

**Agency Worker Costs
Director of Resources**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The recruitment market has been extremely challenging over recent years meaning the council having to rely more heavily on the use of agency workers to fulfil certain roles. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the costs of using these agency workers and actions being taken to reduce these costs.
- 1.2 Members should note that a level of reliance on agency workers and specialist interim staff is to be expected, since a small unitary authority like Bracknell Forest cannot expect always to be able to employ staff directly for specialist posts. Such staff do provide needed skills and capacity. However, the level of agency staff having to be employed in recent years to cover vacant posts is a concern and has prompted a detailed review of recruitment and retention approached for hard to fill posts, starting with social workers. The proposals from the first stage of this review were recently endorsed by the Employment Committee and the Executive.

2.0 Supporting Information

- 2.1 Over the past 5 years the council spend on agency workers has increased as shown below:

Spend by Year	
Year	Agency Expenditure
2018/19	3,657,621
2019/20	4,525,408
2020/21	3,869,866
2021/22	5,677,565
April 22 to September 22	3,792,396*
Excludes Public Health and Schools Block funded spend	

- 2.2 Until April 2022 the details above include the spend through the Matrix contract – the actual costs will be higher as there will have been workers engaged off contract. Since April 22 these costs are being monitored in addition to spend through Matrix.
*For the period April 2022 to September 2022 this includes:

Through Matrix: £2,714,858
Off Contract: £1,077,538

- 2.3 The People Directorate is the highest user of agency workers at 72% due to the well documented issues with recruitment in that area where statutory duties must be covered

April 2022 to 21 October 2022

Percentage Spend by Directorate



- 2.4 The Employment committee has recently agreed measures that should help address these challenges across social care. The blueprint for this work incorporated the gathering and analysis of data to understand the issues, engaging with the service to explore solutions, benchmarking salary levels of our neighbouring authorities, revisiting job profiles so they accurately cover the full duties and responsibilities for job evaluation purposes. This was done alongside the development of a revised set of career pathways to aid both recruitment and retention initiatives. This blueprint will be extended to other areas of the council where we experience similar recruitment challenges and/or high dependency on agency workers, such as; Highways Engineers, Planning Officers, ICT Network Officers, Legal Services, Educational Psychology,
- 2.5 CMT have been monitoring agency spend and a process is in place to challenge managers where there are longer standing agency workers to fill the roles with a substantive staff member, through either making the agency worker permanent in the role or through recruitment process. Since August 2022, three agency workers have been transferred over to permanent employees. Due to the current recruitment challenges there remain several roles, primarily within the People directorate, where filling the post through these means have proved unsuccessful and agency worker reliance continues. However, with the recent approval of the new reward structure, there is every expectation that the recruitment position will be improved.
- 2.6 Other measures in place to reduce spend which form part of the recruitment and retention strategies include:
- Apprenticeships in Social Care and Occupational Therapy are being offered to existing staff members where training is funded using the apprenticeship levy.
 - Apprentice positions are being discussed with managers for a variety of roles across the council.
 - Exploring options for secondment opportunities between workforce partners in health
 - We continue to operate the Step Up to Social Work programme on behalf of the Thames Valley Partnership, with the aim of moving students onto the Bracknell

Forest permanent payroll on completion of the course and attainment of their qualification.

- Careers Events are being attended in the local area to promote Bracknell Forest jobs and career opportunities – this includes events at the job centre and at local secondary schools for 6th form students
- Three members of staff are being supported to achieve their AMHP qualification at Brighton University in the first half of 2023.
- Induction process is being improved and new employees will shortly be issued with questionnaires asking for feedback on the hiring process and their first 3 and 6 months in post to address the issue of resignations within the first 12 months of employment.
- A more robust leaver process is also due to be introduced, to obtain more information on why staff are leaving us so that we can address any issues that this raises for future recruitment and retention.

2.7 The Council operates a neutral temporary agency provider framework through an organisation called Matrix. This should be the source for all agency staff, covering all roles and provide cost effective agency workers. This arrangement runs until March 2023. Matrix have had some difficulties in providing agency workers, predominately through social care, largely due to the temporary staffing agencies being in a strong position to avoid the neutral agency vendor arrangements, and the lower pay returns, as they know their candidates are sought after and will obtain work direct from employers anyway. This has resulted in agency spend not fully being met through this contract arrangement with Matrix. For the period 1 April to 30 September 2022, the split between Matrix and Off Contract agencies is:

Matrix	71.6%
Other	28.4%

2.8 It is recognised that there will always be the need to rely on engaging temporary workers through agencies and the Matrix contract has been designed to allow for this. Critical to this arrangement is for Matrix to contract to special social care suppliers to ensure staff can be provided when required. These arrangements are being managed with the aim of reducing off contract spend and subsequent reduction in costs.

2.9 A selection of slides will be presented at the meeting to highlight the areas included with this covering report.

3.0 Equalities Impact Assessment

A full assessment needs to be undertaken for this work.

4.0 Strategic Risk Management Issues

- Reputational risks associated with costs of temporary workers.
- Service risks of engaging workers with high turnover - impact on customers.
- Increased budget challenges as a result of increased workforce costs.
- Negative impact on employees working alongside agency workers who may be receiving higher pay.

Contact for further information

Alison Beswick – Head of Human Resources

Alison.beswick@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

Paul Young – Assistant Director of Human Resources and Organisational Development

Paul.young@bracknell-forest.gov.uk