

Joint Negotiating Committee (Employers')



SOCIAL WORKER EMPLOYEE REFERRAL SCHEME - CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Contact Officer: Ayesha Shokar (HR Business Partner) - Tel: 01908 253397

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To obtain agreement to introduce a 'Employee Referral Policy' for hard to recruit posts, reimbursing both the referrer and all permanently employed qualified Social Workers in Children's Services that are referred.
- 1.2 Several organisations including many Local Authorities operate a 'Employee Referral or Refer a Friend' scheme which is a great incentive for existing employees to refer known experts to our organisation, thus reducing the cost of recruitment fees and supporting the organisation to recruit and retain talent.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The aim is for the scheme to become active from 1 October 2020 in line with the Autumn Social Worker recruitment campaign allowing current employees across the organisation to refer a friend and receive up to **£1,000** in payment each. Depending on the success of the application, payment will be issued in two parts to both parties:
 - (a) £500 following a successful appointment; and
 - (b) £500 upon completion of 1 year in the post.
- 2.2 This is non-contractual and does not form part of employees Terms and Conditions of employment.
- 2.3 It is proposed that this is introduced initially on a trial basis with a review being undertaken in March 2021 to measure the impact of this proposal on the recruitment and retention of social care staff in Children's Services.
 - (a) Only external applicants applying for a Social Worker position in Children's Services will be considered to qualify under the scheme. This scheme will not apply to referrals made for existing employees of Milton Keynes Council as an internal move to Children's Services.

3. Issues and Choices

- 3.1 The social care workforce supports the most vulnerable in our society to enable them to live healthy, independent and safe lives within their community. This is both a highly rewarding and very challenging role. Milton Keynes has attracted many talented and committed people to work in social care, but we continue to face a shortage of permanent social care staff.
- 3.2 A national shortage of Social Workers in Children's Services in particular has increased the competition to recruit from a limited and reducing pool of staff. We recognise that the children's workforce is critical to achieving our ambitious plans for improving outcomes for children and their families.
- 3.3 The Council's ability to continuously improve is intrinsically inked to:
- (a) the quality and capacity of the people who lead, manage, deliver and support our services; and
 - (b) how effectively people work together across organisational and professional boundaries to combine their expertise.
- 3.4 Milton Keynes has a lot to offer, along with being a great place to practice and develop as a professional social worker. The service is due an Ofsted inspection with a trajectory to 'Good' and this is an important feature which shows practitioners that Milton Keynes is a stable and safe place to work. The workload is balanced and appropriate and the training opportunities are substantial.
- 3.5 The level of demand across social care services for all client groups continues to rise. To respond, we need to build, develop and maintain an engaged workforce with sufficient capacity and the right skills, knowledge and capabilities to meet a range of needs, which are often complex, in a flexible way and reduce reliance on agency and relief staff to help meet that demand.
- 3.6 Permanent, committed staff better enables effective team working, which requires team members to recognise and build on each other's strengths which enhances service delivery. Constant changes can unsettle a team and the regular reallocation of cases and/or having to induct or update new workers on cases reduces the quality of support. Regular changes in teams also impact on a manager's ability to lead and improve practice within their teams as they will have to spend a lot of their time getting to know new workers strengths and capabilities to ensure they are confident to support children, families, adults, older people and carers.
- 3.7 The recruitment and retention of Social Workers is extremely challenging for many Local Authorities. This benefit will be added to the existing financial and non-financial range of benefits available to Social Workers to enhance the offer and promote the Council as an employer of choice.
- 3.8 At present the children's social worker salary range is £29k-£42k but no 'golden hello' payment is offered. There is a market supplement policy in place for certain levels of social workers, in hard to recruit services within Children's Services. The market

supplement is not extended to all social workers across Children's Services. The market supplement is an annual payment of 4k, paid in two instalments per year and is strictly dependent on meeting qualifying conditions based on absence, performance etc.

- 3.9 Qualified Social Workers are required to register with the HCPC in order to practice. The HCPC is the statutory regulator for several health and care professions. The aim of the HCPC is to protect patient safety by keeping a register of health and care professionals who meet HCPC standards. The registration fee is paid by the Social Worker at the point of registration and is for the two-year registration cycle, currently costing £180 (£90 per year). Reimbursement of the HCPC registration fee is currently met by Milton Keynes Council for all qualified social workers in children's and Adults services.
- 3.10 Payments for the Employee referral Scheme will be made directly through payroll, evidence of the referral and approval from the line manager and HRBP will be required before payment requests are made to payroll. The Gov.uk website confirms reimbursement is subject to tax and NI deductions for both parties.
- 3.11 All applicable posts within Children's Social Care will be marked on the job advert on the Council jobs page. Applicants submit their application and confirm they saw the vacancy by a referral. Once the referred employee has worked 1 full month both parties will receive an initial payment of £500 in the next pay-run - then upon completion of 1 year in the post, both parties will receive the final payment of £500 each.
- 3.12 The proposed reimbursement has been put to the Council's trade unions for their comment. Comments received will be reported to the meeting.
- 3.13 The trade unions are being consulted on this issue and a verbal update will be given at the meeting.

4. Cost Implications

- 4.1 The Council does not currently operate an Employee Referral scheme. The inability to recruit and retain permanent Social Workers has a huge impact on the cost as agency workers are significantly more expensive than permanent staff.
- 4.2 With reductions in government grants and increases in population, all services are required to meet care needs within a reduced budget. The Employee Referral Scheme is being proposed to support in recruiting and retaining a staff group that has significant recruitment and retention challenges.
- 4.3 The estimated cost of reimbursement based on the current vacancy total of 6 positions, would be a total of £12,000 assuming all vacancies are filled by Employee Referrals. The cost difference between employing a Social Worker within Children's Social Care when compared to using agency cover is £16k per annum. The cost of appointing a qualified social worker through the use of a permanent recruitment agency is 15% of the salary, approx. 6k fee to the agency per appointment. If all six vacancies were filled via a recruitment agency this would be a cost of 36k.

5. **Conditions of the Scheme**

- 5.1 Only current, existing employees of Milton Keynes Council (MKC) can refer a friend.
- 5.2 Only external applicants applying for Social Worker positions in Children's Services will be considered. No existing employees of Milton Keynes Council will be considered under this policy as an internal move to Children's Services.
- 5.3 All incentive posts within Children's Social Care will be marked on the job advert on the Council's job page. Applicants submit their application and confirm they saw the vacancy by your referral.
- 5.4 The successful candidate must have Social Work qualification and HCPC registration. The payment relates only to successful qualified social workers. It does not apply to support worker posts, newly qualified posts or any other vacancies within Milton Keynes Council.
- 5.5 Referrals cannot be accepted retrospectively.
- 5.6 Referrals can only be accepted for people eligible to work in the UK.
- 5.7 Only those referrals that result in a permanent placement of the individual will qualify for the payment.
- 5.8 The person referring must obtain prior consent from the potential candidate before referring.
- 5.9 Payment is subject to tax and NI deduction and will be paid to both parties after a successful appointment and after being in the post for 1 year. Payment is not applicable if the employment is terminated for any reason during the guarantee period.
- 5.10 Payments will be paid directly into the bank account to which the referrer and new employee receives their salary.
- 5.11 No alternative to the payment is available.
- 5.12 There are no limits to the number of referrals made.
- 5.13 Milton Keynes Council's decision on payments to be made is final.

Background Papers: None