

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet member children and families</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Friday, 22 November 2019</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Improvement of Children's social work practice</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Director of Children and Families</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

Non-key

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose and summary**

To approve the use of earmarked reserves to provide the opportunity to recruit to improve the quality of children's social work.

Cabinet has recognised that the council can support children's social care work further by enabling more staff to be recruited within this financial year. This is in conjunction with work that the council has already done to increase the number of social work posts, expand the early help service and family support service to work with families and business support to take some tasks off social workers.

The proposals in this report will enable the service to potentially recruit five social work posts (including a senior practitioner post) and a manager to provide further capacity that would be located in the assessment service and carry out assessment team work. This would enable some cases to be held in the assessment teams rather than in the child protection court teams and therefore lessen the pressure on social workers, particularly in the child protection court teams where we are finding it particularly difficult to recruit agency and permanent staff, despite all the work the council has done to improve the retention and recruitment offer.

## Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) **the use of earmarked reserves of up to £150k to recruit 6 children's social work posts before the end of the financial year be approved.**

## Alternative options

1. To not use the earmarked reserves for the purpose approved by cabinet. This would not enable the service to try to recruit to hard to fill social work and supervisory posts and would not enable the council to do all it could to support good quality children's social care practice.
2. To recruit to non-social work qualified posts. This could increase the overall capacity of the children's safeguarding and family support workforce but some cases must be held by qualified social workers, so recruitment whilst valuable and enabling the overall service to work in different ways with vulnerable children, young people and families would not enable the service to try to address caseloads and quality of social work.

## Key considerations

3. Cabinet has been supporting the service to try to create the conditions for good social work to flourish through a range of measures including increasing the number of social work qualified posts within the service, the number of family support workers, business support to take some tasks off social workers and begin to use technology to support social workers to undertake recording tasks in a more efficient way.
4. The Ofsted focused visit of January 2019 noted that "The pace of progress has been hampered by staff turnover and difficulties recruiting to key management positions, such as lead officer for quality assurance. There continues to be strong political and corporate support for children's services. At a time of budget pressures, elected members have recently agreed further investment in children's services."
5. The council has over the past year strengthened its approach to retention and recruitment by:
  - An enhanced market forces supplement
  - Introducing individual learning accounts for social workers
  - Rewarding "find a friend" joiners as children's social workers
  - Establishing a social work apprenticeship scheme starting in February 2020
  - Commissioning an external recruitment agency to recruit to hard to fill posts
  - Working with the regional Association of Directors of Children's Services Future Social Scheme to bring in agency workers when Herefordshire could not recruit at all.
  - Continuing to recruit and support newly qualified social workers in their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment year (our long term strategy is to grow our own)
6. Despite this Herefordshire still has a number of children's social work posts that are either filled by agency staff or are vacant. We do have more success in recruiting to posts in the assessment teams than in the child protection/court teams. This is in part due to the nature of the work currently held in the different teams. The service intends to provide an

improved way of working for children and young people who are child in need by working with these families in the assessment service. Currently this work is passed to the Child Protection/Court teams that have the greatest number of permanent vacancies. Due to the nature of the work in the child protection/court teams some agency staff have declined to join Herefordshire because of this. The budget proposal for 2020/21 include proposals for a third team in the assessment service that would provide greater capacity to work with children in need and therefore not require new cases to be transferred to the CP/Court teams. In time this would lessen the caseloads in the CP/Court teams, whilst the council still tries to retain and recruit to the establishment of these teams to provide high quality social work and therefore comparatively low caseloads.

7. At present caseloads are still higher than we would wish in some teams. Using part of the earmarked reserve approved by cabinet on 24 October 2019 would enable the service to try to address this now rather than from April 2020 when, if approved through the budget setting process, there would be further funding available.

## **Community impact**

8. The potential to recruit additional children's social care posts supports the corporate plan's objective of keeping children and young people safe and giving them a great start in life by providing additional staffing to work with vulnerable children, young people and their families. The families that will benefit from additional children's social workers will all be open to children's social care and therefore will be deemed to be requiring a service because they have been assessed at the time as suffering or at risk of suffering significant harm.
9. The recruitment would also support Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2024 objective to enable children and young people to be safe from harm by providing the potential additional capacity to work with children, young people and families and potentially lessen the need for children to be supported through child protection plans or become looked after.

## **Equality duty**

10. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Our recruitment processes support and encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds and/or with additional needs themselves and our employment policies support flexible working.
11. Staff recruited to children and families social work posts are required to pay due regard to all relevant equality duty legislation and statutory guidance.

## Resource implications

12. The earmarked reserve of £550k was approved by cabinet on 24 October 2019. It was established, subject to governance, to enable the service to start to establish an edge of care service within the financial year 2019/20 which will be subject to a separate decision. It also contained provision to recruit to a separate service, five social work posts (including a senior practitioner post) and one manager to provide additional capacity to work with child in need cases and therefore, if successful in terms of recruitment, reduce the caseloads for some current staff.

<b>Revenue</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>Future Years</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Staffing costs</b>	<b>Up to £150,000</b>	<b>To be covered in base budget</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>£150,000</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Up to £150,000</b>	<b>To be covered in base budget</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>£000</b>	<b>£150,000</b>

## Legal implications

13. There are no specific legal implications in respect of the recommendation. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the council to promote and safeguard the welfare of children in need in its area.

## Risk management

14. The inability of Herefordshire Council to fill all its children's social work posts is a key risk to creating the conditions for good social work to flourish and enabling staff to have consistent caseloads. A number of measures to retain staff and to recruit both permanent and agency staff have been put in place. Despite this there are still risks in place which this use of earmarked reserves will attempt in part to address.
15. There is a risk that the money will not be spent because recruitment will not be successful. The council is constantly advertising and has recently launched a bespoke micro site to provide an enhanced recruitment approach.
16. There is a risk that funding will not be provided as part of the 2020/21 budget. This is being considered and is explicitly part of the additional investment being proposed to improve children's social work as part of the budget consultation. If funding was not provided money would have to be found by cutting services elsewhere in the council, including potentially children and family services. Consideration has been given to trying

to recruit to temporary positions pending confirmation of next year's budget but this is not recommended given the need for a permanent workforce.

## **Consultees**

17. None

## **Appendices**

None

## **Background papers**

None