

Frequently Asked Questions: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Agency Rates and Use of Agency Workers in Social Work across the North-East

1. What is the purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)?

The MoU formalises the use of agency workers in social work across twelve local authorities in the North-East of England. It outlines guidelines on the engagement, rates, and governance structures for using agency child and family social workers. The key objective is to ensure workforce stability, consistent practice, and cost management across the region.

2. Which local authorities are involved in this MoU?

Darlington Borough Council

Durham County Council

Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council

Hartlepool Borough Council

Middlesbrough Council

Newcastle City Council

North Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council

Northumberland County Council

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council

South Tyneside Council

Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council

Sunderland City Council (Together for Children)

3. What are the key objectives of this project?

Manage agency worker rates within set price caps.

Ensure collaboration between local authorities to share data and best practices.

Enhance workforce planning and service delivery, focusing on reducing reliance on agency workers.

Maintain quality and consistency in the services provided by agency social workers.

4. How are the hourly rates for agency workers determined?

The MoU introduces capped hourly rates for different roles within social work. These caps are the maximum that can be paid, including statutory costs and fees. The specific rates for Social Workers, Senior Social Workers, Team Managers, and Independent Reviewing Officers are detailed in the MoU.

5. What happens if a local authority needs to exceed the capped rates?

Local authorities must submit a formal request, using the "Request to Exceed Capped Rate Form," to the MoU Governance Group. The request must include justification for exceeding the cap, including market pressures or exceptional circumstances. Decisions on whether to approve or reject such requests are made by the Governance Group within 10 working days.

6. What is the role of the Workforce Board?

The Workforce Board, co-chaired by regional Directors of Children's Services, provides strategic oversight for the MoU. It includes senior leaders from each local authority who contribute to decision-making regarding the use of agency workers. The Board meets quarterly to review progress and address issues related to workforce planning.

7. What is the process for managing agency social workers who leave assignments early?

Agency social workers are required to serve a minimum four-week notice period unless an alternative is agreed upon. If a worker leaves without serving this notice, the local authority may reflect this in the worker's reference. Workers who have left early will not be rehired for at least three months, except in exceptional circumstances.

8. Are agency workers required to work from a specific location?

Yes, agency workers are expected to work from a designated office location for at least three days per week unless otherwise approved by their direct line manager. This helps maintain operational continuity and oversight.

9. What kind of training and development opportunities are available for agency workers?

Agency workers may access core mandatory training, with the local authority covering the costs. However, for non-mandatory or specialist training, the agency worker may need to bear the cost themselves unless the training is required by the local authority.

11. How is the MoU governed and monitored?

The MoU is governed by a structure involving the Workforce Board, MoU Governance Group, and the RIIA Executive Board. These groups oversee project implementation, approve exceptions to the capped rates, and ensure that objectives are met. Regular reports and data sharing across the local authorities ensure transparency and accountability.

12. Is this MoU legally binding?

No, this MoU is not legally binding. It reflects the commitment of the involved local authorities to follow the agreed principles and standards. However, it is intended that all parties honour their obligations under the MoU.

13. Where can I get more information or raise queries about the MoU?

For any queries regarding the MoU, please contact Jude Dickinson at neadass-adcs@durham.gov.uk