

Practitioners (AMHPs) and Operational Commissioning Officers and this has required the directorate to use agency workers to ensure consistent, safe provision of services and maintain performance against KPI's.

There has been an increase in spend during the summer months due to agency staff being used to cover vacancies pending the outcome of the pathways review and the implementation of the new Learning Disability Team during this period, however, recruitment is currently under way to fill permanent statutory function vacancies, supported by a targeted recruitment campaign. Agency staff have also been used to cover secondments and maternity leave. In addition to this, permanent recruitment is underway to AMHP vacancies in the Mental Health Teams. It is expected that use of agency staff will decrease during the second half of the financial year.

The long-standing agency staff have mainly been utilised flexibly across the whole service to meet the needs as they arise, cover vacancies that we have been unable to recruit, to cover during absences and to fulfil the roles created by grant funded initiatives.

2. Children's Services

As with previous reports that have been submitted, there continues to be challenges regionally, sub regionally and nationally in recruitment to the children's workforce. This includes social work, Educational Psychology and other key parts of the workforce. There is a national shortage of trained and qualified workers for particular roles eg the Doctorate level qualification for Educational Psychology has had a notable impact.

We have observed an increase in staff absence through sickness and maternity leave. Whilst maternity can be planned for sickness absence cannot and through a challenging market the only option to ensure that our statutory provision is still provided the only option available has been to engage agency workers to cover these vacancies.

We continue to be in competition with other LAs to attract, recruit and retain in these key roles and this is being looked at in more detail through a separate steering group has been created to look at social work recruitment, specifically within Children's services, to understand and benchmark against other Berkshire councils when it comes to packages being offered. This information gathered has included social work salaries that are paid by other Berkshire councils and other enhancements, that they may offer to attract and retain talent in the Council in the hope that we can rely less of agency workers.

Additionally, we are looking making early offers to undergraduates, recruiting trainees and growing our own social work workforce. As a Council we have been able to secure external funding through the DfE which will allow for the introduction of apprenticeships and will cover staffing costs which will in turn will see us utilise the levy to support their qualifications.

3. Resources & Assets

As with previous reports submitted, the use of agency workers within this area has been in relation to hard to fill posts where we have ongoing recruitment campaigns but are struggling to fill the vacancies due to ongoing market challenges such as salary we can offer. These areas relate to legal and also procurement where specialist skills and knowledge are required however there is limited resource available due to the public sector pay scales.

Agency usage within the property team is being used to support specific projects whose cost is capitalised against the projects worked on.

We also have short term placements in some areas where we have vacancies such as income and assessment, however there are structural changes being implemented which should see a reduction in agency placements once this is finalised.

4. Chief Executive Office

As within previous report submitted, we have continued to use agency on where necessary and this has typically been within short term capital projects that we have engaged interim workers.

Within the first period of the financial year and to de-risk the new website launch an interim placement was used to cover absence to implement and support on the go live on the new website. We have also needed to engage IT and Digital interims on other capital projects too which are time specific and linked to project that are likely to result in efficiencies for the Council.

We are also engaged bespoke programme management through interim to work on key transformation project within other areas of the business such as Children's Services. It is often better value for money to engage in this way rather than have extended fixed term contracts in place.

5. Place & Growth

As with previous reports have been submitted, there remains to be ongoing placement within highways which is a national sector that typically sees a lot of movement as it is an agile and contracted market due to national schemes which can typically command higher markets rates in the short term. This leaves very few specialists within this sector that will take permanent placements in highways. This is also the same for areas such as building control, where the market is strong and competitive not only with other local authorities but the private industry too.

Within the reporting period above, we have seen an increase in higher graded roles being used to cover maternity absence and some interim appointments to see change being implemented and delivered in areas such as housing. This has resulted an increase in some costs however this has been done through the framework and approved suppliers which previously may have not been the case, resulting in higher costing consultants.

Benchmarking

The costs associated with agency workers and interims are high across the Council and work has commenced to address this.

It is important to report to Personnel Board that benchmarking, on agency costs, has been undertaken across all 6 Berkshire Councils. An outcome of this benchmarking has resulted in Wokingham being one of the lowest spenders on agency contracts.

Moving forward

The corporate mandate of only hiring workers through the procurement framework is working well. This has resulted in a reduction again of the number of off framework contracts across Wokingham.

The re-tendering of the agency contract has been approved by Full Council and is in process.

In addition to looking at how corporate functions can work more closely to improve the position when it comes to interims and agency workers the following areas and actions have also been addressed.

- HR and Procurement continue to work in collaboration to tightly manage Matrix, holding them to account of their contractual obligations and service level agreement. There are weekly operational meetings and quarterly strategic meetings to ensure that improvement continues.
- Market intelligence is used to assess appropriate pay of specialist interims and the memorandum of understanding for the South East is being adhered to for Social Care jobs in both Adults and Children’s Services
- Having capped agency fees through the contract it ensures value for money without impairing quality. Hiring managers are supported by HR in hard to fill roles such as change and programme managers, strategic commissioning, and educational psychologists.
- HR have established a front door for recruitment needs and regularly collaborate and advise hiring manager to the most appropriate resourcing route whether that be agency or fixed term.
- HR and Finance have agreed an amended governance of the appointment of agency workers and ensure that there is consistency with other forms of recruitment approval but also value for money. A business case will need to be produced and signed off by the relevant Director, HR and Finance before an agency worker is engaged. This will enable more challenge from business partners.
- HR Business Partners will focus within DLTs and senior management meetings with each of their assigned areas so that there is full oversight and challenge in terms of tenures and the appointment of agency workers this will also include understanding whether or not permanent posts are being advertised on a cyclical basis, to test the market which will allow further justification for interim appointments if they are unable to successfully fill.
- Reviews have commenced on whether agency workers can be converted onto either permanent or fixed term contracts.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

	How much will it Cost	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	NA	NA	NA

Next Financial Year (Year 2) <i>Ongoing annually</i>	NA	NA	NA
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	NA	NA	NA

Other Financial information relevant to the recommendation/decision
N/A

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
N/A

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