

**TO: EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE**  
**20 March 2018**

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**SOCIAL WORK RECRUITMENT & RETENTION INCENTIVES**  
**Chief Executive**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 In order to address some significant challenges with the recruitment and retention of Children's social workers, the Council implemented pay incentives in 2015 in the form of market premia and retention payments. These are up for review in April 2018.
- 1.2 Given the current fragile position of the recruitment and retention strategies and the fact that a review is currently underway to seek to address the challenging recruitment and retention areas across the council, the suggested approach is to renew the current incentives pending this council wide review.

**2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 **Employment Committee agrees for the extension of the market premia and retention payments for children's social workers until 31 March 2020.**

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 In order to ensure that the Council meets its statutory duties in relation to Children's Social Care it is vital that high quality staff are recruited and retained. It is important that Bracknell Forest maintains a stable Children's Social Care workforce so that the best interests of the young people in the Borough can be served most effectively. The introduction of the market incentives has proved effective in stabilising the workforce and making Bracknell Forest an attractive place to work.
- 3.2 It is important that Bracknell Forest continues to reduce the use and reliance on temporary agency staff which is both expensive and does not provide a consistent and quality level of service to families and children.

**4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 The option of removing the current pay incentives could be implemented but the effect of this action is likely to result in a significant exodus of staff from Bracknell Forest to neighbouring authorities where the pay and conditions are at a similar level. At any time this would be a challenge and would place the local authority and the services provided for young people at risk. Also, at a key time for the Family Safeguarding work, destabilising the workforce would be a significant risk for the council to take with this programme.

## 5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 In order to respond to the challenges with the recruitment and retention of children's social workers in 2015, the following pay incentives were introduced:

Post	Retention Payment	Number of posts
NQSW	£2000	39
Social Worker	£2000	
Senior Practitioner	£2000	16
Assistant Team Manager	£3000	13
Team Manager	£4000	5
Head of Service	£5000	4

Post	Market Premia %
Social Worker	11.5%
Senior Practitioner	9%
Assistant Team Manager	4%
Team Manager	5.5%
Head of Service	5.5%

### 5.2 Impact of incentives

The introduction of the pay incentives proved effective with turnover stabilising and recruitment to vacant posts seeing greater numbers in the quality and quantity of candidates. This has had a positive experience for the young people working with a regular social worker and the staff themselves with a degree of stability within teams across the service. Since January 2016 there has been a full complement of permanent staff in Assistant Team Manager, Team Manager and Head of Service positions. If any manager left, the posts have been filled without delay.

- 5.3 The impact of these strategies was recognised positively with the Ofsted inspection in the summer 2017. This commended the Council on the way it had assured the workforce stability for the benefit of the children and families, ensuring that there are minimum changes in social work, and the way in which this strategic challenge had been addressed.
- 5.4 An Internal Audit of the controls and procedures in place within Recruitment & Retention (Incentives) – Children's Social Care (Children, Young People and Learning) was carried out in autumn 2016 and in general, it was found that the Recruitment and Retention Strategy implemented in 2015 has been successful in achieving the aims as set out at the time. Emphasis has been placed by management on improving the staffing position through financial incentives, but also through ensuring that the departmental culture and working environment is positive and focussed on staff need, making it conducive for employees to stay with the service.

### 5.5 Staff turnover

Following the introduction of the pay incentives, the turnover for these posts have stabilised significantly as identified in the table below.

Date	Turnover
Year ending 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2014	39.6%
Year ending 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2015	15.3%
Year ending 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2016	16.9%
Year ending 30 <sup>th</sup> September 2017	15.6%

### 5.6 Vacancy rate

The introduction of the incentives showed a positive picture and there was certainly greater confidence in filling any vacant position. The vacancy rate compared favourably with the national picture of an average vacancy rate of 17% at September 2017.

Date	Vacancy rate
September 2014	14.1%
September 2015	13%
September 2016	4.4%
September 2017	8.6%
December 2017	6.8%

### 5.7 Social Worker Case Loads

A key objective in stabilising the social care workforce was to reduce the caseloads and work pressures on staff. This would clearly assist the Council in the recruitment and retention activities by reducing the work pressures on staff. However, this has not been achievable due to an overall increase in the number of children involved with Children Social Care – more than a 25% increase since 2015. A casework breakdown is show below:

Date	Average case load per social worker
March 2015	17.7
March 2016	24.7
March 2017	18
June 2017	19.2
September 2017	18.5
December 2017	17.7

5.8 Through the various surveys, Social Work health check and exit interviews, the case load management is a key element to staff retention strategies of the Council. As a comparator for September 2017, the average case load per social worker throughout England and Wales was 17.8. Although the Council compares favourably with the national average it does little to enable an overall competitive advantage.

## 5.9 **Agency spend**

Another of the drivers in implementing the recruitment incentives was the desire to reduce the reliance on agency staffing in Children's Social Care. Bracknell Forest has decreased its reliance on agency staff over the past 3 years and this compares very favourably with the other Berkshire local authorities. The reduction in the need to employ agency staff reflects the positive impact of recruitment on the service with a £329k saving for 2016/17 (2015/16 costs were £769k).

## 5.10 **The National Picture**

The social work profession continues to face two key problems: the recruitment of social workers with the right skills and retaining the most effective and experienced social workers. Nationally there is a dearth of experienced social workers with the difficulty particularly acute in management positions i.e. Assistant Team Leaders, Team Leaders and Heads of Service. The expected working life in the profession is an average of less than 8 years, significantly shorter than comparable professions.

## 5.11 **The Local Picture**

Regional collaboration between councils is essential in understanding and shaping the market for qualified social workers. A project took place during 2015 in the South East to develop a regional protocol through a Memorandum of Cooperation. Eighteen of the nineteen South East authorities (excluding Slough) have signed up to the Memorandum which has been designed to exert some control over the social work recruitment and retention market and the movement of agency staff. This approach has proved successful to date although there is evidence that a neighbouring authority is considering breaking away from this agreement.

All neighbouring Berkshire authorities have implemented improved recruitment and retention packages for children's social workers including retention bonuses, market supplements and sabbaticals. Current Bracknell Forest salaries and incentives are in line with the other Berkshire local authorities.

## 5.12 **The current position in Bracknell Forest**

There is an overview & scrutiny working group currently reviewing the recruitment and retention initiatives across the Council. Whilst ultimately this will need to incorporate the social care workforce through these discussions and actions, these current pay incentives need to be considered separately as the pay incentive are already in place and ready for review.

5.13 The introduction of the pay incentives have no doubt impacted positively on the reward package, it is clear that this is now considered by practitioners as a standard element of the overall reward package. Any decision to remove this payment would have a significant detrimental impact on the ability to retain existing staff and would likely lead to a high level of staff leaving to seek opportunities in neighbouring council's.

5.14 Although staff turnover has been stable, as indicated at paragraph 5.5, the position has changed over the last 9 months where turnover is increasing – 11 staff left the service in 2017 whilst it is known others have been approached by neighbouring authorities but, following discussion with their managers, persuaded to remain. Although there have been a number who have just moved out of the area, 3 staff have left to join a partner organisation who attract a higher benefit package. The staff are marketable in the current time with has been assisted with the positive Ofsted. This does continue to be a challenge.

**5.15 Recruitment**

There has been a marked reduction with the number and quality of applications received for social work vacancies. The initial impact of the introduction of the incentives showed a positive picture and there was certainly greater confidence in filling any vacant position. The current picture has changed significantly where there is no longer the quantity of experienced candidates to fill vacant positions. This does place a great emphasise if retaining the existing workforce which the pay incentives have been designed to assist.

5.16 There is little doubt that the introduction of the pay incentives has made a positive impact for the Council in fulfilling the children's social work responsibilities. Whilst the information in this report substantiates this, the position does remain fragile and wherever possible the Council should seek opportunities to retain this stability in this important part of the Council workforce.

**6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS**

Borough Solicitor

6.1 The relevant legal issues are addressed within the report. The LA has power to offer these premiums to retain and recruit to key positions.

Borough Treasurer

6.2 The approved staffing budget includes sufficient funds to finance the cost of social work recruitment and retention incentives, which cost around £0.5m in total per year. It is estimated that whilst the total cost of social work is likely to reduce if the package was withdrawn, given the additional costs of using agency staff, the saving is likely to be relatively small and would need to be considered against the negative impact on the service and the children supported

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 There are no equality issues arising from this report

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Ensuring there is suitably qualified staff in these key posts is essential for the work of CYP&L and the vulnerable young people and their families who have contact with the staff. Removing these pay incentives would seriously hinder the recruitment and retention strategy across the department and almost certainly lead to high numbers of staff departures to neighbouring authorities.

Background Papers

None.

Contact for further information

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