

Decision Maker: Executive

Date: 20th May 2015

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Key

Title: **RELEASE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND PROCUREMENT STRATEGY TO SUPPORT THE STEP UP TO SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMME**

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Chief Officer: Director of Human Resources,
Executive Director of Education, Care & Health Services

Ward: All

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 On 1 December 2014 the Department for Education wrote to all Directors of Children's Services to notify them that cohort 4 of the Step Up To Social Work Programme has been agreed and invited consortium of Local Authorities to bid to participate in the programme.
 - 1.2 The Council has taken part in cohorts 2 and 3 of the Department for Education's Step Up To Social Work programme and have signed up to take part in cohort 4.
 - 1.3 This report is seeking approval for the release of the 'ring-fenced' funding for cohort 4. The funding is released in instalments over two financial years: 2015/16 and 2016/17.
 - 1.4 As part of the delivery of cohort 4, LB Bromley is required to commission a higher education institute (HEI)/university. This report sets out the procurement strategy for commissioning the HEI and the Executive are asked to approve the strategy.
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2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

2.1 **The Executive is asked to:**

- (i) **Consider the content of the report**

(ii) Approve the release of the 'ring-fenced' funding for 2015/16 and 2016/17 for cohort 4 of the Step Up To Social Work Programme and agree the procurement strategy to deliver cohort 4.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing Policy:
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People:
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated Cost: £1,211,750
 2. Ongoing costs: Non-Recurring Cost:
 3. Budget head/performance centre: Safeguarding and Social Care
 4. Total current budget for this head: £Nil
 5. Source of funding: Department for Education – Step Up To Social Work Programme Grant
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): 1 FTE
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 1 FTE
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-Statutory - Government Guidance:
 2. Call-in: Applicable:
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): N/A
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

Background

- 3.1 Step Up To Social Work ('Step Up') is a Department for Education (DfE) funded initiative that started initially as a pilot in 2010 as a new accelerated work based entry route into children's social work. The programme was developed in response to recognised recruitment issues, plus concerns that qualifying programmes were not consistently preparing graduates for the realities of practice upon qualification, particularly in front line child care services. Step Up is designed to attract high calibre, professionals into children's social work and enables employers to work closely with their chosen higher education provider to ensure that the programme produces skilled, confident and capable social workers for front line child care teams. Due to the programme being a resounding success the DfE agreed to fund further cohorts of the programme and it now has national coverage.
- 3.2 The programme is only accessible to Local Authorities who come together to form a Regional Partnership (RP). Within the RP, there must be one authority who takes the lead. The lead Authority's primary role is to receive the entire grant funding for the programme on behalf of all the Authorities in the partnership. It is also the lead authority's responsibility to manage the project and contract with the higher education institute.
- 3.3 The Council first took part in the Step Up programme at cohort 2 (2011). LB Bromley took the lead Authority role in a partnership of three local authorities known as the South East London RP. Cohort 3 of the Step Up programme began in 2013 and the Council once again took the lead in an expanded partnership of six local authorities (the Surrey and South East London RP).
- 3.4 13 students successfully completed cohort 2. Bromley Council recruited 6 of these students and 4 are still in employment. Across the whole partnership, 12 students were recruited and 10 remain as social workers within the partnership. 1 student was offered a social work post within the partnership, but declined the offer and took up employment elsewhere. So far, 27 students have successfully completed cohort 3 and Bromley has recruited 3 of these, with another one in the pipeline. The recruitment and selection process is still ongoing in the partnership.
- 3.5 For clarification LB Bromley and the South East London/Surrey and South East London RPs were not part of national cohort 1.
- 3.6 Due to the continuing success of the Step Up To Social Work Programme, the DfE gained ministerial support in order to fund a fourth national cohort. An announcement was made by the DfE of its intentions to support a fourth cohort on 1 December 2014. Any partnerships that were interested in participating had to respond by 13 February 2015.
- 3.7 The Council has agreed to participate in cohort 4, taking the lead authority role once again. The partnership is known as the Surrey and South East London RP and now includes the London Boroughs of Bromley, Bexley, Lewisham, Lambeth and Southwark, the Royal Borough of Greenwich and Surrey County Council. LB Lambeth are a new partner authority for cohort 4. The partnership is looking to recruit 35 trainees across the seven Authorities. Bromley are looking to take on 6 students; LB Lewisham – 4; LB Bexley – 4; LB Lambeth – 3; LB Southwark – 4; RB Greenwich – 6; Surrey CC – 8. The partnership have confidence in Bromley Council to lead the next programme having successfully managed the last two programmes on behalf of the partnership.
- 3.8 The timetable for initiating cohort 4 has been set by the DfE in order that trainees can commence studies in January 2016 (see Table 2)

Funding for cohort 4

- 3.9 As the lead authority, the Council is responsible for accessing and administering the funding on behalf of the partnership to deliver cohort 4 of Step Up. It is estimated that the Council will receive total funding of £1,211,750 over a period of two financial years: 2015/16 and 2016/17 (based on taking 35 trainees onto the programme).
- 3.10 As with cohort 2 and 3, funding is released in stages as certain milestones are met. Table 1 below sets out the timescales for the release of funding. The partnership continues to operate under a Memorandum of Understanding which states that all decisions regarding the detailed use of the funding to meet the objectives must be agreed by all partner Authorities. The project is managed by a Steering Board who oversees and monitors the operational implementation and actively participates in the strategic development of the project to make sure that it is delivered to the highest standards and to timescales. A new Steering Board involving all cohort 4 partners has been established which is chaired by a LB Bromley representative (Head of Workforce Development). They will ensure that financial monitoring and procurement follow Bromley's procedures and regulations.
- 3.11 The DfE grant funding sits within the ECHS department budget.
- 3.12 The Executive are therefore asked to agree the release of this funding for financial years 2015/16 and 2016/17 to be used for the delivery of the Step Up programme cohort 4.

Procurement strategy for a higher education institute

- 3.13 One of the continuing key benefits of the programme is that partnerships are able to work closely with their chosen higher education institute (HEI) to create a bespoke course that better reflects the world of work within the partner organisations.
- 3.14 As the lead Authority in the cohort 4 partnership, LB Bromley is responsible for the Tender process to commission a HEI to work with the partnership to develop, deliver and evaluate the training element of the programme. Due to the funding arrangements discussed it is necessary for LB Bromley as the lead Authority to make a single contract with the HEI who is awarded the contract. LB Bromley have overall responsibility of managing the contract and subsequently making the necessary payments under the agreed payment schedule. This was also the case in both cohorts 2 and 3.
- 3.15 The estimated whole life contract value for procuring the HEI service for the cohort 4 contract is £408,345. (see Table 1 for calculation of this figure).
- 3.16 It is proposed that this contract should begin on 29 June 2015 and end on 30 April 2017 (22 months). This includes the recruitment & selection of the students, designing the course, delivering the course and closing-down and evaluating the course.
- 3.17 An initial specification has been developed and agreed by partners to procure the HEI. Any changes required to the specification during the contract period will be discussed and agreed by the Steering Board. The contractor will not be given access to any Council facilities or equipment.
- 3.18 3 representatives from across the partnership will be involved in the process of evaluating the submissions, in order to come to the decision on who to award the contract to.

Table 1 – Breakdown of cohort 4 funding timetable

Objective	Funding for cohort 4	Total funding for the Surrey and South East London Regional Partnership (based on 35 students)	When the funding will be received (based on 35 students)
Administration and Management of the Programme	£48,000	£48,000	£48,000 – approx. June 2015. (Once DfE have seen evidence of Memorandum of Understanding and contract with HEI)
Bursary	£19,833 per student	£694,155	£46,277 per month (15 instalments from Jan 2016 – March 2017)
Training Costs (University Fees)	£11,667 per student	£408,345	£27,223 per month (15 instalments from Jan 2016 – March 2017)
Placement Supervision	£1,750 per student	£61,250	£4,083.45 per month (15 instalments from Jan 2016 – March 2017)
Total		£1,211,750	

Table 2 – Timetable for the delivery of cohort 4

Step Up to Social Work candidate application form goes live	16 March 2015
Application window closes	1 May
Short-listing of application forms	11 May – 5 June
Invite candidates to assessment centre	From 5 June
Joint assessment centre with Local Authorities and HEI	29 June - 3 July
Successful applicants invited to confirm place on course	From July
References and checks completed	July-December
Partnerships and their chosen HEI develop the course	July-December
Step Up to Social Work programme starts	January 2016

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Step Up to Social Work Programme will assist the Council in delivering its commitment to prioritise the safeguarding and protection of our most vulnerable children and young people, as stated in Building a Better Bromley. The scheme also forms a key part of our recruitment strategy.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Confirmation of the level of funding has been received by the DfE, and will be £1,211,750 spread over two financial years (2015/16 and 2016/17). Funding is broken down in Table 1 and assumes that 35 students will be recruited and take part in the programme.

Expenditure will take place over two financial years covering the course and its evaluation. All costs associated with this programme will be picked up through the grant and there will not be a call on core funding to run the programme. Should the level of applicants reduce then funding per trainee will be affected accordingly. Any funding that has not been used by 31st March 2017 to support the programme must be returned to DfE under the terms of the grant.

The report accurately reflects the procurement strategy arrived at following discussions between the various interested parties at officer level and reflects the requirements of the EU legislation as it applies to section 3 Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The late notification of available funding coupled with a need to have the necessary arrangements in place by the end of the summer, necessitates the Council runs a number of authorisation processes in parallel, if the arrangements are to be secured within the necessary timeframe. While normally tender action would not commence until grant funding has been formally accepted in to the Council's budgets, the risks of issuing tender documents prior to this acceptance has been managed by the inclusion of caveats in the Invitation to Tender document to cover the cancellation of the tender process should the required authorisations not be obtained.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Council policy and EU regulations on a fair and transparent procurement procedure will be followed as will adherence to Council Financial Regulations. Although there is a Partnership between other Councils who will be involved and contribute to the decision making of the procurement exercise, Bromley is taking the lead role and the procurement will be subject to Bromley Financial Regulations.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

Whilst the Council's recruitment and retention strategy for children's social workers has successfully helped to reduce the vacancy levels within this area of work, it is important that we take advantage of any opportunities to increase the supply of high calibre social workers available to work within Bromley.

<http://cds.bromley.gov.uk/documents/s50026482/Childrens%20Social%20Care%20Recruitment%20Retention%20StrategyPART%201%20REPORT%20TEMPLATE.pdf>

The DfE provides RPs with funding to manage the project and they expect RPs to use this funding to employ a Step Up To Social Work Co-ordinator. The partnership established this post in 2011 on a full-time fixed term basis. The post sits within the HR division in the Workforce Development team at Bromley. The post is managed by Bromley's Workforce Development Manager. The Surrey and South East London partnership has agreed to extend the term of the current Step Up Co-ordinator post to continue to provide support for cohort 4. The Step Up Co-ordinator will continue to have day to day management of the project and management of the contract with the HEI, with overall responsibility held by the Workforce Development Manager.

Non-Applicable Sections:	N/A
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	RES13106 - Release of Government Funding and Procurement Strategy to Support the Step Up To Social Work Programme CS14078 - Children's Social Care Recruitment & Retention Strategy