

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker:	Gerard Jones, Managing Director Children and Young People
Date of Decision:	2 August, 2022
Subject:	Senior Family workers in targeted early help district teams
Report Author:	Bruce Penhale, Assistant Director Early Help
Ward (s):	N/A

Reason for the decision:	<p>In order to increase capacity and enable the retention of experienced workers in the targeted Early Help district teams until 31/3/25, the report seeks approval to increase the number of Senior Family Workers to 35 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Replacing five agency Family Workers for which there is approval to 31/12/22 with five fixed term Senior Family Workers to 31/3/25• Extend the contracts of five Senior Family Workers on fixed term contracts by 12 months to 31/3/25• Deleting five posts of Family Worker (Grade 5) and replacing these with five Senior Family Worker posts (Grade 6).
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Summary:	<p>The targeted early help district teams 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.</p> <p>Similarly to other parts of Children's Services, the targeted early help teams are experiencing significant demand pressures, resulting in high caseloads (averaging 32 children per FTE) which is too high to deliver the necessary timeliness and intensity of support for children and families.</p>
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This report therefore seeks to increase capacity in the teams, as well as to put it on a sustainable footing to 31/3/25 in order to ensure the retention of experienced staff.

This is also important in order to meet the requirements of the national Supporting Families programme. The current programme runs to 31/3/25 and provides significant additional resource for delivering intensive family support and developing the early help system. However this is linked to targets for successfully supporting families. These are increasing from 420 families in 2022/23 to 841 in 2024/25. In addition, government has introduced a new outcomes framework for assessing the impact of interventions, which will make it harder to demonstrate that a family has been successfully supported. There is therefore a need to strengthen capacity in the targeted early help teams in order to build capacity to meet these targets. This is alongside other investment in a Demand Management Strategy which aims to increase capacity for earliest possible help, reducing the numbers of children and families needing support from Children's Services.

The proposals seek to establish a team of 35 Senior Family Workers, all with contracts running to at least 31/3/25 (duration of the current Supporting Families programme). This will be achieved by:

1. Replacing five agency staff with contracts to 31/12/22 with five Senior Family Workers (Grade 6) on fixed term contracts to 31/3/25;
2. Extending the contracts of five Senior Family Workers on fixed term contracts to 31/3/24 by a further 12 months to 31/3/25 – ensuring retention and preventing them seeking to apply for the new posts with a later end date; and
3. Deleting five posts of Family Worker (Grade 5) and replacing them with five posts of Senior Family Worker (Grade 6). In practice the staff in these posts are undertaking the same tasks as the higher graded Senior Family Workers, and the work with families with less complex needs is undertaken by the commissioned provider (Positive Steps). The staff in the Grade 5 posts would be slotted in as Senior Family Workers, reflecting the complexity of the work with families which they are undertaking.

Funding is available from the Reform Investment Fund (Government Supported Families programme) to resource the additional costs of these changes.

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 timeliness and intensity of support to children and families, and increasing the likelihood that needs will escalate into social care or that there will be future referrals. There is a risk that the Council would fail to achieve the necessary Supporting Families targets for families successfully supported, potentially putting at risk Supported Families Funding (£1.37m in 2022/23 rising to £1.70m in 2024/25).

Option B - Implement changes 1-3 as proposed

This would secure increased capacity in the targeted early help district teams through to 31/3/25. This will assist in reducing caseloads to a level at which timely and intensive support can be provided to children and families, alongside wider investment to improve the provision of early intervention and reduce demand on Children's Services. The changes will offer greater security to staff, preventing the loss of experienced workers and also providing greater clarity in which families should be supported by the Council district teams and which by Positive Steps as the commissioned provider delivering support for a shorter period to families with less complex needs.

Option C – Do not replace 5 agency workers with staff on fixed term contracts to 31/3/25

Not replacing the agency workers with staff on fixed term contracts risks a substantial loss of capacity in working with children and families from January 2023. In addition, agency staff are significantly more expensive and are also proving more difficult to recruit than permanent staff or staff on fixed term contracts of several years.

Option D – Do not extend the contracts of 5 staff on fixed term contracts currently ending on 31/3/24

If the five staff currently on fixed term contracts to 31/3/24 do not have their contracts extended by a further 12 months, they are likely to apply for the roles which finish at a later date. It will therefore take longer to increase capacity, as some advertised posts are likely to be filled by existing staff, resulting in a need for further rounds of recruitment and creating additional uncertainty for staff and work for managers.

Option E – Do not replace the 5 Family Worker posts with Senior Family Workers

This would not address the current inequity with the Grade 5 staff taking on families with a similar level of need as those supported by the Grade 6 Senior Family Workers. It would also fail to resolve the

potential overlap between the level of support offered by Grade 5 staff in the Council targeted early help teams and that of the commissioned provider. There is potential for a pay and grading claim if this change is not undertaken.

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 (2/7/22).

Recommendation(s):

Option B Implement changes 1-3 as proposed by:

1. Replacing five agency staff with contracts to 31/12/22 with five Senior Family Workers (Grade 6) on fixed term contracts to 31/3/25;
2. Extending the contracts of five Senior Family Workers on fixed term contracts to 31/3/24 by a further 12 months to 31/3/25; and
3. Deleting five posts of Family Worker (Grade 5) and replacing them with five posts of Senior Family Worker (Grade 6), with the staff in these posts slotted into the more senior roles.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*

This report is seeking to implement changes as set out in **Option B**. The funding for these additional posts will be undertaken 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.

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. An allowance of £22k has been made for this cost in the profiling

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

The table below summarises the posts in scope with a total annualised cost including on costs, all to be met from the reform investment fund

	Option B - Implement Changes 1-3	8/22-3/23 £m	FY 23-24 £m	FY 24-25 £m
1	Replace Agency staff with 5 x Senior Family Workers	0.137	0.210	0.225
2	Extension 5 x Senior Family Workers	0.137	0.210	0.225

	Increase Family Workers to Seniors G5 to G6			
3		0.026	0.040	0.042
	TOTAL	0.301	0.460	0.492

Vicki Hayes – Senior Accountant/Sadrul Alam Finance Manager

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

Comments from HR below are noted. The service should also be mindful of agency workers rights under the Agency Workers Regulations and seek legal advice if there are any concerns.

No further comments.

Radhika Aggarwal Principal Employment Solicitor
N/A

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

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

Agency workers – replace with fixed term workers – this makes sense and hopefully will lead to a financial saving. The service are advised to check with agreement with the current agency provider to be clear on costs should any of the current agency workers successfully apply for one of the fixed term roles.

Extending contracts of 5 family workers – as names are not included, checks on length of service have not been carried out and there is a possibility the recommended extension could take individuals over 4 years service which means the individual has a right to request that their contract is considered permanent – this check can be carried out prior to the extension being processed if required.

Deleting 5 Family Worker posts and replacing with 5 Senior Family Worker posts can be achieved with a straightforward organisational change process. Initial discussions have taken place and if approved further support should be sought by the HR advisory team.

The Division are advised to be mindful of the potential for incremental drift – there have been a number of issues around the grading of Family Workers and it is possible this change will lead to further claims for regrading so it is important to be clear of the roles and differentials between the different roles across the Division.

As with any Fixed term contracts the usual advice applies around redundancy entitlements and costs, being clear in contracts about reasons for roles and the potential need for future organisational change should the requirement for these roles cease or

diminish. Further advice should be sought from the HR advisory team should this situation arise.

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:

Not securing the additional capacity risks impacting upon the support to children and families, and to delivery of the Government's Supporting Family targets which could result in the loss of future funding.

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 Early Help	
Date:	2/8/22

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



Signed:

Date: 2/8/22

In consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive, Sayyed Osman

Signed :

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sayyed Osman', enclosed within a light gray rectangular box.

Date: 25/08/22