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# The Greater Manchester Pledge for workforce stability in children’s social care

## Introduction

This Greater Manchester Pledge (“GM Pledge”) is designed to address challenges related to the workforce of Children’s Social Work Professionals with a focus on the supply and quality of agency workers through evidenced protocols, adopted by other regions over many years, and a commitment to transparent and co-operative working.

On 31 October, 2024 new national guidance on the use of agency child and family social workers comes into effect. [Agency rules statutory guidance for local authorities on the use of agency child and family social workers (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e1738bcaa02d92e72c8d45/Agency_rules_statutory_guidance_for_local_authorities.pdf)

This document has been reviewed and updated to reflect the required changes.

The data collection section of the guidance is a legal requirement for local authorities [Agency child and family social workers: data and price caps operational guidance (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66e0233545cb18e102ebac3c/Agency_child_and_family_social_workers_-_data_and_price_caps_operational_guidance.pdf) . The rest of the statutory guidance should be complied with unless exceptional circumstances arise.

## Objectives of the Pledge

The GM Pledge complies with statutory guidance on the use of agency child and family social workers.

Across the region we have significant numbers of children who are experiencing changes of social worker, it is our collective ambition to improve the experience and lives of our children and families by providing a stable workforce. This, in turn, will support the Local Authorities by reducing the costs associated with staff turnover and high numbers of agency staff. The GM Pledge also contributes towards tackling children’s social care budget pressures caused by the high cost of agency staff.

The GM Pledge recognises the need to respond to these challenges collectively and in co-operation, providing clear protocols and mechanism of control.

## Scope

The GM Pledge covers agency staff within the Children’s Social Work Professional Workforce, including Children’s Social Workers, Senior Social Workers, Advanced Practitioners, Independent Reviewing Officers/Conference Chairs, and Team Manager roles (or equivalent) within the following Local Authorities:

* Bolton
* Bury
* Manchester
* Oldham
* Rochdale
* Salford
* Stockport
* Tameside
* Trafford
* Wigan

(“the Local Authorities”)

## Effective Date

The GM Pledge first came into effect on 1st November 2023. The Pledge was then updated to meet the requirements of new DfE statutory guidance which comes into effect on 31 October 2024.

## Governance & Resources

The GM Pledge is overseen by Directors of Children’s Services who are responsible and accountable for ensuring that their service managers, HR, Managed Service Providers and agency suppliers implement the GM Pledge in a timely manner within each of the Local Authorities.

Directors of Children’s Services will be supported by Assistant Directors of Children’s Services, Principal Social Workers, Workforce Leads and Senior HR representatives from across the region.

Progress updates will be shared with GM DCS and GM HR Directors Groups on a quarterly basis and discussed sub-regionally. A HR Director will attend for the performance monitoring report item at the Quarterly DCS session and vice versa. Resources to support communication and consistent messaging across the key stakeholder groups, the supply chain and candidates will be made available in a central repository (GMCA).

## Adoption of The GM Pledge

Every Local Authority will include the GM Pledge in the terms of contracts and other documents to support the delivery of its objectives, working with Reed and other agencies to fully represent its terms throughout the supply chain.

The Directors of Children’s Services commit to implementing the GM Pledge in their own service holding one another to account. The Local Authorities agree to:

* communicate within the Local Authority and hold Heads of Service and managers to account locally for adherence to the GM Pledge
* adopt the protocols for agency CSW recruitment and
* hold one another accountable through agreed processes of control and transparency.

## Commitment to The GM Pledge

The Directors of Children’s Services commit to the GM Pledge for a period of 12 months from its original adoption. Following 12 months (or earlier if needed) the rates and process will be reviewed by Directors of Children’s Services and HR Directors.

## 8. Management of agency staffing

Rates of pay based on FTE hours for agency workers (Schedule 1):

The Local Authorities agree that they will:

1. Pay agency social worker staff at pay rates no greater than those set out in Schedule 1 of the GM Pledge, instructing their Managed Service Providers and any agencies who supply each Local Authority of the rates. The pay rates set out should not be supplemented with any additional allowances (such as travel or accommodation) and all Heads of Service/Team Managers are not to go against this without express permission from their DCS. Mileage payments at the agreed rate will still be made.
2. Ensure that the relevant Director of Children’s Services and Chief Executive sign-off any assignments above price caps prior to the assignment being agreed and report any price cap breaches to the Department for Education (DfE) through the quarterly data collection.
3. Work in collaboration with Managed Service Providers to ensure that the assigned role title and pay rate for agency staff appropriately reflects the experience of each worker, aligned to the pay rates outlined in the GM Pledge.
4. Not advertise any roles above the pay rates outlined within the GM Pledge. Any non-compliant adverts should be reported and removed, with support from the Managed Service Providers where adverts have been posted by agencies.
5. Ensure that hours paid to workers reflect the hours worked within their contract.
6. Not employ case working ‘project’ or ‘parachute’ CSW candidates. The Local Authorities will not use these descriptions or other similar terms to create any case working Children’s Social Worker roles that are deemed to fall outside the pay rates and terms of the GM Pledge.

## 9. Referencing quality and supply chain engagement

The Local Authorities agree that they will:

1. Require a detailed practice-based reference using the agency rules standard reference template for all agency child and family social workers before offering an assignment irrespective of the length of assignment. (Schedule 2)
2. Require at least two detailed practice-based references for all agency child and family social workers before offering an assignment (the agency rules standard reference template should be used for references date on or after 31 October 2024.)
3. Complete the reference template (Schedule 2) as part of the end of an assignment process for agency workers, supported by the Managed Service Providers.
4. Complete the reference template (Schedule 2) in a timely manner providing detailed feedback on the capabilities and performance of workers alongside confirmation of dates, and not defer to the representing agency to provide a date reference.
5. Ensure that the Managed Service Providers embed the template for use in the agency supply chain and ensure its use as part of their typical pre-employment compliance process.
6. Work with Managed Service Providers to host conference calls with the CSW agency supply chain wherever possible to ensure needs and expectations for roles placed are fully understood. Agencies will be expected to retain and re-train this information with their staff to ensure learnings are captured and utilised in future recruitment activities.
7. Work with the Managed Service Providers to ensure that any persistently non-compliant agencies are removed, suspended or demoted from the agency supply chain.
8. In order to qualify for agency appointments, candidates must demonstrate a minimum of 3 years’ post-qualified experience in direct employment of an English local authority practising in a child and family context while registered as a social worker with a UK regulator.

## 10. Six Month ‘Cool-off’ period for transfer of workers:

The Local Authorities agree:

1. Not to engage on an agency contract, candidates leaving a permanent contract with another Local Authority in Greater Manchester for a minimum of 6 months after leaving their permanent post. This does not apply to:-
   * 1. permanent staff moving to a permanent role in another Greater Manchester Local Authority.
     2. Child and family social workers who are made redundant from a permanent post.
     3. A social worker who is seeking an agency assignment in a different region from their previous employment
     4. A social worker who has left a permanent role during their probationary period

Local Authorities may also consider exceptional circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

## 11. Notice Periods

The Local Authorities should ensure that all agency assignments have a 4 week notice period (or align the length of the assignment notice periods with that of the local authority’s contractual notice period for substantive staff in the same or equivalent job role where that is less than 4 weeks) and commit to adopting a reciprocal arrangement between agency workers and Local Authorities to minimise immediate or quick departures and the associated impact on children and the permanent workforce.

## 12. Management of permanent staffing

The LAs agree that they will:

1. Refrain from proactive headhunting of staff from signatory Local Authorities committed to the GM Pledge directly or through third parties, unless for a promotional role.
2. Engage in opportunities to work more effectively with the agency supply chain to better enable their support of permanent recruitment activities across the region.
3. Provide mutual support and assistance to other signatories to the pledge wherever possible, recognising that the needs and challenges of each Local Authority will differ but our collective commitment to Greater Manchester children is consistent. The support could, for example, involve the short-term provision of staff or leadership advice and support in specific areas.

## 13. Data Collection

The data collection section of the guidance is a legal requirement for local authorities.

Local Authorities must:

* Provide the Department for Education with quarterly data on the use and cost of agency child and family social workers, including where supplied via a project team or packaged model

LAs agree that they will also:

1. Participate in surveys and data gathering by providing a timely, accurate and comprehensive response to requests so that accurate and reliable information is available to all signatories.
2. Provide accurate and complete data to GMCA and the DfE on a quarterly basis (working with Reed and in collaboration with other agencies where applicable). This information will be anonymised.

The parties to the GM Pledge will adhere to the following principles and practices and will comply with the UK General Data Protection Regulations, the Data Protection Act 2018 and all applicable law about the processing of personal data and privacy:

* Where it is necessary for a party to share personal data that cannot be truly anonymised, then they shall only share personal data or confidential information/data where an appropriate lawful basis has been established in accordance with data protection legislation
* They will process all personal data fairly and lawfully for specified and lawful purposes
* They will endeavour to hold relevant and accurate data, and where practical, they shall keep it up to date
* They shall not keep personal data for longer than is necessary and shall securely delete the data when no longer required
* They shall keep all data secure
* They shall endeavour to ensure that personal data is not transferred to countries outside of the European Economic Area (EEA) without adequate protection
* They shall obtain evidence that any third party involved in data processing is compliant with data protection legislation
* They shall regularly review associated internal controls and processes, how data is captured, kept safe and stored; and
* They shall periodically review their Privacy Policy and ensure full accessibility to all.

## 14. Transition to GM Pledge and DfE Guidance

The Local Authorities agree that they will:

1. Commit to working within the pay rates and protocols of the GM Pledge from November 2023. Financial or non-financial bonuses that take a worker over the price cap should not be offered. Only reasonable expenses should be covered in addition to the hourly rate.
2. Ensure that any advert placed on behalf of a Local Authority complies with the DfE guidance. If a supplier seeks to circumvent the caps, local authorities should consider whether it would be appropriate to restrict their access to new vacancies and/or report them to their respective Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance.
3. Bring any existing agency workers who exceed the new GM Pledge pay rates in line with the pay rates within a reasonable time as agreed with each Local Authority.
4. Commit to bring any existing project or managed teams to an end as soon as possible.
5. Engage with the GMCA project team with performance management data to ensure governance arrangements are adhered to.

## 15. Project Teams

The Local authorities agree to ensure that all contracts to supply agency social workers via a project team or other packaged model comply with the following requirements:-

1. Prior identification and local authority approval of all constituent child and family social workers
2. Disaggregation of costs related to the provision of each child and family social worker and any other service provided. All contractual arrangements to supply agency child and family social workers via a project team or other packaged model should include as a minimum:

* An overall price
* A clear breakdown of costs, including hourly pay rate, related to the provision each child and family social worker in the project team or other packaged model
* A clear breakdown of all other staff costs
* A breakdown of other charges that have been wrapped into the total price
* A payment schedule; and
* The right for the local authority to request further information on cost transparency throughout the contract term

1. Ensure that for each contract the supplier provides the following details in advance of the assignment start date:
   * 1. Number of social workers
     2. Name of each social worker
     3. Each worker’s registration number issued by Social Work England
     4. References for each social worker
2. Governance arrangements that allow the local authority to maintain complete oversight, control and management of social work practice delivered via the project team or other packaged model including:-
   * 1. A clear line of accountability from the DCS to each constituent child and family social worker of a project team or other packaged model and their practice
     2. Control of decision making in relation to all child and family social work practice delivered by the constituent workers of a project team or other packaged model
     3. Determining the supervision and task/line management of the constituent workers of a project team or other packaged model

This means that as a minimum, local authorities should retain overall control over:

* The practice model used by all constituent child and family social workers of a project team or other packaged model
* Practice supervision of all constituent child and family social workers of a project team or other packaged model
* Line management of all constituent child and family social workers of a project team or other packaged model
* Quality assurance of all child and family social work practice delivered by the constituent workers of a project team or other packaged model
* Decision-making in case management, such that the project team or other packaged model is fully integrated within the children’s services department

## 16. Continuous Development of the GM Pledge

1. The performance of the GM Pledge will be reviewed by the GM DCS and GM HR Directors groups with support from GMCA on a quarterly basis.
2. The pay rates outlined in Schedule 1 will be reviewed at least annually in consultation with other regions nationally and in line with the annual pay award agreement.
3. The protocols outlined in the GM Pledge will be reviewed at least annually in order to strengthen the GM Pledge.
4. The GM Pledge forms part of a wider strategic workforce programme to respond to CSW recruitment and retention challenges.
5. The Local Authorities will collaborate with other regions to strengthen the GM Pledge and developed shared objectives and opportunities where appropriate.
6. The GM Pledge will be reviewed following the first 12 months and an analysis of success will be provided to each Local Authority.

***The Pledge was signed by Lead Members for Children and Young People and Directors of Children’s Services on Friday 17 November 2023. And updated in October 2024 to meet the requirements of the DfE statutory rules/guidance.***

**Schedule 1**

**FTE Pay rates for new agency staff (inclusive of on costs, exclusive of agency mark- up)**

The rates set out below are hourly rates (umbrella/Ltd company rates) and must be converted for the PAYE equivalent candidates.

These are rates inclusive of Employers' NI and holiday pay ie. equivalent to Ltd Co/Umbrella rates. The rates exclude agency mark ups, which are unchanged.

These rates have been arrived at by analysis of data collected from Greater Manchester Authorities’ outlining the most common pay rates, as well as in collaboration with neighbouring regions to ensure that they are representative of market rates.

The pay rates have been applied based on existing agreed rates across Greater Manchester.

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| **Job Categories** | **Agency Worker Pay Rate** |
| Social Worker | Up to and including £39.00 |
| Senior Social Worker | Up to and including £40.00 |
| Advanced Practitioner | Up to and including £40.00 |
| IRO/Conference Chair | Up to and including £40.00 |
| Team Manager | Up to and including £46.00 |

*The rates set out should not be supplemented with any additional allowances (such as travel or accommodation)*.

**Schedule 2**

**Standard Reference Template**

In accordance with the statutory guidance a detailed practice-based reference for agency child and family social workers is required before offering an assignment.

The standard reference template is based on the social work professional standards in England. The professional standards are the threshold standards necessary for safe and effective practice set out by Social Work England outlining what every social worker must know, understand and be able to do after qualifying. Local authorities should ensure that both sections are completed.

For a copy of the standard reference template see link below:-

[Agency rules- statutory guidance for local authorities on the use of agency child and family social workers](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/670e59e9080bdf716392f380/Agency_Rules_-_statutory_guidance_for_local_authorities_on_the_use_of_agency_child_and_family_social_workers.pdf#page=33)

**Section 1**

This is a factual reference which includes a short summary of the agency child and family

social worker’s employment including job title and employment dates but does not

include details about knowledge and skills.

**Section 2**

This is a detailed reference based on the social work professional standards. It is important this section is an accurate and objective reflection of the agency child and family social worker’s practice during their assignment. It should provide an unbiased assessment based on the agency child and family social worker’s actual performance and abilities, highlighting both strengths and practice areas in need of development.

**Providing a reference**

Local authorities should complete the standard reference template for each agency child and family social worker before their assignment ends. Local authorities should not delegate responsibility for completing the template to agencies or managed service providers.

This reference template should be completed by an appropriate line manager within the LA. This may be the direct line manager or the manager as detailed within local policy.