

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker:	Gerard Jones, Managing Director Children and Young People
Date of Decision:	12 May, 2022
Subject:	Additional agency 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 agency Family Workers to increase capacity in the targeted early help district teams on temporary contracts to 31 December 2022.

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.

As a result of the pressures on Oldham's communities, including the legacy of Covid-19 and the escalating cost of living, there has been an increase in both the numbers of referrals to targeted early help and the complexity of need. The number of children referred to targeted early help increased from 588 in January – March 2021 to 973 in January – March 2022. As a result, caseloads in the targeted early help teams have increased to a point at which

the service cannot deliver support which is timely or intensive enough to meet families' needs. They are currently 34.7 children per family worker. This both creates a risk that families' needs will escalate further, or that support to build their resilience will not be sufficient to prevent them being the subject of repeat referrals to Children's Services.

High caseloads are impact on the wellbeing of staff – with a risk of an increase in sickness or staff leaving the service.

The report therefore seeks to appoint an additional five agency Family Workers to the district targeted early help teams to 31 December 2023. 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.

During this period the permanent staffing levels within the teams will be reviewed, as well as allowing more time to implement the Demand Management Strategy which is seeking to strengthen the multi-agency early help offer with the aim of providing a strengthened early intervention offer for children and families – and consequently the numbers escalating to need support from children's services (both Children's Social Care and Early Help).

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 model from reducing service demand and supporting budget savings in future years. It also increases the risk of staffing going sick or leaving the service.

Option B Recruit an additional five agency Family Workers in the targeted early help district teams to 31 December 2022

Increasing capacity in the teams will assist in reducing caseloads in the teams in order to ensure that 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 legacy of Covid-19 and the rising cost of living has increased families' needs for support, and enable the permanent staffing structure to be reviewed alongside implementation of the Demand Management Strategy to reduce the number of children and families requiring support from Children's Services.

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

The proposal has been discussed with the Children's Services Directorate Management Team (26/4/22).

Recommendation(s):

Option B Recruit an additional five agency Family Workers in the targeted early help district teams on fixed term contracts to 31 December 2022

Implications:

What are the financial implications?

This report seeks to approve the recruitment of five additional agency Family Workers in the Targeted Early Help District Teams, fixed term for a period of 32 weeks until 31st December 2022.

The costs associated with this are in the region of **£208,287.45** assuming a start date of mid May 2022.

These costs will be wholly funded from the Council's Reform Investment Funding.

Sufficient balance is available, and the costs will be factored into the in year use of the reserve.

There will be no additional cost to the authority.

Vicki Hayes – Senior Accountant /Sadrul Alam
Finance Manager

What are the legal implications?

Comments from HR & Finance are noted and further that this proposal is expected to cover a period of a year and half while a service review to consider permanent staffing levels will be undertaken. This is a pragmatic approach to an emergency situation facing both the families and well being of staff.

While agency workers are not employees they are protected by the Agency Workers Regulations 2010 and those managing the agency workers should be mindful of Day 1 rights and separate to these week 12 rights which entitles equal treatment as if the worker had been recruited directly by the hirer.

What are the **procurement** implications? Radhika Aggarwal Principal Employment Solicitor
N/A

What are the **Human Resources** implications? Where possible we should avoid the use of agency workers due to high costs and potential impact on quality, if this is unavoidable then the ongoing requirement should be kept under review.

As an alternative, consideration could be given to contacting any appointable candidates from recent interviews to offer casual or short term contracts.

Kate Jolley HR Strategic Lead

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:	26/4/22

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

Signed:

Date: 13/5/22

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerard Jones", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

In consultation with the Chief Executive, Oldham Council

Signed:

Date:

13/5/22

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Caldwell", written in a cursive style.

