



General Purposes Committee
31 March 2016

**Report from the Operational Director,
Children's Social Care**

For Action

Wards affected:
ALL

Market supplement for Children and Families social workers

1. Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to apprise the Committee of the issues in relation to the payment of a market supplement to social workers within the Children and Young People's Department.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the Committee approves the continued payment of a market supplement to children's social workers, but allows the department discretion about whether this should be paid differentially, focused on the harder to recruit service areas.

3. Detail

- 3.1. The London employment market for social workers is very competitive with a highly mobile workforce. Potential employees are highly informed about the market, the advantages and disadvantages of the various authorities and the salary ranges of each. The last few years has seen a surge in the number of social workers making lifestyle decision to work on an agency rather than a permanent basis and this has changed the nature of the workforce. The competition for that smaller number who are willing to work on a permanent basis has therefore increased further.

- 3.2. In Brent there has been a continual drive to reduce the reliance on agency social workers due to their higher costs and their relative instability. We employ 167 children and families social workers, approximately 65% of whom are permanent. 35% are employed on an agency basis and it is this group on which we continue want to reduce our dependence. Ensuring that

we have an attractive employment package (which includes basic salary, market supplement, manageable caseloads and a good earning and development offer) to attract new staff and retain existing staff, is a key component of that strategy.

- 3.3. The employment package in Brent has improved significantly over the last two years with the agreement by members for additional social work resources to address the caseload issues making a considerable difference.
- 3.4. Over the last few years, a market supplement of £1,200pa has been paid to children's social workers as part of that package and in recognition of the hard to recruit nature of the job. A corporate decision was made at the end of 2014 to cease paying this, with a view to bringing their Terms & Conditions in line with other staff across the Council.
- 3.5. They were advised that their market supplement would be reduced in two phases, 50% reduced in Dec 15 and the final 50% reduced in Dec 16. Staff have been re-assured that they would not be financially disadvantaged (for all the obvious reasons about high agency ratios, staff losses and the hard to recruit nature of the job) as a result of these changes.

However, upon investigation it became evident that there were significant potential problems with the approach to mitigating the salary losses that had been identified. These were:

1. The cost of re-grading staff to ensure that they are not financially disadvantaged by the loss of market supplement has been estimated provisionally at a minimum of an additional £250,000pa. This is related to points 2 and 3 below, which explain how the only manageable mitigation plan would involve re-grading all social workers upwards.
2. The logistics of ensuring that staff are not disadvantaged are extremely complicated as it involves addressing each member of staff on an individual basis, pushing some up a number of spinal points WITHIN the pay range (for those at the bottom of their pay range) and (for those at the top of their pay range) re-grading others onto a completely different pay band. This is because many staff are already at the top of their pay bands.
3. Even with the solutions identified above, all social workers will ultimately have to be re-graded, as over a two year period, any re-grading advantage (point 2 above) will have been eroded by the fact that previously they would have progressed to the top of their pay band AND have the advantage of a market supplement.
4. The work with TMP (specialist recruitment agency with which Brent is now working on a children's social work recruitment campaign), has identified a mixed picture in terms of salary comparisons with some local boroughs paying more and others across London paying at a similar level. It is

crucial that with a high profile recruitment campaign due to launch imminently that the Brent package is as attractive and as transparent as is possible.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1. In conclusion, it is clear that the agreed plan for mitigating the loss of the market supplement was essentially flawed, expensive and un-manageable. As well as being complicated, it would have involved considerable additional expense for the authority.
- 4.2. The recommendation (based on the evidence laid out above) is that the decision to remove the market supplement for children and families social workers is reversed. The further recommendation is that the department is given discretion to make decisions about whether the supplement should be paid to all staff or whether it should be paid only to staff working in hard to recruit areas, such as front line safeguarding and looked after children teams. This is in recognition of the fact that there is not a significant staff shortage in areas such as adoption and fostering, which have generally benefitted from a stable and permanent workforce.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. This report proposes continuing an existing arrangement, and therefore no new resources are required to deliver the recommendation

6. Legal Implications

- 6.1. None

7. Diversity Implications

- 7.1. None

8. Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

- 8.1. None

Contact Officer

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