



**General Purpose Committee**  
1 November 2023

**Report from the Corporate Director  
of Care, Health and Wellbeing**

**Recruitment and Retention Payments for Adult Social Care  
Social Workers, Occupational Therapists and Visual  
Impairment Rehabilitation Officers**

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	N/A
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	One Appendix 1: Outline of proposed recruitment and retention arrangements
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	<p>Claudia Brown Director Adult Social Services <a href="mailto:claudia.brown@brent.gov.uk">claudia.brown@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Sarah Richards Head of Intermediate Care and Principal Occupational Therapist <a href="mailto:sarah.richards@brent.gov.uk">sarah.richards@brent.gov.uk</a></p> <p>Evelyn Amedoda Head of Safeguarding and Principal Social Worker <a href="mailto:evelyn.amedoda@brent.gov.uk">evelyn.amedoda@brent.gov.uk</a></p>

**1.0 Executive Summary**

1.1 The local authority has a legal duty to assess residents' care and support needs and the local and national picture indicates there is high demand and strong competition for qualified, regulated staff to discharge this statutory responsibility. In Brent, this has resulted in recruitment and retention challenges and a heavy reliance on costly agency staff. A lack of permanent qualified staff in these posts risks poorer quality services and poses a risk to financial stability due to the escalating costs associated with agency staff.

- 1.2 This report provides the General-Purpose committee with a summary of activities undertaken by Adult Social Care to date to recruit and qualified Social Workers, Occupational Therapist and Visual Impairment Rehabilitation officers.
- 1.3 This report seeks approval for plans to introduce incentive payments for qualified Social Workers, Occupational Therapist and Visual Impairment Rehabilitation officers in ASC. Introduction of the proposed will improve the recruitment and retention of permanent staff in these areas.
- 1.4 This approach compliments a suite of strategies being employed and is forming the building blocks of an overarching workforce strategy within the refreshed ASC transformation programme. The proposals are closely aligned to the children's social care approach approved earlier this year to ensure that parity and fairness across the social care workforce is maintained.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 That the Committee agree to the use of recruitment and retention initiatives, to all teams within the department, as follows:
- 2.2 To make a one-off payment of £5,000 to newly recruited permanent qualified social workers, occupational therapist and visual impairment rehabilitation officers' staff on grades PO2 – PO7, 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 annual retention payments of £3,000 to all qualified social workers, occupational therapy and visual impairment rehabilitation officer staff on grades PO2 to PO7.
- 2.4 To make retention payments for Best Interest Assessors of £2,000 a year for being on the rota to carry out statutory duties commensurate with the role.
- 2.5 To make retention payments of £1,000 a year for qualified Practice Educators to take two students a year.

## **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 fifty percent of regulated staff are locum workers. The proposal in this paper aims to retain good performing agency workers which include staff who live within Brent and recruit a permanent workforce that is representative of the borough at all levels.

3.1.3 We are currently hosting 15 local apprentices and the aim is to have a retention offer that will enable us to retain them once they have gained their social work or Occupational Therapist qualification.

## **3.2 Background**

3.2.1 The Adult Social Care workforce is of central importance in delivering an excellent service to adults requiring care and support and the Director of Adult Social Care is held accountable for professional leadership including internal and external workforce planning. This proposal relates to those who are direct employees of Brent council as opposed to a commissioned or provider service.

3.2.2 The ASC workforce is its greatest asset; having the appropriate numbers of staff who are highly skilled, confident, compassionate and care about the people they support is what ensures the services delivered are of high quality and meet the needs of Brent residents. Whilst this paper specifically addresses recruitment and retention payments for regulated staff, where there is a high agency spend and significant recruitment difficulties, it is important to recognise the enormous contribution to the delivery of ASC offered by non-regulated staff, and without whom ASC would not be able to deliver services to residents. However, at the current time in Brent these positions do not present the same challenges in relation to recruitment and retention.

3.2.3 Recruitment challenges are not unique to Brent; the employment market for social workers, occupational therapists and visual impairment rehabilitation officers is extremely competitive both nationally and locally. For example, London wide, at the time of writing, there were 700 vacancies for OTs across health and social care. In July 23 Brent ASC was employing a total 117 agency staff, 72% of whom were covering vacant establishment positions. National Government recognises the magnitude of the national challenge and in July 2023, unveiled a £600 million package to help with recruitment and retention in social care. The Adult Social Care Market Sustainability fund will support the social care workforce and boost capacity in social care, in turn supporting the NHS ahead of winter and through into next year. £600 million funding for adult social care includes a £570 million workforce fund over two years, distributed to local authorities and £30 million funding for local authorities in the most challenged health systems. Brent has been allocated £2,042,535 for 2023-24 from the fund. Part of this fund will be used to support recruitment and retention of qualifying staff in Brent ASC.

3.2.4 The proposed scheme is set out in appendix one and is reflective of the successful scheme adopted by Brent's Children and Young People both in quantum and in structure. There are some small deviations from the CYP scheme which are reflective of the differing departmental structures.

3.2.5 Over recent years, ASC leads have taken a wide range of actions to address recruitment challenges focusing on:

- Workforce recruitment, retention, and stability
- Workforce development

- Leadership and management
- Our work culture

The overarching workforce strategy for adult social care will ensure that this approach, alongside the wider offer which is being refreshed will be effectively managed into implementation and the impact measured which includes both financial and quality metrics. The capability and capacity of the workforce is a key strategic risk to the effective delivery of the adult social care offer in Brent so strong governance and oversight is essential.

- 3.2.6 It is anticipated that the proposed recruitment and retention payments, would increase the number of permanent staff into adult social care, reducing reliance on agency staff, which would also lead to a reduction in the cost pressure arising from the use of those agency staff. This will also create stability and the opportunity for career progression. Notably, an increased permanent workforce will better support continuity of care to Brent residents.

### **3.3 Impact**

- 3.3.1 Since COVID the adult social care workforce nationally has become even more, with more staff irrespective of the employer looking to retire, change careers or move to agency work. This is a national issue and is reflected in the Brent Council employed workforce. All councils increasingly looking for agency staff to address gaps in capacity has inevitably driven up cost of agency staff and means local authorities have seen even more of their permanent staff resign to take advantage of the attractive rates being offered by employment agencies. Staff have left permanent posts with the Council to take up employment either as an agency worker or other London local authorities where there is a more competitive remuneration and reward structure. The impact of staff leaving is felt financially and, on the morale, and cohesion of the teams. It inevitably has consequences for service delivery as existing staff have to spend significant time inducting and supporting new team members and new staff cannot generate the throughput of their longer serving colleagues. To attract talented, permanent workers, manageable caseloads and opportunities to develop are essential components of the employment offer. In July 23 Brent ASC was employing a total 117 agency staff, 72% of whom were covering vacant establishment positions. The annual cost of agency staff for 22/23 in ASC was £6.5m.

- 3.3.2 Stabilising the Adult Social Care workforce has been a major challenge in recent years. Both the social work and occupational therapy professions appear on the list of skills shortages which enables overseas recruitment to fill key vacancies. The shortage has also resulted in a sharp decrease in the quality of agency workers and hence an increase in the amount of support they require from managers and colleagues putting further pressure on existing permanent practitioners and managers. Many agency candidates are newly qualified graduates but are commanding top rates of pay. Agency staff are less likely to be invested in service development, and to develop the skills, experience, and local knowledge to give quality services to residents. This places a risk on the

delivery of stable support for adults in need of care in Brent and meeting our statutory duties.

- 3.3.3 Despite repeated advertising, there has been limited success in recruiting permanent staff through the current recruitment and retention arrangements. In addition to other measures, introducing recruitment and retention payments will attract qualified professionals looking to work and remain working in Brent and will introduce parity with colleagues working in Children and Young People.

#### **4.0 Recruitment and Retention Bench Marking**

- 4.1 A recent bench marking exercise demonstrated that many local authorities have introduced recruitment and retention allowances and many that are not currently doing so are considering introducing them. To remain competitive within the London market, to retain existing staff and to recruit competent new team members, recruitment and retention incentives are being recommended to complement the portfolio of other measures.
- 4.2 Some local authorities have embedded higher than average salaries into the job role. For example, in Tower Hamlets a main grade occupational therapist commands a salary of up to £51,781 whereas in Brent a practitioner of the same grade receives up to £40,566. It's not known whether this approach has improved the position in relation to permanent employees, but introducing a retention allowance would allow Brent to assess whether this might be a viable option in the long term if a recurrent funding stream can be identified.
- 4.3 At the time of writing, Brent ASC was spending £6m annually on agency staff, 72% of the agency spend is used on establishment posts. If the proposed scheme were applied to all vacant establishment posts it would cost £1,076,000 over two years. However, it is anticipated that it this will pay dividends in the cohesion of teams and quality.

#### **5.0 Other Approaches to Recruitment and Retention**

- 5.1 Other approaches to recruiting and retaining staff have included reviewing the benefits to working in Brent, ensuring that our offer is competitive and effectively marketed to encourage high quality practitioners to apply and stay in Brent. Over recent years, ASC leads have taken a wide range of actions to address these challenges. These actions have included:
- Offering the opportunity to rent key worker housing which has led to practitioners becoming permanent and remaining in their roles.
  - Developing the offer for newly qualified social workers (ASYE). Since the refreshed programme was put in place in October 2022 a total of nine newly qualified social workers have been supported and remain within the council's employee.
  - Introducing internal apprenticeships for OTs and SWs and launching Brent's first Community Social Work Apprenticeship Programme which offered local residents an opportunity to gain a degree whilst learning and earning a London Living Wage salary. The apprenticeships have been

very popular, ASC currently hosts 15 social work apprentices and two OT apprentices and there was strong competition for the places.

- Development of staff to become practice educators and recruitment to dedicated practice development roles to support students and apprentices in social work. This allows frontline staff and managers to maintain service delivery as well as supporting students.
- Introduction of the Adult Social Care Training Academy ensuring all social care staff have access to training that will enhance their skills, knowledge, and confidence. Between April and December 2022, 329 courses were completed.
- Fast-tracking of active agency staff to convert to a permanent contract has had limited success.
- Market supplement payment for OTs at PO2-PO4 grades which has generated some success in recruitment and significant success in retaining practitioners.
- Rolling recruitment adverts and social media advertising have had limited success.
- Regular supervision supported by a standardised documentation and a tracker.
- Using creative strategies to advertise and recruit local people who are more likely to want to work in their local community. Working with North West London Social Care Academy on ways to engage with different groups in our communities, including previously marginalised groups who may not have been in work as part of a pipeline into Social Care.
- Recruiting based on values and behaviours, like kindness, compassion and reliability, life experiences and a willingness to learn. Evidence suggest that people are more likely to stay in the sector.
- Communicating clearly with applicants about progress on their application, to help build positive relationships and keep them onboard for the recruitment process. Share information and timeframes early on to ensure eager applicants can start as soon as possible.

## 5.2 Other measures which are currently in development include;

- Launch of a career progression framework, enabling staff to move through the promotion system for PO2 – PO7 grades. This will be supported by linked grade job descriptions to facilitate progression.
- International recruitment programme and sponsorship for practitioners from overseas.
- Rotations for OTs across health and social care
- Introduction of a new Workforce Project Delivery Officer role and introduction of practice development lead for OT.
- For non-regulated staff the developing care workforce pathway will reflect the skills, behaviours and expertise needed to deliver excellent social care and set clear expectations about what high-quality care looks. In time, it will become a recognised benchmark for all non-regulated in adult social care roles.

5.3 The wellbeing of staff is crucial, and the pandemic put into sharp focus the need to consider staff resilience and morale which can be a contributing factor to high staff attrition rates. Brent ASC strives to offer supportive working conditions and recognises that stabilising the workforce is likely to reduce caseloads which subsequently reduces pressure. There are a mixture of things that allow our staff to feel valued, such as pay, training and secondment opportunities and positivity about their work. In addition to these, the right environment needs to be cultivated that allows a high level of support and a culture that doesn't look to just place blame but learn when mistakes are made by learning events. Other elements of the offer to staff include:

- Use of the council's employee assistance scheme which is regularly promoted and staff are encouraged to use the service.
- Support and advice offered by senior managers, managers and Principal Social Worker/OT.
- Celebrating success in team meetings as well as creating an environment where social care staff feel safe to practice.
- Promoting Brent's flexible working conditions internally to support retention and to potential new recruits. When there is a balance with the needs of the business, there is a positive impact on retention and morale and gives people the ability to have better work life balance which is beneficial from a health perspective.
- Supporting staff by providing payment for things like travel (zip cars) and promoting claiming back professional registration fees from Inland Revenue. This will reduce the administrative and financial challenges that staff might face.
- Promoting staff benefits to help them to utilise all available benefits, such as annual leave, sabbatical, pension and Brent Reward care. We reinforce staff understanding of what benefits they have and should utilise through our internal departmental communication such as monthly newsletter.
- Promoting a positive working environment and inclusive culture that people buy in to. Visible leadership that models the desired behaviours is vital. This has been borne out in LGA ASC staff survey results.

5.4 Whilst these and other measures will continue to contribute to the recruitment and retention of permanent staff, the proposal for recruitment and retention incentives as outlined in this report are required to maintain and boost the number of permanent staff in regulated roles across the department.

## 6.0 London Salaries and Financial Incentives for ASC Workforce

Borough	Recruitment & Retention incentive payments
Newham	£3000 per year for all teams including OTs
Bromley	£2000 welcome payment and £2000 retention payment for some Senior Practitioners and Team Managers (in certain teams) £1000 welcome payment and £1500 retention payment for Social Worker roles (in certain teams)
Waltham Forest	£2000 per year for all social work roles £2000 welcome payment for OTs

Richmond	£3000 per 2 years (for Social Worker roles)
Wandsworth	£3000 per 2 years (for Social Worker roles)
Harrow	Planning to introduce incentives
Hillingdon	Planning to introduce incentives
Greenwich	Planning to introduce incentives
Barnet	Planning to introduce incentives
Camden	No R&R but higher average salaries for all roles
Southwark	Payments for OTs not SWs. £2,327 per annum.
Lambeth	For all PO1-PO3 £1000 welcome payment plus £1000 annual retention allowance Additional payments for targeted hard to fill posts
RBKC	Market supplement for social workers of £1500 per annum
Hammersmith and Fulham	No R&R but higher average salaries for all roles

- 6.1 A recent bench marking exercise demonstrated that many local authorities have introduced recruitment and retention allowances and many that are not currently doing so are considering introducing them. To remain competitive within the London market, to retain existing staff and to recruit competent new team members, recruitment and incentives are being recommended to complement the portfolio of other measures.
- 6.2 Some local authorities have embedded higher than average salaries into the job role. For example, in Tower Hamlets a main grade occupational therapist commands a salary of up to £51,781 whereas in Brent a practitioner of the same grade receives up to £40,566. It's not known whether this approach has improved the position in relation to permanent employees, but introducing a retention allowance would allow Brent to assess whether this might be a viable option in the long term if a recurrent funding stream can be identified.
- 6.3 It is anticipated that the proposed incentives, would increase the number of permanent staff into adult social care, reducing reliance on agency staff, which would also lead to a reduction in the cost pressure arising from the use of those agency staff. This will also create stability and the opportunity for career progression. Notably, an increased permanent workforce will better support continuity of care to Brent residents.

## 7.0 Next Steps

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 It is proposed that payments start from January 2024 (Please refer to Appendix 1 which specifies qualifying staff)



7.3 Recruitment of the Workforce Project Delivery Officer to assist with implementation of the payments and continue to drive recruitment and retention activities.

## **8.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

Not Applicable

## **9.0 Financial Considerations**

9.1. The financial impact of the proposed Recruitment and Retention Arrangements are shown in Table B in Appendix 1.

9.2. If every vacant position was filled, then the full cost to the department would be £1.076m across 2 years. However, the cost is based on success of recruitment, and a further breakdown of costs based on the % of capacity filled is shown in Table B.

9.3. In 2023/24 this will be funded from the Market Sustainability and Improvement Fund-Workforce Fund. As is referenced in 3.1.3 Brent has been awarded £2.043m of MSIF funding in 2023/24, and part of this will be set aside to fund these proposals.

9.4. It is anticipated, but not confirmed, that this MSIF will also be available in 24/25; otherwise, the service will need to identify alternative funding to proceed. If we are to continue with this approach beyond 24/25 the impact and success of this approach will need to be reviewed, and a recurrent funding stream identified. However, as the use of agency reduces and the workforce becomes more stable, the costs of the scheme would also reduce.

## **10.0 Legal Considerations**

10.1 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.

## **11.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

11.1 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.

- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 The proposal in this paper seeks to introduce recruitment and retention payments for all social workers, occupational therapist and visual impairment rehabilitation officers 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.
- 11.4 The make-up of the Adult Social Care workforce (specifically the posts which are qualified social workers) overall is predominantly female and from a BAME background. The characteristics of ethnicity and gender are specified as these were the two most significant types affected by the proposed changes.
- 11.5 The diversity make-up of the Adult Social Care workforce population (where individuals have declared this information) is as follows:

BAME	79%
White	21%
Female	69%
Male	31%

- 11.6 The current demographic of Brents Adult Social Care workforce reflects the diversity of the borough and indicates equality and fairness, through the lens of diversity, in the current recruitment and retention approach. Additionally, the programme for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic managers demonstrates the focus on supporting the workforce's diverse talent.
- 11.7 There are no obvious, substantial equality implications within these proposals particularly as the approach seeks to ensure Brent continues to deliver a quality service to adults with care needs. However, for staff, it is important to ensure that recruitment and retention payments are awarded in a fair and equitable manner.

## **12.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

Not applicable

### **13.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

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

### **14.0 Communication Considerations**

14.1 The approach to Recruitment and Retention payments will need to be communicated across ASC 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:**

**Helen Coombes**

Corporate Director Care, Health and Wellbeing