

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Employment & Appeals Committee

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CONTACT OFFICER: Kitty Ferris, Assistant Director, Children, Young People and Families, Wellbeing

(For all enquiries) (01753) 690901

WARD(S): All

PART 1 FOR INFORMATION

WORKFORCE ISSUES ARISING OUT OF OFSTED INSPECTION

1 Purpose of Report

This report has been produced for Members following a request to update the committee on recruitment and retention issues that were detailed in the final Ofsted report published in February 2014. This report outlines the key factors that were requested with a summary of actions that have, and are being taken, to address the concerns. An action plan has been created and is attached in the appendix.

2 Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

That Committee Members note the contents of the report.

3 Supporting Information

Members will be aware that the recent Ofsted **inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers** highlighted that there was a need for priority and immediate action to 'develop and put into operation a comprehensive workforce strategy to attract and keep high quality, experienced permanent staff in Slough.

Officers have drafted an action plan (attached in the appendix) and set up a working party of key personnel from across the Council to ensure that the recruitment and retention of permanent staff is coordinated and acted upon as a matter of urgency.

There have been very poor response to recruitment campaigns over the past year and Slough has particular difficulties in attracting good quality permanent staff for a number of reasons, including:

- There is a national shortage of Child and Family Social Workers.
- Geographical location- Slough is in competition with many surrounding authorities for a finite pool of workers. This includes the other Berkshire Unitaries, Bucks CC and West London authorities.
- Poor reputation and profile and difficulties in attracting workers to an authority deemed 'inadequate' by Ofsted.

- Poor market profile compared to competitors. Lack of good quality branding and website attraction.

A number of initiatives are under way or planned to attract new workers and to retain existing staff, including:

- Benchmarking our pay rates and other incentives with our neighbours to ensure we are competitive. We have evidence that surrounding LA have increased their level of market supplements which will impact Slough. Incentives under consideration include; market supplements; car loans and lease cars; golden handshakes and retention bonuses; introduce a friend scheme.
- Encourage existing locum staff to go permanent and giving each of them individual time to explore the benefits of being a permanent worker.
- Developing a new website and look for Slough to sell ourselves better, to include videos and testimonies from social workers on why they work for Slough.
- Exploring access to Essential Worker Housing in Slough.
- Improve the live open advert.
- Improve and speed up the recruitment process. We have signed up to the electronic DBS checking system which will now take 48 hours rather than the 12 weeks we have been experiencing recently.
- Working with specialist agencies to raise the profile of Slough and the way we market ourselves. This includes initiatives to target specialist and specific management roles as well as creative approaches to recruiting new SW staff eg overseas recruitment and recruitment from other parts of the country- initial discussions have taken place with some recruitment agencies.
- Develop an ongoing annual Newly Qualified Social Work scheme that ensures a regular stream of SW's for the future. We currently have five NQSW's who are in their Assessed and Supported Year Employment (ASYE). We plan to recruit another five year on year and will be employing a practice mentor to develop and manage an academy for new workers from September 2014.
- The practice mentor will develop stronger links with local Universities and ensure a regular pool of 3rd year students on placement who can be recruited to the NQSW scheme.
- Continue to improve the ability of Social Workers to undertake good practice. Caseloads have started to reduce with the creation of extra teams and improved workflows. We have secured extra business support to free up social workers from tasks that are not directly involved in safeguarding children.
- A comprehensive Learning and Development Programme has been introduced to ensure we have a highly trained and motivated workforce.

It is abundantly clear that there is no one 'quick fix solution' to the recruitment and retention problems in Slough. A concerted effort on a number of fronts is believed to be our best chance to bring about a gradual but steady shift away from an over reliance on agency staff and begin to attract and employ social work practitioners of the right calibre. This will cost the authority less money and bring stability and consistency for children.