



People, Performance and Development Committee  
29 September 2015

**Social Worker and Occupational Therapist 'Refer a Friend' incentive scheme**

**Purpose of the report:**

To seek endorsement from the Committee to implement an Adult Social Care and Children, Schools and Families incentive scheme to encourage permanent recruitment to Social Worker and Occupational Therapy vacancies within these services.

Surrey County Council employees who refer a friend/acquaintance to a vacancy will receive a 'reward' on certain conditions.

**Recommendations:**

It is recommended that the Committee endorses and supports:

- a. The implementation of the 'Refer a Friend' incentive scheme.
- b. The initial 'awareness' launch of the scheme at the Surrey County Council Adult Social Care Social Work Conference, 1 October 2015.
- c. The development, by officers, of transparent conditions for the scheme which maximise benefits to the Council and minimises any potential or inadvertent abuse.

**Introduction:**

1. Demographic changes mean that there is an increasing demand for Adult Social Care (ASC) and Children's Services. Meeting the increase in demand with appropriately trained and qualified staff is a national challenge, particularly in relation to the recruitment of qualified Social Workers and Occupational Therapists.
2. There are many influences contributing to this, such as financial restraint in the public sector and changing service requirements. Factors

particular to Surrey, including its vibrant economy, relatively high levels of employment, buoyant housing market and proximity to London, increase this challenge.

3. Surrey County Council's (SCC) Adult Social Care and Children's Services experience difficulty in recruiting to qualified Social Worker and Occupational Therapy vacancies.
4. Appendix 1 shows the current level of Social Worker and Occupational Therapy vacancies in ASC, and average time vacant. The current total number of vacancies is 43; the average time vacant is six months.
5. In order to meet the requirements of the service, both long term and locum agency workers are used to cover vacancies.
6. The use of agency workers increases staffing costs (a comparison of employment costs for agency workers and permanent Senior Social workers is shown in Appendix 1). On average, a locum Senior Social worker costs over £16,000 more per annum than a permanent staff member. A permanent Senior Social Worker secured through a recruitment agency will cost the Council approximately £5,000 in 'finder's fees'.
7. In order to improve recruitment to these positions in ASC, various work strands are already under way, including the ASC Work Force Strategy; the Children's Social Work Recruitment and Retention Strategy and review of the Council's Pay and Reward Strategy.
8. This is a complex and long-term issue requiring more than one form of solution. For this reason an innovative approach to enhance recruitment - the 'Refer a Friend' incentive scheme is proposed.

#### **Proposed incentive scheme**

9. The scheme will encourage all SCC employees to refer a family member/friend/acquaintance to ASC vacancies for Social Workers or Occupational Therapists. Following standard recruitment processes and the completion of the six month probation period, the referring employee will receive £500 in recognition of their successful referral. On completion of one year of employment with SCC, the referring employee will receive a further £500 recognition payment.
10. There are examples of similar schemes operating in other organisations and other councils. For example, Buckinghamshire County Council offers £50 to the 'referrer' when the applicant attends an interview, followed by £500 if the applicant is appointed and completes their six month probation. A locum recruitment agency offers £200 to 'referrers' when an applicant is accepted and stays in a role for four weeks.
11. Anticipated benefits of the scheme:

- Increased exposure of vacancies through SCC employee's own networks, professional and personal e.g. Facebook, Twitter, cross-authority professional groups.
  - 'Better fit' of potential candidates through referral from current employees/ 'Peer vetting'.
  - Positive but realistic background information passed on to potential candidates.
  - Development of a culture within SCC of 'referring friends,' and positive 'word of mouth' discussions about SCC and the Social Work/Occupation Therapy professions.
  - Current employees feel more engaged in recruitment.
  - Current employees are recognised for their contribution.
  - Potential to roll out to other areas of the Council where recruitment is difficult, if successful.
  - Low risk/low cost opportunity to increase recruitment to Social Worker and Occupational Therapy vacancies.
12. Proposed key elements of the conditions of the scheme can be found at Appendix 2.

<b>Conclusions:</b>
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13. The recruitment of Social Workers and Occupational Therapists in Surrey remains a challenge and the launch of this incentive scheme would provide an alternative recruitment option.
14. There is minimal risk attached to this scheme as it will be funded within current budgets and if there are no positions filled through the scheme, there will be no payments made. However, it has the potential to realise financial savings on the cost of agency finder's fees and locum costs. It will also engage current staff in recruitment and enhance their sense of belonging to the organisation.
15. The scheme also has the potential to improve retention, as current staff will provide a realistic view of working within ASC, therefore new staff joining the organisation will have a greater understanding of their role.

### **Financial and value for money implications**

16. The current cost of appointing an experienced Social Worker via a permanent recruitment agency is approximately £5,000 (based on 15% of starting salary for an S9 Senior Social Worker).
17. This scheme, if successful, should reduce the amount of appointments made via these agencies. Therefore there is a potential saving of approximately £4,000 per appointment.

18. Further potential savings could be achieved if the level of vacancies decrease, and less locum Social Workers/Occupational Therapists are required; approximately £16,000 per annum for a Senior Social Worker.
19. There will be no financial risk associated with this scheme if there are no successful appointments.
20. As with agency fees, the Refer a Friend incentive will be paid from the staffing establishment under spend from the relevant team budget.
21. The Section 151 Officer confirms the additional costs of these pay changes will be met from the service budget. This will cause budget pressure but will not be material.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

22. At this point no adverse impacts have been identified. This scheme will follow established recruitment policy and process.

### **Risk Management Implications**

23. There is a potential risk that Refer a Friend rewards are paid to people or in circumstances outside the purpose of the scheme i.e. paid to current SCC employees when a permanent Social Worker/Occupational Therapist has been employed for six months and one year. For example, to current longer term agency workers. To mitigate this risk we will develop clear and robust conditions for the scheme in collaboration with HR and Legal colleagues.

### **Legal Implications**

24. A local authority may agree such reasonable terms of remuneration for staff as they think fit. In deciding whether to adopt the proposals in this report, Members will wish to be satisfied that they are reasonable and supported by the financial case, as set out in paragraphs 16 to 20, above.

<b>Next steps:</b>
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25. Pending the decision of the Committee next steps would include:
  - On 1 October 2015 ASC will be hosting a Social Work Conference, which would be an ideal time to raise awareness of this initiative. In the region of 150 Social Workers will attend, representing a large number of the target audience for the scheme.
  - Further discussions with Children's Services as to the appropriate timing for introduction of the scheme in the recruitment process.
  - Development of final conditions for the scheme.
  - On-going communication and engagement with SCC staff about the scheme.

- On-going monitoring of take up of the scheme.

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**Sources/background papers:**

- Appendix 1 – Current Social Worker and Occupational Therapy vacancies and cost comparison with agency staff
- Appendix 2 – Proposed key conditions of the Refer a Friend Scheme

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