

# OFFICER DELEGATION SCHEME RECORD OF DECISION

**TO BE UPLOADED TO THE INTERNET BY DEMOCRATIC SERVICES**

<b>Date:</b> 17 March 2025		<b>Ref No:</b> 2269	
<b>Responsible Officer:</b> Emma Massey - Principal Social Worker			
<b>Type of Decision (please refer to MO Guidance):</b>			
<b>Key</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Non-Key</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Freedom of Information Status:</b> <i>(can the report go in the public domain)</i> Not Exempt			
<b>Title/Subject matter:</b>  Mental Health Social Work Fast Track Programme - Think Ahead			
<b>Budget/Strategy/Policy/Compliance:</b>			
(i) Is the decision within an Approved Budget?	Yes		
(ii) Is the decision in conflict with the council's policies, strategies or relevant service plans?	No		
(iii) Does the decision amend existing or raise new policy issues?	No		
(iv) Is the decision significant and/or does it meet the £100,000 threshold for recording?	No		
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b> [Does this decision change policy, procedure or working practice or negatively impact on a group of people? <b>If yes</b> – complete EIA and summarise issues identified and recommendations – forward EIA to Corporate HR]	No		

**Summary:**

The Think Ahead mental health social work fast-track programme offers several benefits for recruitment, retention, legal literacy, and team support during organisational transformation. In summary:

**Enhanced Recruitment:**

**Attracts High-Caliber Candidates:** The programme targets motivated individuals with strong academic backgrounds and leadership potential, ensuring a high-quality talent pool.

**Diverse Recruitment:** Think Ahead appeals to candidates from various disciplines, bringing fresh perspectives to mental health social work.

**Improved Retention:**

**Commitment to the Sector:** Participants receive robust training and mentorship, fostering a deeper connection and long-term commitment to mental health social work.

**Career Development Opportunities:** The programme supports participants in building clear career pathways, reducing turnover and promoting loyalty.

**Strengthened Legal Literacy:**

**Focused Training:** Think Ahead provides comprehensive education on mental health legislation, The Care Act and Mental Capacity Act alongside social work ethics, equipping participants to navigate legal complexities confidently.

**Practice-Based Learning:** Trainees gain hands-on experience, integrating legal knowledge with practical application in mental health settings.

**Support During Transformation:**

**Workforce Resilience:** The programme builds a skilled workforce capable of adapting to organizational change and implementing new practices effectively.

**Change Champions:** Think Ahead participants bring fresh ideas and energy, driving innovation and supporting teams through transformation.

**Collaboration and Team Building:** The programme emphasizes interdisciplinary teamwork, enhancing collaboration and morale during periods of change.

By combining rigorous training, professional development, and a focus on legal and practical skills, Think Ahead strengthens the mental health social work workforce, ensuring it is well-prepared to meet current and future challenges.

**Wards affected:** N/A**Consultations:** N/A**Scrutiny & Review Committee Interest:** N/A

**Options considered:**

Option One:

To manage and operate the Think Ahead Mental Health Fast Track Programme. The benefits are listed below. :

- Enhanced Recruitment: Attracts high-calibre candidates.
- Improved Retention: Encourages long-term commitment to the sector.
- Strengthened Legal Literacy: Provides focused mental health social work training.
- Practice-Based Learning
- Support During Transformation: Acts as change champions.




Option Two:

Continue to rely on traditional recruitment and retention methods.

**Decision** *[with reasons]*

Think Ahead enhances the mental health social work workforce with rigorous training, professional development, and a focus on legal and practical skills. This ensures readiness for current and future challenges during regional and national transformations in Mental Health Social Work.

Approval the creation, establishment, and recruitment of the 'Think Ahead For Mental Health Project' and an associate Social Work Consultant post with recurrent costs.

<b>Decision made by:</b>	<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
Director of Adult Social Services and Community Commissioning		21 April 2025
Section 151 Officer	NA	
Interim AD HR		24 April 2025
<b>Members Consulted</b> <i>[see note 1 below]</i>		
Cabinet Member		1 May 2025

Lead Member - HR	NA	
Opposition Spokesperson	NA	

### Notes

1. Where, in accordance with the requirements of the Officer Delegation Scheme, a Chief Officer consults with the appropriate Cabinet Member they must sign the form so as to confirm that they have been consulted and that they agree with the proposed action. The signature of the Opposition Spokesperson should be obtained if required, to confirm that he/she has been consulted. Please refer to the MO Guidance.
2. **This form must not be used for urgent decisions.**
3. Where there is any doubt, Corporate Directors should err on the side of caution and seek advice from the Council's Monitoring Officer.

## 1. Background

Nationally recruitment of and retention of Social Workers is challenging area for several Local Authorities. The Local Government Association (LGA) has provided evidence of retention and recruitment difficulties for Social Work roles across local councils. Latest data has found that councils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland experience recruitment difficulties for adult social workers (75% of all councils) and children's social workers (55% of all councils).

Bury Council's Adult Social Care, specifically Mental Health Social Work, has had difficult recruiting in this area. The impact of this could lead to challenges in meeting our statutory duties. Mental Health Teams across the service continue to experience difficulties with recruitment and retention, reflecting a trend across Greater Manchester and at a national level.

## 2. Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention of staff, particularly professionally qualified staff has proved increasingly difficult. So much so that even attracting suitable agency staff has proved extremely challenging, with few agency staff available and the quality low.

Incentive packages, including enhanced salary offers and additional annual leave are being offered to Mental Health Social Workers by other Local Authorities and Mental Health Trusts in GM and Lancashire, and have led to staff losses.

Transformation in Mental Health social work across Greater Manchester and nationally could impact on recruitment and retention.

To support a grow-your-own approach, an application was made to the Think Ahead programme, which provides a paid two-year fast track into mental health social work for graduates and career changers. The application was successful and Bury will have 4 trainee places. The selection process is managed by Think Ahead.

### **3. Think Ahead Programme**

#### **Programme Details:**

Think Ahead will manage all recruitment of trainees.

Bury will be allocated 4 trainees per year. Bury Local Authority will be responsible for establishing, recruiting, and funding a Consultant Social Work post.

In Year One, all four trainees will work in a Bury Local Authority 'Think Ahead Unit' with support from a Consultant Social Worker, based within the social work mental health team.

Trainees will receive an £18,500 bursary from the Think Ahead programme and earn a postgraduate diploma in Social Work.

In Year Two, qualified trainees will be employed by the local authority as newly qualified Social Workers. These positions will primarily be in the mental health sector; however, if there are no available roles in that area, positions can be offered across other teams in the department.

Trainees will participate in the Assisted and Supported Year in Employment programme and complete their Masters in Social Work degree.

In order to realise this exciting opportunity position of Consultant Social Worker (Grade 14) will need to be funded and recruited to.

This role may initially be offered as an internal secondment. It provides experienced social workers with opportunities to support workforce learning, stay in practice, and develop leadership skills. This position enhances career progression and forms part of intentional retention strategies beyond team management roles.

The configuration of the Consultant social worker and unit of trainee is set out in the partnership contract between Bury Council and Think Ahead.

Bury Adult Social Care have a successful apprenticeship programme, this additional fast track programme will broaden routes into Adult Social Work in Bury.

### **4. Financial**

A signed contract is in place and payment for trainees in the first year is via a bursary from the Think Ahead programme. the second year, they will become salaried members of staff and will be placed into an existing vacant post.

The consultant Social Work post will be funded by the Adults department. The cost of this will be £62,802 recurrent.

Think Ahead will pay the Lead Partner, namely the Bury Local authority £29,000. For a standard Unit of four Participants/ trainees. This will come in the following phases, 28 February 2025 £4,000, 01 September 2025 £13,000. The date when all Participants have satisfactorily commenced Year Two employment with You £12,000 You will invoice Us for the Fees prior to the dates set out above. We reserve the right to make

The net contribution required over 2 years is £ 96,604  
This will be funded from the DHSC apprenticeships fund

## **5. Legal**

The contract will be signed by the Director of Adults outlining the agreement between the Local Authority and Think Ahead, the organisation and share with partner organisations.

## **6. HR**

The post will be newly created and recruited to initially via internal expressions of interest, should this not be successful, the paper seeks permission to advertise the post externally. Appropriate Job description will be reviewed within the job family.

## **7. Procurement**

'Think Ahead' FastTrack programme will be procured in line with the council's procurement policies.

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

To approve the creation, establishment, and recruitment of 'Think Ahead For Mental Health Project' and associate Social Work Consultant post on a recurrent basis.