

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 18 MARCH 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

STEP UP INTO SOCIAL WORK PILOT PROGRAMME

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Learn Together Partnership consists of the Merseyside local authorities plus Warrington and Halton and on a shared basis develops training and learning for the childrens workforce. Step Up into Social Work is a national pilot programme offering an employment based route to qualifying as a social worker. This report outlines the programme, seeks agreement for Wirral as the lead local authority to host the management of the programme on behalf of the Learn Together Partnership and outlines the specific arrangements for Wirral.

1. Background

1.1 The Learn Together Partnership

1.2 The Learn Together Partnership (LTP) consists of Sefton, Knowsley, St Helens, Liverpool, Wirral, Warrington and Halton. The LTP's role is to develop training and learning opportunities across the member local authorities to share good practice and develop the childrens workforce. The LTP has close links with our local universities and has successfully developed professional qualifications and training to enhance the skills and knowledge base of the local workforce.

1.3 The LTP has requested that Wirral be the lead local authority for the Step Up into Social Work Programme.

1.4 Step Up into Social Work

1.5 Following the death of Baby Peter, there were a number of national actions to review childrens services and social work. Lord Laming published his report "The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report" in March 2009 and "Building a Safe, Confident Future" was published by the Social Work Taskforce in December 2009.

1.6 Lord Laming identified the national shortage of qualified social workers who wish to work in childrens services as a critical issue for services for children and this was again highlighted in the report of the Social Work Taskforce. Both reports highlight concerns with the quality of the training for social workers and the difficulty in attracting good quality candidates to train in the first place.

1.7 As part of the Government's response, the Childrens Workforce Development Council (CWDC) has been charged with piloting various approaches to supporting social workers once qualified and remodelling social work to ensure that qualified and experienced social workers are retained at the frontline. Wirral is involved with a number of these pilots and is already seeing an impact on the support to staff and retention.

1.8 The Step Up into Social Work programme is targeted at the training of social workers. The normal route to qualify as a social worker is to either undertake a three year BA degree or if a degree is already held a two or three year MA.

- 1.9 The programme aims to attract high quality candidates into social work. It is targeting people with a 2:1 degree who are able to complete a “fast-track” MA course to qualify as a social worker over 18 months. Candidates will be employed on a fixed term contract with a local authority to enable them to complete the academic elements but also to have excellent opportunities for work-based learning.
- 1.10 Regional partnerships were invited to bid to participate in the programme; the LTP was successful as the only partnership in the north-west of England and is one of eight across England.
- 1.11 The CWDC is supporting the pilot programme in a number of ways. It has contracted with two universities to design the qualification and the LTP is linked with Manchester Metropolitan University. The LTP is working closely with Manchester Metropolitan University on the course design of the MA to ensure it meets some of the gaps that employers have identified in current social work training. CWDC is also leading the recruitment to the course via a national advertising campaign and has appointed a recruitment agency to manage the recruitment and application process. The LTP member local authorities will be closely involved in decisions and will have the final say on appointing any candidates.
- 1.12 Financial support is being provided by the CWDC. Set up costs of £60k have been allocated to the LTP to assist with the administration of the programme and it is proposed that a Project Officer is appointed to work part time on a seconded basis to work across the local authorities.
- 1.13 There is funding of £30k per candidate to contribute to salary costs for the duration of the course and the CWDC is also providing £480k for the LTP to procure delivery of the course. As such, a procurement process will need to be undertaken in line with the procurement rules. The timescale for the programme to begin is September 2010 with candidates qualifying by March 2012.
- 1.14 In addition there are placement and supervision costs to support the provision of placements for the candidates up to £224k.
- 1.15 The LTP has committed to providing up to 40 places across the member local authorities.

2 Wirral

- 2.1 The set up costs will not only enable the LTP to second to the Project Officer but will also cover the costs Wirral incurs in administering the Project including the procurement process and the financial management and distribution of funds to the member local authorities. Wirral as lead local authority will sign the contract with the CWDC and also receive the funding and distribute to the member local authorities.
- 2.2 Wirral is aiming to have up to 7 of the candidates as part of the programme.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 The programme is funded by the CWDC in principal but also attracts funding from the General Social Care Council (GSCC) and the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFC) for England. The CWDC will co-ordinate the funding.
- 3.2 The funding breakdown is:

Set up costs		£60k
CWDC costs 40x £15k	Year 1	£600k
	Year 2	£600k
HEFCE funding	Year 1	£240k
	Year 2	£240k
GSCC funding	Year 1	£72k
placement costs	Year 2	£72k
CWDC supervision costs	Year 1	£40k
	Year 2	£40k

Total: £1.964m

4. Staffing Implications

- 4.1 A Project Officer seconded from a member local authority of the LTP to assist with the administration and delivery of the project within timescale. The cost is to be met from the set up costs for a part time secondment up to £32k for the 18 month duration of the project.
- 4.2 Each member local authority will employ its own candidates from the 40 candidates. Wirral is not undertaking this on behalf of members of the LTP as each local authority needs to meet its individual employment and contract responsibilities.
- 4.3 For Wirral, each candidate will be placed on a fixed term contract which will cover the duration of the course but also cover eventualities such as not meeting the academic demands, deferment, leave and sickness. There is no automatic right to employment as a qualified social worker with Wirral upon successful completion of the course.

5. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

- 5.1 The programme is targeting those who already hold a degree. Manchester Metropolitan University in obtaining approval of the course from the General Social Care Council must have a satisfactory Equality Impact Assessment. The recruitment process will also ensure that any candidate who may be covered by equal opportunities will have their needs and requirements met.

6. Community Safety Implications

- 6.1 There are no community safety implications.

7. Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 7.1 There are no Local Agenda 21 implications.

8. Planning Implications

- 8.1 There are no planning implications.

9. Anti-poverty Implications

9.1 There are no anti-poverty implications.

10. Social Inclusion Implications

10.1 The programme will be of particular interest to people who are wishing to change career and will attract a wider range of people to social work training.

11. Local Member Support Implications

11.1 There are no local member support implications.

12. Background Papers

12.1 Lord Laming. The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report. March 2009
Building a Safe, Confident Future: The Final Report of the Social Work Taskforce.
December 2009

RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- (1) Members agree for Wirral to be the lead authority for the Step Up into Social Work programme on behalf of the Learn Together Partnership and to enter into the contract with the Childrens Workforce Development Council.
- (2) Members approve Wirral entering into a procurement process to deliver the MA in social work course.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services