

APPROVAL TO PROCURE CONTRACTS FOR TEMPORARY AGENCY STAFF

COMMENTS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD

At its meeting on 26 May 2022, the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board considered the report and unanimously agreed to support the recommendations to the Executive.

In response to questions from members of the Board, the following points were confirmed:

- The £5m agency spend included all the associated costs such as holiday pay entitlements. However, travel expenses were separate which was the same for employees of the Council. As agency staff were employed by the agency, pension costs would sit with the agency and not the Council.
- The attraction and retention framework allowed for payments of up to 15% on top of the basic salary for social workers to try to make the pay offer more attractive. It was recognised that public sector pay had fallen in real terms since 2010. Pay was a major factor in attracting and retaining staff and the increase in cost of living could increase the risk of losing more staff to agencies due to higher pay offers. However, other factors were also important in attracting and retaining staff and adjustments such as condensed working hours and more flexibility around where staff worked from were being explored. The emphasis in the People Strategy was to be an employer of choice and a good place to work, where employees could thrive.
- In relation to the adult social care reforms, there was concern nationally as to whether the new system could be fully staffed. It had been estimated that there could be a shortage of approximately 4000 social workers across the country which would be needed to enable these reforms to progress. The Chairman of the Adults and Community Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee requested that the Committee be kept informed if the number of agency social workers for adult social care escalated so that the Committee could support officers with identifying a solution.
- As of 26 April 2022, there were 666 staff employed across the social care qualified and unqualified posts within Adult Care and Children's Services and 80 agency workers. In Legal Services, there was eight agency workers compared to 61 employed members of staff.
- There were processes in place to 'grow our own' within the Council. There had been 13 social worker apprentices taken on in 2021 and another 13 were in the process of being recruited for 2022. A number of trainee lawyers had also been taken on in 2021 and 2022.

The Board recognised the work being done to attract and retain staff but felt that more needed to be done to reduce the £5m spend on agency staff. The Board requested that further information be brought to a future meeting on the Attraction and Retention Framework and setting out proposals to help reduce the agency spend, including increasing the number of 'grow our own'.

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