

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP SERVICES

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	5 NOVEMBER 2015	AGENDA ITEM:	8
TITLE:	CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION - PROGRESS REPORT		
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recruitment and retention of social workers continues to be a challenge for local authorities on a national level. This problem is fuelled by a shortfall in experienced social workers which is predicted by Policy Exchange to continue until at least 2022.

As an area of high employment, relatively expensive housing and due to its geographical location competing for talent with both neighbouring authorities and London, Reading finds itself in an acutely competitive market.

From both a practice and financial perspective the preference is for permanent workers rather than agency staff. However, Reading continues to be reliant on sourcing workers through the agency route to ensure that we can continue to deliver services. This is an equally competitive labour market.

This paper outlines the actions already taken and plans to improve recruitment and retention of Children's Social Care staff.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

2.1 That the Committee notes progress and endorse the planned actions

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 This work forms part of the Children's Services improvement plan.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Below are details of the current staffing situation in Children's Social Care. Agency staffing currently exceeds Establishment vacancies as additional resource has

been sourced to address workload. The majority of substantive vacancies are covered by agency staff.

4.2 Current substantive vacancies by FTE are as follows:

Vacancy FTE Team	Role				Grand Total
	ATM	HS	IRO	SW	
A&A and MASH	4.0			5.0	9.0
Adoption				1.0	1.0
CYPDT	1.0	1.0		2.0	4.0
East, North Leaving Care				6.0	6.0
Family Support South	3.0	1.0		5.0	9.0
Family Support West	1.0	1.0		6.0	8.0
Fostering1				0.5	0.5
Fostering2				1.5	1.5
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance			1.0		1.0
Grand Total	7.0	5.0	1.0	26.0	39.0

4.3 Current agency staffing by FTE

Sum of Agency FTE Team	Role				Grand Total
	ATM	HS	IRO	SW	
A&A and MASH	5.0			14.0	14.0
Adoption					
CYPDT				4.0	4.0
East, North Leaving Care				7.0	7.0
Family Support South	3.0	1.0		5.0	9.0
Family Support West	2.0	1.0		5.0	8.0
Fostering1				1.0	1.0
Fostering2	1.0			1.5	1.5
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance			1.0		1.0
Grand Total	11.0	2.0	1.0	37.5	45.5

4.4 This translates to a relatively high percentage of agency workers for these staff categories. Gaining definitive, up to date intelligence from other authorities for comparison has proved difficult. However we understand that our levels of agency staff are about the same as other authorities in our region.

4.5 Percentage of agency workers covering substantive posts

Team	Establishment	Agency staff	%
Assistant Team Manager	24.2	8	33%
Higher Specialist Social Worker	18.6	2	11%
Independent Reviewing Officer	7	1	14%
Social Worker	68.4	27	39%
Totals	118.2	38	32%

The initiatives to improve recruitment and retention that have already been implemented and also those that are planned are listed below.

4.6 Market Supplement Policy Review: This policy states that market supplements will be reviewed annually. This review took place recently and the payments to the RGSW5 and 6 grades in Access & Assessment, MASH, Family Support, Fostering & Adoption and the North & East and Leaving Care Team has increased from £2,000 to £3,000 per year. The other grades are within market ranges with the market supplement taken into account. This was implemented in July 2015.

4.7 Development of an Academy: Work is underway to explore the development of an Academy where the Council trains Social Workers and provides the support to newly qualified workers especially for their portfolio work in the Assisted Year in Supported Employment (AYSE). We're also participating in the Step up to Social Work initiative and currently have 5 workers completing MAs.

4.8 AYSE: We are recruiting for a cohort of 8 AYSE workers to join in January 2016. A strategy to ensure recruitment of 2 cohorts of 8 AYSE workers each year has been implemented. This includes links with selected universities and ensuring promotion at University job fairs and ensuring internal processes are in place to support the new workers.

4.9 Transport: To enable us to recruit workers from further afield who travel into Reading on public transport and to better enable our the business travel of our current workers, additional pool car availability will be assigned from the existing fleet.

4.10 Agency Recruitment of Social Workers: Feedback from Team Managers was that the process of approaching agencies, screening CVs, interviewing candidates and negotiating rates as well as internal processes such as IT set up, are very time consuming and take time away from the delivery of services. To help with this "recruitment time" and to ensure that Reading is well placed to secure the best agency workers available, a Recruitment Co-ordinator was hired in May on an agency basis specifically for Children's Social Care recruitment. This role is working alongside the existing agency management team who together handle most of the processes involved, from screening candidates, negotiating rates and terms to generic inductions and organising the IT set up for new starters. Agency performance has improved since this new approach was adopted.

4.11 Results are that

- The new screening service provided by the RBC Agency Management Team including a telephone pre-screen, saves the managers significant time and has been well received.
- The attendance at interview has increased from 65% to 92%
- The average time from application to appointment has improved, averaging one week, this is considered to be very fast and makes the Authority more competitive as candidates know quickly if they have a job offer.

4.12 Review of permanent recruitment process for Children's Social Care

Work here included:

- From the beginning of August we changed the way in which Social Work applications are managed. Applications are now handled individually with candidates shortlisted and interviewed within a week. Contact and support throughout the process is provided by the agency management team to both applicant and hiring manager, this has reduced candidate drop off before interview from around 50% to almost zero. It also ensures adherence to process and makes Reading stand out from other recruiting authorities.
- Interview questions were revised to ensure fitness for purpose.
- Additional recruitment training was provided for all Children's Social Care hiring managers.
- The time taken to complete DBS checks has previously caused delays to workers starting with the Authority. We have recently started to use an online checking service, it is anticipated that this will reduce the time taken significantly.

Overall results so far have been encouraging, averaging one hire per week since implementation. This could translate to 50+ hires over the year which would mean a significant reduction in the reliance on agency staffing.

4.13 Promotion of working in Social Care at Reading: A targeted 12 month national marketing campaign was launched on 17th August. This includes online advertising of our vacancies on Community Care, The Guardian and LinkedIn, alongside a print presence in The British Association of Social Work magazine. This had an immediate impact in increasing the number of applications received. Additionally a stand has been booked at the next Compass Event - the market leading recruitment event for qualified social care.

4.14 Use Recruitment Agencies for Permanent Recruitment: Alongside the approach described in paragraph 4.12, we have agreed preferential terms with a panel of suppliers, and a process with HR to implement this recruitment approach for hard to fill roles. We have also set up arrangements with suppliers for international recruitment. Since implemented in July results have been encouraging and have already translated to 4 additional hires.

4.15 E-Recruitment: We intend to use functionality within I-Trent and the E-recruitment system. This will mean applicants to jobs at Reading will set up an account registering the type of work they are looking for, along with their qualifications skills and experience. Over time this will create a talent pool database allowing potential workers to be contacted proactively about opportunities in Reading. I-Trent allows a similar methodology to be applied to those that have left employment at the Council.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The planned actions and progress in this report are in line with the overall direction of the Council and the priorities in the corporate plan. Particularly a social care workforce that contributes to safeguarding and protecting those that are most vulnerable, as well as contributing to early help provided to families.

All planned actions and progress contribute to financial and workforce sustainability.

6. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

- 6.1 Feedback from Children's Services managers and staff has been considered and used to shape this new recruitment approach.

7. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 The new recruitment approach is in line with HR policies and all applicants follow the council's recruitment and selection procedures.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Nil for this progress report as procedures comply with the Council's HR policies.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Revenue Implications

- 9.1 Budgeted spend on advertising is £17,000 to date
- 9.2 Impact of market supplement increase by £1,000 from July 2015
- 9.3 Budgeted funding of the Recruitment Co-ordinator post is £25,000 pa

Value for Money

- 9.4 These costs are netted against better negotiated rates from staffing agencies, reduced management time spent on recruitment and by recruiting permanent staff as opposed to agency workers, this saves £20,000 per worker recruited, per year.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None