

Notice of Meeting

Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission

Monday, 21st July, 2014 at 6.30 pm
in Council Chamber Council Offices
Market Street Newbury

Date of despatch of Agenda: Friday, 11 July 2014

For further information about this Agenda, or to inspect any background documents referred to in Part I reports, please contact David Lowe / Charlene Myers / Elaine Walker on (01635) 519817 / 519695 / 5194

e-mail: dlowe@westberks.gov.uk / cmyers@westberks.gov.uk / ewalker@westberks.gov.uk

Further information and Minutes are also available on the Council's website at www.westberks.gov.uk



Agenda - Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission to be held on Monday, 21 July 2014 (continued)

To: Councillors Brian Bedwell (Chairman), Jeff Brooks (Vice-Chairman), Sheila Ellison, Dave Goff, Roger Hunneman, Mike Johnston, Alan Macro, Garth Simpson, Virginia von Celsing, Quentin Webb, Emma Webster and Laszlo Zverko

Substitutes: Councillors Peter Argyle, Paul Bryant, George Chandler, Gwen Mason, Tim Metcalfe, David Rendel, Julian Swift-Hook and Keith Woodhams

Other Officers & Members invited:

Agenda

Part I

Page No.

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
To receive apologies for inability to attend the meeting (if any),
- 2. Declarations of Interest**
To remind Members of the need to record the existence and nature of any Personal, Disclosable Pecuniary or other interests in items on the agenda, in accordance with the Members' [Code of Conduct](#).
- 3. Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Strategy** 1 - 28
Purpose: To review the strategy to redress recruitment and retention issues in Children's Services and the investment that is required to implement the strategy prior to consideration at the Executive on the 24 July 2014.
- 4. Homelessness - Young Families** 29 - 40
Purpose: To receive the report from the Task Group who reviewed the reasons why West Berkshire appears to have a disproportionate amount of young families facing homelessness.

Andy Day
Head of Strategic Support

If you require this information in a different format or translation, please contact Moira Fraser on telephone (01635) 519045.



West Berkshire
C O U N C I L

Agenda Item 3.

Title of Report:	Children's Services Recruitment and Retention Strategy
Report to be considered by:	Executive
Date of Meeting:	24 July 2014
Forward Plan Ref:	EX2876

Purpose of Report: To advise Executive the extent and an impact of the recruitment and retention problems faced by Children's Services and to set out a costed strategy to address them.

Recommended Action: Executive are requested to endorse the drafted strategy attached to this report and agree to the one off use of general fund reserves of £311k in the current financial year along with the increasing ongoing investment required from 2015/16 to implement it.

Reason for decision to be taken: This issue is already impacting on our ability to provide a safe and effective child protection service. If action is not taken this position will weaken still further. In addition to this our current position could contribute significantly to a poor outcome to an Ofsted Inspection (which is due imminently) which would result in significantly higher costs and reputational damage to the council.

Other options considered: A wide range of other options have been explored in previous reports. This report sets out the best option in terms of the likely effectiveness balanced against affordability and value for money.

Key background documentation:

- Reforming Social Working – Improving Social Worker recruitment, training and retention, The Policy Exchange (2013)
<http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/reforming%20social%20work.pdf>
- All Party Parliamentary Enquiry into the State of Social Work (2013)
- http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_90352-5.pdf

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the following Council Strategy priority:

CSP1 – Caring for and protecting the vulnerable

The proposals will also help achieve the following Council Strategy principles:

CSP5 - Putting people first

CSP8 - Doing what's important well

The proposals contained in this report will help to achieve the above Council Strategy priorities and principles by:
Seeking to address the recruitment and retention issues being experienced in recruiting children's social workers.

Portfolio Member Details	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Irene Neill
E-mail Address:	Irene.Neill@westberks.gov.uk
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	17 July 2014

Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Mark Evans
Job Title:	Head of Children's Services
Tel. No.:	01635 519735
E-mail Address:	mevans@westberks.gov.uk

Implications

Policy:	Revised West Berkshire Children's Social Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2014 - 2017 being proposed.
Financial:	The proposals contained in this paper will require a one off contribution from General Reserves of £311k in the current financial year. The significant ongoing funding requirements estimated to total £992k by 2017/18 will be funded by the Communities Directorate finding alternative savings and/or additional revenue streams to help mitigate these additional costs. A further £210k from General Reserves has been earmarked for 2015/16 to assist the Directorate in delivering the funding requirements over the medium term.
Personnel:	The development of a distinct T&C offer for a discrete category of staff in response to market conditions and risks disaffecting members of staff outside this group. Some aspects of these proposals may be regarded as setting a precedent which other members of staff will seek to follow. It will be necessary to be very clear and open about the boundaries, requirements and expectations associated with these proposals.
Legal/Procurement:	N/a
Property:	Proposals to acknowledge the requirements around confidentiality, quiet space and space for shared team reflection in the light of this challenging work may require adaptations to the buildings where these staff are primarily located.
Risk Management:	Failure to address this issue would significantly elevate two key risks faced by the council. The first relates to the significantly increased potential for the avoidable death or serious injury of a child. The second is the impact on an Ofsted inspection and the potential for an inadequate judgement.

Is this item relevant to equality?	Please tick relevant boxes	Yes	No
Does the policy affect service users, employees or the wider community and:			
• Is it likely to affect people with particular protected characteristics differently?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	
• Is it a major policy, significantly affecting how functions are delivered?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	
• Will the policy have a significant impact on how other organisations operate in terms of equality?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	
• Does the policy relate to functions that engagement has identified as being important to people with particular protected characteristics?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	
• Does the policy relate to an area with known inequalities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	
Outcome (Where one or more 'Yes' boxes are ticked, the item is relevant to equality)			
Relevant to equality - Complete an EIA available at www.westberks.gov.uk/eia			<input type="checkbox"/>
Not relevant to equality			X

Is this item subject to call-in?	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/>	No: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If not subject to call-in please put a cross in the appropriate box:		
The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Report is to note only	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Executive Summary

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Children's Services is facing an acute staffing crisis which is impacting on our ability to provide a safe and reliable child protection service. The problem is part of a wider national issue, but it is imperative we address it in the local context to ensure that we are able to effectively help, support and protect vulnerable children.
- 1.2 This paper is set out in two parts; the first outlines the recruitment and retention challenges and their impact, the second details our strategy designed to deal with this issue and includes detailed costing for the proposals.
- 1.3 Extensive discussion and consideration of this issue has already taken place including two previous reports to management board and detailed discussions with the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Children's Services. The strategy and investment required to support it is set out in this report represents the outcome of this work. The strategy has been carefully considered and the current iteration represents the options that are most likely to be successful whilst representing best possible value for money. Consequently it needs to be considered as a whole, as the impact would be reduced significantly if elements are removed or reduced.

2. Part 1 – The Recruitment and Retention Challenges

- 2.1 Children's Services are dependent upon good quality staff to deliver a safe and effective child protection service. Nationally there is a serious recruitment crisis, that is most acute in the South East. Locally we have been unable to fill 29% of frontline child protection posts despite a range of innovations designed to address this problem. Difficulties have arisen over the last three years with the gradual loss of staff, combined by an inability to recruit suitable replacements. This situation was manageable until recently when the agency/locum market also started to become increasingly volatile. The problem impacts very significantly on both the quality and cost of the service (agency workers cost 58% more than WBC staff).

3. Part 2 - The Recruitment and Retention Strategy

- 3.1 The second part of the report sets out our strategy to address this problem. The strategy itself is included in a separate document (Appendix A), whilst the costings and financial implications are included in the body of the report (Tables 4 & 6).
- 3.2 **Equalities Impact Assessment Outcomes** - No equalities issues have currently been identified in relation to these proposals, but before implementation, this dimension will be considered further.

4. Conclusion

- 4.1 West Berkshire Council needs to act quickly and decisively to address this issue. Failure to do so will expose vulnerable children to unacceptable risks. It will also lead to significant additional costs. Other neighbouring local authorities have already implemented policies designed to attract and retain good children's social work staff. We are competing for staff in a challenging market. The strategy proposed is designed to represent the best possible balance between being both effective and represent good value for money.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 Executive are requested to endorse the attached draft Recruitment and Retention Strategy.
- 5.2 Executive are requested to agree the investment required to finance the strategy as outlined in Tables 4 & 6.
- 5.3 Executive agree that the strategy will be reviewed annually with a report outlining the impact and any proposed changes. There will also be a quarterly report to Corporate Board which will be escalated if it is deemed necessary. We also anticipate the impact of the strategy will be reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny.

Executive Report

6. Introduction

- 6.1 Children's Services is facing an acute staffing crisis which is impacting on our ability to provide a safe and reliable child protection service. The problem is part of a wider national issue, but it is imperative we address it in the local context to ensure that we are able to effectively help, support and protect vulnerable children.
- 6.2 This paper is set out in two parts; the first outlines the recruitment and retention challenges and their impact, the second details our strategy designed to deal with this issue and also includes detailed costing for the proposals.
- 6.3 Extensive discussion and consideration of this issue has already taken place including two previous reports to management board and detailed discussions with the Leader of the Council and Lead Member for Children's Services. The strategy and investment required to support it is set out in this report represents the outcome of this work. The strategy has been carefully considered and the current iteration represents the options that are most likely to be successful whilst representing best possible value for money. Consequently it needs to be considered as a whole, as the impact would be reduced significantly if elements are removed or reduced.

7. Background

- 7.1 West Berkshire's Children's Services has for several years had a problem with recruitment and retention of permanent social workers. This reflects a recognised problem in the wider market which is turbulent and subject to a tendency to high turnover and over-dependence on agency staff. In this challenging workforce context, the service has also been implementing the recommendations from the Munro Review of Child Protection in England and the recommendations made by Ofsted during its last inspection of the service in July 2012, which found the service to be "adequate" for safeguarding and "good" for looked after children.
- 7.2 In response to this situation, the service – in collaboration with HR colleagues – developed and implemented a career progression framework with the aim that this would attract and retain strong child & family social workers in the West Berkshire workforce. At the time of implementation of these proposals our internal evaluation of our own service was that it was safe, and any vulnerability was around a lack of pace in implementation of the Munro reforms and Ofsted recommendations. Although the career progression framework has been implemented and has led to the successful establishment of a number of senior practitioner posts, this change has not been quick or comprehensive enough to offset the accelerated turbulence in the market. Our turnover of social workers and managers has not reduced and our reliance on expensive (and sometimes poor quality) agency staff has increased. As of May 2014 we are concerned that these issues mean that not only is the service less effective than it should be, but also that we can no longer guarantee to keep the service safe.
- 7.3 Over recent months there has been a significant change in our ability to recruit and retain staff. Prior to this we were maintaining a relatively stable position with the service being supported by a small group of known and trusted locum staff. More recently our dependence upon agency staff and their contribution to the service has become much more problematic and is now judged to be impacting on our ability to deliver safe service. The problem is not unique to West Berkshire; similar difficulties

are being experienced by other nearby authorities. We cannot be definitive about the reasons, but suspect the recent second inadequate Ofsted judgement in Slough, alongside other local authorities improving their terms and conditions for social workers, is having a very significant impact on an already competitive recruitment market.

- 7.4 Over recent years, reliance on agency staffing has been gradually increasing. Last month 29% of qualified staff in our frontline Child Protection teams were temporary agency workers, costing on average 58% more than an employed social worker at the same level. This is both detrimental to the quality of service delivered and extremely costly for the council. The seriousness of the situation has been exacerbated over recent months by real difficulties in recruiting good quality locums and by significant vacancy levels in some of our “frontline” teams. As a consequence of this, we have also identified some concerns with the quality of practice in some key areas (most notably our Referral and Assessment Team). Failure to address this problem will result in us being unable to deliver a safe child protection service, to the detriment of the most vulnerable children and young people of West Berkshire. Such weaknesses, if not promptly and adequately addressed could also contribute to a poor Ofsted inspection, which would result in significant additional costs and the potential for severe reputational damage for the council. More recently, councils found inadequate for the children’s services functions have been stripped of the right to operate them (although the costs and the accountability continue to fall to the council in question).
- 7.5 Considerable work has already been done including re-designing our children’s social work career structure. From April 2014 we implemented a new approach that is designed to offer social workers improved opportunities to progress. The new structure is based on a sector best practice example that has been developed by the College of Social Work. This has had some positive impact. Seven Senior Social Workers have been appointed to date. One has been an external agency to permanent appointment, one has moved from one of our easier-to-recruit-to teams to one of our most challenging teams and the other five have been internal appointments. This is encouraging, but is not enough progress and it will not resolve the situation quickly enough to make the service securely adequate for children, young people and families and certainly prevents the service from being good. Significantly, more action is now required to address the issue. Part of the new work will include increased promotion of the new career structure within a suite of measures to recruit new permanent staff to West Berkshire and to keep them in the service for longer.

8. Scale of the Problem

- 8.1 We employ qualified Social Work staff in eight teams, Table 1 sets out the level of vacancies and agency staffing at present. The table shows that several teams have high proportions of vacant posts covered by agency staff, of which the Referral & Assessment Team, the two Locality Teams and the Disabled Children’s Team are the most vulnerable.

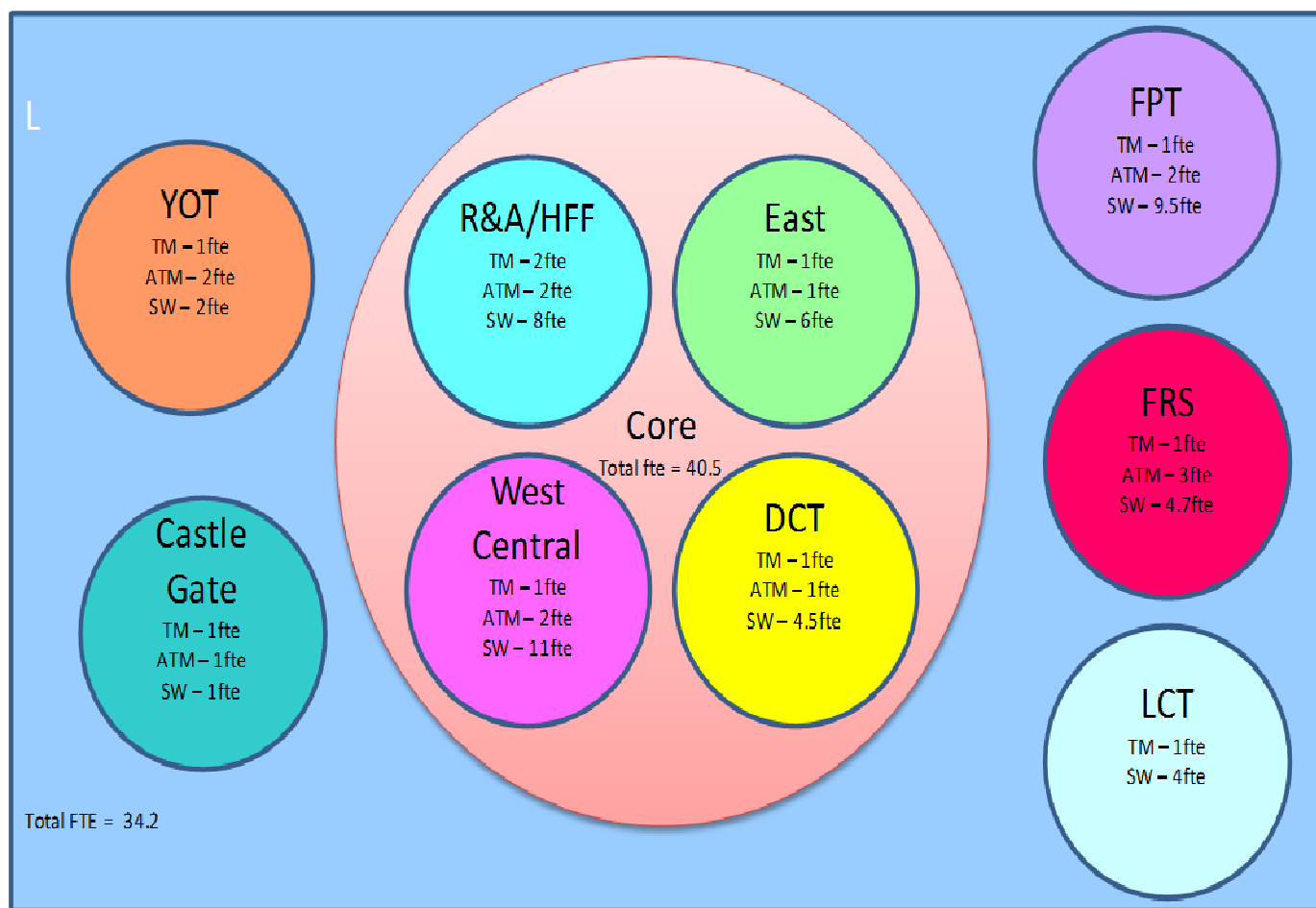
Table 1

Team	Social Workers			Assistant Team Managers			Team Managers		
	FTE	Vacant FTE	Agency FTE	FTE	Vacant FTE	Agency FTE	FTE	Vacant FTE	Agency FTE
Referral and Assessment	8	2	2	2	0	0	1	0	0
West Locality	10	6	6	2	2	2	1	0	0
East Locality	6	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
Leaving Care	4	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Family Placement	9.5	0	1	2	1	1	1	0	0
Family Resource Service	4.7	0	0	3	1	1	1	0	0
Castlegate	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Youth Offending Team	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Disabled Children's Team	4.5	2	2	1	0	0	1	0	0
Total	49.7	13	11	14	4	4	9	1	1

9. Analysis of the Problem

- 9.1 The difficulties experienced by the service are cumulative and attritional in nature, meaning that as the same underlying problem persists over an extended period.
- 9.2 Over recent years we have lost permanent social work staff and struggled to replace them with permanent replacements. For a while we were able to recruit high quality, long-term locums. This increased our costs, but enabled us to provide relative stability in the teams and for the children and families those staff worked with. More recently this has no longer been possible; agency staff tend to stay with us for shorter periods, the quality of staff provided through agencies is more variable and in some cases we have been unable to fill a vacancy using agency staff because none were available.
- 9.3 The problem is most acute in our four frontline teams. Diagram 1 below illustrates the numbers of staff in the core hardest to recruit to teams and our other services.

Diagram 1



9.4 There is clear evidence from our use of agency staff that the problem is impacting differentially across teams. The West Central Team has had the highest use of agency staff for a significant period. This is linked to instability in the management of that team. Until recently the team manager and both assistant team managers were locums. We have made some progress by recruiting a permanent team manager and one of the two assistant team managers. We are confident this will help to improve the situation in the team. Unfortunately we now have instability developing in two other teams (R&A and East Locality) following important changes in the management of both those teams. Our East Team Manager has resigned and both teams are losing one of their two assistant team managers. Experience shows us that if we don't do anything to address this promptly we are likely to lose more frontline staff following the departure of key managers.

9.5 We carried out a review of agency spend with detailed analysis of the two cost centres in Children's Services where the cost of agency staff most exceeded the notional cost of the establishment posts they replaced. A couple of key pieces of information exposed as part of this work are that on 31/3/14 the vacancy level for Children's Social Workers stood at 29% and the average cost of an agency worker was 58% above the cost for an employee. This includes all on costs such as pension contributions etc. It is the difference in those costs that accounts for the disparity

between vacancy “savings” and agency costs. There are no supernumerary workers in those teams.

9.6 The difficulties of recruitment and retention impact on all Child and Family Social Worker posts, but are particularly acute in four of our teams that manage our child protection, court and looked after children work. In total we employ 74.7 FTE social work posts, 40.5 of these in the hardest-to-recruit-to teams. Diagram 1 (on the previous page) illustrates the distribution of workers between the core four hardest to recruit to teams and our other five teams. The proposal at this stage is to limit the most costly recruitment/retention measures to this core group of 40.5 staff, whilst continuing to monitor the situation for the other 34.2 staff. Workforce intelligence suggests that many neighbouring authorities are already experiencing problems recruiting to these teams and taking steps to address similar issues with revised terms and conditions of employment. As a result this decision will need to be kept under constant review, depending on changing market conditions.

10. Additional Workforce Intelligence

10.1 To date our succession planning work for our management vacancies has been unable to identify internal candidates with the skills and experience required to take on these roles and our market intelligence suggests they will be difficult to recruit to externally. Experience also suggests that the loss of an established team manager often leads to a rapid de-stabilisation of teams and increased reliance on agency staffing. Social workers find it easy to follow a respected manager to a new organisation in this unstable market. Table 2 shows the increasing volatility of the workforce in our four hardest-to-recruit-to teams over the past three years. The recent resignations are in addition to these losses.

Table 2

Team	2011/12			2012/13			2013/14		
	Leavers	Starters	Net	Leavers	Starters	Net	Leavers	Starters	Net
R&A	1	2	+1	0	0	0	3	2	-1
W&C	2	0	-2	3	0	-3	5	3	-2
East	3	0	-3	0	0	0	2	1	-1
DCT	0	1	+1	1	0	-1	2	1	-1
Total	6	3	-3	4	0	-4	12	7	-5

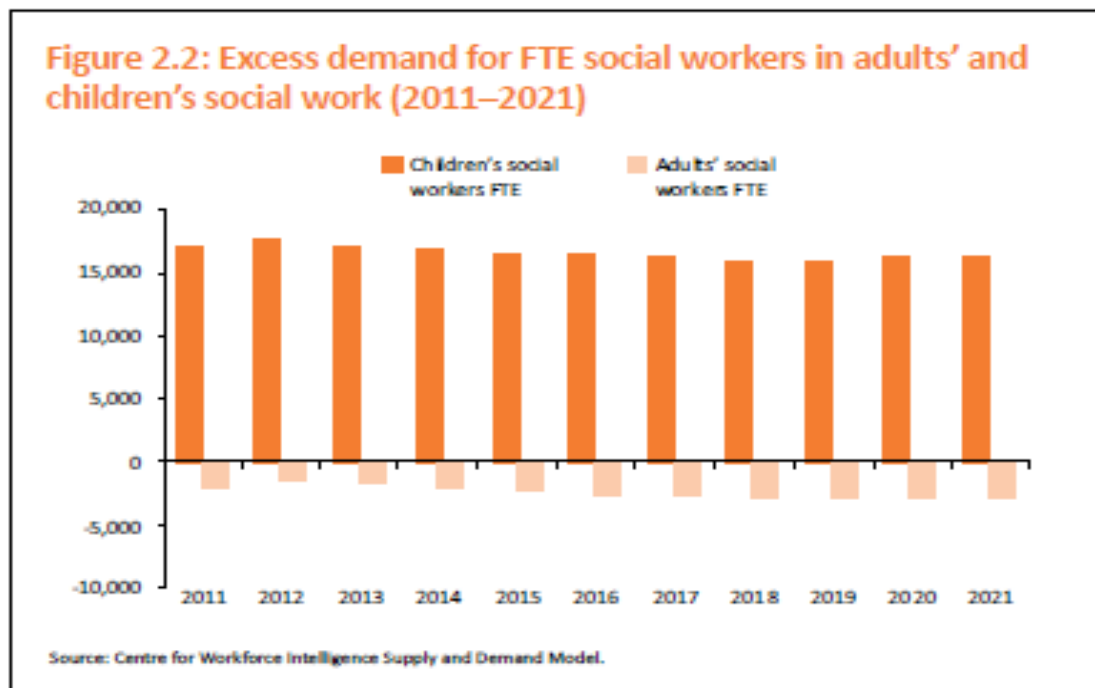
10.2 Leavers’ records from the last 12 months show the following outflow of staff from key teams:

30/05/14 – SW R&A
 28/02/14 – SW West Central
 14/02/14 - SW East
 08/02/14 – SW West Central
 06/12/13 – ATM West Central
 27/11/13 – SW R&A
 04/10/13 – SW West Central
 31/07/13 – ATM West Central
 01/05/13 – SW East

11. Nationally and Regionally

- 11.1 This issue is not just a problem at local level. Table 3 below illustrates the extent of the recruitment challenge nationally. It also shows clearly that the situation is unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future for as long as there is such a shortage of child and family social workers available from which to recruit. One of the reasons for the shortage of child and family social workers is the very short “life” these workers have in the profession – on average seven years. This is attributed to the very challenging nature of the work, taking place in an increasingly risk averse and punitive environment and with poor organisational understanding of the conditions in which good social work thrives, thus leading to early burnout among social workers in the highest risk teams.

Table 3



- 11.2 A recent benchmarking survey across the South East in September 2013 identified Children's Social Work vacancy rates across the region as ranging from 5-38%. At this time West Berkshire had a rate of 19.8% (Bracknell Forest 5%, Reading 11.5%, Slough 32.6%, Windsor and Maidenhead 25.6%, Wokingham 38%, Hampshire 14.5%, Oxfordshire 13.7%, SE average 15.2% and England 13.6%). Local experience and discussions with other local leaders indicate that there has been a rapid increase in vacancy rates over the intervening eight months, which is consistent with West Berkshire's own increase in agency workers to 29%.

12. Impact of Vacancies & Agency Staffing

- 12.1 High vacancy levels and reliance upon agency staffing impact in three key areas, they are:
- **Quality and Safety of Service** – Frequent changes of staff impede our ability to deliver a high quality service. Effective child protection is built on good relationships with families, and staff who are familiar with local working practices. High turnover fractures these important relationships and makes the workforce less effective as

new starters have to learn and re-learn local systems. High turnover also results in extensive management time and resources being devoted to recruitment and induction at the expense of other important activities. Child protection requires stable, supportive teams who are able to work closely together in a trusting environment to deal with the challenging emotional content of the work. This has been identified in research as a crucial component in safe, effective practice.

- **Risk** – Child Protection work is fraught with risks. The service works with some of the most vulnerable children in our community. If the service fails the consequences can be catastrophic for individual children and their families. There are also potentially very serious reputational risks for the council in terms of both the potential for a child death or an “inadequate” judgement in an Ofsted inspection. Councils who experience these high profile and tragic events often then experience a vicious circle in which recruitment difficulties become even more acute and significant investment to restore adequate services is needed. Locally, Slough is known to have invested in excess of £2million following their “inadequate” Ofsted inspection outcome, and this was not sufficient to stabilise the situation, which has led to a further “inadequate” judgement. Slough Borough Council now faces the prospect of having Children’s Services being removed from their control, whilst having to resource it at level that will be determined by others and whilst still being held accountable for the outcomes of the services provided. In another local example, Oxfordshire recently spent £8million in one year addressing Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) concerns. Coventry Council are investing in excess of £6million following a recent Ofsted inadequate judgment.
- **Cost** – Agency Social Workers and managers are expensive. The average cost of an agency children's social worker is currently £67,488 per annum whereas the average cost of an employed children's social worker is £42,560. In 2013/14 Children’s Services spent over £1 million on agency staff. Current projections indicate this is likely to rise significantly in the financial year 2014/15 because of the increasing instability of our teams. Despite the rise in cost, the number of social workers deployed will not increase.
- **Increase in Demand for Service** – The main focus of this report is on the staffing challenges facing Children’s Services, it is important that these are seen in the context of the demand pressures experienced over the last three year period. Locally and nationally there has been a significant increase in the workload of Children’s Services driven by changes in demography, increased expectations in relation to the quality of services, responses to specific issues (e.g. Child Sexual Exploitation) and a series of high profile child death tragedies. In the local context this has led to a significant increase in workload. Between 2011/12 to 2013/14 the number of children looked after has increased by 22% (125 to 161) and children subject to a child protection plan rose by 48% (78 to 116).

13. Part 2 - Strategy to Address the Recruitment and Retention Crisis

13.1 To address this problem it is vital that West Berkshire Council acts quickly and decisively. Failure to do so will incur additional costs and risks. Other neighbouring local authorities have already implemented policies designed to attract and retain good children's social work staff. We are competing for staff in a challenging market.

- 13.2 Action to improve the situation will require additional investment above the current CEL for the Communities Directorate in order to create the right range of incentives to attract and retain good quality social workers. Withdrawing and recycling funding from elsewhere in the service reduces the amount of early intervention and prevention work that we are able to carry out and in turn leads to increased pressure in these high risk teams which further impacts on our ability to retain staff.
- 13.3 The child protection social worker labour market is complex. There is extensive research that demonstrates workers are not simply motivated by direct financial incentives. The most successful local authorities combine competitive pay with a supportive workplace and appropriate working environment. (These too have financial implications). Consequently resolving this issue will require a multi-faceted approach designed to make West Berkshire an employer of choice. We will need a bold approach that differentiates us clearly from other local authorities and their offer.
- 13.4 In response to this we have developed and costed a draft recruitment and retention package that is included with this report in Appendix A.
- 13.5 The proposed costings for the package set out in Appendix A are set in the tables below. The retention elements have been calculated on the basis of a 60% take up of the planned retention benefits. To qualify for these benefits staff would need to remain in the service for three years. Retrospectively modelling the impact of this identifies 11 (27%) staff who would have qualified. There is a financial risk that a greater number may qualify which would increase the total cost of the package. This is an unlikely scenario, but the additional cost would be offset by a very stable workforce with minimal use of agency staffing.

14. Financial Information

- 14.1 The tables set out the information as described below:

14.2 Table 4 – Funding requirements for financial years 14/15 to 17/18

Table 4: Funding Requirements for Financial Years 14-15 through to 17-18								
The table below shows the annual investment required into Children's Services to fund the programme.								
It is anticipated that financial year 14-15 the initial investment will be funded via reserves.								
The entire cost requirement of the programme will be funded through the CELs/SELs.								
			Additional FTE	FY 14-15	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18	Total Annual Funding Requirement 17-18 onwards
Retention Bonus & Leave	Retention Bonus	Initial investment in 15-16, rollover in base in subsequent financial years. Additional investment required in 17-18	0	0	0	0	360,000	360,000
	Retention Leave	Agency requirement to cover leave period, 14-15 increased agency budget sufficient. Financial year 16-17 onwards supernumerary posts to cover leave.	3	0	0	134,407	3,494	137,901
Recruitment Specialist	Recruitment Specialist	Initial investment into base budget in 14-15, 15-16 additional full year effect of post less 14-15 initial investment. 16-17 onwards growth only.	1	28,000	21,248	1,280	1,314	51,842
Social Worker Academy	Social Worker Academy	50% investment in 14-15, balance of £258K in 15-16. 15-16 base budget rolled forward no further additional investment.	0	73,603	103,717	0	0	177,320
Employing four additional Family Support Workers	New Assistant Social Worker Posts (Para Professionals)*4	Initial investment into base budget in 14-15, 15-16 additional full year effect of post less 14-15 initial investment. 16-17 onwards	4	67,130	50,942	3,070	3,148	124,290
Promoting Relocation Allowances	Relocation Package	Initial investment in 14-15 budget, funding rolled over as part of base budget in subsequent years.	0	40,000	0	-16,000	0	24,000
Use of Car for Work	Travel Options Package (formally Re-open of lease car scheme).	14-15 initial investment for new employees (12), seven month (1.9.14 appointment dates), 15-16 full year effect and budget rolled over into 16-17 onwards. Existing staff (4), full year effect factored into 14-15 and budget rolled over into subsequent years.	0	19,704	6,000	0	0	25,704
Effectively Marketing our Offer	Advertising, Campaign & Media	Initial investment made in 14-15 and rolled over as base in subsequent financial years.	0	52,000	-2,000	-15,000	0	35,000
Additional Support Posts	Resilience Post	Initial investment into base budget in 14-15, 15-16 additional full year effect of post less 14-15 initial investment. 16-17 onwards growth only.	1	28,000	21,248	1,280	1,314	51,842
Additional Recruitment Incentive	Recruit a Friend Scheme	Initial investment in 14-15 budget, 15-16 includes increase to base as 14-15 investment not the full year effect. 16-17 onwards budget rolled over in base, assume no increase or decrease required.	0	2,500	1,250	0	0	3,750
Total Funding Requirement Financial Years 14-15 to 17-18				310,937	202,405	109,038	369,269	991,649

14.3 Table 6 – Detailed breakdown of costs and assumptions

Table 6: Detailed Assumptions and Total Programme Costings Annually							
Table below documents the total annual cost of the							
	Activity	Assumptions	Additional FTE to agreed current establishment	FY 14-15	FY 15-16	FY 16-17	FY 17-18
Retention Bonus and Sabbaticals	Retention Bonus	Retention bonus - one off £15k payment post 3 years of service from start of programme.					
		Assume 14-15 is first year of contract for all staff (40), handcuff payment payable in financial year 17-18. Calculations based on the assumption that even with proposal, employee churn will exist. Staff levels anticipated to fulfil the three years and require bonus is 60% (24 employees)					
		EXISTING 28 EMPLOYEES.			0	0	252,000
		12 NEW EMPLOYEES - entry into scheme on date of commencement of employment. Assume vacancies recruited 14-15.			0	0	108,000
		Leave is paid, therefore financial requirement is agency budget to cover permanent staff on leave. Agency staff using 13-14 average cost is £67k per worker pa. £125k budget for agency built into 14-15 budget.					
		EXISTING 28 EMPLOYEES: Assume that 60% of existing staff will remain in post and therefore eligible for leave (17), staggered over 3 years, i.e. 6 per year from 15-16. One employee on leave at any one point, cover required 1fte agency worker full year.		0	67,000	67,000	67,000
	Retention Leave	NEW 12 EMPLOYEES, assume all recruited in 14-15. 60% anticipated to stay for 3 years (7), all leave due 17-18. Assume 2 1fte agency to cover leave staggered throughout the year.		0	0	0	134,000
		Less existing agency budget (14-15 figure £125k) plus savings from supernumerary posts employed 16-17 onwards (3 posts, 1.0Fte).		0	-67,000	-67,000	-201,000
		Supernumerary Posts (*3 at SCP 40 Mid J), appointed 15-16 (full year). Purposes is to replace the need for agency staff covering staff on retention leave and dependency on agency staff.	3	0	0	134,407	137,901
Employment of a Recruitment & Retention Specialist	Recruitment Specialist	1.0fte post at K grade mid point SCP 44, growth in costs per annum assumed as 2.6% (in line with MTFs). FY 14-15 7/12s, assumes appointment at 1.9.14.	1	28,000	49,248	50,528	51,842
Social Worker Academy		Costing per Academy paper. Assume full year effect from 15-16 onwards. 14-15 50% as recruitment will be late in year.		129,000	258,000	258,000	258,000
	Social Worker Academy	Reduction in programme costs through rebadging an existing graduate post and two existing newly qualified posts into programme.		-55,397	-80,680	-80,680	-80,680
Employing four additional Family Support Workers	New Assistant Social Worker Posts (Para Professionals)*4	4 1.0fte additional posts, grade F/G, mid point SCP 26, annual growth 2.6%, average increment £700 pa, top of pay scale will be reached post FY17-18. Assume a 14-15 start date 1.9.14, all 4 posts recruited to in 14-15.	4	67,130	118,072	121,142	124,290
Promoting Relocation Allowances	Relocation Package	£8k maximum offer per individual, anticipated 5 appointments in a full year. Assume all appointed in 14-15. Requirement reducing in subsequent (16-17 onwards) years to 3 appointments.	0	40,000	40,000	24,000	24,000

Use of Car for Work	Travel Options Package (formally Re-open of lease car scheme).	Package offered consists of: Essential user status £1.2k average cost per employee pa, 0% interest free loan (applicable to essential users), cost to Council is cost of borrowing to supply 0% loan to employee. .					
		Current 12 Vacancies: 100% essential user status plus 0% loan.					
		LEASE CARS - option removed	0	0	0	0	0
		ESSENTIAL USER STATUS, average cost pa £1.2k, assume full year effect 15-16 onwards, pro-rata to 1.9.14 start date 14-15.	0	8,400	14,400	14,400	14,400
		EXISTING STAFF not receiving either essential user status or a lease car: (28 employed staff, based on ResourceLink approx 80% receive either a lease car or have essential user status), using 8 as base, 100% essential user status plus car loan:					
		LEASE CAR option removed	0	0	0	0	0
		ESSENTIAL USER STATUS, full year effect (assume backdated to 1.4.14)	0	9,600	9,600	9,600	9,600
	**0% Interest Free Loan (12 new employees & 4 existing staff assumed will become essential users). Cost to Council is annual cost of borrowing (average borrowing 0.71% in 13-14), £15K loan essential car status only.	0	1,704	1,704	1,704	1,704	
Effectively Marketing our Offer	Advertising	Advertising budget assumed as an annual requirement. £2k pledge development funding incorporated in 14-15 only.	0	17,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
	Campaign	Funding an annual requirement, with spend anticipated to reduce by £5k 16-17 onwards.	0	15,000	15,000	10,000	10,000
	Media	Funding an annual requirement, with spend anticipated to reduce by 50% in 16-17 onwards.	0	20,000	20,000	10,000	10,000
Additional Support Posts	Resilience Post	Assume K grade post at mid point SCP 44, 2.6% annual growth applied. Assume full year effect from 15-16. 14-15 start date 1.9.14 applied.	1	28,000	49,248	50,528	51,842
Additional Recruitment Incentive	Recruit a Friend Scheme	£1k finders fee paid to employee once friend commences employment, success of scheme to be reviewed in the mid term. Currently approx 12 vacancies, assume on average 3 new appointments from scheme per annum for a fully year. Assume for 14-15 as three months into the financial year, 2 appointees. Assume one off fee more enticing than continuing payments.	0	2,500	3,750	3,750	3,750
Annual Costs:			9	310,937	513,342	622,380	991,649

14.4 The proposals detailed in the tables above will require a one off contribution from General Reserves of £311k in the current financial year. The significant ongoing funding requirements estimated to total £992k by 2017/18 will be funded by the Communities Directorate finding alternative savings and/or additional revenue streams to help mitigate these additional costs. A further £210k from General Reserves has been earmarked for 2015/16 to assist the Directorate in delivering the funding requirements over the medium term.

15. Conclusion

15.1 West Berkshire Council needs to act quickly and decisively to address this issue. Failure to do so will expose vulnerable children to unacceptable risks. It will also lead to significant additional costs. Other neighbouring local authorities have already implemented policies designed to attract and retain good children's social work staff. We are competing for staff in a challenging market. The strategy proposed is designed to represent the best possible balance between being both effective and represent good value for money.

16. Recommendations

- 16.1 Executive are requested to endorse the attached Draft Recruitment and Retention Strategy.
- 16.2 Executive are requested to agree the investment required to finance the strategy as outlined in tables 4 and 6.
- 16.3 Executive agree to that the strategy will be reviewed annually with a report outlining the impact and any proposed changes. There will also be a quarterly report to Corporate Board which will be escalated if it is deemed necessary. We also anticipate the impact of the strategy will be reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny.

Appendices

Appendix A - West Berkshire Children's Social Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy

Consultees

Local Stakeholders: N/a

Officers Consulted: Extensive discussion has taken place with Children's Social Care Staff and the Communities Directorate Leadership Team, Corporate Board

Trade Union: Initial discussions have taken place with the relevant trade unions.

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West Berkshire Children’s Social Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2014 - 2017

**'Nobody does this job for the money, but a competitive salary/package
would help recruitment and retention'**

Views of a group of West Berkshire Social Workers 12th June 2014

1. Introduction

The recruitment and retention of children's social workers is one of the most challenging issues facing councils nationally. The problem has been enduring, going back over fifteen years and projected to be a very serious issue for at least a further seven (Reforming Social Work 2013¹). To address this it is essential that West Berkshire has an effective strategy that both helps us to retain our existing staff and also to recruit new staff. This strategy sets out how we will achieve this.

Our first priority in the strategy is to stem the loss of good quality staff from West Berkshire through effective retention. Our next priority is to become much more competitive in the children’s social work recruitment market.

2. Our Vision

¹ Reforming Social Work, Policy Exchange 2013
<http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/reforming%20social%20work.pdf>

Our vision is that West Berkshire should become an employer of choice for skilled and experienced children's social workers. This will enable us to have enough high quality staff to meet the needs of our community. This will be achieved by developing a reciprocal commitment from and to staff who work in this incredibly challenging area. This will include sustainable approaches which combine 'growing our own staff' with attracting the best that are available in the open market. Protecting the vulnerable is at the heart of the council's vision and we recognise this group of staff are critical to our success in achieving this aspiration.

3. Where are we now?

Over the last three years we have seen a gradual loss of permanent staff that has contributed to us becoming heavily reliant upon agency staffing in our frontline teams. At the time of writing, almost a third of our frontline staff are temporary agency workers. This is both detrimental to the quality of service provided and costly. Child Protection work requires consistency, commitment and a stable workforce. Constant changes of staff are profoundly unhelpful in work that is dependent upon the quality of relationships between workers and children and their families. Agency workers are expensive (58% above the cost of an employee) and excessive turnover wastes extensive time and effort (repeated recruitment, induction, training etc). Over each of the last three years we experienced a net loss of staff (11/12 - 3, 12/13 - 4 & 13/14 - 6), we have also seen a considerable rise in turnover during the same period.

The problem has worsened despite considerable activity to address the issue, this has included:

- ❖ Implementation of a social worker career progression based on The College of Social Work Best Practice Model
- ❖ Re-grading Assistant and Team Manager roles
- ❖ Cut a management post to invest in two additional front line social worker posts
- ❖ Constant social worker rolling recruitment campaign
- ❖ Small 'grow our own' social worker scheme (two places annually)
- ❖ Developed a pan-Berkshire agreement to manage local agency staffing market
- ❖ Held staff focus groups to explore retention issues
- ❖ Held staff conference themed around retention

Research indicates that the difficulties recruiting children's social workers will continue to be very difficult for at the least the next seven years (Reforming Social Work 2013²). We are also aware that neighbouring authorities are preparing improved recruitment and retention packages for this group of staff.

During this three year period we have also seen a significant increase in the workload of our child protection staff. The number of children subject to child protection plans, looked after and care proceedings have all increased by 15-20%. Over this period we have only created two new social work posts (funded through deletion of a non social work post). Due to the recruitment challenges faced, the teams have not experienced the intended benefit of these posts. Consequently individual social workers case loads are higher than ideal.

If we do not take action we project that the gradual attrition of staff that has taken place over the last three years will accelerate and it is already presenting serious risks to the safety of the service and the finances of the council.

4. Where do we need to get to?

It is important that we stabilise children's social care and increase our ability to be competitive in a very challenging recruitment market. Our aspiration over the next three years is to ensure 95% or more of our staff are directly employed WBC staff, to reduce turnover to healthy levels (less than 10%) and to have a competent and capable children's social care workforce.

Our strategy to achieve this focuses on two key strands:

- ❖ Building on our strengths to become the employer of choice for children's social care in the Thames Valley area.
- ❖ Training and developing our own staff to ensure long term sustainability

5. How will we achieve this?

² Reforming Social Work, Policy Exchange 2013

<http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/reforming%20social%20work.pdf>

To become an employer of choice for this group of staff will require a significant improvement on what we offer today. Our staff tell us that they like working in West Berkshire because of the strong commitment to protecting vulnerable children, the open and honest style of leadership and management and because it is a great place to live and work.

We will build on these strengths in this strategy. We have identified a strong potential to promote the unique qualities of West Berkshire in our recruitment message. West Berkshire has many strengths that if clearly communicated will become a powerful recruitment and retention message. As a small authority, staff have ready access to senior management, members and a strong connection to the core values of the council.

The strategy is based around three key elements:

- ❖ Attracting, developing and retaining the best staff
- ❖ Ensuring our terms and conditions are competitive
- ❖ Effectively marketing our offer (both internally and externally)

5.1 Attracting, developing and retaining the best staff

Working in child protection is a tough and gruelling profession, research indicates that the average career span of a children's social worker is seven years (Reforming Social Work 2013³). Key to this short duration is burn out, working day in day out with children experiencing distress and trauma takes a toll on individuals and many decide that they are unable to do it longer term opting for other less challenging roles. Some staff choose agency work as it offers financial independence and the ability to take regular career breaks.

5.1.1 Supervision, Support and Leadership

Social Workers consistently report locally and nationally that good quality support and professional supervision is one of the most important factors in their employment. Nationally this is highlighted

³ Reforming Social Work, Policy Exchange 2013

<http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/reforming%20social%20work.pdf>

in both Reforming Social Work 2013⁴ and the 2013 All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work⁵, locally our own staff identified it as a pivotal factor in the career decisions in both focus groups (Spring 2014) and our staff conference (June 2014). Staff are very positive about the supervision provided, but indicated the addition of high quality external clinical supervision would be greatly valued. Consequently we will be investing in the provision of additional external clinical supervision.

5.1.2 Retention Bonus and Retention Leave

Central to our strategy is a package of benefits designed to attract staff who want to commit to one employer to enable them to provide the consistent presence children need. Staff working in the most challenging teams will be provided with a three year retention bonus and up to three months paid retention leave at the end of three years continuous service (eight weeks additional leave with up to four weeks banked annual leave). This will be costly, but still far better value than employing an increasing number of agency staff who cost 58% more than our directly employed staff. Retention bonuses have been successful in a number of other local authorities (Westminster, Bexley, Bromley, Kent and many others). Windsor and Maidenhead experienced a major loss of staff when they removed their retention bonus arrangements in 2013. Both Reading and Wokingham Councils currently pay market supplements to staff engaged in child protection work.

The retention leave element of the strategy was identified by our own staff, firstly in focus groups held in Spring 2013 and then reiterated at our Child Protection Social Work Conference held in June 2014. The retention leave will be a powerful tool in retaining staff to both West Berkshire and the profession. It will give workers a period to recover from the intense pressure of child protection and return energised and refreshed. This is an essential point of difference to our strategy which will act as a powerful inducement to both retain and recruit staff.

Existing staff already in post at the start date of the scheme will have an additional entitlement - at managers' discretion - to 'draw down' the sabbatical early, subject to the conditions that their total working time (i.e. not including sick leave or maternity leave) for West Berks council exceeds three years at the time the sabbatical is taken and that they give not less than eight week's notice.

⁴ Reforming Social Work, Policy Exchange 2013

<http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/reforming%20social%20work.pdf>

⁵ All Party Parliamentary Group Report on Social Work 2013 http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_90352-5.pdf

If two or more existing staff members seek to draw down this entitlement at the same time, managers will have discretion to stagger the leave on a presumption that the member of staff with the longest service gets to go first.

Existing staff members who choose to draw down the entitlement early will be required to pay back the cost of the leave if they subsequently leave the service before the end of the three year scheme. (Thus people who took the leave early in 2015/16 would have to work 2.5 further years before they could leave us without payback but those who didn't take it until early 2017 would have given us nearly the full three additional years anyway).

This will provide existing staff with long service an opportunity to have the break they need, but would still make it more likely that we achieve the full retention benefit of the retention leave offer for those staff. It will also enable us to flex the timing of the retention leave to meet the needs of the service.

5.1.3 Employment of a Children's Social Care Recruitment and Retention Specialist

This will be a critical role that will drive much of the work outlined in this strategy. The role will require expertise in both social work and recruitment processes. The role will include:

- ❖ Leading the implementation and regular reviewing of this strategy
- ❖ Co-ordinating all retention work (regular focus groups, exit interviews, tracking leavers destinations etc).
- ❖ Head hunting new staff
- ❖ Implementing an agency to permanent programme
- ❖ Expediting the recruitment process at every stage
- ❖ Managing all agency recruitment (and relationships with agencies)
- ❖ Developing relationships with universities to recruit newly qualified SWs

The success of the post will be easily measured with an initial focus on reducing the loss of permanent staff quickly and moving to an increase in the permanently employed West Berkshire staff. The scope of the role will include all 74 of the qualified social work posts working with children.

This is a tried and tested concept, it builds on work that was originally pioneered in the education sector when facing an acute recruitment crisis for teachers. Most larger authorities have this type of dedicated role already and Reading have developed something similar which has helped them to reduce their reliance on agency staffing (currently in the region of 10%).

5.1.4 Social Work Academy

The route to a sustainable position is to recruit and develop our own staff. Whilst the market for experienced staff is fierce we can recruit bright and capable, but inexperienced staff. At present workloads are so heavy that our teams have very little capacity to take on staff who are not able to do more complex work. To address this we will develop a unit with six newly qualified staff who will be supported over a two year period to develop the levels of skill and competence required. The unit will recruit high quality graduates with a connection to the local area (as this is one of the strongest factors in retention). This is a tried and tested approach. In one example (Sunderland City Council⁶) the introduction of an academy helped reduce reliance on agency staff from 33% in 2010 to 2% in 2014.

5.1.5 Employing Four Additional Family Support Workers

This measure supports the strategy's aspirations in two ways. Firstly it helps to reduce the workload of social workers enabling them to focus their time more effectively on working directly with children and families. Family Support workers can manage time consuming tasks on behalf of the allocated social worker, for example the organisation of contact, transportation of children, implementing elements of child protection plans. This strategy has been used very effectively in education where classroom assistants take on many tasks to free up teachers to teach.

We will also recruit Family Support Workers with the potential to go on to train to be Social Workers. Working as a Family Support Worker is the ideal foundation experience for becoming a child protection social worker and experience gained in this role will accelerate progress when they complete their social worker training. Consequently the additional Family Support Workers will help to create a pipeline of good quality local candidates for our social work academy.

⁶ <http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=11641&p=0>

5.1.6 Promoting Relocation Allowances

We will be promoting our existing relocation package (which is potentially available to all WBC employees) in future advertising and consequently anticipate a significant increase in demand as we seek to attract good quality staff from further afield.

5.2 Ensuring our terms and conditions are competitive

5.2.1 Good Team Working Environment

Child Protection can be a frightening and dangerous role. Social Workers face threats and intimidation on a regular basis. Consequently it is essential staff return to safe and secure team environments where they can discuss complex case issues and debrief with colleagues following home visits. This is also particularly important to newly qualified staff learning their profession, but is often also essential for more experienced staff. Flexible working does not assist in this process as it erodes the team identity and makes it more difficult to find where their team colleagues will be on any given day.

The recent (2013) All Party Parliamentary Group Report on Social Work⁷ identified the damaging effect of hot desking and makes a recommendation to end the practice for social work staff. This is also an increasing body of academic research supporting this view (Re-imagining SW).

Consequently we will move away from hot desking arrangements for frontline workers over the next year.

5.2.2 Use of Cars for Work

Social Workers need their cars to work with children and young people. Research by leading Social Work academic Harry Ferguson (2012⁸) identifies cars as essential working tools for social workers. Many of the most difficult and challenging conversations with children and young people

⁷ All Party Parliamentary Group Report on Social Work 2013 http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_90352-5.pdf

⁸ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/oct/23/social-workers-car-place-of-sanctuary>

are held in social workers cars. The importance of the car is also recognised by the 2013 All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Work⁹ who include a recommendation that local authorities support social workers to have access to cars for their work.

In recognition of this we will provide a range of measures to support social workers to have access to appropriate vehicles. This will include interest free loans and essential car user status for all frontline social workers. Social workers will also be provided with appropriate parking spaces.

5.3 Effectively marketing our offer (internally and externally)

We are confident that we have the potential to be an employer of choice based on our existing strengths and the measures set out in this strategy. However these benefits will only be realised if they are effectively marketed both internally and externally. As part of this process we will develop a pledge/contract for existing staff setting out what they can expect from us as an employer, and what we expect from them in return. Kent¹⁰ have used this approach very successfully in their recruitment and retention of social workers.

The investment in this area will be to promote West Berkshire as a great place to be a social worker using various channels (social media, trade press etc).

6. How we will Measure Success

We will devise a recruitment and retention score card including detailed information including quantitative measures (vacancy rates, turnover, agency staffing etc) alongside qualitative information (outcome of exit interviews, staff surveys etc). This will be reported on a six monthly basis to management board.

⁹ All Party Parliamentary Group Report on Social Work 2013 http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_90352-5.pdf

¹⁰ http://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/11359/social-work-contract.pdf

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Agenda Item 4.

Title of Report:	Scrutiny review into the reasons for the apparent prevalence of homelessness amongst young families in West Berkshire.
Report to be considered by:	Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Date of Meeting:	

Purpose of Report: To outline the results of the investigation into the apparent prevalence of young families in West Berkshire who are facing homelessness.

Recommended Action: That the Overview and Scrutiny Commission endorses the recommendations for the consideration of the Executive.

Background Documents: Minutes of meetings, and papers submitted during meetings of the Task Group. (available from Strategic Support).

Task Group Chairman	
Name & Telephone No.:	Councillor Quentin Webb – Tel (01635) 202646
E-mail Address:	qwebb@westberks.gov.uk
Contact Officer Details	
Name:	Elaine Walker
Job Title:	Principal Policy Officer (Equality and Diversity)
Tel. No.:	01635 519441
E-mail Address:	ewalker@westberks.gov.uk

Executive Report

1. Introduction

1.1 In November 2012 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission undertook a scrutiny review into homelessness. Recommendation 12 from the review was:

“Further investigation should be undertaken into the reasons why West Berkshire seems to have a very large proportion of young families facing homelessness whose friends and extended family are unwilling or unable to provide them with temporary housing/accommodation.”

1.2 At its meeting of 10 December 2013, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission agreed to commence a review as recommended.

1.3 This report sets out the findings and recommendations from the review and provides details on its Terms of Reference and methodology.

2. Terms of Reference

2.1 The terms of reference for the review were to conduct a review into homelessness in young families in West Berkshire and in particular:

- i) the prevalence of homelessness in young families;
- ii) the reasons for young families becoming homeless;
- iii) the strategic approach and operational practice for managing young homeless families;
- iv) to consider the opportunities available for reducing the numbers of young families reporting as homeless.

2.2 Recommendations arising from the review are to be reported to the Executive for consideration.

3. Methodology

3.1 The review was conducted by a cross-party task group, working with Council Officers and representatives of other organisations. The members of the task group were Councillors Quentin Webb, Sheila Ellison, Tony Vickers and Paul Bryant. Councillor Webb was elected as the Chairman.

3.2 The task group held meetings as outlined below:

Meeting date	Meeting focus
3 March 2014	<p>Agreement of review subject and scope.</p> <p>Background information received including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Definition of young family ▪ Previous scrutiny activity ▪ Statistical data ▪ Legislation ▪ Council processes
31 March 2014	<p>Gathering of evidence from organisations and individuals who might become involved with clients at risk of becoming homeless.</p> <p><u>Witnesses:</u></p>
28 April 2014	<p>Gathering of evidence from organisations who are, or have been, involved with homeless young families.</p> <p><u>Witnesses</u></p>
19 May 2014	<p>Gathering of evidence from internal services.</p> <p>Consideration of evidence and formulation of recommendations.</p> <p><u>Witnesses</u></p>

3.3 The following witnesses contributed to the review:

- (a) West Berkshire Council Officers
 - i) Mel Brain – Housing Strategy and Operations Manager
 - ii) Cathy Dodson – Housing Options Team Leader
 - iii) Dave Wraight - Young person housing panel
- (b) Councillor Roger Croft, Executive Member for Housing
- (c) Health Visitor – Samantha Knight
- (d) Family Resource Service - Jo Watts

(e) Children's Centres, Victoria Park - Debbie Rowe

(f) Step by Step - Marie Glover

(g) Two Saints

i) Meriel Colbert-Owen

ii) Chloe Lyons

3.4 The Task Group wished to report their concern that some of the witnesses invited had not taken up the offer to attend.

3.5 The group had hoped to hear the experiences of someone who had been homeless but had not been successful in finding an appropriate witness within the timescale of the review. The Task Group did not consider that this had been detrimental to the outcomes of the review.

4. Acknowledgements and thanks

4.1 The Chairman and Members of the Committee would like to acknowledge and thank all those who supported and gave evidence to the review.

5. Definitions

5.1 A homeless person is a person who has no accommodation in the UK or elsewhere which is available for his/her occupation and which that person has a legal right to occupy

5.2 A person is threatened with homelessness if s/he is likely to become homeless within 28 days.

5.3 A young family is defined as a young person between the ages of 18 and 24 with one or more children.

6. Background

6.1 The authority has a statutory duty to assist people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, according to the above definitions, and who meet each of the following five tests of homelessness:

(a) Eligibility – whether the person is a British citizen or has a right to reside in the UK through their immigration status. A person not habitually resident in the UK may not be eligible;

(b) Homeless – whether the person has access to habitable accommodation and a legal right to occupy it;

(c) Priority need – for the purposes of this review, a young person with children would automatically qualify as having a priority need, whether or not any other priority indicators were present;

- (d) Intentionality – a person who deliberately did, or did not do, something that caused them to leave accommodation which they could otherwise have stayed in;
 - (e) Local connection – whether or not the person has a family or work connection to the area. If not, they may be eligible for homeless assistance in an area where they do have a connection.
- 6.2 The authority is required to secure accommodation for an applicant fulfilling all of these criteria. For an applicant who is found to be ineligible for a full housing duty, a decision review and an appeals process is in place.
- 6.3 The authority also has a duty to provide advice about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness.
- 6.4 No research had been identified that looks into the reasons why homelessness occurred; all available research focuses on the effects of homelessness on the individual and the wider community.
- 6.5 There is a significant negative impact to society and government resulting from homelessness which illustrates the importance of reducing the number of homeless young families. This is evidenced by external research which has shown that:
- (a) Each homeless household costs the government approximately £6,680;
 - (b) Children in bad housing are more likely to be excluded from school;
 - (c) Approximately 57% of homeless young people are not in education, employment or training (NEET). This is five times the number of young people of the same age in the general population.
- 6.6 In 2012, the Housing Service undertook a statutory review of homelessness in West Berkshire, and developed from this a Homelessness Strategy and associated actions. Identified actions include:
- (a) Working with young people in schools to intervene early by raising awareness of the realities of homelessness and signposting to relevant services that support and assist young people:
 - i) Identify key staff that will deliver the training;
 - ii) Ensure key staff have attended training for trainers;
 - iii) Agree and implement a timetable of sessions to be delivered across schools;
 - iv) Track the number of young people aged 16 and 17 who approach the Council for housing advice up to 24 months after receipt of training to monitor effectiveness of scheme and adjust / amend training where needed.
 - (b) Working with Children’s Services and Connexions to develop a returning home or staying home ‘virtual’ team to provide early intervention to young people and families where breakdown appears to be a concern.

- (c) Continuing to work with Health Visitors, Social Workers and other professionals to educate them on housing options and homelessness to enable them to prevent homelessness by identifying early signs of problems and through early intervention
- 6.7 When a young family presents to the Housing Service, they receive an assessment to ascertain their eligibility, and this process includes a review of the different means by which homelessness could be prevented. Consideration would be given to negotiation, financial assistance, advice and support, or other appropriate measures.
- 6.8 Homelessness applications can be made in joint names, but it is more frequent for the application to be made in the female's name. Where a partner is present, they can be named as being allowed access to the accommodation.
- 6.9 Parents are responsible for their children until the age of 18. Until this age, the child has an implied licence to remain in their parent's home. A parent asking their child to leave represents a withdrawal of that responsibility. A person who is 'sofa-surfing' would not have a legal right to occupy the accommodation.

Agency Involvement

Young Person's Housing Panel

- 6.10 The Young Person's Housing Panel consists of multiple agencies working together to consider the appropriate placements and skill requirements for young people who were, or were at risk of becoming, homeless. Meetings are held monthly but virtual meetings may also be convened.
- 6.11 Young people being considered might be referred through a number of routes (eg the Youth Offending Team, but all would be known to the Housing Service if they were known by any agency, to be at risk of becoming homeless).

Health Visitors

- 6.12 Health Visitors visit new mothers once a baby reaches 10 days old, following their discharge from a midwife, and the health visitor would remain responsible for the child until the age of two and a half years. During this time 3 further planned development checks would take place. Only the first one or two checks would take place at the mother's home.
- 6.13 It was reported that health visitors would not consider the mother's housing situation during their visits unless an issue was flagged by the mother. However subsequently this was disputed and the task group were led to understand that health visitors do in fact undertake a rounded view of the mother's situation which would include an understanding of their housing arrangements.
- 6.14 Information is not shared between the different agencies unless concerns are raised, for example, child protection or domestic abuse.

Family Resource Service

6.15 The Family Resource Service (FRS) focuses on preventative measures such as parenting support in the home, facilitating parenting groups as well as domestic abuse and self harm awareness sessions.

6.16 The FRS also offers family mediation aimed at helping families to identify ways in which they could improve living together.

Children’s Centres

6.17 Children’s centres provide support and signposting for any issues relating to families, including health wellbeing and safeguarding.

Two Saints

6.18 Two Saints provide a variety of services for those needing housing assistance. Provision ranges from emergency accommodation, resettlement units, floating support, outreach work and advice on budgeting or debt management.

Step by Step

6.19 Step by Step is a charity organisation providing a number of services to young people in Hampshire, Surrey and West Berkshire.

6.20 West Berkshire Council commissions Step by Step to provide supported lodgings, where a young person lives within a household to gain life skills and enable independent living. This can include mother and baby placements.

7. Findings

Prevalence of Homelessness in Young Families;

7.1 In November 2012, it was reported that the biggest group of people accepted by the Council as being owed a full housing duty were young people with families, and the proportion was reported to be significantly higher than national averages. It was explained that families and friends were unable or unwilling to continue to accommodate them. To put this statement into context:

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	01/04/14 – 20/05/14
WBC Homelessness Acceptances	53	54	54	9
WBC Homelessness Acceptances for Young Families	24 (45%)	21 (38%)	19 (35%)	5 (56%)
National comparison	30%	30%	N/A	N/A

(The data for 2014/15 should be considered cautiously, as insufficient time has passed to establish with certainty whether this reflects an upward trend.)

It follows therefore, that to equal national percentages West Berkshire would need to reduce the number of homelessness acceptances amongst young families by approximately 5 families a year.

- 7.2 West Berkshire has a higher number of full duty housing cases for young families than neighbouring authorities, however, the information gathered by different local authorities would not allow for an accurate comparison at this level.
- 7.3 Temporary accommodation might be offered to a homeless young mother (where a full duty had been accepted or enquiries were underway) to assess her skills to manage living alone (e.g. budgeting) which would not be possible if she was helped to find private rented accommodation or housing via the Housing Register. This would be counted as a homelessness acceptance for statistical purposes.

Reasons for Young Families Becoming Homeless

- 7.4 There were considered to be two broad reasons for young families becoming homeless:

Conflict within the family home:

- (a) Non-compliance with rules set by parents. Case law has shown that quite strict rules set by parents would be considered to be reasonable, and some authorities might consider homelessness in these circumstances to be intentional. This is not automatically the case in West Berkshire;
- (b) Parenting and housekeeping styles may differ sufficiently that the parents may feel unable to house the young family;
- (c) Parents agreeing to house the young family for a short period may feel the length of stay has exceeded that agreed;
- (d) Anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been an increase in domestic violence, including within step-families. In addition, changes to the family set up resulting in step parents, can alter family loyalties, and can result in a lower tolerance for the actions of the young family.

Misunderstanding of the measures available to the Council:

- (e) Some families believe that allowing their home to become 'overcrowded' will enable them to be awarded a greater number of housing needs points, thereby setting an expectation that a larger house will be made available to them. However the length of time taken for this process can be unexpected and lead to an unwillingness to continue to house the young family;
- (f) Families were not believed to be open and honest about their reasons for asking a young family to leave, and might state reasons that they think will achieve their aim of obtaining good housing for their child through the Council;
- (g) Young people do not take responsibility for their likely eviction once it became apparent, and do not comprehend the reality of their situation;

(h) More people are becoming aware that eligibility for accommodation is not automatic, however the progress of spreading this message is slow.

7.5 Following eviction from the family home, young families can continue to experience difficulty in maintaining a home or placement for the following reasons:

(i) The Housing Service finds that it needs to invest a significant amount of time to assist young families in accomplishing simple tasks that they are not prepared for;

(j) Young families often do not have the necessary skills to live independently, lacking basic knowledge such as budgeting, nutrition or maintaining the home. These skills are often learned within the family, so if the parents do not have these skills they cannot pass them on;

(k) Where parents of a young person do have the necessary skills, they are taking on this role in the family home, preventing the young person from preparing for independent living. The stress of living independently unexpectedly exacerbates the lack of knowledge.

(l) Training in some skills is available through Sovereign or the Citizen's Advice Bureau; however this may not be available to everyone.

7.6 Families were reluctant to engage with agencies to consider ways in which the young family could remain in the family home, for example mediation, Family Group Conferencing, or points maximisation. Parents are adamant about young people leaving the home immediately which gives little opportunity to explore alternative options.

7.7 Many families, who had evicted their child from the family home, maintained an active interest in them ensuring that they were provided with accommodation.

Strategic Approach and Operational Practice for Managing Young Homeless Families

7.8 The Housing Service operates practices that could result in a greater number of homeless applications being accepted in West Berkshire than in some other authorities:

(a) The West Berkshire Housing Team act to reflect the law, and do not act as 'gatekeepers' to available accommodation;

(b) Applicants not found to be owed a full housing duty were actively encouraged by the Housing Service to request a review of the decision.

7.9 Once a young family has been provided with reasonable and suitable accommodation, their social housing points would be reduced to reflect their accommodation status, and they are therefore in less pressing need of more permanent housing.

7.10 The majority of young families did not have agency involvement (other than routine) prior to becoming homeless which meant it was not possible to assess their risk of becoming homeless prior to it happening. However, the effects of becoming homeless and perhaps housed alongside other homeless people, were known to be negative and might result in agency involvement, for example relating to substance misuse or domestic abuse.

- 7.11 There was an emerging need for mother & baby placements and commissioning at Bramblings had been changed to accommodate the demand.
- 7.12 Housing information leaflets are posted on the Council website, but are currently not widely available in print, with most likely to only be seen by those in immediate need of housing advice.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The actual numbers of young homeless families have reduced and there is little actual difference between national and local proportions; however the long term impact on these families and their children, and the resulting societal cost remain significant.
- 8.2 It is likely that the way in which the Housing Service operates, inflates the number of homelessness acceptances above that of other areas.
- 8.3 All agencies appear to be functioning appropriately according to their remit and no pressing issues have been forthcoming; however there is further scope for better inter-agency working.

Accommodation

- 8.4 There is a need for more supported accommodation placements for young families. This would enable families to remain together, would provide support whilst learning the skills needed to live independently, and would allow support to transition effectively from pregnancy to beyond birth. This could be achieved by making changes to existing accommodation or through the commissioning process.

Skills and Knowledge

- 8.5 Further information would be useful to understand the extent to which Connexions are delivering information in a school setting, for example which schools receive the information, and whether the delivery is being evaluated.
- 8.6 There is a need for further skills training for young people prior to them moving away from home. Skills training should provide the message that individuals should take responsibility for their own and their family's welfare.
- 8.7 The provision of skills training would assist in the long term by providing young people with skills to be passed on to their own families.

Information and Communication

- 8.8 Information about the options available to people when considering moving away from home, or about the Housing Service, is not widely available and is currently directed towards people already in need.
- 8.9 There is a need to manage the expectations of parents, and of young families with regard to the options available to the Housing Service.

8.10 Contact with the Council should be made at the earliest opportunity in order to allow consideration of mediation or other prevention measures, or to help put together a housing plan.

8.11 Young families at risk of becoming homeless are not identified early enough.

9. Recommendations

9.1 The following recommendations are proposed for submission to the Executive:

- (a) The Head of Housing should review what information is made available within secondary schools and Academies in order that pupils are made aware of the realities of homelessness, the options available to those made homeless, and possible actions to avoid homelessness.
- (b) The Head of Housing should review whether all secondary schools and Academies in West Berkshire are providing information about homelessness to their pupils.
- (c) The Portfolio Holder for Education should write to the head teachers of any schools found not to be delivering homelessness materials, to encourage the inclusion of educational information as set out in recommendation 1.
- (d) The Head of Housing should review what information is available to members of the public to advise them of the options available when considering moving away from home or about the Housing Service, in what format it is provided, and in what locations, in order to reach a wider audience.
- (e) The Head of Housing should assess the range of skills required for a young family to live independently, and ensure that information, training and support is available to enable this.
- (f) The Head of Housing should investigate ways to secure more supported accommodation placements for young families.
- (g) The Head of Public Health should develop the role of midwives and health visitors to enable them to identify young families at risk of homelessness, once the health visitor function transfers to the Council in 2015.

Appendices

There are no Appendices to this report.

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