



CABINET - 25TH JULY 2018

SUBJECT: SOCIAL WORKER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES LOCALITY TEAMS

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR, SOCIAL SERVICES & HOUSING

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To report the recruitment and retention challenges being faced within Children's Services and the direct correlation with the Council's current salary scales for Social Workers and Senior Practitioners. The report also identifies additional resources required to safely manage the significant increase in workload experienced over the last 12 to 18 months.
- 1.2 To seek Cabinet approval to use service reserves to fund the recruitment of four additional Social Workers (in addition to the two unfilled posts agreed last year) and an Independent Reviewing Officer to meet workload demands.
- 1.3 To apply a market supplement of £3227 to all Social Worker and Senior Practitioner posts in the six Children's Services Locality Teams, which will be reviewed 12 months after implementation and be reported to Cabinet.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 Cabinet are already aware of the service pressures faced across Children's Services with the increased complexity of difficulties being presented by families, the significant increase of 100 Looked After Children, the resultant projected budget overspend and the relentless demands of increased court proceedings.
- 2.2 Children's Services relies on professionally trained and registered Social workers and Senior Practitioners in order to deliver its statutory function. Ensuring the Council has a high quality workforce is imperative to managing the risks to children, young people and families across the Borough. Over the last 12-18 months, we have been experiencing increasing difficulties in both recruiting and retaining qualified staff in the six frontline Locality Teams across the Division.
- 2.3 Discussions undertaken with staff leaving and potential applicants who do not accept posts confirm that the current level of remuneration is a critical factor. The Council offers the lowest starting salary and a restricted salary scale for their Social Worker posts in comparison with neighbouring Local Authorities with whom we are in direct competition for qualified staff.
- 2.4 This report identifies the additional resources required in response to the workload pressures and considers the possible actions that can be taken to respond to the recruitment and retention crisis that is being experienced.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Social Services & Well Being (Wales) Act 2014.

- 3.2 Children's Services Commissioning Strategy 2015-2020.
- 3.3 Well-Being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015. The recommended course of action contributes to the following Well-being Goals:
- A resilient Wales
 - A healthier Wales
 - A more equal Wales.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 Frontline Children's Services teams, called Locality Teams in Caerphilly, have historically been areas where recruitment and retention of staff can be challenging
- 4.2 There are 6 Locality Teams covering the following geographical areas across the Borough; Risca, Blackwood, Bargoed, Rhymney, Caerphilly Town East and Caerphilly Town West. These teams provide direct social work support to children, young people and their families across the following key service areas:
- Assessment and care planning
 - Children in need services
 - Children on the Child Protection Register
 - Children Looked After
 - Court proceedings
- 4.3 The Teams are responsible for undertaking assessments on referrals received from the Information, Advice & Assistance (IAA) Service – the front door for Children's Services, developing Care & Support Plans and delivering direct social work support. The key pressure across the Teams relates to court work and Cabinet will recall their support for the request for additional fixed term Social Workers for the Locality and Fostering Teams and an additional Solicitor for the Legal Team that was approved in July 2017.

Recruitment:

- 4.4 Currently there are 14 full time equivalent vacancies for qualified Social Workers (including the 2 additional posts agreed last year) and Senior Practitioners across the teams with the Rhymney Team currently being worst affected with 4 full time vacancies. Overall the Locality Teams Social Worker vacancy level equates to 23%.
- 4.5 Whilst adverts continue to run, Children's Services has to cover these critical vacancies through the use of Agency staff which can be disruptive to case planning, can result in poor outcomes and inevitably comes at additional cost. This is not a sustainable position.
- 4.6 Comparisons undertaken across neighbouring local authorities confirm that:
- Caerphilly's starting salary for Social Workers and Senior Practitioners is the lowest in the region
 - Newport and Monmouthshire's starting salary for Social Workers and Senior Practitioners is the same as the top of Caerphilly's grade
 - The recruitment of Social Workers across South Wales is highly competitive and Caerphilly's position in the market is no longer strong enough to attract applications.
 - The option to continue to pay salaries at their current level cannot be supported.
- 4.7 It is important to acknowledge that Caerphilly was one of the first Councils to implement Job Evaluation with Newport and Monmouthshire being two of the most recent to complete the task. This may be a factor in the difference in pay scales across the Councils.

- 4.8 Social Worker recruitment is always advertised externally. Over the past two years 25 adverts have been run for Social Workers within the front line Children's Services teams of which, 3 adverts were re-advertised due to low interest and 7 adverts failed to recruit to the post advertised. Response rates have decreased during this time, the average number of applications in 2016/17 was 7 per vacancy and this has dropped to an average of 4 applications per advert in 2017/18. Senior Practitioner posts are promotional and it is important to acknowledge that the majority of appointments are made internally from the existing pool of Social Workers thereby generating Social Worker vacancies.

Additional workload pressures:

- 4.9 In July 2017, Cabinet approved the recruitment of two additional fixed term Social Workers to the Locality Teams to support the increased court pressures but we have been unable to recruit to these posts. The salary and fixed term nature of the positions does not make them attractive.
- 4.10 There has been a further significant increase of 105 Looked After Children (LAC) over the last twelve months which equates to the caseloads of at least 4 Social Workers. It is therefore proposed that four more additional posts are required to meet the increased demands and all the posts need to be advertised as permanent. Any potential risk for the Council can be mitigated by the fact that there is a natural turnover of Social Workers and posts can be reduced in the future through vacancy management.
- 4.11 This increase in LAC also equates to a whole time equivalent caseload for an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO role is a statutory role and they are required to independently review the Care & Support plans for children Looked After. They play a critical quality assurance role in ensuring plans accurately reflect the individual needs of each child and ensuring the child's wishes and feelings are taken into account. It is proposed that an additional IRO is recruited at Senior Practitioner grade.

Training secondments:

- 4.12 Supporting unqualified staff to undertake training to qualify and register as a Social Worker is a proven way of ensuring vacancies are able to be filled going forward. When recruitment pressures were not as challenging, staff secondments were suspended across the Directorate. It has been agreed that secondments recommence in Children's Services only, utilising Welsh Government grant funding available through Workforce Development. Seconded staff will require study days and placement opportunities to be made available.

Retention:

- 4.13 The current level of resignations and vacancies is significant and the turnover rate for the previous two years has been 24% in front line Children's Services teams. Some staff are transferring to posts in Adult Services and Adoption due to the pressure of Children's Services work. A few staff are moving due to promotion. Over half the staff leaving have cited remuneration as the critical factor and when staff can be paid £3k more in another Local Authority for doing the same job it is hard to argue.
- 4.14 The Divisional Management Team are confident that Social Work staff are well supported with good quality managerial supervision and oversight, well managed caseloads (when fully staffed) and a structured and perhaps most importantly, safe framework in which to practice. Anecdotally, we are aware that staff who have left have only recognised this level of support once they left and acknowledge this can be as important as remuneration. However, it is difficult to use this argument when the financial information is so stark.

Options for consideration:

- 4.15 As outlined in paragraph 4.7 above, the option to continue as we are has been considered but is not deemed to be a sustainable position. A report was presented to Corporate Management Team who in turn agreed a Task Group consisting of Finance, Human Resources and Social Services should be established to identify options.

4.16 Two options were considered by the Task Group:

1. *Regrade Social Workers to Grade 10 and Senior Practitioners to Grade 11 within the existing Job Evaluation Pay Scales to align Caerphilly with the other Council's in Gwent.*

The Task Group considered this option and concluded that the Council should not re-evaluate the Grade 9-12 posts because of the equal pay claim potential for all other posts in those grades across the whole of the Council.

2. *Introduce a market supplement in recognition of the recruitment difficulties and the workload pressures in Children's Services Locality Teams only.*

The Task Group agreed that a market supplement should be applied to the posts within the Children's Services Locality Teams. This supplement would need to be £3227 to make it competitive with Newport and Monmouthshire. The Group considered whether this should be applied across the Division and/or the Directorate and agreed that the rationale for applying the supplement clearly links to persistent and sustained recruitment difficulties over 18 months in specific teams.

4.17 The Task Group therefore proposed the following:

- The recruitment of four additional Social Workers (in addition to the two unfilled posts agreed last year) and an Independent Reviewing Officer to meet workload demands
- Apply a market supplement of £3227 to all Social Worker and Senior Practitioner posts in the six Children's Services Locality Teams
- All current Locality Team vacancies will initially be ring fenced internally to allow Social Workers in teams that do not attract the supplement the opportunity to apply to transfer into vacancies if they wish to.
- The market supplement will be reviewed 12 months after implementation though it is fully acknowledged that it is unlikely to change.

5. WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

5.1 Social Services contribute to the Well-being Goals and the 5 ways of working in the context of strategy and vision, preventing problems occurring or getting worse and collaborating to meet agreed objectives specifically:

- Corporate planning
- Risk management
- Workforce planning
- Performance management
- Financial planning.

6. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Children's Services provides care and support to the most vulnerable children, young people and families in Caerphilly. It is essential that levels of Qualified Social Workers are maintained in order to safeguard and protect these most vulnerable groups and not leave them at risk. However, the Council's EIA process does not need to be applied in this matter.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The full year cost of implementing a £3,227 market supplement to the posts within the six Locality Teams will be £264,776. This is based on 7 Social Workers and 3 Senior Practitioners in each of the six teams plus the two additional posts agreed last year and includes employer's National Insurance and Superannuation contributions.

- 7.2 The full year cost of the 4 additional Social Workers (Grade 9 plus the market supplement) and 1 Independent Reviewing Officer (Grade 10 with no market supplement) would be approximately £244k.
- 7.3 It is proposed that the additional cost of £338,666 for the remainder of 2018/19 is funded through the one-off use of Social Services Reserves. The recurring cost for subsequent financial years will need to be incorporated into the budget setting process for 2019/20 in the light of anticipated growth to be allocated to the Directorate of Social Services.

8. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are Human Resources implications related to the implementation of these proposals and HR have been fully involved in the process.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 The report reflects the views of the consultees.
- 9.2 The Trade Unions, GMB and Unison have both confirmed their full support of the application of the Market Supplement based on the rationale outlined in this report.
- 9.3 Staff briefings within Children's Services have taken place.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 Cabinet is asked to note the content of this report.
- 10.2 Cabinet is asked to approve the use of Social Services Reserves in the sum of £338,666 to fund the following proposals for the remainder of 2018/19: -
- a) The recruitment of four additional Social Workers (in addition to the two unfilled posts agreed last year) and an Independent Reviewing Officer to meet workload demands.
 - b) The application of a market supplement of £3,227 to all Social Worker and Senior Practitioner posts in the six Children's Services Locality Teams, which will be reviewed 12 months after implementation with a further report being presented to Cabinet at that time.

11. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 To ensure Cabinet is fully aware of the staffing pressures being experienced in Children's Services and the associated financial implications of these pressures.
- 11.2 For Cabinet to provide support to Children's Services to assist in combating the challenges being faced.

12. STATUTORY POWER

- 12.1 Social Services and Well Being (Wales) Act 2014.

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Background Papers:
Report to Cabinet 19th July 2017 – Request for Additional Resources in Response to Increased
Demand within Children’s Services.