

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RESOURCES

TO:	POLICY COMMITTEE (ACTING AS SOLE MEMBER FOR BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN)		
DATE:	23 JANUARY 2023		
TITLE:	BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN LIMITED - RESERVED MATTERS		
LEAD COUNCILLORS:	CLLR JASON BROCK CLLR LIZ TERRY CLLR HOSKIN	PORTFOLIOS:	LEADERSHIP CORPORATE SERVICES & RESOURCES CHILDREN
SERVICE:	N/A	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To report to the Policy Committee in its capacity as the sole member of Brighter Futures for Children Ltd (BFfC) on an element of the work of the HR Taskforce Group - established in July 2022 and consisting of the Director of Children's Social Care (DCSC), Head of HR and Executive Director of Finance and Resources (EDFR) - and formed to focus on recruitment, retention, and conversion of agency workers to permanent hires, and to seek the Committee's agreement to a proposed approach to recruitment and retention payments to QSWs in the Tff service.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That Policy Committee in its capacity as sole member for BFfC agree the recommended approach of implementing a recruitment and retention (R&R) payment for QSWs working within the Tff service to create a stable team of permanent hires, by recognising the market pressures that prevents the team from being able to recruit and retain staff in sufficient numbers at the normal graded salary for the role.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In October 2018 the Council approved the formation of a separate Company for the delivery of Children's Services in Reading; Brighter Futures for Children Limited (BFfC). The Company subsequently began delivery of services in December 2018.
- 3.2 BFfC is a company limited by guarantee without share capital and its sole member is Reading Borough Council. The Company's Articles of Association set out its obligations in terms of reporting to the Council as Sole Member as well as the matters which are reserved to the Sole Member. The employment of a new Executive Director is listed as a reserved matter in the Articles, hence this report requesting the Committee's consideration and agreement as sole member.

- 3.3 The recruitment of qualified social workers (QSWs) in local children's services remains a national issue and for many directors of children's services, it is the biggest barrier to improvement. As record numbers of social workers continue to leave the profession, the high level of reliance on agency social workers within a very small regional and national pool has become the norm. This places significant pressure on children's services generally and within the Together for Families (TfF) service at BfFC particularly in terms of both budget and service pressures.
- 3.4 It is also recognised that the level of resilience and expertise for QSWs in the TfT service is higher than other service areas. This is mainly due to the risk levels of children open to this service that necessitates QSWs navigating between child protection and court work. Regrettably, there are fewer QSWs with the necessary skills, experience and resilience attracted to the role under the current pay offer.
- 3.5 The priorities of the HR Taskforce Group (as per 1.1 above) are to:
- reduce agency spend on QSWs by stabilising the TfF workforce
 - improve the recruitment of QSWs through 'growing our own' programmes
 - improve the retention of SWs through targeted support, bespoke training and addressing caseload and other concerns which impacts recruitment and retention
 - convert the high number of agency staff to permanent recruits through our ambition to be an 'employer of choice'
- 3.6 As part of the HR Taskforce's work, it was identified that it is particularly difficult to recruit and retain permanent QSWs in the TfF service. The attached Report provides further pertinent detail.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The recommendation from the HR Taskforce is to implement a recruitment and retention (R&R) payment for QSWs working within the TfF service to create a stable team of permanent hires, by recognising the market pressures that prevents the team from being able to recruit and retain staff in sufficient numbers at the normal graded salary for the role.
- 4.2 The implementation of this scheme needs approval from this Committee. In addition, trade unions and colleagues and employees in the children's social care team will be consulted.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

- 5.1 In Spring 2021 the Council refreshed its Corporate Plan, incorporating a number of major change projects under 3 themes:
1. healthy environment
 2. thriving communities
 3. inclusive growth
- 5.2 This proposal aligns with the delivery of the BfFC Business Plan, which forms part of the Thriving Communities theme.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

6.2 There are no environmental or climate change implications arising from this report.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Not applicable

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 An Equality Impact Assessment is submitted as appendix A to the main report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Please see attached background paper.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Please see attached background paper.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Attached Proposed RR Payment for TfFT SWs Paper.