

Decision Report – Officer Key decision

4 February 2018

Appointment of the successful bidder for the South West ‘Step Up to Social Work’ Higher Education Institute

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Frances Nicholson and Cllr Mandy Chilcott

Division and Local Member(s): All

Lead Officer: Chris Squire – Director of HR and OD

Author: Clive Mallon / Interim Service Manager, Children and Families, Learning and Development Team

Contact Details: 01823 357977

	Seen by:	Name	Date
	County Solicitor	Honor Clarke	7 th December 2018
	Monitoring Officer	Scott Wooldridge	7 th December 2018
	Corporate Finance	Peter Lewis	7 th December 2018
	Human Resources	Chris Squire	22 nd November 2018
	Property / Procurement / ICT	Simon Clifford	7 th December 2018
	Senior Manager	Relevant SLT Director – Chris Squire	22 nd November 2018
	Local Member(s)	All	7 th December 2018
	Cabinet Member	Cllr F Nicholson and Cllr M Chilcott	7 th December 2018
	Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr J Lock (Children and Families) Cllr Simon Coles (HR)	7 th December 2018
	Relevant Scrutiny Chairman	Cllr L Redman	24 January 2018
Forward Plan Reference:	FP/18/12/106		
Summary:	<p>Following the success of the Step Up to Social Work Cohort 5 Programme where the South West Regional Partnership 2 recruited 49 trainees across the South West, who are due to qualify in March 2019. SCC, as part of the South West Regional Partnership 2, has successfully bid to secure a DfE grant to recruit and deliver the successful ‘Step Up to Social Work’ employer-led, qualification programme across the South West regions of Somerset, North Somerset, Swindon, BANES, Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Plymouth, Torbay, Devon and Bristol. The Regional Partnership 2 has bid to secure funding for 54 trainees under cohort 6.</p>		

	<p>The grant is subject to certain conditions including the appointment of an appropriate University Provider (HEI) following a formal procurement process. SCC, working with ten other local authorities, is the lead authority in the partnership and in the procurement of the HEI to which this key decision relates.</p> <p>Step Up to Social Work is a fast track graduate scheme led by employers and is an accelerated entry route into social work for high achieving graduates and career changers. It is a nationally recognised and successful programme, now in its 6th year of operation, with proven successes nationally, in the recruitment and retention of good quality social work practitioners.</p> <p>The programme is highly advantageous to Somerset in helping to support organisational workforce needs, particularly recruitment and retention of children’s social work practitioners.</p> <p>The ‘Step Up’ programme, in addition to bringing in high achieving Social Work graduate social work trainees to Somerset and the South West region, also provides some significant career and professional development (CPD) opportunities for Somerset’s existing workforce in our endeavour to continue to improve and transform Children’s Social Care services in Somerset. The Director of Children’s Services and Cabinet Member for Children and Families endorse this programme as part of delivering the Children and Young People’s Plan priorities.</p> <p>SCC ran a procurement process to appoint the current HEI which was awarded in Feb 17. The contract allowed for an optional extension into Cohort 6. This was covered in Key decision reference FP/16/12/11.</p> <p>The provider has successfully delivered the previous course and has offered the same price for the extended period, set up fees will be minimal. This is all covered by the central grant funding.</p> <p>Agreeing to the extension of the current contract will avoid the costs of another competition exercise and will remove the potential for additional set up costs if a different supplier is selected.</p>
<p>Recommendations:</p>	<p>It is recommended that the Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development agrees to extend the current HEI contract to a further cohort as permitted under the terms of the existing contract.</p>
<p>Reasons for Recommendations:</p>	<p>By extending the current HEI contract to deliver the DfE programme ‘Step Up to Social Work’ in the South West, Somerset will ensure a sufficient supply of high calibre Children’s Social Work graduate social work trainees into Somerset and across the South West region.</p>

	<p>The success and national profile of this programme will improve Somerset's reputation as an employer of Social Workers, again impacting upon recruitment and retention of expertise into the county; staff will want to work with us.</p> <p>Step Up to Social Work trainees will provide a significant boost to the service and to the quality of provision and the recruitment and retention of high quality practitioners in Somerset and the South West.</p> <p>This is an employer-led qualification route into children's social work, offering multiple development opportunities for SCC social care and social work staff who can contribute to the shaping and delivery of the programme – their involvement will contribute to, not only recruitment, but the retention and enhancement of existing children's social work skills and expertise in Somerset.</p> <p>The recruitment of the trainees, once qualified, will drive down the cost of having to employ locum Social Workers so will therefore be an additional 'invest to save' measure (albeit that entire funding for the programme comes direct from the DfE).</p> <p>The alternative to extending would be to go through another full procurement exercise to the market. This would need to involve all members of the Regional Partnership as well as internal SCC resource from Procurement.</p> <p>Any financial benefit from this exercise would not rest with SCC due to the programme being wholly grant funded.</p> <p>The current provider is working well and there are no issues with the administration or course content. As such there is unlikely to be a significantly meaningful increase in the quality of the provision that would outweigh the internal costs of re-tendering followed by the time taken to implement any change in supplier.</p>
<p>Links to Priorities and Impact on Service Plans:</p>	<p>Supporting;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce Development Strategy • Children's Social Care training CPD strategy 2018 – currently being updated. • Ofsted recommendations (2018) around workforce development <p>Step Up to Social Work will enable SCC to drive down the cost of Children and Families locum Social Workers by 2021.</p>
<p>Consultations and co-production undertaken:</p>	<p>The decision to proceed with a bid to the DfE for Step Up to Social Work was an action arising from the Recruitment and Retention Strategy Working Group. (Directed by Operations Director, Claire Winter, with non-key decision to market approach to secure HEI made by Julian Wooster, Director of Children's Services).</p>

	<p>Somerset has lead consultation, in partnership with Local Authorities across the South West, to determine a South West Regional Partnership bid to run the Step Up programme. Following this consultation 10 local authorities including Somerset, have formed the South West Regional Partnership 2, which covers the South West region including Somerset, North Somerset, BANES, Swindon, Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, Devon, Torbay, and Plymouth. The partnership has received funding for 54 trainees for the next cohort. As the lead authority for the South West Regional Partnership 2, Somerset led on the procurement process for an HEI. This decision was signed off in January 2017 and allowed for one extension period.</p>
<p>Financial Implications:</p>	<p>The Total grant income for the partnership is £1,795,500 (plus £48,000 set up), funding provided by the Department for Education and allocated to the Southwest Regional Partnership 2 to support 54 trainees through the 14 month programme. Of this £570k is paid to the HEI to run the course, the remainder covers bursaries and admin costs etc.</p> <p>Grant income allocated to Somerset specifically is £21,000 for the support of 12 Somerset students during their placements within Somerset CSC teams.</p> <p>All the grant from the DfE is paid into the Somerset Step Up Budget at various points within the programme. We then arrange the transfer for the students bursaries, the LA's funding and payments for the HEI.</p> <p>All costs for Step Up are met from the DfE grant income. There is no financial strain or impact on SCC budgets. Grant funds are either passed immediately through or are received in advance of any payments that SCC make. The exception to this is the Bursary element. The first payment is made at the end of January and then grant funds are received mid Feb and this is then a monthly cycle for 15 months. The monthly Bursary is £71k.</p> <p>No additional funds from SCC are being sought to support this programme. It is completely funded from the Department for Education. In addition, SCC takes an income from the partners to cover 1.5 administrative posts within SCC.</p>
<p>Legal Implications:</p>	<p>Extension of contracts procured by local authorities is controlled by the rules in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The circumstances in which contracts can be extended are limited.</p> <p>The current contract contains a clause which clearly, precisely and unequivocally allows SCC to extend the contract in the manner envisaged by this decision</p>

<p>HR Implications:</p>	<p>Should Somerset authorise the decision to award a contract we can move forward in immediately recruiting 12 high calibre trainees to SCC's Children's Social Care Services to commence their training programme in January 2020 with no other associated advertising costs for recruitment.</p> <p>Ofsted recommendations to work towards stabilising the Children's Social Care workforce in Somerset will potentially be undermined.</p>						
<p>Risk Implications:</p>	<p>There is a very minor risk of SCC committing to this contract with the DfE and a delay in the funds being transferred.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="528 952 1481 987"> <tr> <td>Likelihood</td> <td>1</td> <td>Impact</td> <td>5</td> <td>Risk Score</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </table>	Likelihood	1	Impact	5	Risk Score	5
Likelihood	1	Impact	5	Risk Score	5		
<p>Other Implications (including due regard implications):</p>	<p>See Impact Assessment, attached to this report.</p> <p>Should Somerset authorise this decision the positive impact upon Somerset County Council will mean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recruitment of 12 high calibre trainee social workers - Once qualified, the opportunity to immediately match the trainees to qualified social worker vacancies within Somerset - Provides a unique opportunity for a small number of existing SCC employees who meet the eligibility criteria to apply to the scheme and attain qualified social worker status locally. Therefore, this opportunity provides social mobility for individuals who may otherwise not be in a position to relocate or afford to do the qualification through other means. - A longer term sustainable post graduate level qualification route that has been designed by the consortium in close collaboration with the successful HEI, as employers, and therefore fit for purpose for what we need from children's social workers in the south west. - It will mean a saving in relation to the recruitment of 12 social worker posts in 2021, saving advertising and operational costs associated with recruitment, and human resources in terms of time. - The Step Up programme is a significant boost to the workforce development strategy. 						

Should Somerset not authorise the decision to award a contract the following implications are likely to result:

- Access

It will undermine the social mobility of individuals who wish to train and work as a Children's Social Worker in Somerset.

- Equality and diversity

The career progression and development of existing Social Workers will be undermined and limited; therefore staff will be disadvantaged.

Again, social mobility will be reduced where there are high calibre eligible graduates [including Somerset residents] who wish to apply for the programme and otherwise would be unable to afford to undertake a post graduate entry route into social work due to funding issues, family and location issues [there is no HEI provider in Somerset]. The Step Up programme will make social work as a career option realisable for a number of high calibre graduates in the South West.

- Human rights

Reduction of ability and capacity to effectively support relevant legislation, particularly to the rights of children as set out in statute law.

- Community safety

Reduction in the Authority's ability to respond effectively to the safety and protection of vulnerable children and families in Somerset.

- Sustainability

Reduction in Somerset's ability to stabilise its Children's Social Care workforce as a OFSTED / DfE stipulated priority.

- Health and safety

Frontline child protection services will continue to be severely undermined in their capacity to respond to the protection and safeguarding of vulnerable children, young people and their families in Somerset. This could place children at further risk of harm and lead to unsafe practice by already stretched workforce who currently do not have sufficient capacity to respond.

Other implications if this decision is not implemented will include:

- Health and wellbeing

Compound the vulnerability of children and young people and other service users, insufficiently staffed workforce will potentially lead to unsafe decisions and unsafe planning for children.

	<p>- Performance issues The Children's Social Care service in Somerset will remain insufficiently staffed to respond adequately to the protection and safeguarding needs of children.</p> <p>Somerset will potentially fail to recruit the appropriate number of staff to social worker roles.</p> <p>Somerset will potentially lose the will of practiced and experienced SCC practitioners who will be more likely to leave the service and destabilise the workforce further.</p> <p>- Partnership issues Somerset will undoubtedly lose trust and credibility amongst South West partners, the DfE, HEIs and, importantly, members of the public who support Step Up to Social Work, and those individuals who wish to pursue an application to the programme.</p> <p>Loss of resources and resulting potential for legal challenges from HEIs who have invested in tendering process and preparation of reports and documents as request by Somerset.</p> <p>Likelihood of reputational damage at a national, regional and local level.</p>
<p>Scrutiny comments / recommendation (if any):</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>

1. Background

- 1.1. Somerset County Council (Children's Social Care), in partnership with 9 other local authorities across the South West, have together successfully bid for a total of £1,790,502 of Department for Education (DfE) funding towards the Step Up to Social Work (SUTSW) programme.
- 1.2. The Step Up to Social Work South West Regional Partnership 2 comprises of the following Local Authorities;
 - Somerset County Council (Lead)
 - North Somerset Council
 - Bath and North East Somerset Council
 - Gloucestershire County Council
 - South Gloucestershire Council
 - Swindon Borough Council
 - Bristol City Council
 - Plymouth City Council
 - Devon County Council
 - Torbay Council
- 1.3. The SUTSW initiative is a DfE resourced programme supporting fast track entry routes into social work for 2:1 graduates. Somerset are part of a 10 authority regional partnership.
- 1.4. On behalf of the South West Regional Partnership 2, Somerset led the

procurement of the HEI who will work with the Regional Partnership 2 Local Authorities to design and deliver the employer led programme. It is this component of the initiative to which the Officer Key Decision is sought.

- 1.5. The DfE funds will be distributed between 10 local authorities in the South West and provide work-based training for 54 new Social Workers across the South West authorities within the Regional Partnership 2. Somerset County Council will be allocated resources which will be used to recruit and train twelve graduates who can expect to qualify with a Postgraduate Diploma in Social Work in March 2021. The Step Up to Social Work programme helps local authorities across England to work with a local university to design and deliver a 'fast track' masters level training route into social work. It aims to attract high achieving graduates with a degree of at least 2:1 in any field, who have some experience of working or volunteering with children, young people and families.
- 1.6. Candidates can apply from February 2019 – March 2019. Interviews are likely to be held from June – July 2019. Successful applicants will begin the academic and work-based training in January 2020 and can expect to qualify early in 2021.

More information about DfE Step Up to Social Work initiative can be found at www.gov.uk/step-up-to-social-work-information-for-applicants

2. Options considered and reasons for rejecting them

- 2.1. SCC could retender the provision of the training and accept bids from HEIs for acceptance. This will be time-consuming, especially as all 10 authorities would be part of the process. There will also be set up costs if an alternative supplier is appointed.
- 2.2. The option to 'not' award any contract to an HEI will bring the whole 'Step Up to Social Work' South West Regional Partnership 2 initiative for cohort 6 to a complete close and is therefore not feasible.
- 2.3. If the decision is not implemented, the South West partnership will be unable to run the Step Up programme. This will not only impact upon Somerset, but the other 9 local authorities working in partnership across the South West. This will also impact negatively on Somerset's reputation and may affect Somerset bidding for future DfE funded projects.
- 2.4. A decision to not renew this contract would go against the spirit of the Memorandum of Agreement, signed by all 10 Local Authorities within the partnership, and could ultimately damage the partnership; as following consultation and agreement [via their respective legal and procurement teams] they have formally entrusted Somerset to lead on the tendering and procurement process.
- 2.5. Should the decision not be authorised, the South West Regional Partnership 2

will be unable to recruit, in total, 54 high calibre trainees to the South West regions of Somerset, North Somerset, BANES, Swindon, Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Bristol, Torbay, Devon, and Plymouth, which will impact upon the service's ability to recruit and retain expertise not only in Somerset, but across the South West Partnership 2.

2.6. Should Somerset not authorise the extension to the current contract there is potential risk of:

- Damage to Somerset County Council's reputation
- Undermining Somerset's efforts to recruit high quality Children's Social Care staff.
- Damage to Somerset's Social Work recruitment campaign
- Failing to act upon DfE advice and guidance

The need to go through another competitive exercise to appoint an HEI