

Staffing Policy Committee
9th May 2023

‘Grow Our Own’ Social Worker Development Scheme policy

Purpose

1. The purpose of the report is to provide a draft policy to SPC for the Grow Our Own Social Worker Development Scheme. The aim of the Grow Our Own Social Worker Development Scheme is to support employees to qualify as social workers. The scheme provides an opportunity to undertake a professional qualification in Social Work with a view to returning to work within the council’s social services.
2. The Career Break policy has also been amended to reflect the introduction of the new Grow Our Own policy.

Background and main considerations

3. Children’s and adults’ social care are key areas for us as a local authority. These areas pose challenges with regards to both recruitment and retention, leading to greater reliance on agency staff and the risk of staffing instability.
4. The Grow Our Own Social Worker Development Scheme seeks to retain talent within the organisation by supporting staff to develop into Social Worker roles.
5. The scheme applies to those staff currently working for Wiltshire Council, who wish to undertake formal social work training, who have the qualifications required and meet the entry criteria for their chosen programme.
6. The scheme benefits both the employee and the organisation. Investing in staff development in this way demonstrates that we value our staff, positively impacting upon motivation and job satisfaction, and creating a greater sense of loyalty to the organisation. Increasing our number of trained social workers will also address a critical skills gap, improving service delivery and resilience, leading to better outcomes for the residents of Wiltshire.

The Wiltshire Council Offer

7. The council's Career Break policy currently requires staff to resign, ceasing their continuous service. This reduces the incentive for staff to return to the council following their career break.
8. In order to incentivise individuals to return to the council after achieving their social work qualification, the decision, as supported by CLT, is to make an exception to this rule for the Grow Our Own Social Worker scheme. For the purposes of this scheme, employees will still need to resign from their substantive post and will not be an employee of Wiltshire Council for the duration of the programme. Then, providing that staff commence the ASYE programme with Wiltshire Council within three months of successfully qualifying, they will be able to have their previous continuous service taken into account for contractual benefits such as sickness absence, maternity/paternity, long service and annual leave.
9. Enabling staff to have previous continuous service taken into account if they return to the council on the ASYE programme within 3 months is a benefit which will support us to attract these staff back to the organisation.

Environmental impact of the proposal

10. None identified.

Equalities impact of the proposal

11. This policy will be taken to the next equality impact assessment panel. All comments from this panel will be considered.

Risk Assessment

12. If Wiltshire Council does not support employees to grow their career in social work, staff may look to other organisations which offer these development opportunities. Due to the shortages in this area we need to retain staff to enable us to deliver effective services to our vulnerable residents.

Financial Advice

13. The training options are funded via Grant income from DfE, the apprenticeship levy or by employees themselves. Considerations have been made regarding the financial implications of retaining employees' continuous service, however it is believed that the financial and service implications of not

retaining staff would be a greater cost to the council. It should also be noted that continuous service would not be retained for redundancy purposes.

Legal Advice

14. Legal advice has been received internally from Asifa Ashraf, Solicitor, who confirmed that allowing these staff to retain their continuous service would be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, that being resolving the business need for social workers.

Recommendations

15. It is recommended that SPC support and agree the new Grow Our Own policy, and the related amendments made to the Career Break policy.

Tamsin Kielb
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