

# LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Cabinet Members

**Date:** 24/05/2023

**Subject:** Contract award – Step Up to Social Work Programme

**Report of:** Councillor Sanderson – Cabinet Member for Children and Education

**Report author:** Hannah Lambeth, Contracts and Commissioning Officer

**Responsible Director:** Amana Gordon – Operational Director for the Children and Young People's Service

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## SUMMARY

This report seeks approval for the award of a new contract for the provision of the Step Up to Social Work Programme. This award follows an open tender procurement exercise.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To note that Appendix 1 is not for publication on the basis that it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) as set out in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).
  2. To approve the award of a contract for the Step Up to Social Work Programme to the University of Hertfordshire for the period 26<sup>th</sup> June 2023 – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2025. The contract value will be £0.465m for 2 years, with the option to extend twice, with two years for each extension.
  3. To note that this brings the total contract value after both possible extensions to £1.394m. The contract will only continue based on satisfactory performance by the provider and continued funding from the Department for Education (DfE).
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**Wards Affected:** All

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Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the H&F Values
Building shared prosperity	Investing in our social work workforce in order to ensure that our families receive the support they need.
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.
Rising to the challenge of the climate and ecological emergency	As the service will be co-located, students will use existing local authority buildings, which align with H&F's own environmental commitments.

## 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. 38 trainees will be supported, in the eighth cohort, by the programme commencing January 2024.

2. DfE will provide a total grant funding of £1.315m. A fixed single payment of £0.048m will be made at the start of the programme to cover administrative costs plus £0.04m for supporting a certain number of students. Then funding of £33,250 per trainee will be paid in 15 monthly instalments, commencing January 2024 as summarised in the table below:

<b>Total Grant Funding:</b>	<b>£1,315,500</b>	
<b>Fixed:</b>		
Administrative funding element	£48,000	
One-off funding for supporting 36-45 students	£4,000	
<b>Total</b>	<b>£52,000</b>	
<b>Variable (Funding Per Student):</b>		
	For 38 Students	Per Student
Higher Education Institution (HEI) Training Delivery	£443,346	£11,667
Bursary for Student	£753,654	£19,833
Support and Development of Supervisors	£66,500	£1,750
<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,263,500</b>	<b>£33,250</b>

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. Based on maintaining 38 trainees throughout the Step Up programme to their completion, DfE will provide funding of £0.443m towards higher education institution training delivery / university provision. This will cover the cost of a two-year contract with the University of Hertfordshire as HEI training provider at £0.465m, with an additional £0.022m agreed and allocated from the Children's Services department to match funding.

7. To extend the contract with the university for a further two years twice, it is important that the council review and manage the contract with the University of Hertfordshire to ensure that the contract continues to provide value for money based on the number of trainees in future cohorts (i.e. cohorts 9 and 10).

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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), 11<sup>th</sup> May 2023; updated 18<sup>th</sup> May 2023*

*Financial implications reviewed by: Tony Burton, Head of Finance, Children's Services and Education, 16 May 2023; updated 19<sup>th</sup> May 2023*

*Finance implications verified by: Sukvinder Kalsi, Director of Finance, 19<sup>th</sup> May 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 procurement route which has been followed is in compliance with the PCR.

This is a high value contract for the purposes of the Council’s Contract Standing Orders. The competitive tendering procedure which has been carried out 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), 10 May 2023.

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## **Background Papers Used in Preparing This Report**

### **DETAILED ANALYSIS**

#### ***Proposals and Analysis of Options***

1. Officers have undertaken an open tender procurement via the CapitalESourcing portal. There was only one bid and this tender has been evaluated and moderated by a selected panel, with representation from across the West London Regional Partnership including Kensington and Chelsea, Harrow and Hammersmith and Fulham.
2. Following evaluation and moderation, it is recommended that the University of Hertfordshire be appointed the contract for the stated duration.

#### ***Reasons for Decision***

3. The Step Up to Social Work Programme is a fully funded training programme for social workers, successfully delivered in partnership since 2009. Hammersmith and Fulham are the lead borough on behalf of the West London Regional Partnership for this programme and therefore has led on the recommission.
4. 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.
5. DfE funding is provided based on the number of students, with the West London Regional Partnership’s allocation based on maintaining 41 trainees throughout the StepUp programme to their completion. There is a risk, however, if trainee numbers fall during the programme, as funding is only provided on a monthly

basis for the number of trainees still enrolled on the programme but this risk will be managed by using funding held by the Council which is ringfenced specifically to cover any potential overspend on the Step Up programme. This balance currently stands at £0.165m.

6. 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.
7. Since the programme was contracted in 2011, the development, delivery and outcomes of the programme have been extremely positive. The programme has developed high quality social workers across West London, many of whom have been retained and are now in managerial roles. 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.
8. The current contract expires in June 2023 and there is no option to extend. As such, we were required to go back out to the market to undertake a competitive tender process, in line with Contract Standing Order 19.1, in order to award a new contract and ensure the continued delivery of a high quality, value for money Step Up to Social Work programme.
9. All bids were evaluated against a criterion of 60% quality and 40% price. As this is a grant-funded contract, social value does not apply.
10. Following a competitive procedure to identify the most advantageous supplier, it is recommended that the Step Up to Social Work Programme contract be awarded to the University of Hertfordshire.

### ***Equality Implications***

11. The programme will continue to support staff across boroughs with a range of different protected characteristics to step up to social work.
12. 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.

*Hannah Lambeth, Contracts and Commissioning Officer, 17 May 2023*

### ***Risk Management Implications***

13. The report recommends awarding a contract following a competitive procurement process, which is in line with the objective of being ruthlessly financially efficient. The contract is required to support the Council and other participating West London Boroughs in recruiting, training and retaining children's social workers against a backdrop of national and regional shortages. Failure to do so would have an adverse impact on vulnerable residents.

*David Hughes, Director of Audit, Fraud, Risk and Insurance, 10 May 2023*

***Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications***

14. 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.

*Verified by Hinesh Mehta, Head of Climate Change, 10 May 2023*

***Procurement implications***

15. The results of the evaluation process have been verified against the e-tendering system on 10/05/2023 by *Sophie Uddin, Procurement Category Lead*.

**LIST OF APPENDICES**

**Exempt Appendix 1**

**Appendix 2 – DfE Letter**

## Appendix 2 – 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.<sup>1</sup>

### **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.