

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker:	Gerard Jones, Managing Director Children and Young People
Date of Decision:	28 July 2021
Subject:	Additional family workers in targeted early help district teams
Report Author:	Bruce Penhale, Assistant Director Early Help
Ward (s):	N/A

Reason for the decision: The report seeks approval to recruit five additional Senior Family Workers (Grade 6) in the targeted early help district teams on temporary contracts to 31 March 2024.

Summary: In line with Oldham’s continuum of need framework, the district targeted early help teams provide support for children and families with escalating needs – for example in relation to child behaviour and routines, school attendance, mental health problems, housing or finance. They adopt a whole family approach which seeks to build the capacity of children and families to be in control of their own lives.

The team deliver support which seeks to prevent the needs of children and families escalating to a level which requires the involvement of children’s social care, as well as delivering family support alongside social care and in supporting families to successfully “step down” from social care involvement. They therefore deliver preventative support which reduces numbers of children needing social work involvement, or of being re-referred back into social care.

The new district early help model was implemented in April 2021. As well as delivering casework with families, the teams have partnership officers who work with a range of local service providers (including schools, health visitors and many other organisations) to build capacity in delivering the earliest possible support to children and families. The model reinforces that early help is everyone’s

business, and that early intervention prevents the needs of children and families from escalating.

There are currently challenges in implementing the new delivery model. During Covid-19 more families have experienced problems, and needs for support have increased as the period of disruption has continued. During April – June 2021 894 children were in families referred to targeted early help teams, a 19% increase on numbers in the equivalent period in 2020. There has also been an increase in the complexity of need of families referred, with 30% of those in 2021 being for family support / step downs from social care as compared with 27% in 2020.

As a result of these changes, caseloads are currently very high in the targeted early help teams averaging almost 14 families / 33 children per FTE worker. This is impacting on the both the timeliness and quality of service to children and families, with family workers not having sufficient time to deliver the required intensity of support to children and families. This increases both the duration of support required, and the risk that needs will escalate.

The report therefore seeks to appoint an additional five Senior Family Workers to the district targeted early help teams on fixed term contracts to 31 March 2024. This will enable significant reductions in caseloads, increasing the ability of the teams to undertake effective work with children and families – reducing the likelihood that families needs will escalate and the proportion of families who are subsequently re-referred back into targeted early help or children’s social care.

More fundamentally, it will prevent the current caseload pressures from undermining implementation of the district delivery model, through which the targeted early help teams are working with other universal, specialist and community services to strengthen the delivery of earliest possible help to children and families, preventing needs from escalating to require support at higher levels of the continuum of need. The shorter-term investment will therefore support implementation of a model to deliver longer term savings. There is funding available from the Reform Investment Fund (national Supported Families – formerly Troubled Families – programme) which can support this increased capacity as part of delivering a programme of change.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Option A - Do Nothing

Doing nothing would mean that caseloads in the targeted Early Help district teams would remain very

high, preventing them from delivering the necessary quality of support to children and families, and increasing the likelihood that needs will escalate into social care or that there will be future referrals. This will prevent the new district working model from reducing service demand and supporting budget savings in future years.

Option B Recruit an additional five Senior Family Workers (Grade 6) in the targeted early help district teams on fixed term contracts to 31 March 2024

Increasing capacity in the teams will assist in reducing caseloads in the teams in order to ensure that there is capacity to effectively meet the needs of children and families. This will reduce the likelihood of needs escalating to require children's social care involvement or of families being re-referred for targeted support. It will deliver additional capacity during a period in which the impact of Covid-19 has increased families' needs for support, and enable the effective implementation of the district working model in order to support delivery of savings in the longer term.

Consultation: including any conflict of interest declared by relevant Cabinet Member consulted.

The proposal has been discussed with the Managing Director of Children & Young People (19/7/21) and with Children's Services Directorate Management Team (28/7/21).

Recommendation(s):

Option B Recruit an additional five Senior Family Workers (Grade 6) in the targeted early help district teams on fixed term contracts to 31 March 2024

Implications:

What are the financial implications?

This report seeks approval to recruit five additional Senior Family Workers (Grade 6) in the targeted early help district teams on temporary contracts to 31 March 2024.

The recruitment will be at grade 6 with an annualised cost of approximately £41,970 including on costs and assuming a start date of 01.10.2021 the following spend profile is expected:

2021-22	£0.105m
2022-23	£0.216m
2023-24	£0.222m

The posts will be included in the existing establishment and the funding for the posts will be met

by a drawdown of reserve from the Reform Investment Fund.

The costs of these posts have been included in the forward plan profiling of the use of this reserve over the next 3 years.

Sufficient balance is available, and no additional cost will be incurred by the council.

At the end of the fixed term arrangements redeployment will be considered as an initial option before any call on possible redundancy costs. It is anticipated that any such costs will also be met from the reform investment fund reserve.

Sadrul Alam, Finance Manager.

*What are the **legal** implications?*

Comments from both finance and HR are noted. No further comments from legal. Radhika Aggarwal
Principal Employment Solicitor

*What are the **procurement** implications?*

N/A

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?*

The Council's Recruitment Policy and Fixed Term Contract Guidance should be followed when recruiting to these posts. This includes adhering to guidance around those people who were recently interviewed for other posts.

If redundancy is applicable at the end of a FTC, the Council's Redundancy and Redeployment policies should be followed.

FTC guidance and the Council's Recruitment policy should be followed if there is a need to further review and establish the posts on a permanent basis.

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason)

The team provide support to vulnerable children and their families. There is no identified adverse impact on groups with any protected characteristics.

*What are the **property** implications*

N/A

Risks:

The additional temporary capacity will support plans to deliver budget savings in the Medium Term Financial Strategy

Co-operative agenda

Targeted early help services provide support to families which builds their capacity to be in control of their own lives.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

There are no background papers for this report

Report Author Sign-off:	
	Bruce Penhale Assistant Director Family Connect
Date:	28/7/21

In consultation with the Managing Director of Children and Young People, Gerard Jones

Signed:  Date: 28 July 2021

In consultation with the Director of Human Resources, (or representative)

Signed :  Date: 30 July 2021