



FULL COUNCIL REPORT

Date Written	August 2020
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Service Area	Children's Services
Exempt/Non Exempt	Non Exempt
Committee Date	9 th September 2020

To: Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

Reconfiguration of Peripatetic Social Workers Posts to Peripatetic Support Workers - Children's Services

1.0 SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report summarises the Business Case that led to Corporate Management Team supporting the proposal that the Council recruit 2 full time peripatetic social workers to children's services. Endeavours have been made to recruit to the two Social Work posts, however these have been unsuccessful. It is therefore proposed for the reasons detailed within this report that we support the management of demand in an alternative way by recruiting three peripatetic support workers. As the proposal involves a change of structure, Council support of the proposal is required.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS that

2.1 The contents of the report be noted.

2.2 The recruitment of 3 full time peripatetic support workers to Children's Services, for a 24-month period, be approved.

2.3 In 12 months, an update to Council sharing the learning from the recruitment of the posts and new way of working be provided.

3.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Children's Services employs qualified social workers who discharge the Council's duties to safeguard children, provide care and support to children and their families and statutory services to looked after young people and care leavers.
- 3.2 During 2019-20, a service re-configuration has been implemented to develop and improve the Council's services to vulnerable children. Despite this, there continues to be high demand for statutory children's services, and there are examples of staff working excessive hours, and reliance on agency staff to meet demand during vacancy due to recruitment, or parent leave.
- 3.3 The Council has a duty to comply with the Social Care Wales Code of Practice for Social Care Employers that is issued under Section 112 of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016. The Code of Practice includes at 2.7 the following requirement:

Have policies and systems in place for workers to raise concerns about any matter which might have a negative effect on the delivery of safe and dignified care and support and take adequate action to respond to concern.
- 3.4 There are examples of staff informing the service that there are times when they feel overwhelmed due to caseload size. A range of support has been provided to staff in response to this. The support included the previous proposal that two peripatetic social workers were recruited. The recruitment of qualified social work staff would be the optimum working model in response to our duties and the concerns that staff have shared, however despite attempts to recruit into the posts recruitment has been unsuccessful.
- 3.5 Barriers to recruiting into the post have included that the posts are peripatetic and fixed term. Furthermore, all Local Authorities report difficulties in recruiting qualified Social Workers. Given these circumstances and the demand that remains on Children's Services we have considered alternative measures to support the daily demands on the service in order to ensure we comply with our duties and in order to support our existing committed staff.
- 3.6 A significant proportion of Social Workers' working day includes undertaking tasks that can be completed or they can be supported to complete by support workers. Staff report that support in completing these tasks would allow them to focus on tasks that require a qualified Social Worker to complete.
- 3.7 It is proposed that the service employ 3 full time peripatetic support workers to address demand and avoid reliance on agency staff.

4.0 BUSINESS CASE

4.1 We plan to improve our services

The service has detailed improvement plans, which are reported to Scrutiny Committee. The delivery of those plans will improve outcomes for children and young people and develop sustainable services at a lower cost in the long term. Certain areas of progress are at risk of decline due to capacity, for example, focused work aimed at reuniting families and reducing the number of looked after young people.

4.2 Capacity to deliver change

Caseload size has improved but there continues to be a number of examples of caseloads that are higher than they should be for the effective delivery of our work.

4.3 Evidence of demand in excess of capacity

In line with the Council's Flexible Working Policy, the Council's recording process called HR21 evidences the following accumulated 'lost hours' in children's services (hours worked in excess of the 20-hour carry over per flexi period).

- 24.04.18 - 01.03.19 1937:41 lost hours
- 29.03.19 - 13.09.19 1293:55 lost hours
- 15.09.19 – 02.02.20 917:55 lost hours

4.4 There are a number of reasons for these hours being accrued but, for the main part, it is:

- time spent discharging the Council's duties to children who are looked after and supporting young people in crisis; or
- discharging the Council's safeguarding duty and work by staff involved in delivering work for Court deadlines.

4.5 Analysis shows that the bulk of these hours are in the team that does the Court work and work with families in the Local Authority whose children are on the child protection register, with some examples in the Children Looked After Team. There are real pressures in the system resulting in a continued need for agency demand unless we build alternative ways of supporting these teams.

4.6 There is a strong correlation between manageable caseloads, better outcomes for families and improved staff recruitment and retention.

4.7 Capacity in structure

Capacity in service structure is sufficient for predictable demand, dropping below that at times of absence due to annual leave, and particularly vacancy due to recruitment, parent leave and sickness. A workforce strategy is in place to counteract recruitment challenges.

- 4.8 There is currently a bulge in numbers of looked after children that is creating additional demand. Work is required to support young people and families in reducing risks that will either help families to sustain changes to make it possible for children to return home safely or support good permanence planning for those young people allowing them to settle into stable new homes. For some of those cases, the Authority will be able to apply to Court to discharge the Care Order.
- 4.9 There has been reliance on agency staff and as at August 2020, the value of agency costs in Children's Services was £50k. This is for a four-month period
- 4.10 The service proposes to recruit 3 full time support workers on fixed term contracts for 24-months to work as peripatetic support workers in teams where there is peak demand. This will support us in reducing caseload sizes, excessive staff hours and will facilitate our improvement work. The maximum costing for 2 full time peripatetic social workers per year is £108k. The maximum costing for 3 full time support workers is £98k per year. The proposal of the use of support workers would be a lower cost, therefore agreement for a change in approach would not result in the Local Authority incurring additional costs in comparison to the previously agreed peripatetic social work posts.

Numerous recent studies have highlighted how many social workers would appreciate a little more support in terms of managing the job's administrative and practical overload, which is a key factor in stress and burnout. The approach of using support workers to assist the burden on qualified Social Work staff was cited as a key support mechanism for Hampshire Children's Services in their inspection report published on 11th June 2019, the Local Authority's rating by Ofsted moved from 'good' to 'outstanding'.

An initial 2017 evaluation of the impact of Hampshire's innovation programme, by academics from Oxford Brookes University, found stress levels and sick days reduced where support workers were introduced, and estimated that for every £1 spent on them, £2 was saved. Social workers in pilot teams told researchers that time spent working with families increased from 34% to 58% over nine months.

- 4.11 If the Council supports the proposal, the staff, once employed will be used to pilot an innovative new way of working in the teams where the greatest demand exists. The support staff would combine with current support staff based within team structures on average creating a ratio of one support worker to every three social workers. The movement and base of support workers throughout their contracted period would be agreed by Children's Services Management Team. The proposed structure and reporting requirement is included at Appendix 1, however daily supervision and support would be facilitated by the Team Manager of the team their support is required within.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 These are new costs to the service as outlined above given that we were unable to recruit to the peripatetic social work posts, however the cost is lower than the impact of the current levels of agency use being maintained.

6.0 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1

	Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts	Not Applicable
1. Merthyr Tydfil Well-being Objectives	3 of 4	0 of 4	1 of 4
2. Sustainable Development Principles - How have you considered the five ways of working: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term • Prevention • Integration • Collaboration • Involvement 	5 of 5	0 of 5	0 of 5
3. Protected Characteristics <i>(including Welsh Language)</i>	10 of 10	0 of 10	0 of 10
4. Biodiversity	0 of 1	0 of 1	1 of 1
<p><u>Summary:</u></p> <p>The main positive impacts are the development and improvement of services for children and young people.</p> <p>No negative impacts have been identified.</p>			

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SOCIAL SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS		
Title of Document(s)	Document(s) Date	Document Location
Peripatetic Social Workers	February 2020	
Does the report contain any issue that may impact the Council's Constitution?		No

Consultation has been undertaken with the Corporate Management Team in respect of each proposal(s) and recommendation(s) set out in this report.

