



Report to Cabinet

Date: 12th July 2022

Title: **Social Worker Recruitment and Retention – Select Committee Report**

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children's Services & Education

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Ward(s) affected: None specific

Recommendations:

The Children's and Education Select Committee recommends the following to Cabinet:

Recruitment:

1. Overhaul of the approach, understanding and procedures of HR for recruitment
2. Introduction of a new strategy to promote the benefits and advantages of working at Buckinghamshire
3. Consideration of the introduction of an additional payment for permanent staff to be paid 1/3rd after Year 1 and 2/3rd after Year 2, with costs offset by fewer agency staff
4. Improvements to career development opportunities and progression within Buckinghamshire Council

Retention:

5. Dedicated HR resource integrated into these two teams and sitting alongside them
6. Improve and upgrade technology (hardware and software) to increase efficiency

7. Investigate the Introduction of an additional payment for permanent staff to be paid 1/3rd after Year 1 and 2/3rd after Year 2, with costs offset by fewer agency staff
8. Introduction of core skills training for line managers immediately on appointment, potentially through an extension of the AYSE Academy
9. Improved career development path both within and outside of current roles
10. Further investigation into pastoral care and support, including supervision sessions and the introduction of a buddy/mentor scheme
11. Introduction of 360° reviews across all levels and teams including HR support
12. Introduction of administrative support staff to assist with time consuming administrative functions and non-core responsibilities
13. Corporate Director to gather feedback, views and experience of IT from frontline staff to identify areas for improvement of existing software and the introduction of new technology hardware
14. Improved communication and cascading of information of benefits and support available

Additional key recommendations:

15. Consider a review to investigate the effectiveness of HR support across services
16. Expansion of the ASYE Academy
17. Continue to examine other counties with 'Good' and 'Excellent' OFSTED ratings to see what can be learned and which procedures and approaches could be adopted
18. Weekly report to the Cabinet Member and Corporate Director detailing average caseload per social worker (including highest and lowest level), changes in total team numbers together with historic data for comparison and direction of movement to identify trend with the trend trailing two weeks to smooth intra-day movement*

(*unless this report already exists)

Reason for decision: For Cabinet to consider the recommendations of the Children's and Education Select Committee, with a view to improving the success of the recruitment and retention practices relating to social workers at Buckinghamshire Council.

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 A rapid review group was set up in November 2021 by the Children's & Education Select Committee to investigate the issues relating to the difficulties of recruiting and retaining both trainee and qualified social workers. It was noted that this was both a local and national issue and related to the demand for social worker

exceeding the available supply. In order to explore the issues relating to this thoroughly, the rapid review group undertook research and interviewed senior officers, social workers and their managers to explore areas that might be addressed to ameliorate the situation at Buckinghamshire.

2. Content of report

- 2.1 The recruitment and retention of social workers has been a key issue for local authority Children's Services departments for over ten years and has been well documented by various national organisations with statistics relating to the issue published annually by central government.
- 2.2 Through interviews and research the review group assessed such influencing factors as competition, pay and employment packages, agency versus permanent recruitment, development opportunities, welfare issues and quality of leadership.
- 2.3 From the early stages of the review the group decided that the focus should be on the child protection area of social work as there had been a 60% increase in child protection workloads since the Covid pandemic. Turnover rates of staff in child protection were particularly high and agency workers although relied upon to fill team vacancies, created a substantial impact on the permanent staff when they left.
- 2.4 The group gained the views of social workers and officers which highlighted areas of need detailed in the recommendations, which included career progression, thorough support for social workers through supervision and good management, the need for a closely aligned HR function, and a review of IT and administrative support to encourage more streamlining of processes.
- 2.5 Appendix 1 provides further context to the Select Committee's recommendations. Cabinet is asked to consider these recommendations and provide a response.

3. Legal and financial implications

- 3.1 These will be considered as part of the Cabinet's response.

4. Corporate implications

- 4.1 These will be considered as part of the Cabinet's response.



5. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

Not applicable.

6. Next steps and review

- 6.1 As noted above, Cabinet will provide a response to the Select Committee recommendations at its meeting on 12th July 2022. The Children's and Education Select Committee will then receive an update after 6 months and 12 months to monitor the implementation of these recommendations.

7. Background papers

None

8. Your questions and views (for key decisions)

- 8.1 If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the cabinet member to consider, please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by email; democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

