

## LONDON BOROUGH OF HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

**Report to:** Deputy Leader, Councillor Alex Sanderson

**Date:** 01/05/2025

**Subject:** Continuation of the Step Up to Social Work Programme

**Report author:** Hannah Lambeth, Commissioning and Transformation Lead

**Responsible Director:** Jacqui McShannon, Executive Director of People's Services, in consultation with Cllr Alex Sanderson, Deputy Leader

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### SUMMARY

This report seeks approval for the continuation of the existing contract with the University of Hertfordshire to work with Hammersmith and Fulham Council to deliver the Step Up to Social Work Programme, in line with the continued funding from the Department of Education (DfE).

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### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Approves the extension of the contract between the Council and the University of Hertfordshire for the delivery of the Step Up to Social Work programme for a period of 2 years from 26 June 2025 - 25 June 2027, at a cost of £399,072.
2. Approves delegated authority for future contract extensions to the Operational Director for Children and Young People's Services.

**Wards Affected:** All

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Our Values	Summary of how this report aligns to the <a href="#">H&amp;F Corporate Plan</a> and 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

- 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. 36 trainees will be supported, in the ninth cohort, by the programme commencing January 2026.
- The DfE have confirmed funding of £12,028.65 per trainee for HEI training delivery costs in relation to Cohort 9 (due to start in January 2026).
- 36 students are due to commence their post-graduate social work training, as part of Cohort 9 of the Step Up to Social Work programme in 2026/27. Continuing our contract with the University of Hertfordshire equates to an average cost of £11,085.32 per trainee.

## Grant Funding Details

	Per Student	For 36 Students
DfE income	£12,029	£433,031
Higher Education Institution (HEI) Training Delivery	£11,085	£399,072

- DfE grant funding will cover the full costs of this contract.

*Finance implications completed by: Suresh Perumal, Principal Accountant  
17/03/2025*

*Reviewed by Tony Burton, Head of Finance Children's Services and Education, 20  
March 2025*

## Legal Implications

- This report recommends that the Cabinet Member approves the extension of a contract with the University of Hertfordshire for the delivery of the Step up to Social Work Programme from 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025 to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2027. The contract will require a variation to reflect this decision. There are provisions within the contract which permit variations. The Contract was awarded as a below threshold light touch contract under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 ('PCR'). Variations of below

threshold light touch contracts are not subject to the restrictions in regulation 72 of the PCR.

*Implications by Angela Hogan, 25 February 2025*

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

**None**

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## **DETAILED ANALYSIS**

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

#### **Reasons for Decision**

1. 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.
2. The Step-Up programme forms part of our 'growing our own' approach to recruiting and retaining high quality staff. The programme attracts student social workers with the intention that, once qualified, they will become permanent members of the workforce.
3. The current contract with University of Hertfordshire was awarded in 2024, following a competitive procurement process. The initial contract term expires in June 2025, with the option to extend twice, for 2 years per extension, to align with the DfE funding.
4. DfE funding is provided based on the number of students, with the West London Regional Partnership's allocation based on maintaining 36 trainees throughout the Step-Up programme to their completion.
5. 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. 97% of the students that completed the programme in April 2023 are now working in front line children's social work teams across all participating authorities. The West London Step Up programme students are now in Phase 3, Think Family. There are 29 of the 31 students still in the process of completing the programme.

#### **Analysis of Options**

##### **Option 1: Continue the current contract with University of Hertfordshire (Recommended)**

6. The DfE have confirmed funding for cohort 9. It is therefore recommended that the current contract is extended for a further 2 years, until June 2027 to ensure

the continued delivery of a high quality, value for money Step Up to Social Work programme.

7. This option will allow the programme to continue under the same agreement, which is delivering a high value programme. The Step Up to Social Work Programme supports addressing the challenges of 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.
8. Since the programme began in 2011, the development, delivery and outcomes of the programme have been extremely positive. 97% of the students that completed the programme in April 2023 are now working in frontline children's social work teams across all participating authorities.

**Option 2: Do not continue the contract with University of Hertfordshire (Not Recommended)**

9. 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.

**Equality Implications**

10. The programme will continue to support staff across boroughs with a range of different protected characteristics to step up to social work.
11. 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, Commissioning and Transformation Lead, 14 January 2025*

**Risk Management Implications**

12. *There are no significant risks associated to this initiative.*

*Jules Binney, Risk and Assurance Manager, 20 March 2025*

## **Climate and Ecological Emergency Implications**

13. The main climate and ecological impacts of the contract 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.

*Hannah Lambeth, 6 February 2025*

## **List of Appendices**

None