feeling more valued, respondents suggested that social care roles were not seen as equal to those in health care. Raising the public profile and perception of working in the sector might in turn, make social care staff feel more valued and improve retention, and attract more into the profession.
- Several responding organisations welcomed future support with the recruitment process itself; for example, support with where to advertise, access to jobs fairs, and financial assistance with promotion and marketing.

Background

Introduction

A programme of engagement was undertaken to provide the current and future adults and children's social care workforce with the opportunity to put forward their views about the strengths, challenges and opportunities that exist within the Staffordshire social care workforce. In addition to individuals in the social care workforce, providers and employers were also given the opportunity to put forward their views. The views of all participants would feed into the development of an ambitious countywide workforce strategy to help realise the vision of a stable, recognised, skilled, capable, innovate and resilient local social care workforce.

This report provides a summary of the findings of this engagement work, setting out the results and the key themes captured.

Methodology

The engagement took place between 1st June and the end of July 2022 and included two online surveys, one with current and prospective social care employees, and the other with organisations involved in social care provision. In addition, a series of face-to-face focus groups were held with key staff groups, to provide additional insight alongside the survey results.

The survey for individuals working in, or looking to enter, the social care sector ran from 1st June 2022 to 6th July 2022. The survey for organisations involved in social care provision ran from 10th June 2002 to 6th July 2022. All focus groups took place throughout July 2022.

A cross system effort was made to promote participation in the survey and attendance at focus groups. Key channels included:

- Staffordshire partners sharing promotional materials with their contacts and through their social media channels. This included health trusts, universities, the voluntary sector and social care providers.
- Staffordshire County Council promoting through its social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and asking partners to share and retweet.
- Advertisements in Staffordshire County Council job email bulletins (over 6,222 recipients) and two My Staffordshire bulletins (both sent to over 14,300 recipients).

In the penultimate week of the engagement period, further promotional activity was undertaken to warn of the approaching deadline using the channels detailed above and, in addition, two advocate videos were created Future Social Care Workforce Survey Findings 04 and shared. These videos focused on the benefits of completing the survey and how responses would make a difference; these were viewed over 3,650 times.

Responses

In total the two surveys received 323 responses: 261 from individuals and 62 from organisations¹. 92% of respondents (239 individuals) currently worked in social care with the remaining 8% (22 individuals) interested in a career in social care.

Due to the timing of the survey, around examinations and school/college holidays, responses from the prospective workforce were small. A range of partnerships were utilised to target this audience, sharing bespoke promotional information with jobs, careers and further and higher education partners such as the National Careers Service, the Careers and Enterprise Company, the Careers Hubs, the countywide Employment Group and the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent LEP. Social media influencers were also targeted to encourage interaction with a younger audience.

¹ 261 responses from individuals, based on a workforce of approximately 21,800 represents an acceptable margin of error of +/- 6% at County level, with result being statistically robust at the 95% confidence level. Looking at survey results for subsets of respondents should be treated with extreme caution as numbers are likely to be very small and not necessarily representative of the group as a whole.

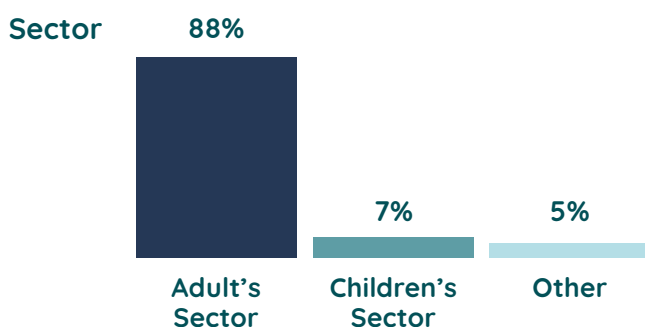
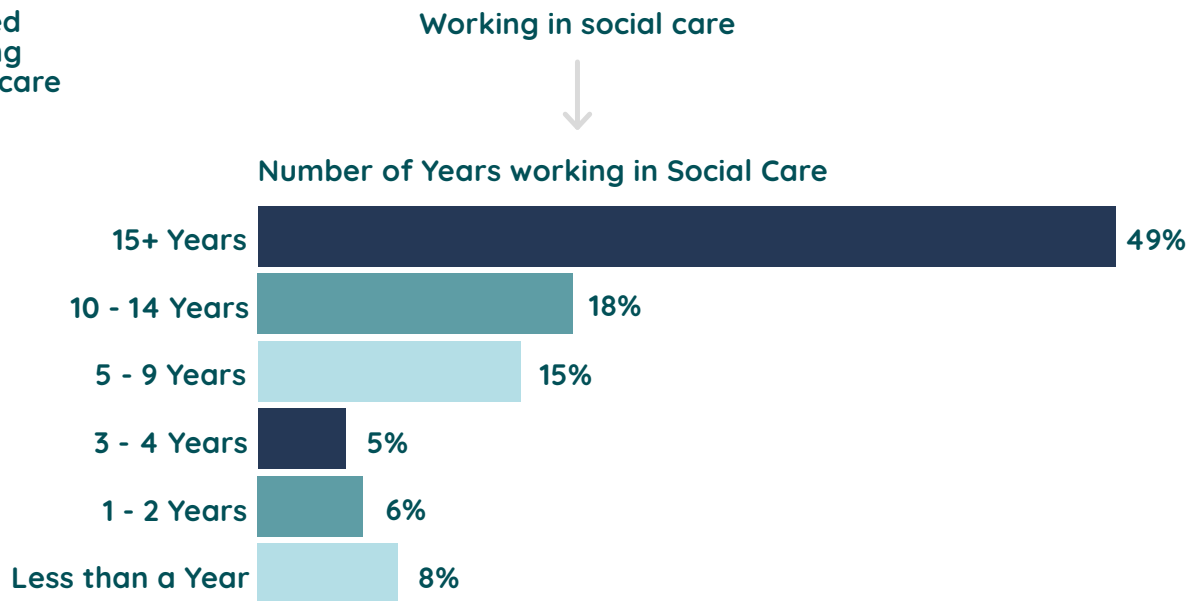
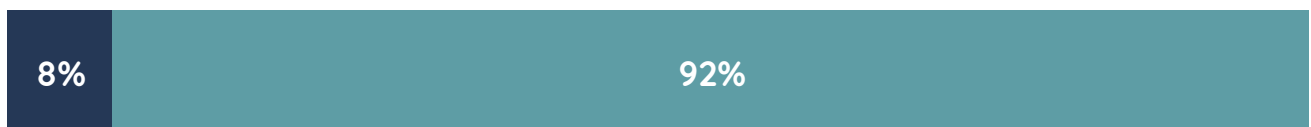
More in-depth views were also captured as part of the face-to-face focus group engagement, which were attended by approximately 70 current and prospective social care workers in total.

Responses by geographical area were well spread, but not sufficient in terms of numbers (between 21-35 respondents per district/borough) to look at geographical variation in opinion.

Due to the number of respondents to the survey, it is not appropriate to look for variation in opinion between different groups, such as role type or by sector, as they would not be statistically robust. However, whilst survey response numbers were relatively small, they do provide a local picture of the key opportunities and issues, alongside our focus group findings, that can be considered in the round with national data and research.

Respondent Profile

Figure 1: Key characteristics of 261 individual respondents



37% managerial or supervisory
29% direct care
23% regulated professional role
11% other

Survey responses compared to the Staffordshire social care workforce:

- Females were slightly over-represented.
- Under 25s slightly under-represented and 55+ over-represented.
- Majority of respondents were White-British; the proportion was in-line with the local social care workforce.
- Although responses from the children’s sector were small (17 responses), compared to the estimated size of the local children’s social care workforce in comparison to the adults’ workforce, they are over-represented in survey responses.
- Regulated professionals and managerial/supervisory were over-represented in survey responses.
- The number of years’ experience in the sector appeared to be higher for respondents than in the general Staffordshire social care workforce. 67% of respondents had worked in social care for 10+ years, compared to 33% of the local adult social care workforce as reported by skills for care. Note, no data is available for length of service in the local children’s social care sector.

Figure 2: Key characteristics of 62 organisational responses

Organisation Type	Number of Responses	% of Responses
Independent Provider of Care Services (Adults)	43	70%
Public Sector Employer of Care Workers (Adults)	5	8%
NHS	5	8%
Other	4	7%
Independent Provider of Care Services (Children’s)	2	3%
Public Sector Employer of Care Workers (Children’s)	2	3%

Of the 61 organisations that provided more details about their organisation:

- 70% were independent providers of adult care services.
- Just 4 were from the children’s sector.
- As a result of the above, responses from organisations should be viewed as a whole, rather than split by organisation type.
- Most district/boroughs had a handful of responses therefore, it is not possible to view organisational responses by geography. It is also likely that these organisations would have clients that cross district/borough boundaries so also it may not be appropriate to view the responses geographically either.

Survey Findings

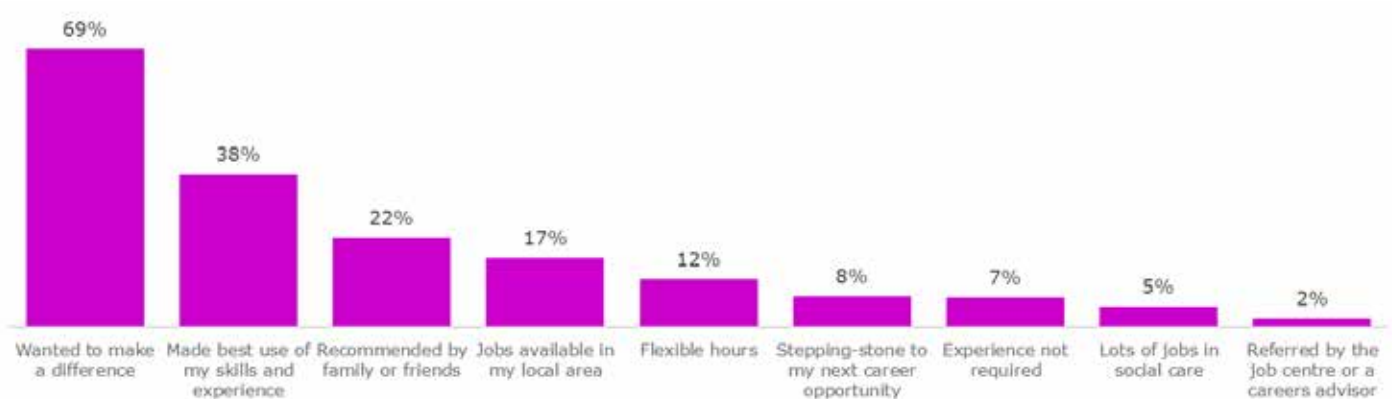
Working in Social Care

- The most frequently cited sectors that respondents had worked in prior to social care were 'retail and sales' and 'education' – possible employment sectors to target with future recruitment campaigns.
- Wanting to 'make a difference' was the most common reason why participants were attracted to working in the sector and remained one of the most important factors once working in the sector.

Almost half (49%) of respondents working in social care had always worked in the sector. For those that had worked elsewhere, 'retail and sales' was the most popular sector to have worked in previously (30 respondents) followed by 'education' (12 respondents). Whilst this may provide employment sectors to focus on, focus group attendees and national research highlights the importance of getting the 'right' candidates with the necessary values and behaviours. Therefore, care would need to be taken to ensure candidates exhibited the required values and behaviours.

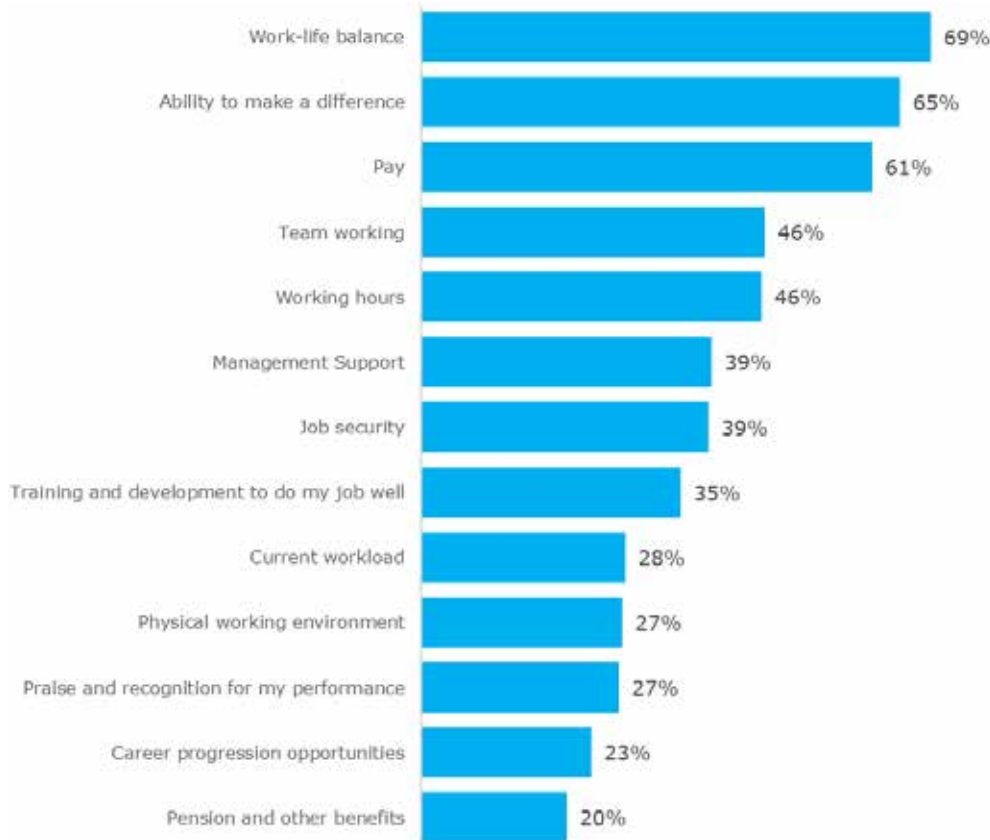
The most common reason why respondents were attracted to working in the sector (Figure 3), was because they wanted to make a difference; cited by 69% (162 individuals). Being able to make the best use of skills and experience was the next most common factor; mentioned by 38% (89 individuals).

Figure 3: Reasons for attraction to work in social care (%)



Respondents were asked which factors were most important to them (Figure 4), with work-life balance (69%), ability to make a difference (65%) and pay (61%) regarded as highly important. Therefore, 'making a difference' appears to be key to both entering and remaining in a career in social care.

Figure 4: Most important factors to survey respondents (%)



Job Satisfaction and Advocacy

- Respondents reported high levels of job satisfaction and advocacy – something to be celebrated and built upon.
- Work-life balance and pay were the areas of lowest satisfaction yet regarded as highly important – potential areas of focus to further increase job satisfaction and improve staff retention.

Overall, almost eight in 10 (78%) respondents were satisfied with their current job and over six in 10 (62%) would recommend social care as a place to work (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Job Satisfaction and Advocacy of survey respondents (%)



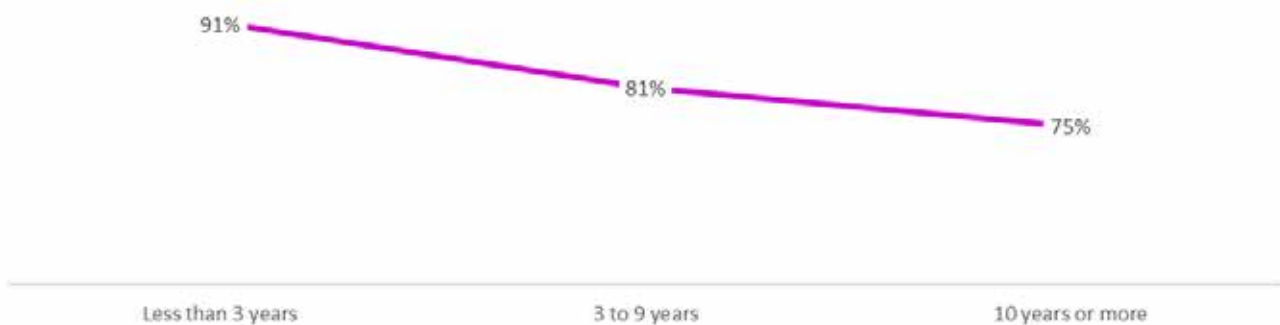
The aspect of their job that the greatest proportion of respondents were satisfied with was team working (82%) with comments about receiving; “good support from my peers...good work ethos and teamwork spirit”.

Many respondents were also satisfied with their physical work environment (81%) and their ability to make a difference (80%); “I get the pleasure of making a positive difference/contribution to the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in society”.

The aspects that the largest number of employees were dissatisfied with were pay (39%), work-life balance (27%) and workload (26%). A common theme emerging from free text comments related to “little pay, large amounts of responsibility, very little recognition”. This is further supported by focus group and national research findings about disparity with other sectors, who it was felt get the same pay for less responsibility.

Work-life balance and workload issues often focused on not being able to make plans due to long hours and having to take on extra unexpected shifts or hours due to staff shortages. This meant respondents sometimes felt they were unable to make personal plans and therefore had no work-life balance.

Figure 6: % of respondents who reported being satisfied in their current role by length of service within that role



Further analysis highlighted that for this survey cohort, the longer people had worked in their existing role, the less satisfied they appeared to be (Figure 6). Also, the factors that respondents were generally dissatisfied with; workload, work-life balance and pay, were the same issues regardless of their length of service.

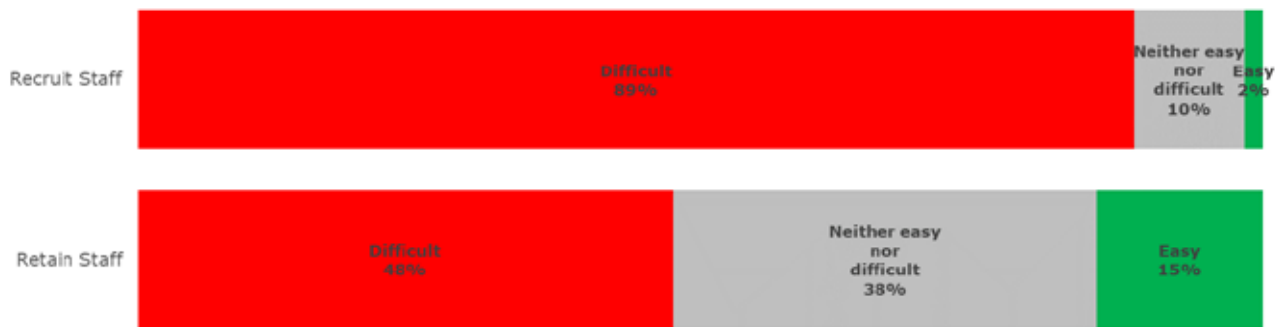
With 42% of the local adult social care workforce having worked in their existing role for three or more years, and the average length of service for Staffordshire County Council’s children’s social care staff being just over 8 years, understanding and influencing long-term satisfaction will be key to improving staff retention.

Recruitment and Retention

- Recruiting staff into social care roles is reported to be more of a challenge, than retention. Yet difficulties are reported with both.
- Satisfaction appears to be important to retaining staff, with satisfied staff reporting being unlikely to leave their role; therefore, looking for ways to drive up employee satisfaction will be key.

Almost nine in 10 (89%) responding organisations suggested they found it difficult to recruit social care staff and almost half (48%) suggested they found it difficult to retain staff.

Figure 7: Level of difficulty associated with recruitment and retention of social care staff (%)



A range of roles were cited by organisation respondents as being hard to recruit to, however, 'care staff' (16 organisations) and 'community care/home care staff' (six organisations) were cited more than others. Few organisations provided details of specific roles in which it was hard to retain staff, with numbers too low to draw any conclusions.

Note: The role types mentioned above should be treated with some caution, as this may be more of a reflection of the type of organisations responding, than true difficulty across the wider sector.

Employees considering leaving their role or the sector

Responses from individuals about the likelihood of them leaving their current role, or the sector, within the next 12 months, support those made by organisations about the difficulties with staff retention. Two in 10 (20%) respondents suggested they were likely to leave their role and just under two in 10 (19%) likely to leave the social care sector completely, within the next year (Figure 8).

Satisfaction appears to be important to retaining staff, with 116 (90%) of those saying they were unlikely to leave their role being satisfied with their current job; therefore, looking for ways to drive up employee satisfaction will be important.

Figure 8: Likelihood of remaining in current role or the sector in next 12 months (%)



Survey respondents that said they were likely to leave in the next 12 months most frequently cited pay/ financial reasons, retirement and pressure, stress and health issues as the reason. However, numbers likely to leave are small and do not provide a robust evidence base. Looking instead at the reasons why employees reported being unlikely to leave, provides a more robust set of factors that we might want to encourage more of to improve retention.

The top reason why respondents reported being unlikely to leave their roles was that enjoyed what they did (52 responses, 40%), often despite the pressure and hours; *“I love my job and the amazing team I work with; the last 2 years have been harder than the other 18 years put together, but I saw some of the most amazing commitment and dedication from people that just continues to fill me with job satisfaction”*.

The other two reasons that were mentioned most often were teamwork; having *“great support from my team and a very supportive manager”* (16 responses, 12%) and that they were settled or had been in the profession a long time (14 responses, 11%); *“I am committed to my role and will stay here until retirement in 8 years times”*.

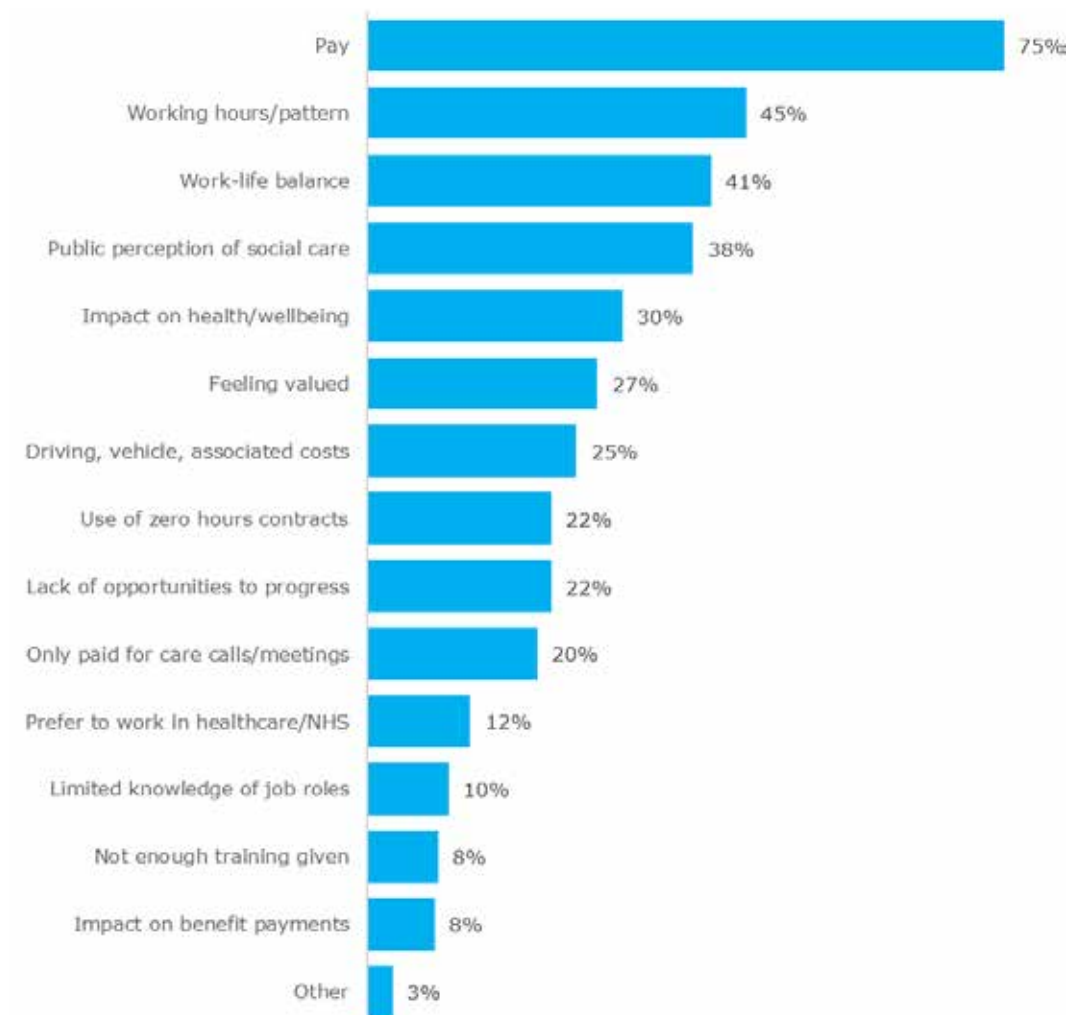
The top reasons why people would be unlikely to leave the sector were very similar to the reasons why they would not leave their role; enjoying what they did (43 responses, 30%), rewarding work where they were able to make a difference (12 responses, 9 %) and age/retirement meaning it was not the time to be starting in a new sector (11 responses, 8%).

Recruitment and Retention Challenges and Opportunities

- Challenges and opportunities to attracting and retaining staff were fairly similar; with the biggest challenge for both being pay - one of the main reasons for job dissatisfaction too.
- Unsurprisingly over two thirds of respondents (69%) mentioned better pay and benefits as a way to improve working in the sector; with the next most common suggestions only being mentioned by 17% of respondents; improved payments for expenses, better training and progression opportunities and improving the imagine of the sector.

Survey participants were asked what they thought the main barriers or challenges to attracting and retaining staff in social care were. Pay came out as the biggest challenge by a notable margin; highlighted by 75% of respondents (Figure 9). Individuals also cited the two, possibly linked, issues of working hours or patterns (45%) and work-life balance (41%) as the next biggest barriers.

Figure 9: Challenges to attracting and retaining staff (%)

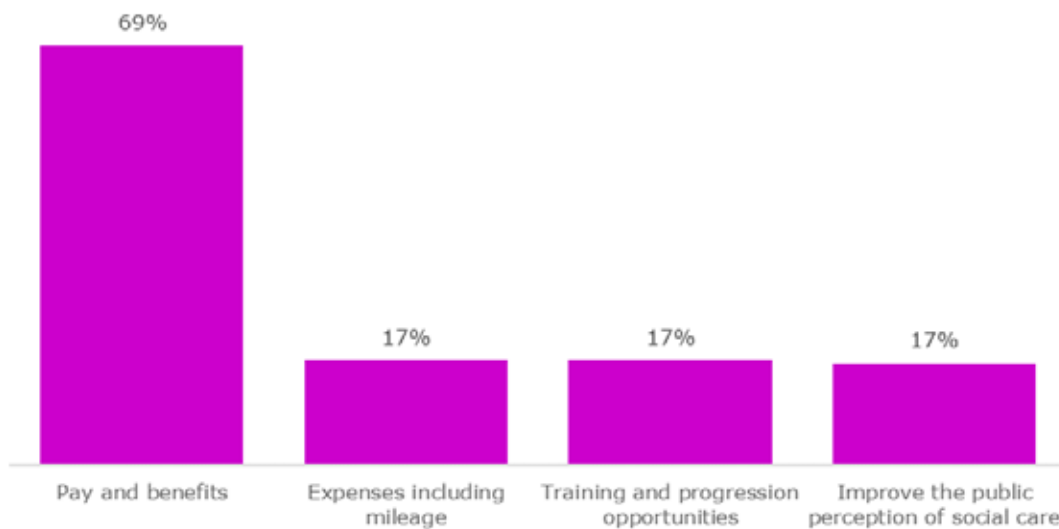


Responding organisations also thought the biggest challenge for recruitment was pay (79% or 48 organisations), followed by travel costs (54% or 33 organisations).

Responding employees were asked to expand on their answers, providing suggestions for how to improve working in the sector or encourage more entrants, with 173 (72%) providing additional comments.

These 'free text' comments were analysed and categorised into several themes with Figure 10 showing the top four themes and the percentage of respondents that mentioned them. Perhaps unsurprisingly the top suggestions were closely linked to tackling some of the main barriers cited.

Figure 10: Top four things that would improve working in social care or encourage more people to join the sector (%)



Several comments around pay were linked to creating parity with NHS staff; a theme also arising in the focus groups and national research. However, there was an understanding that increasing rates of pay would be difficult. Another reoccurring theme around the issue of pay was the difficulties associated with the cost-of-living increase and the increasing cost of work-related travel and that pay was not keeping pace.

Retention challenges were similar to those for recruitment, but public perception was not seen as such a challenge once staff were working in the sector, with work-life balance becoming the third biggest challenge instead.

Support for Recruitment and Retention

- Being able to offer better rates of pay, was seen by responding organisations, as the most useful support to aid them with recruitment and retention.
- Transport related expenses also provided an opportunity to make the sector more attractive, as well as improving the general image of the sector to help make workers feel more valued.
- Organisations also suggested that support with the actual recruitment process itself would be helpful.

Organisations suggested the most helpful form of support to aid recruitment would be being able to offer better pay and conditions (25 organisations). However, support with the actual recruitment process was also mentioned by 11 responding organisations and nine mentioned that being able to offer support with transport costs would help.

Suggestions around helpful recruitment process support included help with where to advertise, more free advertising, support with the promotion of the social care sector and creation of a better public image, more jobs fairs/events and financial assistance with recruitment and marketing.

Being able to make staff feel more valued and to offer recognition and rewards were also thought of as possible initiatives.

Past Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

- The most common areas where responding organisations had tried some successful initiatives in support of recruitment and retention were pay, making staff feel more valued and support with transport costs. These initiatives could be learned from and further developed.
- Not all initiatives were costly; just saying thank you and running schemes such as employee of the month have made staff feel more valued in local organisations and have aided with retention.

Out of the 62 responding organisations, 35 (56%) provided details of initiatives their organisation had tried which they felt had made a positive impact on the recruitment or retention of staff.

The top three areas where organisations had tried some successful initiatives were pay, making staff feel more valued and transport costs. These initiatives could be learned from and further developed for use across the county.

- 14 organisations mentioned initiatives around pay with themes including increasing rates of pay, uplifts for hard to fill vacancies and regularly reviewing pay.
- 10 organisations mentioned ways in which they had made staff feel more valued, and these were not always expensive. For example, saying thank you and initiatives such as employee of the month. There was also a theme of little treats for staff for example ice creams, the occasional packed lunch, little thank you parcels and also just a little bit of time and maybe a drink (tea/coffee) if they had been involved in a difficult appointment.
- Nine organisations mentioned initiatives around transport, these were quite varied but included things like: paid travel time, paid MOTs, allowances towards motor insurance, fuel allowances and mileage rate increases.

Other suggestions with five or more responses; introducing bonuses (6 responses), providing incentives (6 responses), and improving or creating training and career pathways (5 responses).

Prospective Employees

The engagement programme also sought to gain the views of the prospective workforce in order to understand any barriers they saw to entering the sector, and understand more about where they looked for jobs and what social care roles they might be interested in.

The prospective workforce was seen as a broad group of individuals including young people in schools and colleges, people returning to work after breaks in their career, as well as those already working in different sectors who might want to work in the social care sector instead.

Just 22 individuals looking to enter a career in social care responded to the survey, with numbers therefore being too small to draw any firm conclusions. In addition, approximately 20 young people took part in focused discussions to supplement these responses.

In those that responded, there did appear to be a preference for working in children's social care over adults and again being attracted to social care as they felt it meant they would be able to make a difference.

Careers websites, the County Council website and University websites were suggested as the most common place to look for information about social care careers in Staffordshire.

Appendix 1 – Staffordshire Social Care Workforce Focus Group Themes

Face-to-face focus group sessions were held as part of the wider engagement programme, with approximately 70 participants.

The findings support those from the two surveys, with similar key themes:

- Staff saw social care as a profession which, whilst increasingly challenging, could be incredibly rewarding – although they did not always feel valued.
- Work in social care was not always seen as being a profession equal to NHS care or seen as a long-term career prospect.
- Due to the complexity and strain of the work, it was felt that there was a need to ensure that there was always good peer support and access to support for staff wellbeing.
- Levels of pay present a considerable challenge and are not seen as competitive, with other sectors offering comparable pay and conditions, with less responsibility.
- Ensuring that there is a long-term view for training and development, and rewarding staff for development and progression, could help with retention, and also help improve the view of social care as a long-term professional career choice.

Working in the care sector

There was a consensus that roles had evolved over time and that work in the sector had become more complex. Despite this, many still had the drive and passion to continue. Groups discussed the sense of reward from supporting others, which fits with the level of importance given to being able to ‘make a difference’ in the survey responses.

Some younger people held the view that the reward for social work was quite limited, so this might be a challenge when looking towards the long-term future workforce.

Perception of the care sector

There was a view that care within the social care sector was not viewed as equal to care provided in NHS settings, particularly that nursing in the care sector was not deemed comparable to nursing within the NHS.

Some suggested that nursing degrees should include placements in care settings as a requirement, to challenge and change this perception.

Linked to recruitment, focus groups discussed that job centres sometimes promoted care roles as a ‘stop gap’ whilst people looked for other jobs, and not as a serious profession or career choice. Due to the high number of vacancies, it was felt that sometimes the job centres encouraged people to apply for ‘application practice’ who were not appropriate for caring roles – which appeared to further de-value the role.

Recruitment

There was a shared view, that roles in the care sector were not often viewed as being professional roles. This view is underpinned by low levels of pay, and a perception that roles do not present a serious long-term career option with progression.

The level of competition at a similar pay level is also seen as a challenge, with individuals able to find jobs with comparable pay, but far less responsibility and complexity in other sectors.

There was a feeling amongst some that within nursing, the NHS was the first choice for many, and it was hard to compete. Similarly, there was a feeling that agencies were also a preferred choice, as they could offer better pay and flexibility.

One focus group raised challenges with the timeframe for completing vetting processes before new staff could start – with a comment that sometimes, applicants would secure work elsewhere because the DBS clearing process was taking so long.

Retention and resilience

In terms of retention and resilience, it was suggested that there was a need for good support for mental health and well-being, and a need to build strong team dynamics with effective peer support. There was some suggestion that this could be achieved through good reflective practice.

Good resilience and good retention seem to occur where staff knew that they were valued. Several felt that there was value in focusing on ongoing development, and rewarding development well – e.g. increasing pay in line with additional training or qualifications completed. One focus group mentioned the use of retention rewards for continued service.

There was also widespread concern that retention was made difficult because wages are often not very competitive.

Particularly amongst managers, there was a feeling that there was a considerable amount of bureaucracy but very little peer support across settings.

Development and training

Some felt that regular mandatory training refreshes were demotivating for staff, particularly when training related to things that staff already did well and had done for some time.

Training and development often related to skills needed in the 'here and now' and did not have a long-term view. To build resilience, motivate and retain staff, there was a feeling that there must be a view on longer-term development and upskilling. This longer-term view should also consider succession planning; understanding that skilled staff may move on, but this should not leave settings in a skills deficit.

Some felt there was a need for staff to undertake more non-care related training, including improving digital skills, and in some cases improving administration and back-office skills, so that managers were able to delegate appropriately.

Additionally, there was a sense that train the trainer courses may be beneficial, so that upskilling could happen flexibly and internally. This would also boost the confidence and value of skilled staff providing the training.

Appendix 2 – National Research Review

Three papers have been incorporated into this review, with the second paper itself being a review of over 190 pieces of relevant literature:

1. [A People Plan for Social Care](#) (2021, Institute of Health and Social Care Management)
2. [Evidence Review and Sector Consultation](#) (2021, Skills for Care)
3. [Recruitment and Retention: Secrets of Success](#) (2017, Skills for Care)

The key findings support the findings from our local engagement, with the following main themes:

- Careful and considered recruitment is important; ensuring the right values and behaviours are found – skills can be taught more easily.
- There needs to be honesty in recruitment about the reality of the job, so people know what to expect, to improve retention.
- Recruitment campaigns need to go further to address negative perceptions of working in the sector and to try and see a career in social care as equal to one in the NHS.
- Challenges exist around pay and responsibility, with disparity with other sectors. Comparative rates of pay would potentially help staff feel valued.
- Learning and development needs to interest the individual, with plans to help them see their potential future progression.
- Mental health and wellbeing support is key; ensuring that staff are mentally healthy for work goes hand-in-hand with a positive workplace culture, with links to better retention and quality of care.

Attracting and recruiting staff

Building a strong reputation for being a good employer, with existing staff spreading that message, may encourage applications for vacancies.

Values-based approaches to recruitment can carry a lot of merit. Finding staff with the right values and behaviours can be more important than finding staff who are already experienced and qualified; skills can be taught but personal attributes (kindness, compassion, reliability, honesty, etc.) cannot.

Smaller providers can struggle to recruit because they cannot afford to invest in recruitment campaigns. National recruitment and sector promotion campaigns, which could benefit smaller providers, are sometimes disjointed, and do not have a coordinated strategy – so are not always successful. There is a feeling that recruitment campaigns do not go far enough to tackle and address negative public perceptions of the sector.

Background checks, including DBS clearance can be a lengthy process. In some instances, candidates have decided to secure alternative employment rather than continue to wait.

Job satisfaction

Developing a positive culture, where staff are supported and valued and have opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge, reinforces the message that working in adult social care is a good career choice.

There is a possible case to be made for recognising the competency of individuals, to avoid them having to repeat the same mandatory training year-on-year. This would also show recognition of staff skill.

Pay and reward

Employers with lower turnover recognised the value in offering pay above the National Living Wage, or at least above the local minimum. Paying competitively helps ensure that staff feel valued and fairly compensated for the work that they do, which can have a positive impact on retention rates.

There is some feeling that pay does not reflect the level of responsibility an individual in social care had, when compared to similar levels of responsibility within the NHS. A further report (Unfair for Care, 2021) suggested that many social care professionals would receive 39% higher pay in roles with the same skillset and responsibility in publicly funded roles.

This links with national concerns about retention, where staff can find roles in other industries with similar levels of pay, but with lower levels of personal responsibility.

Challenges with pay are caused by a range of factors: recruitment difficulties can result in the use of expensive agency staff – which require more money from wage budgets than directly employed staff; levels of local authority funding are constrained by national settlements, and commissioners must work within the available budgets and select the most cost effective providers – the result is that income for those with local authority contracts is essentially capped. Equally some providers are in the sector as a profitable industry choice, and similarly to other industries, limit distribution of funds back into the workforce.

There is a view that increasing pay alone, is not the answer; increases in pay and benefits must come with skills and experience, and demonstratable quality improvements and performance.

Workforce development

Where development tends to dovetail best with retention, is in identifying learning and development needs which are of personal interest to the individual, as well as being important to their development.

It appears essential to use a range of approaches to identify development opportunities, including inductions, structured supervision, performance and development plans, and reflections on practice (both individually and as a group).

Working with individuals to create personal development and career plans can help with staff retention, particularly around being able to see their own potential progression within the sector. There is a view that there should also be a greater focus on developing leadership skills.

Using eLearning courses as the sole approach to training and development can be detrimental; it can feel less professional than face-to-face sessions and provide less opportunity for peer-to-peer reflection. There is some concern that eLearning does not become embedded, and that a blended approach is more effective.

As well as formal training, employers with lower staff turnover talked about the success of using opportunities for informal training and knowledge transfer; using mentoring and buddying, as well as group knowledge sharing sessions and exercises.

It was reflected that there are often funding streams available to develop staff, and that effort should be made to best identify these and seek out opportunities for staff.

Working hours and patterns

There is value in being as flexible as possible when setting working hours; different shift patterns suit different types of workers, and the indication is that employers who can accommodate this are rewarded with more loyal staff.

Public perception of the sector

At a national level, the sector itself recognises a serious challenge around public perception and portrayal of social care; which affects both the ability to attract staff, and how existing staff feel about remaining in the sector.

The public image of social care can be demotivating for staff, ultimately, there is a feeling that more needs to be done to change the negative perception the public holds of social care and this will only be achieved if popular culture references, news and media and political perceptions also change.

Publicity activity focusing on the NHS, while vital, is believed to have inadvertently diluted the importance of the wider care sector, and further perpetuated the idea that the care sector is held in lower regard than the health sector. There is a feeling that this has been exacerbated by the slow integration of health and social care.

There is a feeling that while “good news” stories from within the health sector tend to reach the press, those from the care sector do not.

Due to the low levels of pay, there is a perception that those employed in the sector are unskilled and see work in the social care sector as a “stepping-stone” to another job or sector, with no long-term intention to stay in social care.

Retaining staff

At a national level, the same challenges (perception of the sector, pay, progression) which affect the ability to recruit, also affect the ability to retain staff once in the workforce.

For new recruits, the volume and frequency of “tick box” mandatory training can be off-putting, with a view amongst some providers that some mandatory training courses do not provide staff with the actual skills they need.

It is important to be honest about the realities of the job, this appears to help ensure you get the right applicants and ensure that the people you employ are a good match with the ethos and values of social care.

Respecting and valuing staff, investing in learning and development, embedding the organisation’s values, and celebrating achievements all go a long way to improving staff retention.

Considering the mental health and wellbeing of staff in and outside of work is important. Ensuring staff are mentally fit for work goes hand in hand with creating a positive workplace culture, has links to better retention, and quality of care.

Measuring staff satisfaction can be useful in identifying ways to further develop the culture of the organisation, but whether this is done formally or informally, the crucial part is to be seen to listen and act upon what staff tell you.