

<i>item:</i>	6
<i>report:</i>	CYP21/09

RECRUITMENT OF SOCIAL WORK STAFF - UPDATE

By Bill Alexander

Summary

This report provides an update for members on the level of vacancies for qualified Social Workers across the authority.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At previous meetings of the Joint Committee, and also at the Highland Council's Housing & Social Work Committee, it has been reported that there has been a high level of vacancies during 2008 for qualified social workers in various Teams across the Council area. The Committee has requested an update on this situation.
- 1.2 During the last year, it became apparent that the response rate to advertisements for Social Work vacancies had declined considerably. Analysis of the reasons for the changing circumstances suggested two obvious factors for this:
 - A number of authorities, including other authorities in the north of Scotland, had implemented job evaluation, and as a consequence they have more attractive pay rates.
 - The current recession was constraining the ability of people to buy and sell property, and it had become more difficult for staff to relocate to the Highlands from elsewhere in the country.
- 1.3 Not including Team Managers, there are 112 qualified social worker posts in Children & Family Teams. This includes all children's fieldwork services, including the Fostering & Adoption, Youth Action and Disability Teams.
- 1.4 At the start of this year, there were 19.8 full-time equivalent vacancies across these posts, with a further 4.6 fte posts covered by agency staff.

2. Developments

- 2.1 The Highland Council wrote to all staff in February 2009 with the outcome of the job evaluation exercise. This brought Social Workers in Highland into line with colleagues in other authorities that had previously implemented job evaluation, involving an annual salary increase of up to £8,000.
- 2.2 In addition, the previous post of Senior Practitioner was deleted, and a new post was created with an enhanced job description and an increased salary by around £5,000.

- 2.3 A further round of external advertising took place in April. While this resulted in a small number of applications, and more than in the previous round of advertising in 2008, posts in some locations did not attract applicants. The ongoing Council website advert has though attracted further responses. Interviews are presently taking place, which will allow posts to be filled in the near future.
- 2.4 The redeployment of former Senior Practitioners has also enabled some vacant social worker posts to be filled. Three vacancies have been created at the higher grade, and these are about to go to advert.
- 2.5 A number of strategies continue to be used to ensure that priority cases, including looked after children and children at risk of harm, receive a social work service:
- Re-allocation of cases if individual Teams are under particular pressure.
 - Lateral support across Teams.
 - The use of experienced unqualified staff in appropriate roles, such as Assistant Social Worker, covering a range of tasks with children and families, short of assessment and lead professional responsibilities.
 - Recruitment to trainee positions, which provides an experienced worker in the short-term, and achieves a qualified worker in the longer-term.
 - Innovative use of partner services, including from the voluntary sector, to respond in appropriate situations.

3. Update on Vacancies

- 3.1 At the most recent audit, at the start of May 2009, there were 17.7 fte vacancies for Social Workers across all Children & Family Teams. This is a reduction of 2.1 fte on the January position.
- 3.2 There are a further 3.4 posts filled by agency staff.

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is asked to note developments, and comment on the issues raised in this report.

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