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Speaker key

SP Romi Bowen – Strategic Director of Children’s Services

CA Caption

SP I would like to start by saying how important a contribution social workers make to the delivery of children’s services within Southwark; social workers have quite a tough job, and it’s really important that they feel that their contribution is valued in a big department and where their contribution is recognised and supported. So it’s very important to us to ensure that social workers are properly supervised and trained, that they have the right resources to deliver their job, and that they are focused on delivering improved outcomes for children; we want social workers to know what sort of help actually makes a difference to children and families so that they are encouraged to keep up to date with what the evidence says about what makes a difference for children in difficult circumstances. We are also very keen that children and families contribute to the development of services, and that front line staff have a say in the development of services, so when we’re doing our children’s plan we think it’s really important that social workers get involved in helping us plan the priorities for the next few years, and draw on their experience and knowledge to help shape strategic work and investment. I think that Southwark is a really exciting and interesting place to work; as an inner London borough it’s got a very diverse community and it’s the sort of place where many people who first arrive in London come, so it does mean that they’re often unsettled and have the difficulties of new arrivals, but then many go on to make their long term home here. So it makes for a very complicated mix of families in the borough, some of whom are very needy, and in a sense of wanting to deliver social work in an environment where people have got many and complex needs, of course, it’s really quite a significant place to practice. But in recognition of that complexity we’ve got a big service with lots of opportunity to draw on specialisms to support you in doing that work, but we’ve also got very high expectations because our children do have particular needs; we’ve got high expectations from our staff to help them achieve their potential in life, and not find their disadvantage totally impeding their ability to achieve.

CA What attracts social workers to working in Southwark?

SP I’d like to think it was because people are really valued for the contribution that they make, and they’re also very well supported and managed, so we have put quite a lot of investment into the management structure so that people don’t feel that there is no one for them to turn to for advice. So we’ve maintained practice managers and team managers and service managers so that’s a very robust structure in which, as a front line practitioner, you can do your work. We’ve also created a senior social worker and what we had in mind then was like a consultant practitioner, a community matron; because we’re integrated with the health service system locally which is also pretty unique we’ve taken some of the ideas which enable practitioners to stay in practice and earn a good salary, and also have some status for staying in the field and being knowledgeable. So these things seem to have meant that people choose to stay in Southwark; the work is very varied and people can move around the system

- and the fact that you're working as part of a solid team also seems to make it an attractive proposition.