

## **Council Meeting – 10 January 2011**

### **Notice of Motion – Money Spent on Agency Social Workers**

#### **Introduction**

This paper seeks to address the motion raised by Councillors Cassidy, Robertson, Burley, Wilkes, Oliver, Chambers and Westley, which states:

*"This Council notes with concern the vast sums of money spent on agency social workers within children's specialist services - just under £3.8m over the last 3 years.*

*With a substantial reduction in spending in mind, coupled with the need to provide ever more efficient specialist services to our most vulnerable children and young people, this council resolves to urgently address this waste of tax payers money by;*

- *Agreeing to increase the levels of pay of social workers in Walsall to match that of our neighbours in the rest of the West Midlands and Staffordshire as they are currently 30% less than Staffs County Council and the second lowest in the black country and*
- *Ensuring that current recruitment and retention processes are thoroughly reviewed as a matter of urgency to see where they can be improved"*

#### **Current Situation**

##### **Salary levels**

Walsall Newly Qualified Social Workers, Social Workers and Senior Social Worker are on a grade which ranges from Spinal Column Point (SCP) 26 (£22,221) to SCP 36 (£30,111). There is currently a bar in place at SCP 29 which requires the evaluation of a progression application to enable the Social Worker to progress through the bar and be classed as a Senior Social Worker. The Walsall Senior Practitioner grade currently starts at SCP 37 (£30,851) and runs to SCP 40 (£33,661).

Walsall Social Worker mean salary <sup>1</sup> is £26,166, this is the second lowest in both the Black Country and in the region. The range of mean salaries across the region is £25,484 to £30,718. Our mean salary is therefore in the bottom quartile in the region and 17% lower than the highest payer.

Our Senior Practitioner mean salary is £32,256 and is second highest in the Black Country and 8<sup>th</sup> in the region overall which ranges from £31,405 to £36,758. Again, our mean salary is in the bottom quartile in the region and 14% lower than the highest payer.

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<sup>1</sup> The average point between the top and bottom of the salary scale

## **Social Worker recruitment and retention**

Over the last 3 years Walsall has struggled with both the retention and recruitment of experienced social workers. To put this into context we have turnover rates <sup>2</sup> in the region of 11%, we have recruited 1 external experienced social worker in 3 years and we carry a high vacancy percentage.

Recent research indicates that the West Midlands Region is amongst the most challenging areas in which to recruit. The number of vacancies we have regionally has consistently tracked above the national average at 17% (9.8% as reported by Tribal; 2010; 'Recruiting and Retaining Children's Social Workers: The Challenges and Opportunities').

To ensure that we deliver high quality services we have had no choice but to fill vacancies with temporary staff, this issue brings with it both significant cost and a feeling of inequity amongst permanent staff.

### **Actions currently being taken in response to this challenge**

#### **Salary levels**

Significant work has been undertaken to benchmark the pay levels for our social work cohort, and as such, consultation on new job descriptions has commenced. It is anticipated and indicated that once implemented, these Job Descriptions and proposed grades will bring the Social Worker pay levels up to a level broadly comparable with our regional colleagues. We will be very well placed in the Black Country in terms of the rewards we offer.

We have also removed the bar at SCP 29 which was previously in place, which will remove any barriers to salary progression.

With the anticipated new scales we are confident we will be highly competitive in comparison with other Black Country and regional councils.

#### **Recruitment and Retention**

The Walsall Children's Workforce Development Team has recently begun consultation with senior managers and staff on a new Social Worker Recruitment and Retention Strategy. This innovative strategy covers a number of key elements which when implemented will make Walsall the Local Authority of Choice for Social Workers. Examples of the elements due to be implemented include:

- A clear and achievable career pathway for Social Workers with revised JD's
- A workflow review to ensure that case allocation is optimised.
- An internal pool of peripatetic Social Workers
- A refresh of the recruitment micro-site to include reward package advertisement
- A 'recommend a friend' reward scheme
- A refreshed and fit for purpose learning and development programme

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<sup>2</sup> the rate of social workers who leave us each year as a percentage of the whole

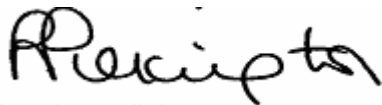
It is anticipated that the strategy will 'go live' from April 2011 with challenging milestones being delivered all the way to March 2014. In order to drive delivery we are looking to develop and grow our Workforce Development team.

### **Early successes**

The work done to date has had an immediate effect on reducing turnover of social workers, with employees choosing to stay with us rather than move elsewhere. We have had excellent feedback from delegates who have attended training under the new programme and are working closely with the service to undertake service redesign under the Working Smarter Programme. We are beginning to take a much more strategic approach to developing the whole Children's Workforce.

### **Author**

Michelle Whiting  
Assistant Director – Children's Specialist Services  
01922 652759  
[whitingm@walsall.gov.uk](mailto:whitingm@walsall.gov.uk)



**Pauline Pilkington**  
**Executive Director**  
**Children's Services**