



**General Purposes Committee**  
17 November 2022

**Report from the Corporate Director  
of Children and Young People**

**Recruitment and Retention Payments for Children and Young People's Social Workers in Looked After Children and Permanency Service.**

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b> (only applicable for Cabinet, Cabinet Sub Committee and officer decisions)	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> (If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
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## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with a further update following the decision in November 2021 to increase the recruitment and retention payments agreed by the Committee in October 2018 to staff in the most hard to recruit teams within the Localities Service.
- 1.2 The report also provides information about the current position regarding social work staff within the Children and Young People's department overall, with particular reference to recruitment and retention challenges within the Looked After Children and Permanency (LAC & Permanency) Service.
- 1.3 Finally, the report sets out a proposal to extend the arrangements agreed for the most hard to recruit teams within the Localities Service to the six Care Planning Teams in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service. This is to address emerging recruitment and retention challenges. Separately there is a recommendation to increase the maximum amount payable for the provision of relocation packages to key social work qualified posts.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 That the Committee agree to extend the two recruitment and retention initiatives, which were agreed for the most hard to recruit teams in the Localities Service, to six Care Planning Teams in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service as follows:

- To increase the one-off payment to newly recruited permanent social work staff on grades PO1 – PO7 from £5,000 to £7,500, on satisfactory completion of probationary period and repayable where an employee leaves the council's employment within 12 months of receiving the payment. (Currently, in the Care Planning Teams in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service the one-off payment is only made to social work staff in grades PO3 to PO7).
- To increase retention payments for all qualified social work staff on grades PO1 to PO7 from £1,200 to £4,500 per annum (currently the retention payment is made to social work staff in grades PO3 to PO7).

2.2 That the Committee agrees to increase the maximum amount payable to provide relocation package support to key social work qualified posts from £5,000 to £6,000 in line with cost of living increases.

2.3 That continued discretion is provided to the department in how recruitment and retention payments are offered across the department with a continued focus on hard to recruit to posts.

## **3.0 Detail**

3.1 Previous GP Committee reports in March 2016, October 2018 and November 2021, approved requests to continue to provide a market supplement to Children and Young People's (CYP) social workers as a tool to support the department in retaining key frontline staff and the introduction and subsequent enhancement of recruitment and retention payments to particularly hard to recruit posts and teams. The continuation and enhancement of these payments, alongside other factors such as stable senior leadership, greater training and development opportunities and manageable caseloads for staff has contributed to a growing number of permanent social work qualified staff – although predominantly in management roles.

3.2 Owing to the ongoing national shortage of social workers and a high number of social workers leaving the profession, coupled with increased demand for services since the pandemic, significant structural difficulties remain in recruiting and retaining more experienced social workers and first line social work management staff. Despite this, recent recruitment campaigns have attracted a favourable response, particularly for first line managers. However, particular challenges remain within the six Care Planning Teams in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service as a result of permanent social workers leaving Brent to take up employment either in the agency market or to other London local authorities where there is a more competitive pay and reward structure.

- 3.3 Currently, only 46% of the 30 social work non-management roles in the six Care Planning Teams are permanent and this is now lower than the short and long term teams in the Localities Service. Historically, recruitment and retention within the Looked After Children and Permanency Service has not presented the same level of challenges as the Localities Service. This is a trend also being reported by other local authorities. Work with looked after children requires a high level of face to face contact with young people. It is reported across London that, post-pandemic, social work staff are increasingly seeking roles where they can work from home for longer periods of time.
- 3.4 Whilst filling vacant posts with agency workers increases staff budgetary pressures, the decline in the number of agency workers coming forward and the very limited success in recruiting permanent staff through the current recruitment and retention arrangements, is becoming a particular challenge in the Looked After Children and Permanency Teams with some posts currently vacant.
- 3.5 This is a core statutory service that requires qualified social workers to work with children who are looked after by the Council or subject to care proceedings and court directed activities. The number of vacant posts within the teams has led to a rise in caseload levels. This raises risks to the long-term quality of service delivery if not addressed.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 A screening exercise undertaken by CYP in June 2018 to research packages offered by other London children's services, found the majority had an extensive offer in place to attract new staff, including at social work management level.
- 3.8 Despite the introduction of the recruitment and retention arrangements in 2018 and enhancement to these in 2021 agreed by GP committee and when looking at the overall package offered, this is not as generous as that offered by some other London boroughs. There is also anecdotal evidence from staff who have left the Council recently that the overall package from some councils in the South East region is attracting candidates to relocate.
- 3.9 It is important that Brent is able to compete in what remains an increasingly competitive market place for suitably qualified and experienced social workers.

#### **4.0 Update**

- 4.1 Experience from recruitment activity following the enhancements agreed by GP Committee in November 2021 highlights the particular difficulty faced in recruiting experienced social workers. Only 2 non-management social work roles have been filled in response to traditional advertising methods this calendar year, both within the Localities Service with a further two recruited on permanent contracts via agencies. There has been a more positive outcome from targeting the conversation of existing agency staff, leading to 13 agency

workers moving onto permanent contracts and this approach will continue. The vast majority of the agency conversions have been within the Localities service, encouraged by the retention payments.

- 4.2 To exacerbate matters, over recent months there has been a marked decline in the number of suitably qualified agency social worker candidates coming forward. To help manage the agency market, the 'London Pledge' was introduced, which all 33 London Councils have signed up to. The aim of the pledge is to stabilise and increase the quality of the agency social worker labour market through a range of measures including the introduction of standard pay rates, standardised reference templates and restrictions on staff leaving permanent roles to take up agency social work.
- 4.3 The recruitment activity carried out in 2022 to date suggests the enhanced recruitment and retention arrangements that apply to specific teams in the Localities Services are having a more positive impact although it is too soon to fully assess their effectiveness as the first annual retention payments are not due to be paid until December 2022. The most recent recruitment campaign in the Localities Service attracted 9 applications which is a significant increase from the previous campaign in April 2022. The introduction of new ways of working for social workers in Localities and better managed caseloads are also likely to be contributing factors.
- 4.4 The departmental workforce strategy was refreshed in October 2022 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. 5 ASYEs have successfully completed the programme in the last 3 months and a further 6 are in the process of completing it.
- 4.5 Career progression panels have been held every six 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 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.
- 4.6 The Panel meets twice a year and the most recent panel was held in May 2022. There were 6 submissions from staff with 5 being successful, of whom 3 became senior social workers. The next panel will be held later in November 2022.
- 4.7 A further round of international recruitment of 9 qualified Social Workers from Africa took place in late 2021. Retention of international staff remains high – 8 of the 2021 and 7 of the 2019 cohort remain in role. A further round of international recruitment will take place later this year/early next year from India.
- 4.8 The relocation support package of up to £5,000 has been used for international recruitment and includes a number of clearly defined elements including payment of the worker's first month's rent and deposit. The contrast in cost of living has been particularly apparent in the last recruitment round and was a

factor in why 5 overseas candidates who were recruited, subsequently withdrew from the process. In addition, the average rents in north-west London have significantly increased. It is therefore considered that the current maximum amount should be increased. There is significant variance amongst local authorities surveyed, offering relocation support packages ranging from £5,000 - £8,000.

- 4.9 Whilst these and other measures will continue to contribute to the recruitment and retention of permanent staff, short-term measures are required to boost the number of permanent staff in key social work roles, particularly in the Care Planning Teams in the Looked After Children and Permanency Service.
- 4.10 Beyond these initiatives and to address the underlying structural workforce concerns, a corporate project, sponsored by the Corporate Director (CYP), focussed on improving outcomes for the recruitment and retention of social workers is being developed. This work will include reviewing, evaluating and benchmarking incentive packages and other drivers, and exploring options for best use of available budgets for maximising the number of permanent staff in hard to fill posts in the long term. It will also consider staffing challenges within Adult Social Care.
- 4.11 There will be an updated report presented to the Committee by the end of spring 2023, following a review of the impact and effectiveness of the recruitment and retention arrangements with proposals for how these should be organised.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

- 5.1 Providing incentives to support the recruitment and retention to social work positions within the Looked After Children and Permanency service is an investment which could lead to cost avoidance if permanent staff are retained in place of providing interim cover for agency staff. The additional cost pressure is estimated at £7.2k per year per agency social work staff member.
- 5.2 The cost of a one-off golden hello payment for the current vacant positions will cost in the region of £0.128m (if all posts were filled). It is proposed to fund the golden hellos on a one-off basis from reserves in order that the scheme can be properly evaluated upon conclusion to determine the impact on recruitment. It is not considered affordable to offer this on a permanent basis and needs careful monitoring and consideration prior to offering the scheme again in the future.
- 5.3 The cost of increasing the retention payment from £1,200 to £4,500 for staff on PO1 to PO7 will cost an additional £0.1m and would need to be identified from existing resources, as it would be a recurring cost.
- 5.4 There is no relocation budget currently available. Funding for relocations of future recruitment of overseas staff would need to be managed within the existing resources and a reserve built up to fund the costs if the need arises.

## **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 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 state of the employment market, which may lead an employer to increase the pay of a particular job in order 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 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 GP Committee in October 2018 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 Adult Social Care Service. The overall analysis was that the risks that the criteria for applying the proposed payments disadvantage persons with a protected characteristic 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. The proposal to enhance the recruitment and retention arrangements for staff in the looked after children teams to align them with the hard to recruit teams in the Localities Service reduces the amount of disparity, at least within the Children and Young People Department.

## **8.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

8.1 Not Applicable (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 above.

## **10.0 Next Steps**

10.1 There are regular recruitment campaigns and, should the GP committee approve these recommendations, they 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 by the end of spring 2023.

## **Related Documents**

General Purposes Committee, 15 October 2018 and 8 November 2021

**Report sign off:**

***Nigel Chapman***

Corporate Director of Children and  
Young People