

REPORT TO EMPLOYMENT PANEL

Title: **Recruitment and Retention Proposal for Children Social Workers**

Date: 10 November 2009

Member Reporting: Councillor David Burbage

Contact Officer(s): Carol Naismith, Head of HR 01628 796992

Wards affected: None

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This Report recommends a course of action to ensure that we retain our highly skilled Childrens Social Work (CSW) staff and are able to recruit to vacancies on a permanent basis. This will ensure the smooth running of the service and reduce reliance on agency staff and the associated costs
- 1.2 In recent months RBWM has experienced particular recruitment and retention difficulties for CSW posts. Skilled and experienced staff are choosing to leave the profession due to the impact of recent high profile cases. This is exacerbating skill shortages and authorities in the South East have responded by providing more attractive remuneration packages.
- 1.3 The impact on RBWM has been an increase in vacancies and difficulties in filling them with permanent staff. Thus having to resort to locum agency social workers at an additional cost of circa £20,000 per FTE.
- 1.4 The annual salary package of a newly qualified CSW would increase from £23,880 to £24,688 and that of a senior practitioner CSW would increase from £31,796 to £32,669 plus retention of market premia of £2,000 plus golden handcuffs of £3,000. Annual leave would increase from 28 to 30 days with an opportunity to participate in subsidised car leasing scheme to the value of £1,500.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That golden handcuffs of £3,000 are offered to front line and field CSW as a retention mechanism for a period of 3 years, with clawback facilities if the employee leaves before the 3 years. This arrangement would start on the one year anniversary from 1st December 2009 or the date of joining RBWM if later.**
- 2.2 **That for the period between 1st December 2009 and 30 November 2012 front line and field CSW are given an additional entitlement to 2 days' annual leave per year as a recruitment and retention mechanism.**
- 2.3 **That for attraction purposes, advertisements for front line and field CSW, state a starting salary equivalent to the second point of the evaluated grade. That**

experienced current employees that are currently either below or the same point are given one accelerated increment as a retention mechanism.

2.4 That the salary sacrifice car lease scheme currently being developed for all staff is partly funded for CSW.

What will be different for residents as a result of this decision?
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Services for children in the Borough will continue to be delivered to the current high standards at a reduced cost.

3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 CSW are becoming more and more difficult to recruit. The recent adverse publicity surrounding the death of baby Peter and other recent high profile cases has increased recruitment and retention difficulties as a number of highly skilled social workers are choosing to leave the profession. CSW posts remain No 1 in the national shortage occupation list published by the Local Government Association.
- 3.1.2 The salaries for CSW in RBWM were competitive in the local area up to early 2009. This coupled with a reputation as a good employer, allowed RBWM to maintain consistent staffing levels without carrying significant vacancies.
- 3.1.3 In 2009 RBWM saw an increase in turnover. This was due to employees leaving for a combination of factors, principally for more competitive salaries and personal reasons. This left a number of vacancies that have proven in the current climate extremely difficult to fill. It has been necessary as a statutory function to fill the vacancies with agency staff to ensure service delivery. This carries a much higher cost than a direct employee. This is estimated to be approximately £20,000 per FTE more than a permanent employee. The service currently carries 19.35 vacancies and is employing 18 agency social workers.
- 3.1.4 Remuneration for CSW was last reviewed in April 2009 and at that point it was found to be comparable to neighbouring authorities. Since then pay for these posts in the South East has increased considerably as Reading increased their pay levels in response to a negative inspection report and others in the area followed suit. In particular the starting salaries have been increased.
- 3.1.5 There are a number of regional and national initiatives taking place to encourage increased take up of CSW as a career choice, which RBWM are party to. These are looking at the longer term. In the meantime RBWM needs to remain competitive to ensure that we recruit and retain the quality staff required to support the service.
- 3.1.6 RBWM operates a system of recruitment and retention inducements and supplements to ensure that where there is a discrepancy between market rates and the job grade these can be addressed. This proposal is an advance beyond our normal inducements. This is in response to the current climate and long term skill shortage and to ensure our attractiveness not only to our current employees but to

persuade agency staff to move to permanent contracts.

3.2 Research

3.2.1 RBWM and Agency staff were consulted to ascertain what factors were important to them or a motivator for them when making employment decisions.

3.2.2 The following issues were influential in their decision making process:

- Pay and benefits
- Flexibility
- Support and reputation of employer

3.2.3 This and the need to reduce the reliance and the cost of employing agency staff are the basis on which the recommendations are based.

3.3 Proposal

3.3.1 To introduce an enhanced package for CSW staff. This affects 56.5 FTEs at an estimated overall cost of £298,500. This is offset by a potential reduction of £387,000 in agency spend. It is anticipated that staffing costs will continue to increase should no action be taken.

3.3.2 Pay and Benefits:

- Retain Market Premium of £2,000 for those posts already in receipt.
- Introduce Golden Handcuffs of £3,000 for 3 years, paid retrospectively, with a claw back facility subject to performance targets being met.
- Enhance annual leave by 2 days per year for 3 years
- Increase starting salary for CSW by one spinal column point and adjust salaries for existing employees on the same basis were required.
- That the salary sacrifice car lease scheme currently being developed for all staff is partly funded for CSW. This would cover the cost of the lease up to the lowest specification of car available. Receipt of this to be linked to Golden Handcuffs.

3.3.3 Flexibility

- Continue to provide flexibility through the flexible working policy, to accommodate the variance in the working day.

3.3.4 Support & Reputation

- To continue providing the high standard of development currently provided.
- Develop a coaching and mentoring programme for newly qualified CSW that supports their on going development.
- To review the level of admin support allowing social workers to deal with casework.
- To maintain current standards and a good inspection score to ensure that quality and reputation are maintained.

4. OPTIONS AVAILABLE AND RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 Options

	Option	Comments	Financial Implications
1.	To introduce £3,000 golden handcuffs for 3 years		This would be a cost of £207,000 to the service, against a projected reduction in agency expenditure of £387,000.
2.	To enhance annual leave by an additional 2 days for a period of 3 years		There is no additional cost as employees would be required to manage their workload in a way that the additional leave can be taken
3.	To increase starting salary of social workers by one spine point and make necessary adjustments to current employees.		The adjustments to current employees carry a cost of £6,500.
4.	To introduce a car lease salary sacrifice scheme for all employees and to subsidise the scheme wholly or in part for children social workers.		The cost of fully funding to the cheapest car available is £1,500 p.a. per car or £85,000 (based on 56.5FTE). There are savings on national insurance contributions per employee of approx 9.1%

4.2 Risk assessment

4.2.1 Enhancing the value of the reward package for specific groups of employees may carry some equal pay risks. However this is considered to be low as there is a strong material factor argument for treating this group in a different way from the rest of staff

5. CONSULTATIONS CARRIED OUT

5.1.1 HR and the Head of Safeguarding and Specialist services met to develop these recommendations to address issues locally.

5.1.2 The views of current staff and agencies workers were sought.

5.1.3 Trades Unions will be consulted as appropriate.

6. COMMENTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

6.1.1 N/A

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1.1 The following implications have been addressed where indicated below.

Financial	Legal	Human Rights Act	Planning	Sustainable Development	Diversity & Equality
√	√	✓	N/A	N/A	✓

Background Papers: None