

## Rapid Review Group Proposed Scope

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| <b>Title</b>  | Review of the Recruitment and Retention of Children's Social Workers in Buckinghamshire  |
| <b>Select Committee Chairman</b>                        | Cllr Birchley, Chairman of the Children's and Education Select Committee   |
| <b>Chairman of Review Group</b>                         | Cllr Mark Dormer, Vice-Chairman of the Children's and Education Select Committee   |
| <b>Scope reviewed and signed-off by</b>                 | Kelly Sutherland, Scrutiny Manager   |
| <b>Author</b>   | Katie Dover, Senior Scrutiny Officer & Cllr Mark Dormer  |
| <b>Date</b>   | December 2021  |
| <b>What is the problem that is trying to be solved?</b> | <p><b><i>National context:</i></b></p> <p>The problem of recruiting and retaining enough qualified social workers has caused concern for local authorities for over 10 years and has been experienced in varying degrees in different areas of the country depending on local and national factors.</p> <p>The factors at the source of the issue include the particular stresses involved in social work, the level of caseloads and the attraction of greater salaries, more training, flexibility or other opportunities elsewhere.</p> <p>The September 2020 government statistics report stated that while 31,854 social workers were in post across the country during the preceding year, that there were 6,113 vacant posts. This is 19.1 % of posts compared to 17% of posts in 2017 and 16.5% of posts vacant in 2018.</p> <p><b><i>Local Context in Buckinghamshire:</i></b></p> <p>Buckinghamshire has experienced similar issues in recruiting and retaining social work staff as other authorities across the country. For example, some social workers have been attracted by higher salaries in London.</p> <p>This has in part been addressed by supplementing permanent social worker staff with agency staff at a higher cost to the authority. The total number of qualified social workers in Buckinghamshire in October 2021 was 339 of which 221 were permanent staff (65%) and 118 (35%) were agency staff. In addition, 53 posts were vacant. The latest statistics of September 2020 from Gov.uk show that of the national number of 31,854 of children's social workers there was an agency rate of 15.4% i.e. 5806 social workers. This number has remained fairly static for a while as in 2006 this number was 5500.</p> <p>Since 2019, the authority has set up a social work academy to develop and support new social workers and therefore aid their recruitment and retention. Two cohorts of new qualified social workers have been brought into the</p> |

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|  | <p>academy, 19 in 2019 and a further 16 in January 2021 with 2 extra in June from the “Step Up Programme. All these social workers are supported in their first few years of work. It is hoped that a further 20 social workers will join the academy in April 2022.</p> <p>Buckinghamshire has also invested in training and support for social workers throughout their time with the authority, but there may be more that can be done to sustain the support given.</p>  |
| <b>What might the Rapid Review Achieve?</b>  | <p>The rapid review group will seek to act as an independent and ‘critical friend’ during this review of the recruitment and retention of social workers in Buckinghamshire.</p> <p>Key lines of enquiry will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the current recruitment practices in Buckinghamshire, looking at good practice and any perceived issues/ gaps</li> <li>• Assess the HR processes available to assist the recruitment of social workers</li> <li>• Understand the retention initiatives used by the council e.g. competitive salaries, managerial practices, supportive culture</li> <li>• Collate examples of good practice from other councils</li> <li>• Understand in more detail the issues impacting on the recruitment and retention of social workers</li> </ul> <p>Overall aim – to identify areas for development and improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consideration of the financial costs to the council</li> </ul> |
| <b>Is the issue of significance to Buckinghamshire as a whole? Is this topic within the remit of the Select Committee?</b> | Yes.   |
| <b>What work is underway already on this issue?</b>  | Louise Cole Children’s Services Business Partner, to meet with the group to update on this.  |
| <b>Are there any key changes that might impact on this issue?</b>  | How has Brexit/pandemic impacted our social workers?   |
| <b>What are the key timing considerations?</b>   | Ofsted review of Children’s Services underway in November means a delay of the start of the rapid review.  |
| <b>Who are the key stakeholders &amp; decision-makers?</b>   | <p>Vulnerable children.</p> <p>Social Workers – especially recently recruited &amp; graduates of the academy</p> <p>HR staff involved in resourcing campaigns</p> <p>Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services</p> <p>Corporate Director for Children’s Services</p>  |
| <b>What are the resource implications in doing this piece of work?</b>   | <p>Attendance at rapid review group meetings – Councillors Dormer, Birchley, Bates and Matthews. Richard Nash and HR representative; Louise Cole Business Partner, Liz Williams, Finance Director, Children’s Services</p> <p>Meeting preparation, research and report writing – Service Directors and Senior Scrutiny Officer</p>   |

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