

LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Report to: Councillor Alex Sanderson, Cabinet Member for Children and Education

Date: 13/02/2023

Subject: Step Up To Social Work Programme Procurement Strategy

Report author:

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Responsible Director: Jacqui McShannon – Strategic Director of Children’s Services

SUMMARY

The Step Up to Social Work Programme is a fully funded training programme for social workers, successfully delivered in partnership since 2009. The programme has developed high quality social workers across West London, many of whom have been retained and are now in managerial roles. A West London Step Up graduate was nominated as the newly qualified social worker (NQS) of the year in 2022. The current contract ends on 26th June 2023 with no option to extend. Hammersmith and Fulham is the lead borough on behalf of the West London Regional Partnership for this programme. This report seeks approval of a strategy to recommission a higher education partner to work with the local authority to deliver the programme by way of a competitive procurement exercise.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet Member for Children and Education approves:

1. The procurement strategy to recommission a new Step Up to Social Work Programme contract for a duration of two years with the option to extend twice, for an additional two years per extension period. The contract value will be £1,400,000 every 2 years, bringing the total contract value after extension to £4,200,000. The contract will only continue based on satisfactory performance by the Provider and continued funding from the Department for Education (DFE).

Wards Affected: ALL

Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	The higher education partner will be required to provide social value as part

	of the contract. This will form part of the tendering process.
Creating a compassionate council	The Step Up to Social Work programme will train up new social workers to provide support for children and families in H&F.
Doing things with local residents, not to them	Strong community input is an important aspect of our social work offer. Young people, foster carers and looked after children input into the Step Up to Social Work programme.
Being ruthlessly financially efficient	Recommissioning the service will help recruit and retain social workers in the borough, which will result in less spend on agency staff.
Taking pride in H&F	The programme contributes to the council's commitment to supporting their residents.

Financial Impact

1. The Department for Education (DfE) will allocate grant funding to the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. This will enable the Council to deliver the Step Up to Social Work programme to social work trainees, on behalf of all boroughs within the West London Regional Partnership. 41 trainees will be supported, in the eighth cohort, by the programme commencing January 2024.

2. DfE will provide a total grant funding of £1,411,250. A fixed single payment of £48,000 will be made at the start of the programme to cover administrative costs. Then funding of £33,250 per trainee will be paid in 15 monthly instalments, commencing January 2024 as summarised in the table below:

Total Grant Funding:	£1,411,250	
Fixed:		
Administrative funding element	£48,000	
Variable (Funding Per Student):		
	For 41 Students	Per Student
Higher Education Institution (HEI) Training Delivery	£478,347	£11,667
Bursary for Student	£813,153	£19,833
Support and Development of Supervisors	£71,750	£1,750
Total	£1,363,250	£33,250

3. The terms and conditions of the grant funding agreement, with the DfE, means funding will be released monthly. The DfE will pay the Council one month in arrears, on receipt of a valid claim and invoice, in respect of expenditure already incurred in the previous month.

4. The DfE will fund the number of trainees still enrolled in the programme for the month claimed. If a trainee drops out of the programme, funding, in the following month, will be reduced by one trainee.

5. It is important to note that there is no dedicated General Fund budget available in the Council to cover expenditure related to this programme. The Grant must cover all programme costs. The Council will, therefore, demonstrate robust budget management to ensure that expenditure is contained within the grant.

6. The West London Regional Partnership steering group, made up of workforce development leads from the 8 boroughs, will oversee the running of the programme and will receive regular updates from the Programme Manager, who has direct oversight of the programme budget.

7. At the end of the training programme, students are expected to continue their employment with their host local authority, for at least two years. Hammersmith and Fulham Council holds several newly qualified social worker posts within Children's Services. The Council's General Fund finances these social worker posts. In the short term, these posts are specifically ring-fenced for newly qualified social workers and people rotate in and out of these posts. At the end of two years, the current post-holders will leave these posts, ready for the next generation of Step Up graduates to enter.

8. In the longer-term, retaining newly qualified social workers who have benefitted from the Step Up programme and wish to progress and develop their careers within the Council is dependent on the number of senior social worker posts available and the level of staff turnover amongst more senior social workers.

Financial implications completed by Daphne Tagoe-Borllons, Senior Accountant (Children's Services), 13th January 2023.

Financial implications reviewed by: Tony Burton, Head of Finance Children's Services and Education, 20th January 2023

Sukvinder Kalsi – Director of Finance, 10th February 2023

Legal Implications

The Council has power to provide these services as the provision of professional training is incidental and conducive to its powers to employ staff to undertake social work services. The Council also has power to procure these services jointly with other local authorities and to act as lead authority in this procurement.

This contract is subject to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR). However, as a contract relating to training it is subject to the "light touch regime" under the PCR. This means that the Council is obliged to act in accordance with the principles of transparency and equal treatment but is not obliged to follow one of the procurement procedures set out in the regulations. The proposed procurement route recommended in this report is in compliance with the regulations.

This is a high value contract for the purposes of the Council's Contract Standing Orders. The proposed competitive tendering procedure complies with CSO 18.

The value of the proposed contract means that this is a key decision for the purposes of the Council's constitution and will need to be included on the key decision list on the Council's website.

Implications completed by: John Sharland, Senior solicitor (Contracts and procurement), 11 January 2023.

Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report

None

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Background

1. The Step Up to Social Work programme is fully funded via a grant from the Department for Education (DfE). The programme trains Children's Services social workers so that, at the end of the course, they gain a Post-Graduate Diploma with the opportunity to obtain credits towards a master's degree in Social Work. They are able to register with the social work regulator, Social Work England, at this point. The result is that participating local authorities are better able to attract and retain well-qualified children's social workers at a time when this is proving difficult nationally.
2. In 2017, Hammersmith and Fulham competitively tendered a contract with the University of Hertfordshire to deliver the Step Up to Social Work programme for a six-year period from June 2017 to June 2023. As the lead authority, Hammersmith and Fulham tendered this contract on behalf of the West London Regional Partnership, which comprises of the following eight authorities:
 - Brent
 - Ealing
 - Hammersmith & Fulham (lead borough)
 - Harrow
 - Hillingdon
 - Hounslow
 - Kensington and Chelsea
 - Westminster.
3. Since its inception in 2009, the West London Regional Partnership have had seven Step Up cohorts with 195 trainees overall, 34 of whom will complete the programme in April 2023. We have a high retention rate for the West London Regional Partnership Step Up programme across the eight boroughs for cohorts

1-7 and through the new contract, will continue to work closely with the higher education institute to maintain and improve this retention rate.

Cohort	Number of students	Date
Cohort 1	33	2011
Cohort 2	27	2013
Cohort 3	33	2015
Cohort 4	33	2017
Cohort 5	28	2019
Cohort 6	41	2021
Cohort 7	34	2022

4. As the lead borough for this programme, we have successfully developed a strong partnership with 7 West London boroughs and the higher education institution to deliver a high quality programme. This has included output research conferences, published journal articles and, this year, a West London Step Up to Social Work graduate was nominated as the newly qualified social worker (NQSW) of the year.

Reasons for Decision

1. The current contract expires in June 2023 and there is no option to extend. There is now a need to go back out to the market to undertake a competitive tender process, in line with Contract Standing Order 19.1, to ensure there is a high quality, value for money contract in place to deliver this programme.
2. As with every other London authority, the eight boroughs within the West London Regional Partnership have experienced difficulties in the recruitment and retention of children's social workers. The Step Up programme forms part of our 'growing our own' approach to recruiting and retaining staff. The programme will attract student social workers with the intention that, once qualified, will become permanent members of the workforce.

Contract Specifications Summary

1. The Council requires the higher education institution to bestow the Post-Graduate Diploma and master's degree and provide academic teaching hours.
2. The higher education institution is required to provide the teaching content and pastoral care hours for students. They will design and deliver the course on behalf of the partnership to ensure academic quality assurance and regulatory approval of courses that must be approved by Social Work England.
3. The higher education institution will provide a programme lead from the University to attend governance meetings, such as the steering group.
4. The higher education institution must be part of all recruitment of new candidates in partnership with the Council.

5. The higher education institution must complete DBS and health checks for students at the beginning of the programme and communicate any key information to the Council.
6. This will be a 2 year contract, with two options to extend to a total of 6 years, with an additional 2-years per extension period. The continuation of the contract following each two-year period will be at the absolute discretion of the Council to give a potential contract duration on up to six years. This will be dependent on:
 - a) Continued funding of the programme by the DfE.
 - b) The provider does not meet identified key performance indicators. This will be monitored via regular contract management meetings and demonstrated via a report to be produced at the end of each cohort.

Procurement Route Analysis of Options

Option 1 – Let provision of a Step-up to Social Work programme end in June 2023 and do not renew (Not recommended)

The programme has confirmed funding for 2023 and is continuing to demonstrate its worth. The continued supply of skilled student social workers coming through the programme to work with Hammersmith & Fulham children and families is an invaluable resource. If the Step Up to Social Work programme does not continue, this would have an impact on the recruitment and retention of social workers, causing more pressure on the workforce and increased reliance on agency staff. The funding from the DfE would have to be returned and not utilised.

Option 2 – Let the current services continue under current arrangements and recommission the contract (Recommended)

Recommissioning the programme for a further 6 years will support the difficulties in recruitment and retention of children's social workers that London authorities face. The Step-up programme has been specifically designed as an innovative way to train social workers. The programme has significantly greater employer input into the course design and content in comparison with other qualifying social work programmes. Students are contracted to work with their host authority and upon successful completion of the course will be expected to continue their employment for two years with the Council they are paired with.

Since the programme was contracted in 2011, the development, delivery and outcomes of the programme have been extremely positive. 98% of the students that completed the programme in April 2021 are now working in front line children's social work teams across all participating authorities.

This option is recommended based on the benefits outlined above.

Market Analysis, Local Economy and Social Value

1. The marketplace for the services is mainly made up of higher education institutions who can bestow degrees and have social work qualifying programmes.
2. The specification will be echoed from the previous contract. Stakeholders and service users will be consulted in February 2023. There will be a market warming event for potential tenderers.
3. Officers intend to tender the contracts under an Open Procedure with no Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) and advertise the contracts via the Capital E Sourcing portal.
4. Before we send out the invitation to tender and during the tender process, we will discuss social value with potential providers.
5. Key areas where we would like providers to add social value are training, and employment opportunities. We would anticipate that trainees have access to multidimensional wellbeing programmes, and this supports H&F's value of being a compassionate council. The service provider will be expected to provide equality, diversity and inclusion training to all staff. They should also require their suppliers to adhere to a modern slavery statement relating to the recruitment of their staff. This will support the council's value of taking pride in H&F.

Risk Assessment and Proposed Mitigations

1. The key risks for the procurement and proposed mitigations are outlined in the table below:

Risk	Mitigation
There is likely to be a small number of service providers who will bid for the contract, due to the specialist nature of provision.	We will engage with a wide range of providers including small service providers as part of the initial consultation and will continue to do so throughout the procurement process. We will hold a market warming event prior to going out to tender.
We are reliant on the DfE for continued grant funding to run the Step Up to Social Work Programme.	To manage this, we will continue to link with the DfE and engage with key contacts. If funding is not continued, the contract extensions will be not exercised.
Risk that services are being purchased from suppliers who do not meet the Council's Quality Assurance measures.	This risk is being mitigated against by the robust vetting measures in place in awarding contractors to this framework as well ensuring all providers meet the minimum standards via the selection questionnaire.

Proposed Timetable

1. Please include an estimated timetable of the competition process through to contract commencing.

Key Decision Entry (Strategy)	Completed (9 th January 2023)
CLT (Strategy)	26 January 2023
Contracts Assurance Board (Strategy)	8th February 2023
Cabinet Member Sign off (Strategy)	13 th February 2023
Distribute to Cabinet Members (48 hours)	14-15 th February 2023
Allow for call-in period (3 days)	16- 19 th February 2023
Open tender	20 th February 2023
Closing date for clarifications	25 th February 2023
Closing date for submissions	25 March 2023
Evaluation of Tenders	13-14 April 2023
Key Decision Entry (Award)	1 April 2023
CLT (Award)	25 April 2023
CAB (Award)	25 April 2023
Cabinet Member (Award)	1st May 2023
Distribute to Cabinet Members (48 hours)	11-12 May 2023
Allow for call in period (3 days)	13-15 May 2023
Find a Tender Service Contract Award Notice	16 May 2023
Contract engrossment	17 May 2023
Contract mobilisation and implementation	26 May 2023
Contract Commencement date	26 June 2023

Selection and Award Criteria

1. Bidders will be expected to complete a Selection Questionnaire (Pass/Fail) before proceeding to the technical and commercial envelopes which will be evaluated based on a 60:40 quality: price split as mandated by the framework terms. The quality criteria will be scored on questions based on the key performance indicators detailed in the contract management section. The questions and weighting will be developed by the project management team. The procurement will be taken forward by a project team from the Children's Commissioning Team, with advice from the council's corporate procurement team.
2. The questions will be individually weighted to arrive at a total of 100% quality. Each evaluator will mark each response out of a score between 0 and 10 with 0 (unacceptable) being the lowest and 10 (excellent) being the highest.
3. The tender assessment panel (TAP) will include representatives from H&F's Children's Commissioning, Contract Manager Fenix Cornejo, and representatives from West London Regional Partnership. They will make the recommendation to award to the Cabinet Member, after shortlisting and scoring tenders based on the criteria set out in the tender documents.
4. Social Value will be assessed as part of the quality evaluation at a minimum of 10%, the Procurement team alongside the service providers will quantify the

number of activities that the supplier can deliver beyond their contractual obligation. These measurements can then be made part of the contract's key performance indicators. These activities will be monitored and delivered during the lifetime of the contract.

5. The Cabinet Member will be kept informed of the progress of the tendering process via Cabinet Member Board meetings.

Contract Management

1. The Council has appointed a Contract Manager, Fenix Cornejo, who will take overall responsibility for delivering services under this contract.
2. The Contract will be subject to quarterly quality assurance meetings. This will be reviewed for the duration of the contract.
3. Key performance indicators for the contract include:
 - a) Numbers of students recruited for each council
 - b) Successful delivery of teaching components of the course: Academic lectures, tutorials, and placement meetings
 - c) Engagement with service users and residents in the development and planning of the programme
 - d) Collaboration with partners in the governance steering group
 - e) Number of students who complete of the course
 - f) Number of students employed following the course
4. Quarterly returns and an annual report will be produced which will be made available to directors and interested councillors as required.

Equality Implications

- 1.1 It is not considered that there will be any negative equality implications arising from this procurement activity.
- 1.2 The successful Higher Education Institution will assess student suitability for the programme, in partnership with the West London Regional Partnership Steering Group members, considering its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 for all protected characteristics.

Risk Management Implications

The proposal to tender the service contributes to the Council priority of being ruthlessly financially efficient, with the scheme is fully funded by central government via a grant from the Department for Education. The programme trains Children's Services social workers so that, at the end of the course, they gain a Post-Graduate Diploma with the opportunity to obtain credits towards a master's degree in social

work. This contributes directly to our residents through a service which has retained and motivated staff with clear opportunities for development and ensuring continuity of high standards of service delivery.

Implications completed by: David Hughes, Director of Audit, Fraud, Risk and Insurance, 11 January 2023

Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications

1. The main climate and ecological impacts of the proposed procurement are relatively low. As the service will be co-located, Students will use existing local authority buildings, which align with H&F's own environmental commitments.

Implications agreed by: Hinesh Mehta, Head of Climate Change, 10 January 2023.

Local Economy and Social Value Implications

There are no local economy and social value implications for this programme as it is fully funded by the DfE.

LIST OF APPENDICES:

Appendix 1. DfE Letter



Department for Education: London
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Dear colleague,

Step Up to Social Work Programme Cohort 8

In August 2022 the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed its intention to run an eighth cohort of the *Step Up to Social Work Programme* starting in January 2024, subject to successful bids from local authorities. I am writing to invite you to apply to participate in this cohort.

Overview

The *Step Up to Social Work* programme provides an accelerated entry route into social work for high-achieving graduates and career changers. The programme has successfully trained over 2000 social workers since 2010. *Step Up to Social Work* is delivered through the development of a work-based 14-month postgraduate diploma programme, led by groups of local authorities working in Regional Partnerships (RPs) who contract the learning element with Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). Award of the diploma enables candidates to apply for registration as a qualified social worker. The scheme targets high calibre individuals who already have experience of working with vulnerable children, young people or adults who want to train as social workers.

In order to drive toward continuous improvement on the *Step Up* programme, for cohort 8 we intend to commission a recruitment contractor to work alongside Regional Partnerships and DfE to:

- Remove any barriers to accessing the programme for participants with protected characteristics/ from underrepresented groups during the assessment and selection process (whilst maintaining its rigour).
- Promote consistency in the recruitment processes across RPs; and
- Provide targeted support to applicants from underrepresented groups throughout the recruitment process.

Step Up to Social Work complements our commitment to raising the quality of social work practice, with a particular focus on the practice of child and family social workers undertaking statutory social work. We expect the delivery of cohort 8 of *Step up to Social Work* to embed the post-qualifying standard (knowledge and skills statement) for approved child and family practitioners in

the design and content of the training programmes and associated Regional Partnership arrangements.¹

Programme Specification

Step Up to Social Work is delivered through a regional consortia of local authorities called Regional Partnerships (RPs) who work together to deliver the programme/training in collaboration with Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) delivering the teaching and award element of the Post Graduate Diploma.

For successful bids, DfE will agree a Grant Offer Letter with the lead local authority of the Regional Partnership (the Grant Recipient) to cover the funding for delivery of an eighth cohort. At its sole discretion, DfE may elect to extend the term of the Grant Offer Letter for a further cohort by giving written notice to the Grant Recipient. Any extension will be subject (but not limited to) the following:

- Funding and other approvals for subsequent years;
- Assessment of Need;
- Satisfactory delivery performance; and
- Commitment to continuous improvement.

Successful bids will be subject to a Grant Offer Letter (GOL) and monitoring KPIs alongside compliance with the grant funding [terms and conditions](#) as well as any other project specific conditions set out in the GOL.

The Grant Recipient is fully responsible for all of their partners and sub-contracting arrangements. The Department for Education will not financially support any additional costs to the running of the programme. In particular, the Grant Recipient should ensure that contracts with HEIs are flexible to allow for a change in student numbers. The Grant Recipient will be responsible for meeting any costs if a lower or higher number of students are enrolled and must ensure that their HEI is able to run the programme regardless of the number of participants.

It is the lead local authority's responsibility to ensure that the programme is delivered on time and within budget. Please note that any cost overruns will be at the expense of the Regional Partnership. The principles governing any unspent monies regarding the programme will be set out in the GOL.

Regional partnerships will be required to have a Memorandum of Understanding and HEI contract in place for grant funding to be released. The Memorandum of Understanding must detail Regional Partnership arrangements, including the roles and responsibilities between the lead local authority and partner authorities throughout the stages of the programme, and how funding will flow between partners.

Step up to Social Work cohort 8

Funding

Step Up to Social Work will run as part of a Programme Grant Agreement between DfE and local authorities, and grant funding payments will be made to the Lead LA on a monthly basis in arrears. DfE funding will be allocated through the lead local authority of each regional partnership.

To enable local authorities to meet programme commitments, DfE provides the following funding to cover the duration of cohort 8:

- **£19,833** per trainee to deliver a bursary to each trainee.
- **£1,750** per trainee to cover the supervision and support that hosting authorities provide during the programme.
- **£11,667** per trainee to allow local authorities to procure the course from their chosen HEI.

In addition to the above, administrative funding is also paid to local authorities involved in the project as follows:

- **£38,000** to each regional partnership for establishing and administering the regional partnership activity required to support local authorities and their selected HEI provider to deliver the programme.
- **£10,000** to each regional partnership for making delivery arrangements with an HEI provider.