



General Purposes Committee
22 May 2023

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

**Recruitment and Retention Payments for Children and
Young People's Social Workers**

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: Outline of existing recruitment and retention arrangements
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with a further update following the most recent decision in November 2022 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 Looked After Children and Permanency (LAC and Permanency) 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, including

proposals developed following a comprehensive review of incentive packages, which are designed to reduce the complexity of existing arrangements and improve recruitment and retention outcomes for social worker staff of all grades and in all teams. The current arrangements are shown in Appendix 1.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee agree to extend the use of two recruitment and retention initiatives, to all teams within the department, as follows:

- To make a one-off payment of £5,000 to newly recruited permanent qualified social work staff on grades PO1 – PO7, on satisfactory completion of probationary period and repayable where an employee leaves the council's employment within 12 months of receiving the payment.
- To make retention payments of £2,500 to all qualified social work staff on grades PO1 to PO7.

2.2 That the Committee agrees to retain the enhanced retention payment of £4,500 per annum for those teams where it is particularly hard to recruit and retain qualified social work staff i.e. the Short and Long Term Teams in the Localities Service and the Care Planning Teams in the LAC and Permanency Service (as outlined in Appendix 1).

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 decisions in March 2016, October 2018, November 2021 and November 2022, 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 supported the permanent recruitment of qualified social work 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, challenges remain within the Short and Long Term Teams in the Localities Service and Care Planning Teams in the LAC 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 Historically, recruitment and retention within other teams across both services has not presented the same challenges, however this is becoming increasingly difficult. In some teams only 50% of non-management roles are held by permanent staff. The disparity between those teams covered by the arrangements and those teams that are not is also having an impact on staff morale as staff feel less valued than their colleagues in other teams.
- 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 challenge across all teams with some posts currently vacant.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 Despite the introduction of the recruitment and retention arrangements in 2018 and enhancement to these in 2021 and 2022 agreed by GP committee, the scale of the challenge at both a national and regional level requires ongoing review and development to ensure Brent continues to compete in what remains an increasingly competitive marketplace for suitably qualified and experienced social workers.

4.0 Update

- 4.1 Experience from recent recruitment activity following the enhancements agreed by GP Committee in November 2021 and November 2022 highlights the particular difficulty faced in recruiting experienced social workers. Only 1 non-management social work role has been filled in response to traditional advertising methods since December 2022 with the outcome of a further 2 awaited. A contributing factor has been the challenges in clearly articulating the different recruitment and retention payment arrangements in a composite job advertisement. An example of this is applicants withdrawing from the process when they establish that not all posts within all teams attract the enhanced arrangements. There continues to be a more positive outcome from targeting the conversion of existing agency staff, with a further 2 currently in the process of converting and expressions of interest from another 3. The vast majority of the agency conversions have been within the Localities service, encouraged by the retention payments.
- 4.2 The recruitment activity carried out recently, particularly the focus on agency worker conversions, suggests the enhanced recruitment and retention arrangements that apply to specific teams are having a more positive impact although it is too soon to fully assess their effectiveness as the first annual retention payments were paid in December 2022 and the first annual payments for the Care Planning Teams are due to be paid in December 2023. Also, of the newly recruited permanent staff who received the £7,500 one-off payment,

the majority of these are still within the 12 month period during which they are required to repay the amount if they leave the council.

- 4.3 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 8 are in the process of completing it.
- 4.4 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.
- 4.5 The Panel meets twice a year and the most recent panel was held in November 2022. There were 5 submissions from staff, all of whom were successful, of whom 3 became senior social workers. The next panel will be held in November 2022.
- 4.6 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 8 of the 2019 cohort remain in role. A further round of international recruitment is underway from India, with interviews taking place in May 2023.
- 4.7 The relocation support package of up to £6,000, which the GP Committee agreed to increase from the previous limit of £5,000, continues to be used for international recruitment and includes a number of clearly defined elements including payment of the worker's first month's rent and deposit.
- 4.8 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.
- 4.9 In April 2023, a Transformation-led project, focussing on optimising the Brent offer for CYP social workers, was completed. 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.
- 4.10 Building on 2022 work by the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA), the review engaged social work leads at other London authorities to compare incentives alongside salaries, progression arrangements and recruitment and retention outcomes. The key findings of this work include:
 - Brent's current incentive package is more complex than most other London boroughs. Whilst most boroughs offer further financial incentives on top of salaries, in Brent the wide variety of additional payments -

including retention payments and one-off 'welcome payments' that significantly differ based on grades, roles and teams – is an outlier.

- Brent's overall financial offer, when combining salaries and higher-range additional payments, is generally competitive for most social worker roles. Brent is least competitive, albeit still near middle-ranking, for non-management social worker roles (PO1 – PO3) that do not attract higher additional payments.
- Some authorities have introduced progression to PO4 grades for social workers in non-management roles. This type of progression does not currently exist in Brent, indicating Brent may be less competitive in non-management progression routes. However, this area has been the most complicated to accurately benchmark and further work is needed to fully understand these arrangements.

4.11 The findings of this review have been considered alongside detailed feedback from CYP and HR leads, who have identified the complexity of existing multi-tiered financial incentives as a challenge in both maintaining staff morale (specifically for those in roles and teams paid lower incentives than their counterparts in equivalent roles and teams), and in successfully developing recruitment initiatives that clearly and concisely communicate what the Brent offer for social workers is.

4.12 In response to these findings, proposals outlined in paragraph 2.1 were developed. These proposals are designed to enable a more consistent and simplified approach to additional payments across the whole service, whilst also ensuring no current staff member is adversely impacted by new arrangements.

4.13 In addition to implementing these arrangements, further work to build on the learning of the pan-London review and explore progression routes for non-manager social workers into more senior grades that are not currently available in Brent will commence.

4.14 The outcome of this work and an updated review of the impact and effectiveness of recruitment and retention arrangements will be included in a report presented to the Committee by the end of spring 2024.

4.15 Payment of the £7,500 welcome payment under the current arrangements will be honoured for those staff who were recruited on the basis of this higher payment as we transition to the proposal to move to a standard payment of £5,000 for all teams.

5.0 Financial Implications

5.1 Providing incentives to support the recruitment and retention to social work positions within the Localities and Looked After Children and Permanency service areas 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 Remodelling the incentives by increasing the cost of retention payment from £1,200 to £2,500 for all qualified social work staff and continuing the retention

payment of £4,500 to the “hard to recruit” positions, will require an overall investment of £0.394m including oncosts and will need to be managed within growth funds allocated to CYP in 2023/24.

- 5.3 Included in the investment, is the assumption that there may be 20 one-off £5,000 golden hello payments which would cost £0.132m including oncosts. It is proposed that a reserve is created to fund the golden hellos on a one-off basis in order that the scheme can be properly evaluated to determine the impact on recruitment.
- 5.4 It is anticipated that the revised incentives, would increase the number of permanent staff into the social care teams, reducing reliance on agency staff, which would also lead to a reduction in the cost pressure arising from the use of those agency staff.
- 5.5 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 2024.

Related Documents:

General Purpose Committee reports - 15 October 2018, 8 November 2021 and 17 November 2022

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director of Children and Young People