

Report of the Corporate Director of Children, Education & Communities

Recruitment & Retention Challenges - Children's Social Workers

Summary

1. Staffing Matters and Urgency Committee agreed in July 2017 to approve a 12 month pilot for the payment of 'golden hellos' and 'golden handcuffs' to social workers in the Referral & Assessment team in Children's Services.
2. The reason for this proposal was to attract new staff to come and work in this service and retain existing staff. There are regional and national shortages of staff to work in these roles and the cost of providing short term cover through agency workers causes a significant financial pressure for the service.
3. The committee is asked to extend the pilot arrangements to Safeguarding Social Work Teams 1 & 2 (Court/Child Protection teams) and this paper provides background details of the number of vacant posts in Safeguarding Social Work teams 1 & 2; the cost of agency workers providing cover; the recruitment campaign activity since July 2018 associated with attracting candidates to the vacancies; and information about the regional and national context.
4. A report will be provided to the Committee in July 2018 to review the impact of the enhanced payment to the Referral & Assessment team. Should the proposal to extend the pilot be approved, interim analysis of the impact of the enhanced payment for the additional groups will be reported at the same time.

Background

5. Since at least November 2016 the Safeguarding Social Work teams have experienced significant recruitment difficulties.

6. There are two Safeguarding Social Work/Child Protection teams which provide intervention to children subject to child protection plans or children where legal intervention is required. These teams intervene and work with very complex, high risk cases where child abuse has either been substantiated or there is the assessed likelihood that children may suffer significant harm and therefore require protection. This includes taking legal action to remove children to safety through court proceedings. Social workers in these teams are required to make professional judgements on a daily basis with a focus on the on-going assessment of risk and harm and critically, capacity of parents to change adverse behaviour. It is a highly pressured environment, with very tight and rigid court deadlines that have to be met as well as ongoing crises in relation to children subject to child protection plans which also require a timely response.
7. Out of an establishment team of 16 social worker/senior social worker full time equivalents, there are currently 7 vacancies. Between 1st July 2017 and 31 December 2017, the service has run a high profile recruitment campaign with the aim of recruiting to a total of 17 vacancies across Children's Social Care. This was at a total cost of £30,000. However this campaign has not resulted in successful appointments to roles in the two Safeguarding Social Work teams.
8. Various solutions to address the recruitment challenges facing the department in attracting and retaining qualified social workers, specifically in the Safeguarding Social Work (Court/Child Protection) specialist teams have been considered. We have established that our pay and grading of these posts is not significantly out of line with others across the region, however most other authorities have a mechanism to respond to the recruitment challenges (as set out in paragraph 25).

Proposal

9. The department wishes to proceed with the following proposals, on a pilot basis for a 12 month period.

Golden Hello

10. To make a 'golden hello' payment to all new starters taking up social work positions in the two Safeguarding Social Work teams.
11. It is proposed to make the same payment of £2500 as per the existing pilot (pro-rata for part time) payable in a lump sum, for ease of

administration, as a one off payment on the successful completion of the probationary period.

12. The payment will be subject to the normal deductions i.e tax, national insurance & pension contributions.
13. As per the current arrangement, should a member of staff in receipt of the payment leave the authority within one year of the agreement, the payment will be recovered in full.
14. Should a member of staff in receipt of the payment leave within two years of the agreement, 50% of the payment will be recovered.
15. This recovery approach is in keeping with other arrangements in place for employees such as a learning agreement.

Golden Handcuff

16. To make a 'golden handcuff' payment to all current staff in the two Safeguarding Social Work teams of £2500 (pro-rata for part time) payable in a one off lump sum payment. This will be paid via the payroll system.
17. Should a member of staff leave the local authority, the same recovery terms will apply to the handcuff payment as the 'golden hello'.

Consultation and Considerations

18. Trade Unions continue to be keen to consider creative approaches to address the recruitment challenges in this area. Should this be agreed in principle, further discussion will take place with trade union colleagues and appropriate communication with staff.

Analysis

National picture

19. There continues to be a national shortage of experienced social workers. It has become increasingly difficult to recruit to the most pressured social work positions. Many local authorities have revised their pay and conditions, or offered a golden handshake/golden hello, to attract to these positions.

Golden Hello & Golden Handcuff Payments

20. A "golden hello" is an amount paid to an employee as an inducement to take up employment with a particular employer.
21. A "Golden Handcuff" is an amount paid to existing employees as a means of holding on to key employees and increasing employee retention rates.
22. There is the expectation, in the application of either payment, that the employ would remain an employee for a specified period of time.
23. Payments are normally made in the form of a cash lump sum. Any payment should be subject to tax and national insurance under the employer's PAYE scheme.
24. There continues to be a variety of pay arrangements across the region. that make use of such payments, It is useful as reminder to note for example;

Barnsley A one off golden hello payment of £2.5k for new social work staff
A one off payment of £1.5k to existing social work staff

Rotherham Payments are made to all social work staff, ranging from £2177 for a social worker on ASYE programme up to £3254 for a Team Leader

Sheffield A market supplement of £4k to Team Leaders

25. A proposal to make a payment of £2500 is in keeping with similar arrangements in place across the region.

Recruitment Activity

26. Between July and December 2017 the service ran an ongoing recruitment campaign with Community Care at a cost of £30,000.
27. Over this period 1 newly qualified social worker and 1 experienced social worker were offered positions within Safeguarding Social Work teams.

28. Out of the 17 vacancies that existed across the whole of Children's Social Care directorate, 12 appointments (11 qualified, 1 unqualified) were made with 8 of these being filled by internal candidates leaving vacancies in other areas, including the Safeguarding Social Work teams. All the vacancies that were within the Referral & Assessment Team were appointed to; however, vacancies remain in the Safeguarding Teams.
29. The experienced social worker recently offered a permanent post in the Safeguarding Social Work team, has since declined the offer, stating that they wanted to pursue other opportunities. The newly qualified social worker is in post and progressing through development.
30. The following vacancies remain unfilled; 2 x Senior Social Worker, 5 x Social Worker posts.
31. Both Safeguarding Social Work teams have their quota of newly qualified social workers in post. The critical issue we now face is to recruit and retain social workers with experience of child protection/court safeguarding work to ensure safe and robust delivery of services to children subject to child protection planning and legal intervention.

Cost of agency

32. At present, up to 4 posts are being covered using agency staffing at considerable additional cost. In addition we are seeking agency cover for the 3 posts still vacant. Therefore the over spend would increase to over £180k if these posts continue to be filled by agency staff through the 2018/19 financial year.
33. The rate of vacancies and high turnover of agency staff could have an impact on those staff in permanent posts, potentially increasing the rate of staff leaving employment and further instability.
34. Taking into account all of the factors listed above, the implications of recruiting in the traditional way could result in the continued reliance on agency workers, pressure on existing staff due to staff turnover and instability in a pressurised environment.

Council Plan

35. Outcomes achieved by the activities covered in this report help us to deliver priorities in the Council Plan 2015-19 in support of 'A

prosperous city for all” ensuring the council supports the delivery of statutory services to children and families in the City.

Implications

Financial

Referral & Assessment Team – Original Pilot

36. At the time of the original report to this committee in July 2017 the R&A team was overspending its staffing budget significantly due to the need to employ agency staff. Each post covered by an agency appointment, rather than a permanent employee, was incurring an average additional cost of c£600 per week. If nothing were to change then additional costs in excess of the team’s budget were projected to reach £156k by the end of 2017/18.
37. Following the introduction of the pilot, and with the team now fully staffed, that overspend has been reduced to £85k. Once the initial cost of paying golden handshakes to existing staff and golden hellos to new starters is taken into account, the total overspend for 2017/18 increases to £144k. However, this still represents an overall reduction in the pressure on the team’s budget of £12k for the year.
38. Looking forward to 2018/19, if the current stable staffing position is maintained, then the need for agency staffing should be significantly reduced. This would represent a much improved financial position for the team’s budget; with the vast majority of the previous £156k overspend having been eliminated.

Safeguarding Team – Pilot Extension

39. Similar to the earlier position in the R&A team, the Safeguarding team is currently overspending its staffing budget significantly due to the need to employ agency staff. Each post covered by an agency appointment, rather than a permanent employee, is currently incurring an average additional cost of c£500 per week. Additional costs in excess of the team’s budget for 2017/18 are projected to be £122k for the year, and if there is no improvement in the current situation this could increase to £182k for 2018/19.
40. If Members agree to extend the pilot to this team for 2018/19, then the initial up front cost is estimated at £53k for golden handcuff payments

to 9 existing staff and golden hello payments to recruit to 7 vacant posts. There is no existing budget available to fund these costs. However, if the pilot is successful and all posts are filled by permanent staff by, say, the end of May, then the saving against the current projected staffing overspend of £182k would be £99k. And, if sustained, further significant savings against current expenditure levels would also be delivered for future years.

41. Members should note that if the pilot is not successful, and some or all of the current vacancies remain covered by agency staff, then the projected overspend for 2018/19 could increase by up to £32k (the cost of the golden handcuffs for existing staff).

Human Resources (HR)

42. As per the report in July 2017, pay proposals for the council are relatively limiting in responding to acute recruitment and retention difficulties. These proposals are in response to specific challenges in a particular specialist area and there is substantial evidence to support the need to make an enhanced payment.
43. Within current policy there are no means of addressing this with pay.
44. Notwithstanding the need to review the existing pilot arrangements, it is recommended that the activity is reviewed on a regular basis throughout the pilot, with a detailed report at the end of the 12 month period to evaluate and make any recommendations to inform future pay policy. However, early reporting will be made available to the Committee in July 2018.
45. Since July 2018, a comprehensive campaign to promote Children's social work in York has been undertaken and is part of the holistic approach to ensure a sustainable Children's social work workforce. A task group has been set up to support with the recruitment and retention of social workers, looking at all aspects of the employment offer. Community Care continues to support with the delivery of a campaign to attract social workers to City of York Council and will support us in the creation of a micro-site to further enhance the promotion of vacancies.
46. This approach will complement the proposal to make enhanced payments to a specific group of staff and promote York as a place to develop and grow as a Children's social worker

47. We will continue to review the potential of setting a precedent for other social work teams or specialist roles; however this is a pilot and will determine any future policy decision.

Legal

48. The proposed payments to attract candidates or retain existing employees would present the Council with an equal pay risk. The result is likely to mean pay disparity between Social Workers and other employees (i.e. Comparators) performing work of equal value, like work, or work rated as equivalent. In its defence the Council would rely on the difference in pay as being attributable to the state of the employment market and that the pay differential was objectively justified to that extent. Whether or not a market forces defence would succeed is a matter for an employment tribunal to determine, but given the regional and national shortages of staff, the Council would be in a very strong position to justify its decision for sound business reasons which were unrelated to sex.

Information Technology (IT)

49. There are no IT implications for CYC arising from this report.

Property

50. There are no property implications.

Other

51. There are no equalities or crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

52. It is proposed that this arrangement is a pilot to determine whether the payment has a positive impact on alleviating the recruitment and retention difficulties in a specific social work team.

53. It is essential that we have a fully staffed service, with a mixture of experienced and recently qualified social workers. To date we have utilised agency staff to cover these positions however this impacts both on the consistency of social work and our ability to move the service

forward in the direction agreed and articulated in the Vision for CSC. It is also an expensive option.

54. Should the proposal not be approved, there is a risk that agency costs will continue to put a pressure on budgets and potentially increase.

Recommendations

55. Staffing Matters & Urgency Committee is asked to agree to the payment of 'golden hellos' and 'golden handcuffs' to social workers in the Safeguarding Social Work Court/Child Protection teams in Children's Services for a 12 month pilot period.

Reason: To support the recruitment and retention of social work staff to stabilise these two Safeguarding Teams.

Contact Details

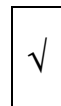
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Report approved



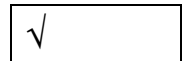
Date 07/03/18

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Human Resources: Claire Waind, HR Manager
Legal: Peter Cairns, Senior Solicitor
Finance: Richard Hartle, Finance Manager

Wards Affected:

All



For further information please contact the author of the report