



In Sandwell Children's Services

December 2017

Making Sandwell the 'Employer of Choice' to Work

One of the main priorities and challenges for management, whether under the Council or in the new Trust, is to make the service the 'employer of choice' for workers to work for.

Given the high staff turnover and the incredibly high levels of costly agency staff this would be a welcomed change.

Jacqui Smith, the new Chair of Sandwell Children's Trust, restated this when she addressed staff in the briefings in October. These warm words are good to hear, but for those of us who have been in Sandwell for a while, we have heard them before.

The key is whether these words are turned into reality. UNISON hopes that this time they will be, but we are also aware from Sandwell's history that we cannot just rely on management. This is why UNISON has raised a twelve-point plan for management and formally presented it to them.

From the feedback we receive Sandwell is still far from the employer of choice to work. This is not created if staff have caseloads and workloads that are too high. It is not created if staff work too long hours, often without recompense or recognition. It is not created by management targeting individuals. It is not created by management establishing a culture where constructive criticism is not allowed and beaten down. It is not created when senior management fail to respond to the concerns raised by staff groups. It is not created by flooding the service with high levels of agency workers who constantly come and go.

The high level of agency workers is a reflection that Sandwell is still yet to become the employer of choice for social workers to be at. Demand on Business Support remains too high. The staffing crisis in Children's Social Care remains to be solved. The sooner the warm words from Jacqui Smith and current Senior Management become reality, the better for staff and the children of Sandwell.

£5million bill or £800,000 investment?

With agency staff numbers at record levels UNISON has been shown financial data that suggests the cost could mount up to £5million for the year.

The proposals put forward by both UNISON and GMB include the suggestion of introducing a 'market supplement' of £4,000 per annum to improve recruitment and retention. If 200 staff were given this market supplement, then the cost of £800,000 is clearly cheaper than continuing to pay through the nose for agency staff.

Along with our other suggestions on the twelve-point plan this would help Sandwell become the 'employer of choice' to work.

Turning Pledges Into Reality under TUPE

Remember the ten pledges made by our employers when UNISON was balloting for industrial action?

The delays in setting up Sandwell Children's Trust means that the formal TUPE negotiations on the transfer of your employment from the Council had also been delayed.

However, these have finally begun in a positive and constructive manner. A staff meeting is set to take place in December.

Turning the pledges into reality will be a key task of UNISON in the talks. Particularly the pledge on pensions and the Redundancy Modification Order (RMO) that protects your length of service.