

Grow Our Own Social Worker Scheme

Background information

1. The Council is proposing to support a cohort of between 25 and 28 existing Children's Services/Adult Services employees to undertake a fast track degree course with MMU enabling the individuals to qualify as Social Workers. The project aims to grow our own qualified Social Workers within the next two years, addressing a significant resource shortage within our organisation with the intention of being able to decrease the amount spent with agencies that the Council must use to fill basic service gaps.
2. Our Local Universities do not offer a fast track option and stopped their part time Social Work Degree option some years ago (when full time degrees went up to £9k per year). This left our workforce unable to access a Social Work Degree whilst in employment and the City Council could no longer financially support Degree level qualification at £27,000 per person. The Open University (OU) offers a part time Social Work Degree Course for £16k plus (depending upon time completed). Due to the number of year's study the OU degree requires, usually between 6 to 8 years and the issues historically encountered by both NCC and our partner NCC supporting people to remain engaged with and completing the Programme, the OU degree was not considered to be a viable option. MMU are a leading provider, being one of the first Social Work Teaching Partnerships nationally with a good track record in delivering the fast track two year option, which is suitable for individuals in employment with experience and aptitude. MMU was one of the two universities commissioned by the Department for Education to develop and quality assure the initial Step Up to Social Work Programme Pilot which ran for the first time in 2010. They have continued to deliver the programme with local authority partnerships ever since and are currently working with our fourth cohort of students. MMU is committed to developing sustained partnership working with employers in order to produce high-calibre Social Workers equipped for the realities of the front-line Social Work practice; this was recognised in a national evaluation of the programme by DfE. MMU currently has three regional partnerships of local authorities in Greater Lancashire, East Midlands and the North East for the fourth cohort of Step Up to Social Work programme, which commenced in January 2016.

MMU has been working in partnership with the East Midlands Partnership since cohort one. For cohort four, the Partnership comprises of the following Local Authorities; Derby City, Nottingham City, Nottinghamshire County Council, Leicester City, Leicestershire County Council, Northamptonshire County Council, Lincolnshire County Council.

External examiners have commented that high attainment levels and high completion levels, reflect the success of partnership working, the commitment to joint working, including co-delivery with service users and an overall commitment to supporting and developing students to very high standards ready for the workforces of each local authority. MMU are the only viable option as provider of a tried and tested route to a Fast

Track Social Work Degree offered to people in work within the employer's premises. MMU are able to deliver this within a timescale as from September 2017.

Grow our Own Scheme

3. The detailed Scheme being proposed is attached as Appendix 1. Eligible employees have already been canvassed for their interest and at this stage there appears to be a viable amount of students to enable the course to run.
4. While the Council will need to fund the course at the outset, ultimately these costs will be recuperated from colleagues via career development loans from the Council. Colleagues will be required to enter into Loan and Learning Agreements which sets out both the Council and Employee obligations and also secures repayment of the loan.

Learning Plus

5. The Grow Our Own Scheme was to be delivered through the City Council Learning Plus Scheme which would have allowed colleagues to access a loan to pay for the course fees and also to benefit from a tax saving salary sacrifice arrangement. This was launched and advertised in August 2016; but within that month HMRC published a consultation document proposing the withdrawal of such arrangements from salary sacrifice schemes. The removal was confirmed in the Autumn Statement in September 2016. Colleagues have therefore put together an alternative package based on a career development loan for our colleagues. This ambitious project is well supported by Management and Councillors as a way of alleviating the crisis of Social Worker recruitment. Teams across the organisation have been working together to identify a workable option to recommend for approval. As part of the funding package, colleagues will receive a contribution of £3,000 to their course fees from the Council. The total amount put forward by the Council is set out in the financial implications for this project.

Partner Local Authorities

6. Neighbouring authorities Nottinghamshire County Council and potentially Derbyshire County Council have expressed interest in funding some of their own employees to become part of the project with MMU. In the event of successful negotiations with our partners, it is proposed that Nottingham City Council be the lead authority in this arrangement. A partnership arrangement mitigates the possibility of the cohort numbers falling below the 25 minimum places which are required to be funded to enable the package to be viable for MMU.

7. Financial implications

The financial implications are set out in the exempt appendix to this briefing note and DDM.

Risks

8. Placement Fees

The Council will receive payments from MMU for providing placements at £20 per day per student for an average of 170 days; an arrangement with all universities providing Social Work Degrees. However, due to capacity and our commitment to the new D2N2 Teaching Partnership, in which we have guaranteed 50 placements for local universities – this will use up our capacity of internal Practice Educators, a requirement for student placements. This means we will have to use this funding to buy in external support for these MMU students. We will be able to contain costs within this envelope and are likely to be able to secure a small income pot for any unexpected expenses.

9. Loans to Employees

The Council will be offering career development loans to individual colleagues. Financial and personal circumstances change all of the time and this can affect a person's ability to pay. Colleagues will be bound by the loan agreement but could be in a situation whereby they cannot pay.

Minimum numbers and Partner arrangement

10. While taking a partnership approach to the project enables the Council to mitigate against the possibility of the cohort falling below the minimum 25 people, it may result in a delay getting all of the required contractual documentation agreed and executed as each partner will have its own internal governance arrangements that it needs to adhere to. Ultimately though, partners will be paying for and taking responsibility for their own employees. Partners will have their own scheme for their employees who set out what support they will give and their expectations of their own employees but the teaching provision by MMU will remain the same for the entire cohort.

11. No back fill. There will be no additional funds for back fill. Services will have to cover for when delegates undertake their placements and course attendance; everything possible will be put in place to ensure the least disruption to services i.e. Placement swaps between delegates and staggered placement times, so delegates are not all out of the service at the same time. Management Guidance is being developed to assist in this regard to equitable arrangements for staff release and cover.