



General Purposes Committee
8 November 2021

**Report from the Strategic Director
of Children and Young People &
the Director of Legal, HR, Audit &
Investigations.**

Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers – Children and Young People.

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	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:	None
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides a further update to the Committee, following the most recent report in July 2020, on the impact of the decision, in October 2018, to introduce recruitment and retention initiatives to key social work roles within the Children and Young People's (CYP) department.
- 1.2 The report also provides information about the current position regarding social work staff retention within the department, with particular reference to current challenges for frontline child protection social work recruitment and retention in the Localities Service.
- 1.3 Finally the report sets out a proposed amended approach to recruitment and retention arrangements in order to address the Localities Service challenges.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee agree to amend two of the current recruitment and retention initiatives until the end of the 2022/23 financial year, with arrangements being reviewed again in late 2022. The proposed amendments to current initiatives are:

- To increase the one-off payment to newly recruited permanent social work staff on grades PO1-PO7 in the most hard to recruit to teams within the Localities service (Referral and Assessment teams, East and West long-term teams) from £5000 to £7500, on satisfactory completion of a probationary period.
- To increase retention payments in the hard to recruit to social work teams in the Localities service, for all qualified social work staff graded PO1-PO7, from £1200 to £4500 per annum.

2.2 That the Committee agree that CYP recommend to the General Purposes Committee to maintain other previously agreed recruitment and retention initiatives:

- Continuation of the one-off payment of £5000 to newly recruited permanent social work managers, practice consultants and senior social workers in all other eligible teams, on satisfactory completion of a probationary period.
- Continuation of a retention payment of £3600 to all other eligible qualified social work managers and social work practice consultant posts, payable after 36 months in role and on a recurring 36-month cycle. Senior social workers currently receive a retention payment.
- Continuation of existing market supplement (retention payment) of £1,200 per annum to all other qualified social work eligible roles.
- To continue to allow the department the discretion to provide relocation package support to key posts, up to a maximum of £5,000 in individual cases together with any COVID related costs associated with the recruitment of overseas social workers.
- To continue to provide the opportunity for all qualified social workers within the remit of the scheme to rent key worker housing.

2.3 The Committee agree to continue with the delegation of authority to the Strategic Director, CYP, in consultation and regular review with the Director of Legal, HR and Audit and Investigations, to determine how recruitment and retention payments are offered across the department, with a continued focus on hard to recruit to posts.

3.0 **Background**

3.1 General Purposes Committee agreed in October 2018 that CYP could introduce recruitment and retention payments in hard to recruit to posts. This was in response to significant structural difficulties in recruiting and retaining more experienced social workers and first line social work management staff. A realignment of CYP social work activity took place in January 2018 and, whilst there were a number of benefits to frontline practitioners, recognised in the May 2018 Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, it had not resulted in an increase in the number of experienced social workers and social work management roles being taken up by permanent staff. As at September

2018 only 44% of experienced social workers and front line management posts (PO3, PO5 and PO7) were filled by permanent staff.

- 3.2 The issue of sufficiency of suitably qualified children's social work staff continues to be 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.
- 3.3 Previous reports to the Committee, in 2018, 2019 and 2020 set out what other London boroughs had introduced as incentives to recruit key social work staff. A recent benchmarking exercise (April 2021) of West London authorities was undertaken to consider current initiatives across the sub-region for social work posts (up to the Brent equivalent of PO3).

Local Authority	Ofsted Rating	Salary Range	Other Incentives
Brent	Good	£32,418 - £42,855	Annual £1200 retention payment £5k golden hello; key worker housing
Ealing	Requires Improvement	£32214 - £43839	No other incentives
Hillingdon	Good	£30585 - £43860	Annual £4k retention payment in frontline teams Annual £1.8k payment for practice educators
Harrow	Good	£34,545 - £42489	Annual £1500 market supplement Retention payment - £3,000 (payable after 3 years)
Barnet	Good	£39,040 - £51,065	No other incentives
Hounslow	Good	£33324 - £40869	£3k every 2 years
Hammersmith and Fulham	Good	£34689 - £44500	No other incentives
Kensington and Chelsea	Outstanding	£36,618 - £44598	£2.5k payment to child protection social workers; zone 1 & 2 travelcard.
Westminster	Outstanding	£34689 - £50000	No other incentives

- 3.4 As further comparison, Barking and Dagenham provide a £5k golden hello and £15k retention payment after 3 years of service and a 2-month paid sabbatical after 4 years in role and have reduced their reliance on agency staff to the London average figure (see paragraph 4.12 below).
- 3.5 The current departmental workforce strategy was refreshed in November 2019 and focuses on the following issues:
- Identifying and promoting the behaviours and practices which support strong teams so that managers are clear about what is expected of them and what support is available, in line with the Brent CYP Practice Framework.
 - Re-aligning the balance of experienced and new staff so that there is better throughput of work and managers can be freed up to focus on developing themselves and their teams.

- Identifying those teams which are particularly at risk from turnover and creating individualised support plans for those teams.

4.0 Update

4.1 Since the previous update to the Committee a number of recruitment rounds have taken place. The campaigns have been to recruit social workers at all levels (grades SO2 – PO7). There are generally no issues with recruiting newly qualified social workers at SO2 level and at any one time the department supports approximately 15 staff through their assessed year of practice (ASYE). The next recruitment round will start in November 2021 after the General Purposes Committee decision on whether to accept the proposed changes to recruitment and retention initiatives as described above.

4.2. The outcome of recent campaigns is detailed in the table below:

Job type	Applications Received / Number Interviewed	Offers	Offers fulfilled	Number to receive R&R payment based on new arrangement (denotes hard-to-fill team)
<i>Team Manager (PO7)</i>				
June 2019	14 / 4	3	3	2
December 2019	17 / 8	3	3	3
November 2020	12/4	1	1	1
June 2021	6/3	2	In process	
<i>SWPC (PO5)</i>				
June 2019	11 / 4	3	3	1
July 2020	14/5	2	2	1
<i>Social Worker (SO2-PO3)</i>				
June 2019*	41 / 13	11	6	1
December 2019	17 / 6	3	2	1
May 2020*	83/27	10	7	0
Sep 2020	10/5	2	2	1
March 2021	21/7	3	0	n/a
April 2021*	85/21	11	8	0
August 2021*	58/18	7	In process	

* Indicates a campaign that included recruitment of ASYEs.

4.3 For the LAC and Permanency service at management level (PO5 and PO7) the position in terms of permanent staffing has remained very high. There is only one vacant post. Social worker permanent staffing levels are also relatively high at 82%.

4.4 For the Localities service at management level the position in terms of permanent staffing remains stronger than in December 2018 where 45% of social work management posts were permanent; currently 75% of posts are filled by permanent staff. However the social worker permanent staffing level across Localities is 50%

4.5 The permanent management appointments have brought in staff from other local authorities as well as converting existing agency staff managers to

permanent contracts. They commented that the recruitment initiatives played a part in their decision to choose Brent or to convert to a permanent arrangement.

- 4.6 Separate to the recruitment programme has been the launch, in January 2019, of the social work career progression framework within the department. This built upon the existing programme that supports newly qualified social workers with the intention of 'growing our own' staff – particularly in supporting them to achieve Senior Social Worker status as current recruitment has failed to make progress to increase numbers in this role. The career development framework also enables talented staff to move through the promotion system at a faster pace.
- 4.7 Panels have been held every 6 months since May 2019 with at least 9 submissions being heard at each panel with a number of staff progressing at each into the senior social worker role. The progression framework is acting as part of the retention strategy with some staff commenting that they were considering leaving Brent before it was put in place.
- 4.8 The most recent panel was held in May 2021. There were 13 submissions from staff with 11 being successful, 6 of whom became senior social workers. The next panel will be held in November 2021.
- 4.9 Agency workers are regularly invited to convert to permanent contracts, facilitated by a fast-track process. In the last 3 months one team manager has converted to a permanent role from a frontline Localities team. However the feedback from most agency staff is that they prefer to retain the flexibility and higher weekly payments that agency work brings.
- 4.10 International recruitment of 13 qualified social workers from Southern Africa (5) and India (8) took place in 2019. Retention of international staff remains high – 12 of the 2019 cohort remain in role and more than half of a 2015 intake from South Africa still remain permanently employed. A further round of international recruitment has been taking place this year. Four social workers from Southern Africa started work last month, a further three are joining from the Caribbean this month with a final three roles to be recruited to before the end of this calendar year.
- 4.11 The recent introduction of key-worker housing as part of the recruitment package has not had the significant impact on recruitment rates that was anticipated. Currently three CYP social workers are key worker housing tenants with a further two going through the approval process. Further work is required to understand why the impact has been lower for social work professions than other key worker eligible roles.
- 4.12 However, despite all of the above initiatives, the overall position of permanent social work qualified staff across the whole department as at 31st August 2021 was 66%, a reduction from 78% at the time of the last report to the Committee. The reduction is due to particular recruitment and retention challenges in the Localities service and for social workers at all levels of experience in the PO1-PO3 range. There are many opportunities in the agency market for child protection social workers with rates of pay being offered by authorities in the South East and some London boroughs exceeding London Councils Memorandum of Understanding. Latest agency social worker data from London Councils (Apr-June 2021) for the 27 London boroughs that submitted a return

showed an average of 50 agency staff were used at any point in time by children's services in each borough during that 3-month period. The range however stretched from 4 agency staff used (Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster – where caseloads are the lowest in London) to 135 (Newham). The Brent figure was 74.

- 4.13 Recent recruitment rounds have not seen any significant rise in successful applications. To improve the situation it is proposed that the measures as recommended in paragraphs 2.1-2.3 above are taken to support an increase in the number of permanent staff in key social work roles. Funding for this will be met from within the CYP department.
- 4.14 Other factors that are known to contribute to recruiting and retaining staff include positive Ofsted inspection outcomes, stability at senior management levels and, most significantly, manageable caseloads for staff. Whilst CYP retains a 'Good' Ofsted rating and has stability in senior management, caseload levels have been rising across the East and West Localities teams since the end of the second lockdown in March 2021 and this is considered the biggest single factor in the current staffing challenge. To address this concern agreement was given in spring 2021 by the Chief Executive and Finance Director to increase staffing levels in some Localities teams and a realignment of service structure is underway (due to complete in December 2021) to create more manageable caseloads.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 General Fund budgets for social worker staffing have been based on the average cost of permanent staff being employed. The cost to the council of engaging agency staff in these roles is greater than the cost of permanent staff (without retention and recruitment incentives being applied). Consequently, the recruitment of permanent staff prevents additional costs being incurred by the council.
- 5.2 The additional cost of agency staff in social work positions contributed to the overall overspend by the CYP department in 2018/19 and in 2019/20. The cost of the recruitment and retention initiatives are additional costs to the council, however, the initiatives can result in reducing budget pressures related to higher cost implications of agency staff.
- 5.3 If all vacancies and current agency posts (62) were filled by permanent staff the £7500 golden hello payments would total £529,170, with a cost beyond current arrangements of £176,390. The retention bonus of £4,500 would cost £209,961 annually for all current permanent staff and would be £527,463 with a full establishment. The costs beyond current existing arrangements would be £153,971 and £386,806 respectively (see Table below).

Summary Costing of Proposed Golden Hello and Retention Bonus Structure in Localities Service from January 2022					On Top of Current Golden Hello & Retention Bonus Arrangement		
Position	Grade	Current Permanent	Difference	Total Planned Establishment	Golden Hello (All Vacant and Agency Posts)	Retention (Current)	Retention (Total Planned Establishment)
Social Workers	PO1 - PO3	26	54	80	£153,630	£97,640	£300,432
Practice Consultants/Deputy Team Manager	PO5	8	0	8	£0	£30,043	£30,043
Team Managers	PO7	7	8	15	£22,760	£26,288	£56,331
Total		41	62	103	£176,390	£153,971	£386,806

5.4 Including these proposed payments the annual costs of permanent social workers (including on costs) would be slightly greater than the historical average equivalent agency cost (see Table below) but would bring the benefit of stability, consistency and the likelihood of greater productivity. It should be noted that the table below includes the historical average cost for agency workers – however currently rates above the long-term average level are required to secure new agency staff due to current market conditions.

Position	Grade	Agency		Permanent			Variance
		Weekly	Annual	Salary	Retention Bonus	Total	
Social Worker	PO2	£1,221	£58,603.20	£55,200	£5,121	£60,321	£1,717.80
Practice Consultant	PO5	£1,554	£74,594.40	£69,800	£5,121	£74,921	£326.60
Team Manager	PO7	£1,707	£81,919.20	£79,200	£5,121	£84,321	£2,401.80

6.0 Legal Implications

- 6.1 Where a supplement is paid on top of the evaluated grade of a post the potential for equal pay equality of terms claims arises. The council will need to demonstrate that there is a “material factor” which is neither directly nor indirectly sex discriminatory to avoid or defend any such claims. The situation highlighted in this report concerning the difficulties which have been experienced in recruiting and retaining suitable staff to these roles, for the reasons stated, could amount to a relevant “material factor” which the council could rely on in respect of justification for the need to offer additional financial incentive, in circumstances where this might result in a pay disparity. The need to continue to make recruitment and / or retention payments must, however, be kept under regular review, with reference to current evidence to ensure that the practice only continues for as long as it is justified by material market factors.

7.0 Equality Implications

- 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 An Equality Impact Assessment was completed in respect of the proposals considered in the previous report to the GP Committee with the analysis being

based on the characteristics of ethnicity and gender as these were the two most significant types affected by the proposed changes. To ensure the analysis was sufficiently broad it also included staff undertaking similar tasks from the Community Wellbeing department. The overall analysis was that the risks that the criteria for applying the proposed payments disadvantage persons with a protected characteristics were low based on ethnicity and medium based on gender. It was considered that the market evidence, establishing that there was a material factor (namely market conditions for recruitment to the affected posts) justified the pay disparity.

8.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

Not Applicable (N/A)

9.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

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

10.0 Next Steps

- 10.1 Monthly progress meetings to consider the impact of the recruitment and retention initiatives continue to take place.
- 10.2 Human Resources will continue to consider any demand pressures within other departments of the Council and the corporate implications where there are similar skills shortages in hard to recruit to posts.

Report sign off:

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