

REPORT TO:	EXECUTIVE CABINET
DATE:	20 December 2023
SUBJECT:	GM CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKER WORKFORCE PLEDGE
LEAD OFFICER:	Tracy Brennand, Assistant Director, People and Workforce Development
REPORT SUMMARY:	<p>The report outlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The introduction of the GM Pledge which sets out a series of commitments relating to the use of agency Children's Social Workers across Greater Manchester with the ultimate aim of providing stability for vulnerable children and young people and tackling the high use of agency workers. • Recommendations for the adoption and implementation of the GM Pledge in Tameside Council, effective from 1 November 2023.
RECOMMENDATIONS:	<p>That Executive Cabinet be recommended to agree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) That all commitments contained within the GM Pledge (<i>Appendix 1</i>) are adhered to and implemented in the timeframes set out within this report. (ii) That the organisation continues to engage with the requirements and agreements set out within the GM Pledge for an initial 12 month period with review at that time.
REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:	<p>Across the region there are significant numbers of children who are experiencing changes of Social Worker. Local authorities in Greater Manchester have come together with a collective ambition to improve the experience and lives of children and families by providing a stable workforce. This, in turn, will support our organisation to reduce the costs associated with employee turnover and high numbers of agency workers. The GM Pledge also contributes towards tackling children's social care budget pressures caused by the high cost of agency staff.</p> <p>It is recognised that a collective approach is required to tackle this issue.</p>
ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:	<p>The current difficulties with recruitment of permanent Social Workers has led to rise in the use of agency workers across Children's Social Care. Other local authorities are facing the same challenges. The result is a market that allows agency workers to move easily between organisations, often for higher rates of pay. The commitments within the GM Pledge aim to address this situation by primarily introducing standard rates across GM authorities. An alternative to this approach is to continue to face rising challenges associated with the use of agency Social Workers. This includes lack of continuity of care for children and families within Tameside and excessive costs.</p>
FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: (Authorised by Section 151 Officer)	<p>Difficulties with permanent recruitment have resulted in high levels of agency social workers at Tameside. There are currently 61 agency social workers with a full year forecast spend of £3.890m against a budget of £3.225m, giving an overspend of £0.665m. This is a pressure felt nationally along with GM colleagues. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care found Agency Social Workers caused a pressure of over £100m nationally and 44% of respondents</p>

stated that there was never or rarely sufficient social workers in the right places to effectively support children, resulting in greater risk for children and families, higher caseloads and increased waiting lists and delays leading to higher costs.

Role	No.	Hourly Rate			FYE Risk £	Saving / Cost Avoidance £
		Tameside Current £	GM Pledge Max £	Risk £		
Team Manager	1	40	46	6	10,656	
	2	42	46	4	14,208	
	8	45	46	1	14,208	
	1	48	46	0	0	-3,552
	1	52	46	0	0	-10,656
	13				39,072	-14,208
Senior Practitioners / Practice Managers	2	37	43	6	21,312	0
	1	42	43	1	1,776	0
	2	45	43	0	0	-7,104
	5				23,088	-7,104
Social Worker	21	35	40	5	186,480	0
	3	38	40	2	10,656	0
	18	40	40	0	0	0
	1	42	40	0	0	-3,552
	43				197,136	-3,552
	61				259,296	-24,864

There are currently 5 Social Workers who are being paid above the maximum rates in the GM Pledge, who if moved to the threshold would realise a full year cost reduction of £0.027m. There is a risk that current or new social workers would look to receive the maximum rate. If all currently social workers did this there would be a full year increase of £0.282m. Contract negotiations would be expected to maintain the majority of social workers below these maximum levels.

By looking to control the market this should reduce the turnover of permanent and agency staff, improving the level of care provided to children and decrease the overspend on agency social workers. It is recognised this will take time to embed and realise cost benefits as a result of the pledge.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:
(Authorised by Monitoring
Officer)**

There are no legal issues arising from the proposals contained in the report. Whilst any agency contract has to comply with the Agency Worker Regulations 2010 and associated Guidance the recommendations of the report do not contravene the requirements of the Regulations.

RISK MANAGEMENT:

The GM Pledge is overseen by Directors of Children's Services who are responsible and accountable for ensuring that service managers, HR, Managed Service Providers and agency suppliers implement the GM Pledge in a timely and appropriate manner. The outcomes of the GM Pledge will be monitored and reviewed by the Director of Children's Services alongside the Assistant Director People and

Workforce Development.

EQUALITIES:

The aim of the GM Pledge is to create a stable workforce and drive an overall reduction in the use of agency workers for the benefit of children and families in Tameside. An assessment has been made of impact to existing agency workers and this will be managed as set out within the report. Changes will apply across the agency workforce and will not impact any individual based on personal characteristics.

LINKS TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES:

The GM Pledge is being introduced with the primary purpose of improving the experience and outcomes for children and families within our social care service. This is a key priority within our Corporate Plan. The GM Pledge will specifically contribute towards providing the best start in life for children, and creating resilient families and supportive networks.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer Jennifer Tyson (Head of HR Strategy and Operations)

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Details of appendices attached to the report:

Appendix 1 – GM Pledge

Appendix 2 – Manager's briefing

Appendix 3 – Frequently Asked Questions

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Senior leaders across all 10 Greater Manchester boroughs including Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services, HR Directors and the GM Children's Board have agreed to introduce a GM Pledge in Children's Social Care from 1 November 2023.
- 1.2 Local government is facing significant recruitment challenges across all areas, with a particular challenge relating to the recruitment and retention of Social Workers. This has led to a buoyant agency market which allows agency workers to demand higher pay rates, and to move easily between organisations. The result is instability for children and families, instability within the workforce, and rising cost pressures.
- 1.3 The GM Pledge sets out a series of commitments related to the use of agency social workers across Greater Manchester with the ultimate aim of providing stability for vulnerable children and young people through a reduction in the use of agency workers.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE PLEDGE

- 2.1 Across the region there are significant numbers of children who are experiencing changes of Social Worker. Local authorities across Greater Manchester have come together to realise a collective ambition to improve the experience and lives of children and families through the provision of a stable workforce.
- 2.2 This, in turn, will support Tameside Council to reduce the costs associated with employee turnover and high numbers of agency workers. The GM Pledge also contributes towards tackling children's social care budget pressures caused by the high cost of agency staff.
- 2.3 The GM Pledge recognises the need to respond to these challenges collectively and in co-operation, providing clear protocols and mechanism of control.

3 SCOPE

- 3.1 The GM Pledge covers agency workers within Children's Social Care professional teams. Job titles vary across local authorities but for clarity the following roles within Tameside will be included:
 - Team Managers
 - Senior Practitioners
 - Practice Managers
 - Social Workers
 - Independent Reviewing Officers
- 3.2 All 10 local authorities that make up Greater Manchester are signed up to the GM Pledge. This includes the following local authorities alongside Tameside Council:
 - Bolton
 - Bury
 - Manchester
 - Oldham
 - Rochdale
 - Salford
 - Stockport
 - Trafford
 - Wigan

4 PLEDGE AIMS

- 4.1 The following aims have been set out and will be monitored throughout the initial 12 month period to measure success and outcomes:
- To provide better care and support for vulnerable children and young people - an over reliance on agency social workers rather than permanent employees means that children and families may have a more unstable social care experience, which can leave them feeling frustrated and unsupported.
 - The increasing use of agency social workers is contributing to workforce challenges across Greater Manchester and proving to be costly to local authority budgets.
 - Agency social workers also cost more to the local authority than a permanent social worker reducing levels of resource that may otherwise be available for wider services.
 - To reduce the excess cost and profiteering of some agencies so that vital funds can be reinvested back into support for children and families.
 - Setting shared standards around things like references and experience will also improve the quality of workers.
 - By working together across Greater Manchester on the Pledge, local authorities will be able to hold one another to account and provide mutual support and assistance to other GM local authorities.
- 4.2 The introduction of the GM Pledge will also help meet the potential national rules on the use of agency staff recommended as part of the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) commissioned by the Government in 2021.

5 GOVERNANCE

- 5.1 The GM Pledge is collectively overseen by Directors of Children's Services across Greater Manchester local authorities who are responsible and accountable for ensuring that service managers, HR, Managed Service Providers and agency suppliers implement the GM Pledge in a timely manner within each local authority.
- 5.2 Directors of Children's Services will be supported by Assistant Directors of Children's Services, Principal Social Workers, workforce leads and Senior HR representatives from across the region.
- 5.3 Progress updates will be shared with GM Directors of Children's Services and GM HR Directors Groups on a quarterly basis and discussed sub-regionally. Performance monitoring will be a discussed on a quarterly basis.
- 5.4 Directors of Children's Services commit to the GM Pledge for a minimum period of 12 months. Annual reviews will be conducted, with the first review commencing following 12 months of the launch of the Pledge (or earlier if needed) to support iterations and improvements. The rates and process will be reviewed by Directors of Children's Services and HR Directors (Assistant Director of People and Workforce Development).

6 COMMITMENTS WITHIN THE GM PLEDGE

- 6.1 By introducing the GM Pledge each local authority will agree the following:
- Agency social workers (as identified in Section 3.1) will be paid in line with agreed maximum rates of pay (Section 7.1)
 - A common referencing standard will be adopted ensuring that a reference is completed on termination of engagement for each agency worker

- Candidates leaving a permanent contract in any GM authority will not be able to take up an agency role within another GM authority for a minimum of 6 months
- Each authority will refrain from headhunting employees from other GM authorities, unless for promotional opportunities
- Authorities will work closely with the agency supply chain to better enable their support of permanent recruitment activities across GM
- Authorities will hold one another to account and provide mutual support and assistance to other GM local authorities e.g. short term provision of staff or leadership advice and support in specific areas
- Provide accurate and complete data to the GMCA's HR metrics service on a quarterly basis
- In order to qualify for agency appointments, candidates must demonstrate a minimum of 2 years' post-qualified experience within Children's Services Social Work (irrespective of their pathway to the profession). Authorities will not engage agency workers with less than 2 years' post-qualifying experience (Tameside do not currently engage any agency workers in this category)

6.2 In addition, each local authority has a right to instate a 3 week notice period for agency workers covered within the GM Pledge. This is a commitment from both the agency worker and the local authority to provide a notice period of 3 weeks. The intention is to minimise immediate or quick departures and the associated impact on children and the permanent workforce.

7 RATES OF PAY

7.1 The table below shows the hourly rates of pay that apply for each agency social work role within Tameside. The rates apply to professional social care roles and case holding roles. Job titles are provided below as an example but may change from time to time and the grade levels should be used as a guide. It should also be noted that the GM Pledge rates are **maximum** levels and the current rates should apply in the first instance:

Substantive Job Role Grades (Social Work Qualified)	Current agency hourly rate within Tameside (per hour)	Updated maximum hourly rate agreed as part of the GM Pledge (per hour)
Grade J <i>Example job titles include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Team Managers</i> • <i>Independent Reviewing Officers</i> 	£40.24	Up to £46
Grade I <i>Example job titles include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Senior Practitioners</i> • <i>Practice Managers</i> 	£37.22	Up to £43
Grade H <i>Example job titles include:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Social Workers</i> 	£35.21	Up to £40

7.2 The rates are inclusive of Employer's National Insurance and holiday pay. The rates exclude agency fees, which remain unchanged as a result of this work.

7.3 The rates have been arrived at by analysis of data collected from Greater Manchester authorities outlining the most common pay rates, as well as in collaboration with neighbouring regions to ensure the rates are competitive within the market.

7.4 All engagements within Tameside should be made at existing hourly rates which are

currently in place. Where there is difficulty in obtaining an agency worker within the current rate, managers can increase the rate up to the maximum amount shown. This will be communicated to all recruiting managers as part of implementation which is set out in the following sections of this report.

- 7.5 The local pay rates will be uplifted in line with the NJC Pay Award which is effective from 1 April each year. This will ensure that our local rate remains competitive.

8 IMPLEMENTATION

- 8.1 The GM Pledge will be implemented from 1 November 2023. Directors of Children's Services will sign the pledge at the meeting of the GM Children's Board on 17 November and report to the meeting of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority at the end of November 2023.
- 8.2 An overview of the GM Pledge has been provided to trade unions and details will continue to be shared on an ongoing basis.

9 COMMITMENTS EFFECTIVE FROM 1 NOVEMBER 2023

- 9.1 From 1 November all new agency engagements for the roles identified above will be made in line with the agreed rates of pay and should not exceed the maximum rates identified.
- 9.2 Tameside Council is part of a collaborative GM contract with Reed Talent Solutions (Reed) for the provision of agency workers. From 1 November Reed will update the agency booking system (XMS) to ensure maximum rates are set. This will ensure that all bookings via Reed are within the agreed ranges.
- 9.3 Reed have communicated the details of the Pledge and required commitments with their suppliers. Suppliers will be asked to confirm that any agency worker provided has had a gap of at least 6 months if they were employed at a local authority within Greater Manchester prior to becoming an agency worker.
- 9.4 Reed will ensure that the requirement for a 3 week notice period is communicated to agency workers at the start of their engagement. Whilst it remains possible to terminate an agency contract where issues are identified, in most cases this will help to ensure a lead in time to allow for handover of cases where required.
- 9.5 All recruiting managers will be required to complete a timely and accurate reference form for each agency worker at the end of the agency engagement using the new template that will be emailed to the recruiting manager and returned to Reed.

10 EXISTING AGENCY WORKERS

- 10.1 Where existing agency workers are paid above the maximum pay rate for the role, it is expected that local authorities will be compliant in 6 months of the Pledge being launched. The Council will therefore be required to bring rates of pay in line with the agreed rates by 30 April 2024 to be within 6 months of the commitment coming into effect.
- 10.2 As of 24 October 2023 there are 65 live agency engagements in social work qualified roles covered by the GM Pledge. There are 6 engagements paid at rates that exceed the GM Pledge updated maximum agreed rate.
- 10.3 All 6 engagements currently paid above the capped rate are due to end on 31 December

2023. As at 1 November 2023 no changes will be made to existing rates and the agency workers will continue to be paid the rate agreed at the point of engagement. However, if any of the 6 engagements are extended beyond 31 December 2023, the agency worker will be re-engaged on the revised pay rates not exceeding the maximum hourly rate from 1 January 2024 onwards.

- 10.4 Upon the launch of the GM Pledge, briefing sessions will be held with agency workers who may be impacted by the introduction of maximum pay rates.

11 COMMUNICATION

- 11.1 A communication plan has been created and will be agreed with the Director of Children's Services and Assistant Director of People and Workforce Development. The plan will ensure that all senior managers and recruiting managers across Children's Social Care are fully informed of the changes, their responsibilities and the commitments made.

- 11.2 The following activities will be undertaken as part of the communications plan:

- Resources and key contact details will be made available on the GMCA website from 1 November 2023
- Presentation at Children's Services Directorate Management Team
- Briefings with recruiting managers to provide an overview of responsibilities and changes
- The GM Pledge, briefing slides and FAQs will be made available internally on the Intranet and links provided for the wider Children's Social Care workforce
- General communications with agency workers will be provided by suppliers under the Reed umbrella.
- Individual briefings with agency workers will be undertaken by Children's and People and Workforce Development where the worker is on a rate exceeding the maximum level to provide information if the engagement is extended and to clarify this will be on a rate within the agreed levels.

12 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.1 As set out at the front of the report.