

**Community Services Brent**  
**Briefing Paper for Brent Health Partnership Overview and Scrutiny Committee on**  
**Health Visiting Recruitment in Brent**

**1. Introduction**

This paper provides an update to the Brent Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee on the progress made by the Trust to improve the recruitment of Health Visitors. This is part of the national "Call to Action" implementation plan for health visiting which is being co-ordinated locally by the NHS Brent Health Visitor Implementation Plan Project Board.

**2. Health Visiting in Brent**

In February 2011 the "Health Visitor Implementation Plan – A Call to Action" was published by the Department of Health. In June 2011 a "Task & Finish group" was set up locally to progress the work, led by a Consultant in Public Health (Maternal and Child Health) from NHS Brent. As the local provider of the health visiting service, Community Services Brent have been closely involved in the design of the Brent plan, represented by the General Manager for Children's Services and the Deputy Director of Nursing & Clinical Standards – Brent. The outcomes and progress of the group are monitored by the Director of Nursing and Clinical Practice for the Trust and contribute to the Health Visiting Plans for the three boroughs (Brent, Ealing and Harrow) covered by the Trust.

**3. Historic Recruitment Status in Brent**

The national shortage of Health Visitors over the last decade has impacted most on recruitment in areas of high deprivation. Across the capital the situation is intensified by relatively high numbers of child protection cases and Looked After Children making it more difficult to attract staff into the service. In Brent, as in many London boroughs, there have been vacancies constantly over the past four years. The current funded establishment for Health Visitors in Brent is 39.8 WTE. Table 1 below outlines vacant Health Visitor posts over the past 2 years which have averaged 12 WTE vacancies.

**Table 1: Band 6 & 7 Health Visitor Vacancies from April 2010 - March 2012**

Vacancies	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Average Vacancy
<b>2010-11</b>	13.54	11.07	11.43	13.03	10.2	13.8	12.8	12.8	12.2	9.5	12.1	12.1	12.05
<b>2011-12</b>	11.5	11.3	12.2	12.2	13.2	12.2	13.2	13.2	9.88	11.46	13.22	12.22	12.15

Recruitment drives during this period have delivered only one to two qualified health visitors per year and this has been offset by the number of staff that have retired, again one to two per year. Currently six of the twelve WTE vacancies are backfilled by internal bank staff (temporary staff service).

#### **4. Current Health Visitor Recruitment Status as of April 2012**

A recent recruitment drive in March 2012 has seen an increased number of external applicants who have been appointed subject to the usual pre-employment checks. It must be noted that four of the applicants interviewed are currently Health Visiting students who are due to qualify in September 2012.

**Table 2: HV recruitment applicants**

External Recruitment	March 2012
Shortlist	6
Interview	5
Offered Post	5
<b>Accepted Offer</b>	<b>5</b>

Community Services Brent also traditionally supports five internal students. This year three full-time students are being supported by our Specialist Community Practitioner Teachers (SCPTs) as well as two return-to-practice students (qualified health visitors who have had an absence from service of more than 3 years and are now on a refresher course). The internal students have all been interviewed and offered health visiting posts upon qualifying in September 2012. It is not compulsory for internal students to remain with the Trust that has trained them once they have qualified. Hence it is imperative that students are well supported and encouraged to take up permanent posts in Brent.

**Table 3: HV applicants in total including Brent supported students**

<b>Applicants</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
Externally Recruited HVs	5
Internal HV Students	3
Return to Practice HVs	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

Consequently Community Services Brent have plans in place to enable a total of ten Health Visitor posts to be filled, predominantly with newly qualified staff, by the end of September 2012. The Trust is now planning how this number of newly qualified staff entering a service simultaneously can best be supported in terms of appropriate induction, mentoring systems, clinical supervision and child protection advice.

## **5. Ealing Hospital NHS Trust Recruitment & Retention Strategy**

The Trust is developing a recruitment & retention strategy which will be an important component of the Brent Health Visitor Implementation Plan. Given that the main requirement of the plan is to increase the number of Band 6 health visitors, the Trust will also be looking to recruit additional health visitors via a new NHS London centralised recruitment process.

A number of recruitment areas are being investigated as part of the strategy. The following two elements provide an example:

### **5.1 Newly Qualified Health Visitors**

Some provider organisations in London appear to be training more health visitors than they have available vacant posts to accommodate. The Trust is therefore asking NHS London to set up a system whereby excess health visiting staff can be identified and offered posts (after interview) in other parts of London.

NHS London may also be able to expand the system enabling a clearing house process with neighbouring areas that have excess health visiting students. Community providers in NW

London would be interested in setting up such arrangements with Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Surrey and Berkshire.

## **5.2 Student Health Visitors**

The Trust has assumed that the new centralised recruitment system will achieve the required target of doubling the number of student health visitors in this recruitment round (22 across the Trust in total). In June 2012 the Trust will find out if this target has been met and if not, the Trust will take a series of actions to attempt to boost the number of students.

## **6. Summary**

The Health Visiting Service in Brent has maintained an average vacancy rate of 12 WTE over the past two years. It is anticipated that the new methods of recruiting and the planned Trust recruitment & retention strategy will support attracting more newly qualified Health Visitors to the service in the long-term.

The recruitment & retention component of the Health Visitor Implementation Plan has provided an opportunity to plan for an incremental increase in qualified staff based on a more equitable and needs-based approach. Overall the Implementation Plan has made good initial progress and is on target to deliver the trajectory agreed for 2012.

## **7. Recommendation**

The Overview & Scrutiny Panel is asked to note the good progress of the Health Visiting recruitment plan in Brent.

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**14 May 2012**