

A day at TSN Headquarters

Teacher Support Network invited local Association secretaries to spend a day at their headquarters at Drayton Park, London. Secretary Marion Wilson was one of those present.

The day started with **Katy Smith** telling us how grants are awarded. This used to be done after an assessment by local TSN officers but that is no longer the method used. Teachers apply direct to TSN. Applicants need to have less than £4000 before a grant can be made. The money granted has to make a difference and so this will not happen say, if the applicant is about to be evicted. They then advise them to become bankrupt. The Grant Advisory committee can deal with an emergency within a day, if for example the teacher has no money for food or any means of getting to work. This is followed up with the normal application procedure. They will ask for copies of bank accounts.

Their CRB trained staff can give advice on money management and debt counselling and will even negotiate with creditors. A flow chart is available to show the system in operation for both types of help.

Helen Chambers then spoke of how the Support Line services are used. In 2013 there were 8775 cases involving 26,394 calls, emails, texts etc. and 3220 talking to or corresponding with teachers. They receive the most calls between 3 and 4 p.m. (i.e as soon as school ends) with Monday being the most popular day.(after the weekend break from school).and October is the worst month. Calls have gone up by 12% since 2012 with 75% of the calls from women. The biggest group are those who have been teaching from 1 to 5 years. The top issues are finance (25%), anxiety (!2%),stress(5%) and work related stress (3%)

Alison from WPO, a counselling service, said they tried to get a holistic view looking at both positives and negatives. They look at the medication being taken and the incidence of domestic violence. They carry out online counselling and don't insist on people giving their name or details. Support is short term but they look for other organisations for longer term help. January is normally the busiest month and between 11 and 12. Work/home issues are about 50/50

Caroline Gielnik then spoke about WorkLife Support which is a wellbeing programme of workshops which can be done in schools. This could be for employees facing redundancy, support for staff with personal and work related issues or just the general well-being of staff and can be a plank between that and pupil performance. Schools have to buy into the programme. A confidential pre survey is carried out which can be done online or at home. It is not possible to identify the individual. The results of the survey are fed back to the staff and action plans are drawn up. These can cover HSE, management structure and culture, personal well-being, work/life balance and priorities. The cost is £6.50 per member of staff, £300 if they come into school and £650 for the final report including a 3 hour feedback meeting with the head. Expensive but cost effective if it means a staff are focused on their job and not stressed out by unhelpful planning or management styles, especially if this improves pupil performance. A copy of a survey carried out in a secondary school is available (Headspace in Chelmsford carry out something similar paid for by Essex CC)

Kevin Armstrong then shared with us the research carried out by TSN to give an insight into teachers' needs and their policy to improve services especially those they don't currently provide such as Government Legislation and teacher training.

Their survey showed that teachers would like access to face to face counselling and this is being trialled in 2014. They are also looking at the relationship between teacher well-being and pupil outcomes, at LGBT discrimination, scrutiny, retirement, redundancy etc. They would be happy for us to tell them what to focus on.

Jason Harrison outlined a caseworker workshop that they had put together, recognising that caseworker are having to deal with difficult cases and may themselves become stressed by the level and content of what they have to cope with. I have passed the information on to Agnes Bishop who co-ordinates the work of caseworkers in Essex. Or we could run our own for school Reps and our caseworker if it is not taken up by Essex. The cost is £450 for a half day or £700 for a whole day for between 15 and 30 people. This could be done at the weekend. An outline of the course is available

Marion Wilson March 2014