

**Review of workforce strategy
business case for Slough
Children First
Report by People Scrutiny Panel Task
and Finish Group**

January 2023

Forward by Chair

Members choose the topic of workforce strategy as an area of focus when reviewing the SCF draft business plan due to the significant impact this has on improvements to services for children and families. Members have received reports in the past highlighting various strategies to recruit and retain staff but have not always understood the reasons why these strategies have not led to improvements in the services.

The group would like to thank SCF staff and the DfE commissioner for attending the meetings and providing members with full and frank responses to questions. Members would also like to thank the officers who assisted with the process. Finally I would like to thank my fellow group members for the time commitment to reviewing a significant amount of material and to identifying key lines of enquiry.

I am looking forward to hearing the debate at the Panel and at Cabinet and updates in the future on whether and how the recommendations have been taken forward.

Councillor Naveeda Qaseem

Executive Summary

The Task and Finish Group on reviewing SCF's business plan was convened in October 2022, following a recommendation from Cabinet in the same month. The group reviewed documentation from SCF and SBC and national public documents, as well as held meetings with various stakeholders.

The Group decided to focus on workforce strategy, however the recommendations are wider than this due to the helpful contributions made by participants in meetings and learning from elsewhere.

All individuals involved and all organisations involved in delivering services for children and young people want to do their best for children. Many staff are motivated by the positive difference they can make to individual children's lives. However, services operate as part of a complex system and to ensure that collectively these services are providing cost effective and high quality support requires the various agencies to work together in partnership at both a strategic and operational level. For this reason the recommendations are split into recommendations for the wider partnership of agencies comprising the children's workforce, recommendations for the Council who still retains duties and responsibilities in relation to services to children and also has responsibility for holding SCF to account for its performance and to SCF.

Group composition

Members of the Task and Finish Group were:

Councillor Qaseem – Chair of the task and finish group and Chair of People Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Puja Bedi

Councillor Brooker

Councillor Sandhu

Lead Officers – Peter Robinson – Finance Lead, Sarah Wilson – Principal Lawyer

Scrutiny Lead Officer – Alexander Polak – Head of Governance and Scrutiny

Democratic Services – Manize Talukdar

Context

Why did we set up the group?

The Council's children's social care functions have been provided by a separate company under statutory intervention of the Department for Education (DfE) since 2015. In 2021, the entity was re-named Slough Children First (SCF) and changed so it became wholly owned by the Council.

Under a new service delivery contract, SCF is required to prepare a draft annual business plan and under their articles of association, this requires approval by the Council as a reserved matter. Last year's business plan was submitted late in the year and there were concerns about the deliverability of aspects of it. Cabinet approved the plan in February 2022 on an interim basis and there was no opportunity for the People Scrutiny Panel to review it.

The business plan for 2023/24 was submitted in draft in July 2022 and requested a significant increase in funding for the financial years 2023/24 through to 2025/26. Due to the level of increased funding and concerns about deliverability of the "invest to save" proposals, the DfE commissioned Mutual Ventures to undertake a review of the business plan.

The People Scrutiny Panel is the designated scrutiny committee to deal with all matters relating to children's social care. This Task and Finish Group was set up to consider the draft business plan and the Mutual Ventures report..

What Were We Looking at?

On 9 November 2022 a meeting was held to scope the review. Officers gave advice to focus on a specific area of the business plan and to do an in-depth review, rather than try to review the whole plan. The Group came to a decision that it should not seek to replicate the work of Mutual Ventures and wanted to focus on a topic where they could add value based on members' local knowledge. The group decided to focus on workforce strategy. Although it had been an area of focus in previous scrutiny meetings members were not sure they had ever got beneath the issue and why the plans and assurances given had not led to improvements. It also linked to financial sustainability and quality of practice.

Who Did We Speak To?

Between November and December 2022, the Group convened meetings and interviews to gather as much information and seek as many views as were required to make recommendations. Members were keen to hear from staff with SCF, including frontline workers and middle managers. The Group felt that they had heard the views of senior managers, both in the draft business plan and business cases and in formal scrutiny meetings. They therefore asked to meet with members of front-line staff and for senior managers not to attend the meetings, however a draft of this report was sent to them for comments.

The Group spoke to the following people:

- Paul Moffat – DfE Commissioner
- A group of team managers

- The Virtual School Head
- An apprentice who was also a care leaver
- A group of managers, including the Head of HR, supporting on practice learning and development

How Did We Engage With People?

The Task and Finish Group wanted to use different ways of engagement based on the different interviewees. The methods used were:

- Virtual interview: This was used for the DfE Commissioner
- Face to face meeting in SCF offices for group of managers
- Face to face meeting in SCF offices with apprentice and Virtual School Head
- Face to face meeting in SCF offices with staff leading on HR and social worker training and development

We also had email correspondence and sent a draft of our report to the following:

- SCF Board of Directors, including statutory Director of Children’s Services
- DfE Commissioner
- Lead Member for Children’s Services and Lifelong Learning

What Did We Read?

The Group was provided with a large amount of background information to undertake this review. The documents that were used were:

National and publicly available documents:

Centre for Governance and Scrutiny – 10 questions guidance
 ADCS Building a workforce that works for all children
 Sunderland City Council Ofsted inspection report

SCF documents:

Draft business plan July 2022 v.1.7
 Draft business cases, including prevention and early help business case, targeted help business case, edge of care business case
 Draft workforce business case – Enhanced retention offer – Frontline case holding social work – July 2022
 Workforce Strategy Headlines Oct 2022
 Workforce Strategy Group TOR 3.0
 Revenue Business Case – SCF – Staffing savings – undated but for 2022/23 to 2024/25
 Exit interview data
 Minutes and other documentation relating to staff forums and feedback

SBC documents:

Report to task and finish group on SCF draft business plan and Mutual Ventures review
 Cabinet report – October 2023

DfE documents:

Key themes

National Context

National pressures

In March 2019, the Association of Directors of Children's Services published a position paper "Building a workforce that works for all children".

This paper emphasises the critical role that the wider "children's workforce" plays, which includes teachers, sports coaches, school nurses and police officers. Appendix 1 details the various roles in the children's workforce and how they interact with one another. As responsibility for these services sit across a multitude of government departments, it risks creating a siloed context at a national level and cuts for funding in these areas impact on the ability for the system to improve outcomes for children and families.

Career progression routes throughout children's services should be championed nationally, as well as locally.

Children's services, in parallel with adults' services, have moved to adopt strengths or restorative based approaches to practice. To work this needs to be applied across the whole children's workforce, not just children's social care.

The use of restorative and relationship-based practices to support children and families is an example in which professionals seek to work with children and families so they can find their own solutions to problems rather than the state intervening further in family life.

The issues facing children and families are multi-faceted and cannot be the responsibility of statutory services alone. This requires greater investment in the early years' workforce and leadership development for aspirant and serving directors of children's services. This includes a greater focus and investment in training black, Asian and minority ethnic leaders for the future and opportunities for new apprenticeships.

The role and expectation of child and family social work has changed significantly in the thirty years since the Children Act 1989. There is an increased level of contact to children's social care and increased prevalence of poor parental mental ill-health, domestic abuse and substance misuse. These challenges cannot be met by social work alone and there needs to be a focus on and development of the wider children's workforce to meet these needs at the earliest possible opportunity. The introduction of apprenticeships for children, young people and families' practitioners

and managers aimed specifically at staff working in early help and residential care roles offers a new route into the sector.

Families with children face higher levels of poverty than any other demographic group and living in poverty puts children at a greater risk of multiple individual and family-level vulnerabilities such as domestic abuse, adult substance misuse and poor mental health.

Schools are the eyes and ears of the safeguarding system and increases in the number of pupils being excluded, “off-rolled”, becoming home educated or attending an illegal school continues to grow, putting vulnerable children at risk.

In a review of local area SEND inspections, Ofsted found that joint commissioning of services is underdeveloped in many areas and that the training of health staff on the SEND reforms has been variable.

Youth services are a key part of early help and should be resourced sufficiently, particularly at a time of rising levels of serious youth violence and criminal exploitation.

A shared language is needed to seek to empower children and families and seek to change the narrative around the most vulnerable, particularly children in care.

A simple, yet aspirational and shared ambitions for all children to be able to say they:

- Live in a safe environment, free from poverty
- Are supported at the earliest opportunity
- Have the opportunity to thrive in life
- Have access to an education that supports them to grow and develop
- Are listened to and valued.

Learning from Sunderland City Council

Sunderland City Council has made highly impressive improvement incrementally from its inspections in 2015 and 2018 of inadequate to an overall grading of Outstanding in July 2021. The improvements include:

- Early help provision being comprehensive, well embedded and an innovative multi-agency service able to meet increasingly complex levels of need.
- Workers’ persistence in developing relationships and use of tools from the chosen model of practice to work with parents and children to help parents understand what life is like for their children living with issues such as parental mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse.

- There is a robust approach for children and young people when they are at risk of exploitation with a facilitated joined-up approach from a wide range of agencies such as different police teams, social care and housing and robust tracking and multi-agency procedures for children missing education and effectively home-educated.

Hearing the voice of the child is an exceptional strength in Sunderland, with their voices resounding in records and clearly informing future planning.

- The senior leadership have transformed the culture of the children's company, focusing on quality of practice and ensuring consistently good outcomes for children and young people. Staff across the council and the multi-agency partnerships are hugely focused on seeking to identify vulnerabilities and needs, providing support for children and families before problems escalate.
- Senior managers have focused on recruiting a permanent and excellent set of social workers to replace the short-term and agency staff that were previously in post. Highly experienced managers have been recruited and supported with well-focused training and mentoring opportunities and there is training of caring and skilled staff to become social workers. Post qualification support and training is benefitting the service and families.

Senior leaders and elected members are aspirational corporate parents, focusing on improving the lives and experiences of cared for children and care experienced young people.

- There is increased participation of children in training and all council departments consider the impact of their work on children, giving a palpable sense across the council that cared for children and care experienced young people are "our children".
- All social workers were complementary about working in the children's company, describing being well supported by visible and approachable managers. They all have reasonable caseloads and are supported to carry out innovative and direct work with children. They receive reflective supervision and appropriate challenge to improve practice.

Slough Context

Partnership working

There needs to be a strong sense of place, that staff are part of something bigger. This needs to be considered at a strategic and operational level. Strategically the partnership needs to consider the recruitment pressures and options to provide a

local offer to promote Slough as a place. Senior leaders should have a coherent message and joined up strategy. Local investment in the local economy should be explored to provide future public servants.

Options for care leavers to take on apprenticeships across the wider partnership should be considered. The partnership should be ambitious and consider large numbers of young people who can be supported, including care leavers or care experienced young people. The local message should be about public service being really positive.

Operationally the focus should be on how the system operates as a whole. There must be a clear role for teachers and health workers in understanding a family's needs.

Funding levels

The baseline budget needs a review, part of which has been undertaken by the Mutual Ventures review. It needs to be recognised that if other parts of the Council are not where they need to be, e.g. SEND services or housing, pressure will be felt in children's social care.

SCF Context

Support from leaders and managers

This is critical to retention of staff. Staff will stay (and return) to an organisation that supports and values them, even if neighbouring boroughs are paying more.

Newly qualified social worker had a late visit and got home at 10pm, manager sent a cake to say "thank you – you went above and beyond".

Social workers need to feel safe and supported in making decisions and carrying risk.

My Head of Service is amazing, stayed because of HoS – compassionate, supportive, empathetic.

It is positive to note that there has been a permanent appointment to the Executive Director of People – Children / Chief Executive of SCF. In the past five years, there have been eight people in this role. This is exhausting for staff and creates uncertainty. The individual needs to demonstrate emotional intelligence, be

someone that staff can trust, who will advocate on their behalf and puts children at centre of decision-making. There is evidence to show that good leadership creates good management, and this will attract and retain staff. There needs to be a consensus approach between SBC, SCF, DfE and DLUHC commissioners. All need to start talking about things that can be done well.

Message from leadership team must be
“we care about you, value you as
practitioners, but also as individuals”

Support during transition periods have not always been managed well. Staff transitioning from council into SCF did not have clear communication on whether their roles would be protected and there would be a restructure.

Successful recruitment and retention strategies

This requires consistency in leadership, a clear model of practice, lots of events recognising work and staff talking with pride about the organisation. Staff like to work for an organisation that values them and will stay even if there is a possibility of earning more money elsewhere.

A need for investment in staff and managers. For managers, there should be a learning and development programme – how to build morale, tackle under-performance and sickness.

Senior leaders should be visible and have a consistent approach.

A “Grow your own” strategy should be considered. It is positive to encourage people from the local area as this builds up loyalty, but there should be a balance. If too many people are recruited from the local area, it risks not encouraging applicants from outside to bring new ideas in. At present there is insufficient evidence to show that “growing your own” will reduce the turnover of staff.

A Social Worker Academy model relates to strategies to allow unqualified staff to train. It represents a long-term approach and is in its infancy in SCF.

The increased cost of living could mean more staff wish to work locally to reduce their financial burden. SCF must ensure that it still maintains high standards and should consider what is the right way for Slough for the next 5-10 years in terms of workforce strategy based on national pressures and the local context.

A recent advertising campaign for a junior Level 4 role led to 97 applicants. SCF promoted the positives about working for Slough. The cohort of children in Slough deserve motivated and skilled staff and that is where the focus should be.

Word of mouth and networking is a strong informal strategy. Staff are recommending that their friends come to work for Slough, two individuals recently joined having had a poor experience elsewhere.

Community Care – could not get any positive stories about Slough, had a conversation with them about changing the narrative of Slough.

Turnover is at lowest level for some time demonstrating that the current strategies are starting to have an impact. Overall turnover has now dropped to 25%. This is the result of the apprenticeship and step-up programme. No single team has less than 65% permanent staffing, which based on historic figures is a significant improvement and provides evidence that the current workforce strategies are started to show impact.

Different programmes for recruitment and retention should be implemented as opposed to a one size fits all. This includes the step-up programme, ASYE (newly qualified) and good links with universities. SCF have a positive relationship with the Buckinghamshire New University and are forming links with Brunel and Royal Holloway.

Newly qualified social workers – SCF has run recruitment campaigns twice a year for newly qualified roles to allow those who have undertaken placements in SCF to apply for a role. For more recent ASYE, responding to feedback, frontloaded training, understanding that the university experience has been largely virtual and people are not confident to do frontline work. 80% of placement students apply for a role in SCF and for the last cohort all those who applied secured a role with SCF.

The step-up programme is a DfE funded programme that has run for the last 7-8 years. A fast track to qualification for those who are changing career. There is a consortium across Berkshire and a link with the Bucks New University. All who have applied for ASYE role have been appointed. Started with four ASYE, but are now up to eight.

Overseas qualified staff need to be supported into senior practitioner roles to avoid losing them to other local authorities. Previous experience of a manager in Milton Keynes indicated it is rare for that authority to recruit externally and it gives opportunities to those in posts already to progress their career.

Mix of newly qualified/overseas to more experienced staff

No one size fits all. The balance depends on how experienced the managers are and the makeup of the team. Newly qualified social workers can be some of the best staff – need to ensure staff can rely on intuition and skills rather than focusing on procedure. Look at the whole team, if all have less than two years' experience, likely to not be appropriate. Risk that newly qualified are over cautious, rely on legal opinion, push for child protection measures, leading to too many children receiving statutory services.

Overseas trained staff can have lots of experience but need support to understand the UK legislative system and language and cultural differences. Terminology and understanding of what is appropriate in the UK system is important.

Training and development

The transformation team is in its second year as a result of DfE funding. With reduced capacity they have focused on safeguarding and the family support teams. It is important to hear practitioners' voice and the need to feel safe. This requires the first line manager group to be supported and that has a drip down effect. Funding for transformation or practice mentoring/improvement ends in March 2023 and no there is no budget for a principal social work role which is a risk.

Practice mentors and practice improvement team is invaluable for overseas qualified and AYSE staff.

Overseas recruitment has been successful, SCF now have three cohorts since starting the programme in September 2021. Have been successful in retaining recruits and this compares favourably with experienced of overseas qualified social workers in other areas. Need for tailored training to learn about practice in UK. Have weekly reflective groups to support workers, might focus on personal issues such as relocating and bringing family over, finding a property, using public transport, understanding tax system, emotional support. Support has improved since the first cohort, who had to spend first 10 days in a hotel due to lockdown restrictions.

The overseas qualified staff see passing probation as a big step. One of the managers bought a gift and a card for those qualifying to celebrate them passing probation.

Need to ensure SCF are valuing staff, so they see a future in the organisation. When in a role for 5-6 years, staff can feel frustrated that there are no opportunities to progress.

Benefit of working across the different teams and in particular spending time in the targeted early help service. Allows you to get to know what is around locally and community resources.

If there is a financial investment in training and development, staff should be required to pay this back if they leave within a certain number of years.

Impact on children

There needs to be less focus on the Ofsted judgement and more focus on impact on children. This does not mean that the judgement is not important or SCF or the Council should not continue to strive to be good, but the focus and performance data should capture the impact and voice of children. Children in residential placements with interim and short-term staff feel the impact and this can feel like their life is not much better than before, it may even be worse. SCF and the Council have responsibilities in relation to corporate parenting. A good parent should know their children: when vaccinations are due, attend parents evening, advocate for them. High turnover leads to a loss of corporate memory and lack of stability and can be very damaging for children.

Options to involve young people in workforce planning. This is not about a Children in Care Council, it is about putting young people at heart of decision-making. SCF should avoid being tokenistic, young people should be visible and able to articulate their impact in a non-aggressive and helpful way. Options to have young people involved in interviewing social workers, their voice incorporated into the training programme.

Families read the press, they don't feel safe and this acts as a barrier to building relationships and makes the job harder.

Need to change the narrative from money to keeping children safe. Impact of delay for children at risk of exploitation, children need really intensive work and wrap around support. The edge of care team would help. There used to be an Innovate team with domestic abuse and youth workers and staff valued this team.

The hub workers are incredible – working with families intensively on a one to one basis, but this is not about buildings, it is about working in a family hub.

Support for children in care and care leavers

Support for UASC is a concern with increasing numbers. Struggling to get local placements for children with no additional needs. 270 children in care and only 50 placements in the in-house fostering team. Struggling to find carers to foster teenagers and sibling groups. In Slough, historically difficult due to cost of living pressures and lack of spare rooms. Increase in family foster carers which is a court drive. Need to demonstrate to the court that every family member put forward have been considered. Historically assessments were not as solid as they could have been. Greater drive through courts to keep children within their family network.

Court required explanation as to why SCF could not find a local placement for children under 5 years.

Should be increased promotion and incentives to foster carers. Best way is via word of mouth and if existing foster carers were valued more, word will get out. Historic cuts to fees has reduced numbers – previously had 48 foster carers, now down to 22. However, do have foster carers who are being used by neighbouring authorities due to only having the ability to take one child and this not matching the need in Slough. Slough have bigger families, maybe 5, 6 or 7 children and older children. One example is Eastern European family with 13 children needing a respite placement.

“Don’t want to go home – I love you”
Child in care to new female foster
carer

Huge amount of time wasted on travelling to see children placed out of area.

Measure participation of children through attendance at conferences, but not via qualitative data. Lack of funding for advocacy, despite referrals being made. Reaching out to local companies, but Covid has impacted all charities.

Have an amazing service co-ordinator,
very creative reaching out to baby bank
for pyjama packs, books, chocolate,
sleeping bags, but outside of her role.

Opportunities for apprenticeships for care leavers is positive but has had to be widened this year due to a lack of applications. Understanding that some care leavers do not want to go to university and need opportunities to secure apprenticeships in a field of their choice is key.

An apprentice is being used to quality assure personal education plans. Good opportunity to learn from experience from a person who has been in care.

Supportive management is key to success for apprenticeships and supporting care leavers into employment. Need to feel supported when feeling over-whelmed or not well. Need to understand whole person, for example how they get to work and impact of working hours.

The Virtual school is supporting a wider group of young people at a strategic level. Includes training for social workers, mental health training, advice and guidance regarding SEND and an advice line. Monitoring attendance of young people, results

for those in need and under child protection plans is poor compared to children in care. Recognising barriers from not having an adult at home who is literate. This requires multi-agency working.

Young people in system do not always feel that their voice is heard. Need an open line of communication and if social workers change frequently, they do not have time to build a relationship. Children and young people do not want to have to repeat their story multiple times.

Improvements in personal education plans seeing voice of child very clearly – has its own section for comments to be added. In the annual report, responded to feedback on transition from primary to secondary and secondary to training.

Children and young people do not want to have to repeat their story multiple times.

Capped / guaranteed caseloads

Important for newly qualified staff not to have too many cases. But can be an arbitrary figure. Whilst Ofsted talk about 14, not clear whether this is 14 children or families. May have a family of 5 children included in a caseload of 25-30. Need to understand what the figures mean. Need good performance management data. If team managers receive good data, they will manage performance. Must be used as a way of managing resources, not as a tool to criticise. Could have a caseload of 24 which a social worker is managing well and 5 will close in next couple of months. But if it encourages cases to be closed too early, they will end up back in the system. Look out for staff leaving due to high caseloads, social workers not completing tasks or filing reports on time or raising concerns about burn out.

Protected caseloads for overseas trained staff is necessary but can already see that many have got the skills to move into senior roles or take on more complex cases.

With reduced turnover and improved recruitment, caseloads are starting to come down to more manageable level.

Use of retention payments

Staff can easily move to other local authorities – many are easily commutable. Need to focus on offering something to encourage people not to leave, this is not always about cash and terms and conditions. Often about other things. Staff do choose to work for local authorities that are judged inadequate, and this is not necessarily a disincentive. Social workers are interested in getting good supervision, having a supportive legal service, clear role of partners in the wider system and whether senior leaders and politicians talk about the good job that is being done.

If Slough is in the middle of pay scales, focus on good supervision and management, support, good IT, caseloads, supportive colleagues, partnership working. If managers are spending percentage of their week fighting other parts of the system,

they will see this as wasted time. Need to see and hear about those issues and focus on fixing them.

Equality of pay is a concern, if there are bonuses and retainers in some areas, leads to other staff feeling devalued.

Why do you get £3,000 for being here for a year?

Many staff are invested in Slough, want to give back to the town. Not just people who live in Slough, as some staff live some distance away. Want to work for a forward-facing organisation that values you and provides flexible working arrangements.

Not always are financial package, staff value flexible working, teams decide on level of flexibility dependent on nature of role. Caseloads are a key factor, now the caseloads are coming down and increased staff stability, options for more flexibility.

Option to offer relocation package or loans that must be repaid may be preferable as encourages staff to invest in local area.

Support systems

Three different IT systems in place – children don't even have the same reference number in each and the detail is different in each system.

Pool cars not available, meaning overseas staff have had to finance own vehicle or rely on public transport. Some students not able to drive, options to fund driving lessons.

Relocation allowances – overseas workers can get up to £8,000 dependent on agency, repayable if choose to leave within 3 years.

Wellbeing support – offering specific wellbeing workshops – genuine long-term commitment to this, as the work is emotionally demanding. Hold open forum safe spaces to talk about experienced. Have a toolkit of support.

“Nobody offered wellbeing sessions like this before”
Social worker who joined recently

Recommendations

Partnership recommendations

1. Recognise the importance and value of the wider “children’s workforce” and develop a shared language across the partnership to empower children and families and to be aspirational and express a shared ambition. All agencies to develop performance metrics to measure these outcomes.
2. Explore opportunities to extend the education and employment support to children in need and under child protection plans, including having a multi-agency structured apprenticeship programme focused on the value of public service.
3. Embed a multi-agency partnership approach to supporting families impacted by the cost of living pressures, including ensuring all partners recognise the impact on children living in poverty.
4. The safeguarding partnership to review its arrangements for youth services.
5. Multi-agency partnership focus on early help and prevention.

SBC recommendations

6. Ensure that SBC is appropriately considering the risks to children and families when commissioning and designing services to target mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse.
7. Ensure SBC’s education service is appropriately supporting the private, voluntary and independent early years workforce to develop their skills in supporting vulnerable children and families.
8. SBC education services to work with schools to reduce prevalence of children missing education, inappropriate home schooling and exclusions and off-rolling.
9. SBC to review its capacity and resources for joint commissioning of services with health.
10. All council departments to consider and assess the impact of their work on children and families within Slough.

SCF recommendations

11. Retention strategies need to focus on non-pay elements. The business case for retention packages is not supported by the evidence presented to the group.
12. SCF strategies need to have a greater focus on impact on the child and family and creating stability for children and families. The Edge of Care Team business case should be supported, however the Family Hubs should be considered on a wider multi-agency partnership basis.
13. Ensure managers have access to good quality management data that supports them to make decisions on caseloads that take account of the context and skills of the team. This should include those on child protection plan and not just children who are looked after.

14. Utilise Slough's diverse population as a positive and avoid focus on Slough being similar to London boroughs, complexity of casework and negativity of the Ofsted rating. Many social workers see the cohort of children and families as a key opportunity to make a real difference.
15. Focus constrained resources on leadership and management development and career progression opportunities for internal staff, as well as loans and payments to support staff with capital outlay.
16. Ensure SCF's model of practice is appropriately strength based / restorative in approach.
17. Embed hearing the voice of the child into all records and decision-making and monitor this on a qualitative basis.
18. Explore opportunities for children and families to be part of delivering training and developing and influencing decision-making at a strategic level.

Commendations

The Members of the Group identified areas of good practice. It is essential that these areas are highlighted as part of this review so that they are maintained and set an example to other areas. The following commendations were made:

- There are very good links with Buckinghamshire New University for social work placements.
- The workforce plans supporting the need to 'grow your own' and recruit newly qualified social workers were embedded, well understood and were reducing the recruitment and retention issues that have been seen in the past.
- Morale appears to be strong within SCF, with many comments about the support that managers, including members of the extended leadership team, provided to staff. This helped staff feel safe and supported.
- Staff were keen to share the excellent leadership and management support being offered, as evidenced by staff choosing to return to SCF.
- The focus on securing apprenticeships for looked after children is positive, although it is also positive to see that these opportunities have been extended to a wider group of young people in the local area.
- Through their interviews with managers that staff and managers were highly conscientious and really seem to want to make a difference to young people's lives.

The Group wish to congratulate staff on the improvements made to date.

Reflections on the task and finish group process

Members, officers of SBC and staff from SCF welcomed this approach and enjoyed discussing the workforce issues in a more informal setting. The group meetings in SCF offices enabled staff to share their experiences in a frank way and for elected members to hear these experiences from a wider group of people as opposed to just reviewing written reports.

Having access to a wide range of written material, including confidential documents which would not normally be reported in a formal member report assisted elected members to understand and delve into the issues.

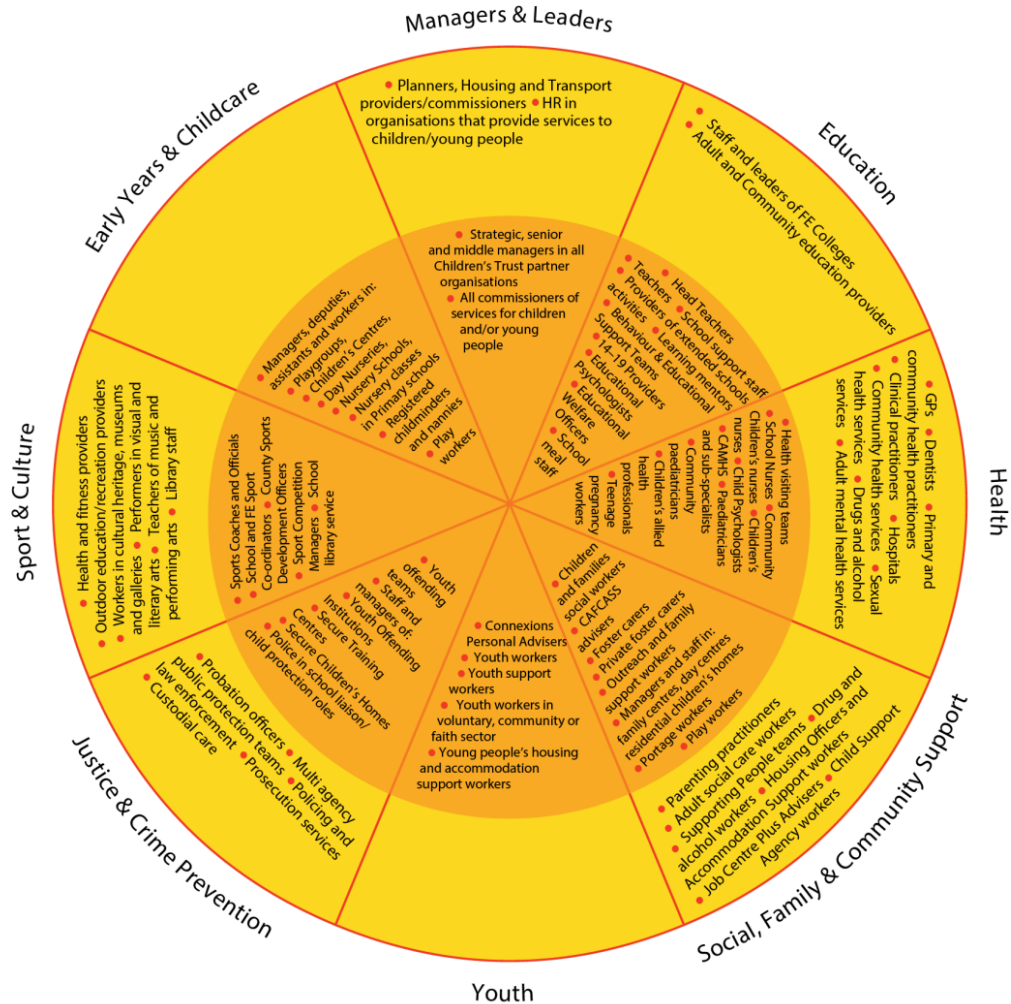
The task and finish group model also allows officers and scrutiny members to get to know each other and to understand their distinct roles and responsibilities.

There were challenges in terms of time constraints and the amount of documentation that elected members were expected to review. Members were disappointed that it was not possible to arrange a virtual meeting with their counterparts at Sunderland City Council and meetings with external bodies should be considered early in any future task and finish group.

The Group would strongly recommend that this model of scrutiny is utilised in the future.

Appendix 1 – Children and young people’s workforce

- Core Children’s Workforce: People who work or volunteer with children, young people and their families, or are responsible for their outcomes all the time.
- Wider Children’s Workforce: People who work or volunteer with children, young people, and/or their families part of the time, or are responsible for their outcomes as part of their jobs.



Source: Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2020 Children and Young People’s Workforce Strategy