

	General Purposes Committee 27 July 2026
	Report from the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development
	Lead Member – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Employment & Climate Action (Councillor Jake Rubin)
Recruitment and Retention Payments for Early Help and Social Care staff and Occupational Therapists	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision: (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	N/A
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
No. of Appendices:	One Appendix 1: Eligible posts for recruitment and retention payments
Background Papers:	None.
Contact Officer(s): (Name, Title, Contact Details)	Palvinder Kudhail, Director Early Help and Social Care Palvinder.kudhail@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 Recruitment and retention of permanent staff to ‘hard to fill’ posts, including social workers and occupational therapists, is a corporate priority and included in the strategic risk register. A lack of permanent qualified staff in these posts risks poorer quality services and an overreliance on agency staff.
- 1.2 The General Purposes Committee most recently approved the payment of recruitment and retention payments in May 2023. This report seeks approval to continue with the recruitment and retention payments for social workers in Children’s Early Help and Social Care roles to improve the recruitment and retention of permanent staff. It also proposes to include occupational therapists in the list of posts that will be eligible for payment. The proposals are closely aligned to the Adult Social Care approach to ensure that parity and fairness across the social care workforce is maintained.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee agree to the continuation of the use of recruitment and retention initiatives as follows:
- 2.2 To make a one-off payment of £5,000 to newly recruited permanent qualified social work staff on grades PO1 – PO7 and to occupational therapists grades PO2 – PO5, on satisfactory completion of their probationary period and repayable where an employee leaves the council within 12 months of receiving the payment.
- 2.3 To make retention payments of either £2500 or £4,500 for qualified social work staff on grades PO1-PO7 as set out in the accompanying policy (Recruitment and Retention Payments Policy for Social Work Staff), to be paid annually after completion of a full year's service.
- 2.4 To make retention payments of £3,000 to occupational therapists grades PO2 – PO5 to be paid annually after completion of a full year's service.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities and Strategic Context

- 3.1.1 Implementation of these activities will enable the service to contribute to the borough's priorities 'Thriving Communities-Every opportunity to succeed' and *'Local people in the borough to gain jobs via our apprenticeship'*.
- 3.1.2 We currently have a diverse workforce; however we are reliant on locum workers to undertake regulated roles. The proposal in this paper aims to enable recruitment of good performing agency workers and external candidates which include staff who live within Brent and retain a permanent workforce that is representative of the borough at all levels.

3.2 Background

- 3.2.1 The issue of sufficiency of suitably qualified children's social work staff is recognised as a national issue that the DfE is seeking to address through new routes into social work and better development pathways for future managers. The profession is noted as an occupation that appears on the list of skills shortages to enable overseas recruitment to fill key vacancies.
- 3.2.2 This challenge is not unique to Brent; the employment market for social workers, a highly mobile workforce, is extremely competitive both nationally and locally. The last decade has continued to see more social workers deciding to work on an agency rather than permanent basis, resulting in higher costs and relative instability for local authorities. Whilst the introduction in 2024 of national rules to manage the children's agency workforce in recent years have redressed the balance somewhat, there is still more action required at a local authority level to recruit and retain high quality staff. Currently, agency workers make up 10.7% of our workforce.
- 3.2.3 The continuation of these payments, alongside other factors such as stable senior leadership, greater training and development opportunities and

manageable caseloads for staff has supported the permanent recruitment of qualified social work staff, increasingly at all levels across the workforce. However, challenges remain within the Family Support and Child Protection/Court and Children with Disabilities services in part due to the more challenging nature of the work, the opportunities of the agency market or for other factors such as pay and rewards.

3.2.4 The departmental workforce strategy is continually reviewed and includes a range of activities to address the ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. The key activities include the social work career progression framework that supports social workers with the intention of 'growing our own' staff such as student social workers, step-up to social work programme, ASYE and the international recruitment of qualified social workers.

3.2.5 Career progression panels are held every six months with a number of staff progressing into the senior social worker role. The progression framework continues to act as part of the retention strategy with some staff commenting that they had considered leaving Brent before it was put in place.

3.3 Impact

3.3.1 Whilst these and other measures will continue to contribute to the recruitment and retention of permanent staff, further measures are required to maintain and boost the number of permanent staff in social work roles across the department.

3.3.2 Previous transformation projects have focussed on optimising the Brent offer for social workers. This work included reviewing, benchmarking and evaluating incentive packages and other drivers at a pan-London level, as well as developing options to minimise any disparities and inconsistencies identified in current arrangements in Brent.

3.4 Salary Bench Marking

3.4.1 Social worker salaries and additional payments data provided by London Councils (as at April 2025) and gathered from recruitment websites is set out in the table below. The data is for neighbouring London boroughs where this is available.

3.4.2 This data highlights that, for some roles, Brent pays below neighbouring boroughs and demonstrates the need for additional payments to remain competitive in a very tight market.

Council	Maximum Salary	Additional payments
Social Worker		
Ealing	46512	
Hillingdon	46968	
Camden	47940	£4K - £2K at end of Years 3 and 4
Hounslow	49056	Market supplement - not defined
Brent	49551	Golden Hello £5K; R&R £2.5 or £4.5K
Hammersmith	49638	Market supplement £1500
Harrow	50691	Up to £6K
Kensington	53319	Market supplement £2500
Westminster	57495	£1K or £2K for project work
Senior Social Worker		
Brent	49551	Golden Hello £5K; R&R £2.5 or £4.5K
Hillingdon	52194	
Hillingdon	57402	Advanced practitioner rate
Hammersmith	55710	Market supplement £1500
Kensington	60003	Market supplement £2500
Deputy Team Manager		
Hammersmith	60795	Market supplement £1500
Ealing	55620	
Brent	63159	Golden Hello £5K; R&R £2.5 or £4.5K
Team Manager		
Harrow	62349	Up to £6K
Hillingdon	62766	
Hammersmith	62922	Market supplement £1500
Brent	63159	Golden Hello £5K; R&R £2.5 or £4.5K
Ealing	63159	
Hounslow	66378	Market supplement - not defined

4.0 Next Steps

- 4.1 There are regular recruitment campaigns, and these payments will be incorporated into the materials. Monthly progress meetings to consider the impact of these initiatives have been set and the overall effectiveness of the proposed changes will be reviewed every 2 years.

5.0 Financial Considerations

- 5.1 Providing incentives to support the recruitment and retention to social work positions is an investment if permanent staff are recruited and retained in place of providing interim cover for agency staff.

5.2 The cost of recruitment and retention payments based on current staff numbers and expected new recruitment is c.£456,000 per annum, excluding employer costs and will be funded from existing budgets.

5.3 It is anticipated that the revised incentives, will increase the number of permanent staff into the social care teams, reducing reliance on agency staff, which will also lead to a reduction in the cost pressure arising from the use of those agency staff.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 Where a supplement is paid on top of the evaluated grade of a post the potential for equal pay claims arises. The council will need to demonstrate that there is a genuine “material factor” which is neither directly nor indirectly discriminatory based on sex to avoid or defend such claims. The position of the employment market, which may lead an employer to increase the pay of a particular job to attract candidates, may constitute an objectively justified economic ground for a pay disparity. Where payments to an employee are on-going the payment must be kept under regular review to ensure that it only continues for as long as it is justified by material market factors.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 The public sector equality duty, as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have “due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a “protected characteristic” and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

7.2 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

7.3 This proposal seeks to continue recruitment and retention payments for all eligible social workers which ensures fairness across these roles. There are no obvious equality issues with this proposal. Additionally, it is considered that the market evidence, establishing that there was a material factor (namely market conditions for recruitment to the affected posts) justifies any pay disparity.

7.4 The make-up of the Social Care workforce (specifically the posts which are qualified social workers) overall is predominantly female and from a multi-ethnic background. The characteristics of ethnicity and gender are specified as these were the two most significant types affected by the proposed changes.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 N/A.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

9.1 The Human Resources implications have been contained within the main body of the report.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 The continued payment of Recruitment and Retention payments will be communicated across the Directorate through email distribution lists, newsletters, team meetings and staff quarterlies. Communication will be well constructed, and the design principles of the scheme will avoid equal pay claims by staff who are not included in this scheme such as non-regulated staff. Externally the payments will need to be highlighted in any recruitment campaigns and in job adverts.

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

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