

EXECUTIVE DECISION - BUSINESS CASE



Title: Direct Award for Managed Social Work Team for 6 months

Directorate: Children' Services - Children, Young People and Families Service

Introduction

Children, Young People and Families Service is requesting an urgent decision to make a direct award for a managed social work service to provide a children's social work team. This course of action is recommended due to critical needs in the service which require an immediate response. Capacity issues in the service are as a direct result of the impact of COVID therefore it is agreed that funding additional temporary capacity will be set against the Covid Outbreak Management Fund as a preventative measure to ensure demand does not escalate further and that any further impact is minimised.

The request:

To award a 6 month contract to **Innovate**, a social work recruitment organisation, to provide Plymouth Children, Young People and Families Service with a dedicated social work team to work with children and families requiring statutory support.

Context for this request:

The Children, Young People and Family Service has experienced a 25% (400 children) increase in demand for social work services since late March 2020, when the first Covid-19 lockdown commenced. This includes an increase in the number of children requiring an ongoing service due to safeguarding concerns. This demand exceeds capacity to respond and requires additional social work resource.

Prior to the pandemic the ability of Plymouth City Council to recruit and retain social work staff has been positive, with the exception of the retention of experienced social workers in the Children's Social Work Teams (those social workers working with children subject to Child Protection Plans and care proceedings). Since March 2020, there have been increased difficulties in retaining social workers in these teams and turnover has been higher than we would ordinarily experience, with some staff naming the pressure of casework as one of the reasons for their decision to leave. We take this very seriously and need now to find a solution that supports retention of staff and supports their wellbeing at this challenging time, as well as enabling the service to continue to operate safely and support vulnerable children and families.

Social workers are now experiencing the stressful impact of the pandemic and this increased demand. The impact of stress on our existing staff group cannot be underestimated and we want to ensure our service response is robust at all times.

Rising demand and retention challenges have combined to impact on the capacity to respond effectively currently.

Our usual recruitment routes and strategies are not yielding experienced social workers in the numbers or timescales needed. This includes both permanent and locum social workers. We know that this is not an issue unique to Plymouth and represents a challenge in the South West Region and nationally.

We are managing to successfully appoint sufficient numbers of newly qualified workers who can take on child in need cases only and in lower numbers than experienced workers can. These staff members cannot take on complex casework during their first year of practice and therefore we still have a significant gap in our capacity.

Reason for urgent request:

We are not following Contract Standing Order processes due to the urgent nature of this request.

This has become an urgent issue and we need an immediate solution to this in order to be able to allocate children's cases to social workers at a level that they can safely respond to.

A direct award would allow us to progress this arrangement as a matter of urgency.

Compliance with The Public Contract Regulations 2015:

We intend to directly award a contract to Innovate pursuant to Regulation 32 (2) (c) of the Public Contract Regulations 2015. The rationale for making such an award is as follows:

1. This is a genuine emergency as we need to respond to the significant increase in demand from children's social work due to the unprecedented circumstances in respect of the Covid19 pandemic and in particular the impact of lockdown restrictions on families. This has led to a significant increase in referrals in to CYPFS (25%). Capacity has also been impacted by social work staff leaving the service during this time resulting in an increased pressure on those who remain in the service. There is a regional and national crisis in the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers; Plymouth is not alone in this.
2. This emergency is becoming more extreme due to the demand and staffing factors resulting in 25% additional children in our service and a diminishing ability to respond.
3. It is impossible to comply with usual procurement timescales as we have to ensure children are seen, assessed and risk is managed. Delay means we will not be able to do this effectively. This represents a significant risk to families, our service and the council as a whole.
4. This extreme situation is due to a combination of factors outside of the control of the authority. We usually operate with less than 2% vacancies in our service with a good pipeline of newly qualified staff. That is not sufficient to address and respond to the current level of demand in our service and the corresponding challenges in recruitment of experienced staff to support this complex work.

Alternative Options explored:

CYPFS continues to explore a range of our business as usual methods of recruitment as well as considering a range of alternative options.

Permanent recruitment is ongoing and will continue in order to do all we can to have sufficient capacity once the 6 month contract comes to an end. However, this takes time and it is not sufficient to resolve the current issues. We will review this on a weekly basis and if we need to extend this contract we will ensure full procurement rules are followed to support any continued arrangement, only if needed.

Established locum recruitment options via Pertemps is ongoing to maximise recruitment agency supply of social workers. This has not yielded the experienced social workers we need in the numbers we require currently. The Service Director is in regular discussions with senior leaders in Pertemps and individual suppliers to accelerate a response but this has not been sufficiently successful to date.

We are now approaching recruitment agencies who are not on the Pertemps contract to source additional social workers alongside the request made in this paper.

Why this provider?

Innovate has a track record in providing social work teams for local authorities. They are currently working with 17 local authorities in England (with 26 teams in these authorities). We have undertaken due diligence and have spoken directly to Directors of Children's Services who are currently using Innovate services. These experiences have been positive and making the difference needed in those authorities.

An alternative recruitment agency was also approached to provide a team of social workers. iPeople are on the existing list of suppliers held by Pertemps. Unfortunately, the local authority where these

social workers are currently based decided to extend their contract and we could not therefore use them as a result in Plymouth. iPeople could not then provide any alternative social workers for us to consider.

What can Innovate offer:

Innovate CYPS can deliver a 6 month Managed Service Project consisting of one team focusing on Safeguarding (Child in Need, Child Protection, Pre-Proceedings/Court).

The team will consist of 1 Team Manager, 7 Social Workers, Innovate CYPS SMT (Director, Head of Service, Head of Quality Assurance), and 1 Business Support.

The service will, at all times, adhere to Key Performance Indicators in line with Plymouth City Council:

- Allocation management oversight case note within 24 hours of allocation
- All children to be seen within 5 working days of allocation
- All visits to be written up within 48 hours
 - Child in Need review meetings/Core Group meetings will be held 4 weekly
- Minutes from meetings and updated plans will be distributed to all parties within 72 hours
- Key documents such as Child Protection Conference reports/Court documents will be submitted to the manager for quality assurance 3-5 working days prior to due date
 - Supervision to be held 4 weekly
- Swift mobilisation of project team by Innovate within 3-4 weeks of contract sign off
- Identified and agreed key deliverables
- Senior Management Team oversight (all qualified Social Work Practitioners) • Clear KPIs to avoid drift and delay
- Fixed cost and timelines
- Innovate are fully accountable for the quality of their work
- This type of project work is very attractive and allows Innovate to cherry pick from a larger pool of practitioners, many of whom are known to us
- Fully insured to deliver services

Total Project Cost Managed Service –£491,091.88

What steps will be taken at the end of 6 months:

It is intended that this request for an urgent solution to staffing issues will support us while we continue to recruit permanent experienced staffing in the coming months. This emergency solution will help to reduce the number experienced staff leaving the service as their caseloads stabilise.

We will continue to monitor this on a weekly basis and will review our success in recruitment so that we can end this team's work in 6 months with handover of children's cases at that time.

We will be working with partner agencies to ensure they are working effectively with children at an early help stage and to manage the number of children who require a statutory service

If for any reason we need to consider an extension to this solution we will manage this via usual procurement processes.