

 the low tax borough	London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham CABINET 6 JANUARY 2014
EXTENSION OF “STEP-UP TO SOCIAL WORK” CONTRACT WITH HERTFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services - Councillor Helen Binmore	
Open Report	
Classification - For Decision Key Decision: Yes	
Wards Affected: All	
Accountable Executive Director: Andrew Christie Tri-Borough Director of Children’s Services	
Report Author: Anthea O’Reilly, Step Up Practice Manager	Contact Details: Tel: 020 87535988 Anthea.Anthony@lbhf.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This report seeks approval for the Council’s contract with the University of Hertfordshire for the provision of a “Step Up to Social Work” Programme to be extended up to four years. Funded by central Government via a DfE grant, this innovative programme seeks to train children’s 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; the objective being that participating local authorities will be better able to attract and retain well-qualified children’s social workers at a time when this is proving difficult nationally.
- 1.2. In 2011 The Council competitively tendered a contract for an educational establishment to develop and deliver a “Step-Up” programme. The Council is the lead authority and this contract was tendered on behalf of a West London partnership arrangement comprising eight authorities.
- 1.3. The contract advert and documentation issued to interested bidders stated clearly that the contract may initially be for only a 2-year period due to uncertainties regarding future Government funding. However, it was also stated that the contract could be extended up to a total of 6 years subject to further funding and the programme delivering positive outcomes.

- 1.4. In August 2011, the Council awarded a contract to the University of Hertfordshire for a period of two years, up until August 2013. The contract was extendable at the absolute discretion of the Council by further periods or period to give a potential contract duration of up to six years.
- 1.5. Development, delivery and outcomes of the programme have been good. 100% of the graduates that completed the programme in August 2013 are now working in front-line children's social work teams across all participating authorities, and the programme has also been validated nationally. The review of social work education commissioned by the DfE views the programme very highly, as does the first national evaluation of the programme completed in June 2013 by Baginsky and Teague.
- 1.6. Cabinet approval is therefore sought to extend the contract, as originally provided for. It is also recommends that the contract extensions are aligned with future student in-take so that they occur at two-yearly intervals, and are renewed subject to continued good performance and confirmation of Government funding.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That approval be given to retrospectively extend the existing "Step Up to Social Work" contract with the University of Hertfordshire from 1 September 2013, at a cost of around £190,000 pa (a maximum of £380,000 for each 2 year term).
- 2.2 That approval be given to renew the contract with Hertfordshire University at two-yearly intervals for a period of up to 4 years until August 2017, subject to satisfactory outcomes, provider performance, and continued Government funding.
- 2.3 That approval be given to delegate the award of any student bursaries related to the "Step Up to Social Work" programme to the Tri-borough Executive Director for Children's Services, applying to future cohorts until the end of the current contract in 2017.

3. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 3.1. The "Step Up" programme has delivered positive outcomes, and in 2013 the Council successfully applied to continue delivering the programme. The DfE grant agreement was issued in August 2013 and, under its terms, requires the next cohort of students to be enrolled and commencing the course by January 2014. Although new students will not start until January 2014, and no payments will be made until Cabinet approval is given, the recommendation includes a retrospective period of four months in order to provide continuity with the previous contract period.
- 3.2. The timescales set by the DfE for this and previous cohorts were demanding. A number of milestones had to be met after the announcement of the Council's successful application for further grant-funding. These included: the Council leading on the recruitment and selection of the students, including undertaking the student admissions process and the student offers. The Council also has worked in close collaboration with the provider to update the curriculum in line with the

recommendations from the DfE and supported the provider in obtaining programme approval from the new social work regulator, the Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC), for in September, in order to meet the conditions of the grant.

- 3.3. In conjunction with fulfilling these requirements to secure the grant funding, the Council was also supporting the previous cohort that was completing the 2012-13 programme at the same time. The 2012-13 cohort was supported in securing frontline social work posts across the partnership and in registering with the HCPC as social workers. The 2012-13 programme culminated with a graduation ceremony for the 25 graduates on the 15th October 2013. All of these activities were led by the Council. The Council employs one full-time post to co-ordinate and manage the programme across the partnership.
- 3.4. Approval is now needed to extend the Council's existing contract with Hertfordshire University for continued delivery of this programme until August 2017.

4. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 4.1. This report provides background information on the Step Up to Social Work programme and describes the actions that have been taken to tender the contract and the results of that process. It recommends that the contract with the University of Hertfordshire be extended.
- 4.2. As with every other London authority, Hammersmith and Fulham continues to experience difficulties in the recruitment and retention of children's social workers.
- 4.3. The 'Step Up to Social Work' programme pilot was developed and funded by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC - a skill sector agency for children's social work). The second cohort that started in 2012 was funded by the DfE. Funding for about 360 places nationally for a Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work is available to employers for a third cohort in 2014-2015.
- 4.4. Hammersmith and Fulham has acted as lead authority for the West London partnership since the first cohort (2010-2012). The 'Step Up to Social Work' programme is now in its third consecutive roll-out (2014-2015). It is well established nationally and the feedback on the calibre, motivation and competence of the trainees is noted across the partnerships locally and nationally.
- 4.5. The programme validated by the university is for a Masters qualification and the contract price includes the Masters. As part of a recruitment and retention strategy the Council's programme offers students the Masters as a top-up to the Post-Graduate Diploma offered by other partnerships. This strategy has proven to be very effective with the Council receiving over 430 applications for the 35 places originally offered.
- 4.6. 33 students have now been selected through a rigorous assessment process and will start the course in January 2014.
- 4.7. The DfE grant agreement outlines the funds guaranteed as follows:

- I. £3,000 towards planning cohort 3
- II. £30,000 to support the partnership and administration costs
- III. £10,000 to support the procurement of a university (if applicable)
- IV. £33,250 per trainee for programme delivery, trainee bursary and supervision costs
- V. The total grant funding based on the cohort of 33 is £1,140,250

- 4.8. Each student will receive £19,833 for the 14 month Post-Graduate Programme which will be paid in 3 instalments. On completion of the Post-graduate Diploma students who go on to complete the remaining university credits to obtain a Masters will receive a further bursary payment of £1,963 in order to complete the dissertation module in a further 6 weeks. Therefore the full bursary cost for those students will be £21,796. The total cost for 33 students all completing the Masters is £719,268.
- 4.9. The programme is required to commence in January 2014 to secure guaranteed funding from DfE.

5. THE STEP UP PROGRAMME

- 5.1 Funded by DfE, the programme has similarities with the successful employment-based programmes that previously operated in the borough, but at minimal additional direct cost for participating local authorities.
- 5.2 Students will be contracted with the authority and upon successful completion of the course will be expected to continue their employment for two years with the Council or partner councils.
- 5.3 The programme is innovative in design and has significantly greater employer input into the course design and content in comparison with other qualifying social work programmes. It is currently commissioned by ten regional partnerships of local authorities across England.
- 5.4 Eight boroughs in West London are one such regional partnership. The boroughs are Hammersmith & Fulham, Ealing, Westminster, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea and Brent. The partnership, which has developed as the West London Social Work Project is now well established. The partnership has experience in managing and overseeing the Step Up Programme since 2010. The member representation from each local authority will largely remain the same to capitalise on the experience and learning from cohorts one and two.
- 5.5 The West London programme expects to take 33 students. DfE funding will include the employer costs and on-costs for each student and the costs of programme delivery for the regional partnership. The total funding provided for the West London Partnership, which is based on the number of students recruited, is £1,140,250 for cohort 3.

- 5.6 £719,268 will be immediately allocated for the contractual costs associated with each student bursary. In previous cohorts the Council allocated the bursaries to the partner authorities to allocate to their students. However, to avoid payment delays, bursary payments will be allocated by the Council directly to students from this cohort onwards.
- 5.7 Management and performance of the existing contract has been good. The current Post-Graduate Diploma leading to a Masters in Social Work has been developed in partnership with the provider. The outcomes have been very positive with 100% of graduates working in frontline social work teams across the partnership. The provider is responsive to feedback from trainees, the DfE and the Council.
- 5.8 A key feature of this scheme is that it offers the opportunity to build on trainee and partner feedback each semester and the programme is now at a stage, three years since it first started, where it is progressing very well from the point of admissions to qualification. Trainee feedback has been extremely positive in relation to how the Council and the provider work together to deliver this programme.

6. PROPOSAL AND ISSUES

- 6.1 The proposal to extend the contract with Hertfordshire University achieves two key outcomes:
- i) it will enable an innovative and successful programme to continue delivering positive outcomes for the Council, and for children and families in the borough requiring good-quality social work support;
 - ii) it will help the Council recruit and retain good-quality children's social workers in frontline teams where turnover is high.
- 6.2 If approval to extend the contract is not forthcoming, The Council will lose DfE funding for the cohort of social worker students starting in January 2013, and therefore discontinue a successful programme well-regarded nationally.

7. OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 7.1. It is not in the Council's best interests to re-tender in advance of the remaining 4 year term. There are a number of risks to the delivery of this programme if the Council tenders again for the cohort starting in January:
- i) The Council will risk losing the benefits and experience of delivering this programme in partnership with the same provider;
 - ii) It is unlikely that an alternative provider could be commissioned and ready to implement the programme in January 2014. Indeed, the Council will have to design and develop a new programme with this new provider as it is being rolled out. This will undoubtedly impact on the new cohort;
 - iii) Re-tendering and switching providers mid-programme is not a viable option. In addition to compromising consistency of the student experience, it also breaches

university regulations and professional regulator's standards. The programme has to be delivered by the awarding body in full as validated;

- iv) The Council risks losing the provider and the regulator-approved social work programme and will not be able to start the programme in January as stipulated by the DfE in the funding agreement;
- v) The Council will therefore lose the DfE grant and will not be able to deliver the programme.

8. CONSULTATION

- 8.1. End users – service-users including young people and a parent were consulted in the selection of the students. Service-users also teach on the course and contribute towards the assessment of students by providing each student with feedback on their experience of the service as delivered by students.
- 8.2. Students – students themselves provide feedback on the academic input and the delivery of the programme in relation to the provider and partner authorities. Their feedback has been very positive about the provider and the Council's delivery of the programme.
- 8.3. Politicians – this programme was initially a CWDC-funded pilot programme and is now a DfE-funded programme. The DfE fund a national evaluation of the programme. The evaluation to date has been supportive of this scheme. The Council has also been recognised for supporting the DfE and other less-experienced partnerships based on local experience and expertise.
- 8.4. Officers – senior managers are in full support of this programme as it brings well-trained social workers into frontline teams where vacancy rates and turnover are high. Furthermore, trainees sign a two-year tie-in post-qualification that contributes to establishing a stable workforce in hard-to-recruit teams. The key feature of this programme is that it is employer-led and this ensures that students qualifying are prepared for practice.
- 8.5. Other teams - There are 15 graduates working in Tri-borough who graduated from this scheme and 56 across the partnership in total. Reports of their performance are extremely positive and they are reputedly better prepared for frontline social work in comparison with newly-qualified social workers from traditional routes.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The Programme is not expected to have a negative differential impact upon any group. The University of Hertfordshire will also assess student suitability on this 18 month Masters programme taking into account its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 for all protected characteristics and more so for disabilities and this will be looked at on a case by case basis.

- 9.2. There was an increase in the recruitment of trainees from BME groups. However, in the new and previous cohort only one male trainee per intake was successfully recruited. Overall, fewer men apply for the scheme and this is reflected nationally.
- 9.3. An equality impact assessment has been conducted in August 2011 and is available electronically.
- 9.4. Implications verified by: Stephen Wood, HR Manager 020 7361 2120

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The current contract with the University of Hertfordshire Higher Education Corporation in relation to the Step-Up to Social Work MA Programme includes an option to extend the term of the contract by any number of periods up to an aggregate of 6 years following the expiry of the initial term (31 August 2013). The Council must provide at least 6 months written notice to the University of its intention to extend the Contract before the expiry of the initial term, which Legal Services understands has taken place. The recommendation will be in accordance with the contract terms.
- 10.2. Implications verified/completed by: Kar-Yee Chan, Solicitor (Contracts), 020 8753 2772

11. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Dof E grant funding agreement received confirming funding in place for 2013/14 financial year to fund Cohorts 2 and 3 of Step up to Social Work. There are no savings attached this programme and fully funded by Dof E
- 11.2. Implications verified/completed by: Suresh Perumal, Senior Accountant (CHS), 020 8753 3733

12. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 12.1. The responsibility for management of this procurement risk lies with the Tri-borough Children's Services Department. Recruitment and retention of children's social workers is of key importance to the Council. The proposal to extend the contract contributes positively to the Bi-borough Enterprise Wide Risk Register entry, number 2 , Managing the Publics Needs and Expectations and number 7a Managing Statutory Duty . Continuity of the service will help the Councils recruit and retention of good-quality children's social workers in frontline teams where turnover is high. The Bi-borough Risk Manager agrees with the risks and benefits identified in section 7 of the report.
- 12.2. Implications verified by: Michael Sloniowski, Bi-borough Risk Manager 020 8753 2587.

13. PROCUREMENT AND IT STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. When tendering the “Step Up” contract in 2011, the Council made clear its intention to extend the contract beyond its initial two-year up to a total of six years if this is beneficial and funding is available. To date, the programme and its provider have delivered positive outcomes. The Director of Procurement and IT Strategy supports the report’s recommendations. These are aimed at ensuring good quality practitioners want to work and stay in H&F, and thereby improve future children’s and families social work in H&F.
- 13.2. Implications completed by John Francis, Principal Consultant H&F Corporate Procurement 020-8753-2582.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT**

No.	Description of Background Papers	Name / Ext of holder of file copy	Department/ Location
	DfE funding agreement	Anthea O’Reilly X5988 Suresh Perumal X3733	CHS 145 Kings Street Finance KTH
	Decision Letter from University	Anthea O’Reilly X5988	CHS 145 Kings Street
	Equality Impact Assessment	Anthea O’Reilly X5988	CHS 145 Kings Street

LIST OF APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 Equality Impact Assessment August 2011 (available electronically)