

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 23 MAY 2002

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALLY QUALIFIED STAFF IN SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

ACTION PLAN 2002

Report by the Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek elected members' authority to implement an action plan in 2002 to recruit qualified social workers and other professionally qualified staff in social work services and to implement associated measures to ensure retention of staff once in post.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 8 November 2001, Committee approved a report on strengthening frontline social work services. Amongst other things, that report highlighted the national crisis in recruitment and retention of staff with professional Social Work qualifications, reflected in East Ayrshire in significant vacancies for qualified social workers across the Social Work service.
- 2.2 The scale of the problem is considerable, with current vacancies across Scotland outstripping supply of newly qualified social workers by an enormous margin. This has resulted in local authorities having to compete with each other to attract scarce qualified staff. The launch of a twelve point action plan on recruitment and retention of social work staff led by the Scottish Executive is a clear recognition of the gravity of the situation facing social work authorities and other social care employers.
- 2.3 As part of its commitment to strengthening frontline social work services, Committee has already approved a recruitment and retention strategy, involving the re-introduction of a secondment scheme for unqualified staff to access professional social work training through distance learning, primarily but not exclusively through the Open University. Since the scheme was approved, 3 members of staff have already been selected to undertake professional social work training through the Open University distance learning route and commenced their studies in February 2002.
- 2.4 In approving the secondment scheme, Committee also recognised that, in the short term, further measures would be required to attract and recruit externally from the pool of social work students currently undertaking/completing professional training courses and that a further report on that subject would be presented to a future meeting of Committee.

2.5 This report fulfils that undertaking and sets out an action plan for recruitment and retention of qualified social workers and other professionally qualified staff in social work services in 2002. The measures contained in the action plan translate the national initiative led by the Scottish Executive into a practical local response to meet the particular needs of the Council at the present time.

3. ACTION PLAN 2002

3.1 The action plan is set out in full in Appendix 1. It indicates priority actions, target outcomes and timescales for completion. The measures are the first steps towards recruiting professionally qualified staff in the short term until the fruits of the secondment policy begin to be garnered. It is anticipated that, subject to annual review, the measures may be repeated over the next 2-3 years, by which time seconded staff will be returning year on year to meet the recruitment needs of the service.

3.2 Elected members should note that the action plan draws on the lessons learnt from the extensive research which has been undertaken into the current social work recruitment crisis, in particular those factors which appear to make employing authorities attractive to prospective staff, thus gaining a competitive advantage in recruitment and retention.

3.3 Lead responsibility for overall implementation of the action plan has been vested in the Head of Social Work, working closely with the Head of Personnel.

3.4 The main elements in the action plan relate to measures to enhance recruitment of new staff from outside the authority and measures to encourage staff to remain here once in employment with the Council.

Recruitment

3.5 The preparation and distribution of an **information pack for prospective new recruits** attending professional training courses in the west of Scotland, backed up by a recruitment drive involving visits and presentations, is designed to raise the Council's profile with students and to highlight the advantages of working here.

3.6 The implementation of a **new recruit incentive programme** is designed to offer a package of measures, some economic, others related to employment conditions, which have been shown in research to be relevant to what prospective employees value in an employer.

Retention

3.7 The implementation of **eligibility for re-grading to senior practitioner** for experienced qualified social workers and occupational therapists is intended to provide an incentive to those staff to remain within the authority. It balances the recruitment incentives scheme. It also provides a career development path other than full line management. However, it is anticipated that part of the

responsibilities of senior practitioners would be to assist team leaders in supervising and supporting less experienced colleagues as well as taking direct responsibility for more complex and demanding areas of practice.

- 3.8 The introduction of a **financial recognition scheme for practice teachers, practice assessors and Mental Health Officers** is designed to enhance the Council's capacity to carry out supervision of student placements and to increase the availability of practising Mental Health Officers. Enhanced involvement in supervising students on placement is likely to have a benefit in terms of recruitment of students who have experience of working in East Ayrshire. Payment of Mental Health Officers is likely to maintain the number of practising officers and reduce the requirement to train additional staff to carry out that role. Given the substantial cost of Mental Health Officer training, it is anticipated that introduction of a financial incentive scheme will be cost-effective.
- 3.9 The **extension of EAGER to all frontline social work staff** is designed to allow the development needs of the workforce to be identified and the capacity of staff to meet their responsibilities to be enhanced by a focused approach to training and development.

4. POLICY/FINANCIAL/LEGAL/PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposed measures can be implemented within the existing policy and legal frameworks which govern the delivery of the Social Work service at present.
- 4.2 The personnel implications arising from the action plan require to be referred to the Corporate Sub-Committee for its approval.
- 4.3 The proposals are subject to discussion with the Trades Unions.
- 4.4 Any additional costs arising from the action plan can be met from within existing resources by re-alignment of relevant budgets.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Committee is requested to:

- a) approve the implementation of the action plan, as set out in Appendix 1;
- b) refer the personnel aspects of the report to the Corporate Sub-Committee, for its approval;
- c) otherwise, note that a report reviewing the outcomes from the action plan will be presented to Committee in a year's time.

John Mulgrew
Director of Educational and Social Services
24 April 2002

For further information, please contact John Alexander, Principal Officer (Quality and Planning) (Tel. 6978)

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER : STEPHEN MOORE, HEAD OF SOCIAL WORK

APPENDIX 1

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL AND SOCIAL SERVICES

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED SOCIAL WORKERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALLY QUALIFIED STAFF IN SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

ACTION PLAN 2002

ACTION	TARGET OUTCOME(S)	TIMESCALE
<p>1. Distribute recruitment information pack to all professional social work and occupational therapy training courses in the West of Scotland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Packs to be available to all students currently in training • Recruitment drive involving presentations/ meetings at all social work and occupational therapy training courses in the West of Scotland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 28-31 May 2002 • 4-28 June 2002
<p>2. Implementation of new recruit incentive programme, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • final salary pension scheme • progressive work/life balance policies • “sponsorship in training” scheme • continuous professional development portfolio • training “bursary” • protected workload • workload management scheme • supervision contract • discretionary enhanced placement on spinal column point • low cost car leasing scheme • preferential car loan rates • re-location scheme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fill 50% of qualified post vacancies • Retain 75% of new recruits beyond 2 years from date of appointment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 September 2002 • 30 September 2004

ACTION	TARGET OUTCOME(S)	TIMESCALE
3. Implementation of eligibility for re-grading to senior practitioner (SO2 grade) on application, subject to formal selection, for all qualified social workers and occupational therapists with 3 years post-qualifying experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate formal selection scheme • Appointment of 12 senior practitioners in first year, distributed as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 in Community Care • 4 in Children and Families/Criminal Justice • 2 in Quality and Planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 September 2002 • 1 September 2003
4. Introduction of financial recognition scheme for practice teachers, practice assessors and Mental Health Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% increase in capacity to supervise and assess placements • 50% increase in availability of Mental Health Officer resources to fill rota 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 September 2002
5. Extend the East Ayrshire General Employee Review scheme (EAGER) to all frontline social work staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all frontline fieldwork, residential and day services staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 June 2002 – 31 March 2004

AGENDA