

Request for the temporary external recruitment to Social Work Assistant posts to cover Social Work vacancies.

Date: 11/11/2021

Report of Simon Johnson

Report to Deputy Director, Children & Families Social Work Service

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

1. There has been a significant reduction in the number of candidates applying for social work posts in Leeds in the latter half of the year (between March and June 2021 there were 52 applications and between July and October 2021 there were 22 applications). Alongside an increase in the number of social worker posts becoming vacant on a permanent basis, this has left a high number of vacancies across the city that cannot currently be filled.
2. In addition, social work teams are already under significant pressure to be able to fulfil their statutory responsibilities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its subsequent impacts, which is contributing to the current difficulties that front-line teams are facing. Social work teams are working hard to meet the needs of vulnerable children and those in need of protection, as well as supporting those children that are looked after by the local authority, however this is increasingly difficult with a reduced workforce.

Recommendations

- A. To *externally* recruit to a number of temporary social work assistant posts to support the social work teams in the interim.
- B. Contracts will initially be offered for a 6-month period, with the ability to review and extend if the social work recruitment is unchanged at that point.
- C. To establish 10 additional temporary SWA posts on the structure.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

3. As it has not been possible to fill the number of social work vacancies with either permanent or agency social workers, it is proposed that as a temporary, interim measure to support the teams in the delivery of services to children and families, that we will look to recruit to a number of unqualified social care workers.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted? Yes No

4. The proposal is to enable social work assistants to be able to work alongside qualified social workers and undertake a number of tasks, to allow social workers to complete their statutory duties. Social work assistants will be able to facilitate family time contact sessions for looked after children; they can accompany social workers on visits to children and families; support in the completion of Child and Family assessments; as well as undertaking direct work with children and families.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

5. Discussions have been undertaken between the Service Manager Recruitment Leads; Heads of Services for CSWS; and the Chief Officer Ruth Terry. Consultation has also been held with the Head of Finance and colleagues within HR.
6. Consultation will take place with the relevant Trade Unions regarding the draft proposals.

What are the resource implications?

7. There are currently 19 permanent full-time social work vacancies in the city, including CHAD, and 5 part time roles. In addition to this, there are 3 temporary vacancies, alongside a number of workers who are on longer-term sick leave (many as a result of Covid symptoms or mental health difficulties).
8. The cost (including on costs) to employ a social work assistant for 6 months is £15,323.82. The cost to employ a social worker for the equivalent period would be £18,629.44 to £24,683.17 depending on experience levels. Money has been saved across the areas as a result of holding a number of permanent vacancies over the last 3+ months. As we only aim to cover 1 in 2 of the current social work vacancies over the next 6 months with social work assistants, savings will continue to be made in this period.
9. The total cost for 10 temporary SWAs for 6 months will be £153,000. Consultation has taken place with colleagues in finance who confirm that the following projected underspends exist at the end of Period 6, based on staff currently in post:
 - ENE 81606, SDM Fiona Tharme – projected *underspend* of £367,000
 - South 81614, SDM Hilary Suddes – projected *underspend* of £101,000
 - WNW 81622, SDM Leanne Gilbert – projected *underspend* of £212,000
10. It is expected that any new staff would onboard in January 2021 and as such the costs for the project will be split across the two financial years.

What are the legal implications?

11. The proposed posts are fixed term contracts for a period of 6 months. Some successful external applicants may have continuous service from previous roles which may need to be considered when their contracts come to an end.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

12. The shortage of qualified social work staff at this time is unprecedented and brings a significant challenge and risk to the department being able to fulfil its statutory obligations in relation to individual children and their families.
13. There is a risk of duplicate recruitment to posts, with temporary social work assistants still filling vacancies, at the time when permanent social workers are recruited. However, this will be managed by not recruiting to all vacant social work posts with unqualified workers, to ensure there is no cross over of staffing. The aim will be to recruit first to the social work posts in the city that remain vacant and that once these posts are filled, a secondary recruitment will take place to fill the posts that will be vacated by social work assistants, once their 6-month contract comes to an end.

Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?

- Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

14. The current pressures on social work teams are very high. Teams are running on reduced capacity not only in terms of permanent vacancies but also with temporary and sickness vacancies, meaning that caseloads and levels of work are rising. Some workers are on sick leave as a result of Covid symptoms and isolation guidelines. In order to be able to manage these vacancies, as well as supporting teams to reduce pressures and improve their overall wellbeing, it is important that we look to increase the number of staff within the service.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

15. To increase the interest and subsequent numbers of candidates submitting social work applications to Leeds CSWS, a variety of strategies have been employed. This has included an increase in the use of social media platforms in order to reach a more diverse audience; making connections directly with the universities and social work student population to encourage them to consider Leeds as a future employer; as well as participating in a local health and social care career's events to boost the profile of Leeds Children's Social Work Service.
16. In addition, contact has been made with social care employment agencies to seek out candidates who may be interested in working for Leeds CSWS as temporary agency social workers, however this has been with limited success.

How will success be measured?

17. Measures include social workers feeling supported, able to focus on their statutory duties, leading to improved morale and retention. This will be evidenced in supervision sessions and through feedback given by social workers. This will also impact on reduced levels of absence through ill health.
18. Success will be measured when around 1/2 of the current social work vacancies are temporarily filled by social work assistants. Alongside the recruitment of social work assistant posts, the Service Manager Recruitment Leads will continue to work to recruit to the social

work vacancies, meaning that the remaining social work vacancies will be filled in the first instance. Thereafter the recruitment strategy will be to recruit to social workers to start in post once the 6-month temporary contracts of the social work assistants is completed.

What is the timetable for implementation?

19. It is hoped that an external advert for the social work assistant posts can be released as soon as possible, to allow the Service Manager Recruitment Leads to shortlist applications forms; conduct interviews; and complete the recruitment process in order to get workers started in post early in the new year.