

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL –RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:

Cabinet

DECISION NO:

22/00058

For publication [Do not include information which is exempt from publication under schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972]

Key decision: YES

Key decision criteria. The decision will:

- a) result in savings or expenditure which is significant having regard to the budget for the service or function (currently defined by the Council as in excess of £1,000,000); or
- b) be significant in terms of its effects on a significant proportion of the community living or working within two or more electoral divisions – which will include those decisions that involve:
 - the adoption or significant amendment of major strategies or frameworks;
 - significant service developments, significant service reductions, or significant changes in the way that services are delivered, whether County-wide or in a particular locality.

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme - Delivery Beyond August 2022

Decision:

Cabinet, agree to:

- i) commissioning and delivery of activity within the Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme can continue until 31 March 2023; and
- ii) further work be undertaken considering the potential for a successor brand to Reconnect to support capacity building in the VCS linked to the vision of Reconnect.

1. Reason(s) for decision:

1.1 The County Council recognises that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected substantially the lives of all Kent residents. All Members have been united in expressing their concern about the particular impact on young people, who saw every aspect of their life and development affected. In March 2021 Cabinet approved the creation of the Reconnect: Kent Children and Young People Programme, with its aims and objectives being approved in June 2021, together with approval of its £10m budget.

1.2 The urgency to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on the County's children and young people was captured by its agreed end date of 31st August 2022. Accordingly, the programme has focused on working with hundreds of organisations, clubs, partners and individuals to secure delivery of a wide range of support, activities, and new opportunities for children and young people.

1.3 As we move towards the anticipated end date, it is important to review whether the original decision, which was made in good faith in an uncertain international context, should be implemented or adjusted.

2. Current Context

2.1 The local, national and international position is much different from that of March and June last year. Covid restrictions have eased, but the supply and cost of food, energy and goods, the availability of labour to fill vacancies, and the war in Ukraine continue to impact on children and

families, and the capacity of the organisations working with Reconnect to support them. The path out of the pandemic during 2021/22 was not quick or certain, with new variants like Omicron affecting both children and young people and those seeking to support them.

2.2 Reconnect was established to be a County Council led, community-based programme. It has delivered, and continues to deliver, a wide variety of support and opportunities for children and young people, thanks to the overwhelming response from clubs and organisations, large and small, across the County. The feedback received by the providing organisations from individual children and families is truly heart-warming and demonstrates the difference these organisations are making. It is a symbiotic relationship, with organisations being supported by Reconnect, while supporting Reconnect as a brand, a call to arms.

2.3 In accordance with the Cabinet decisions, Reconnect has focused on securing delivery of support and activity by 31 August 2022. As we near this end point it is worth reviewing this decision. The context surrounding this is:

- I. Budget – the programme (at the time of writing) has £1.4m of uncommitted funding.
- II. Capacity – providers (commissioned services, the VCS, schools) are all reporting they are at capacity, struggling to recruit further staff, and continuing to experience staff absences. We are receiving requests to allow providers to delay delivery until the autumn.
- III. Timescales – it is increasingly implausible to commission further activity for summer 2022, and thus use the uncommitted funds in a prudent and effective way to support C&YP.
- IV. Reconnect’s Partnership Board has proposed uncommitted funding be used to continue to deliver activity until 31 March 2023.

2. Preferred Option

2.1 Commissioning and delivery continue post 31st August – this option continues to keep Reconnect’s resources focused on delivery of the summer programme, before being diverted to further commissioning. Delivery would need to be extended to “by” 31 March 2023 at the latest.

3. Collaboration

3.1 It is welcomed that some providers have expressed the view that having the Reconnect brand to work within has been helpful. It has provided a clear statement of what people are collectively trying to achieve, made it easier to explain what they are doing and the context, and has helped drive greater collaboration between providers. The vision of Reconnect was “an enhanced and networked approach to creating opportunities for children and young people in their communities. Organisations and communities will thrive, joined around the shared value of generating meaningful impact and sustainable change for children and young people”. The comments indicate Reconnect has achieved some, if not all of this vision. Some providers have suggested a brand, such as Reconnect, should continue, so as to provide the clarity of purpose and explanation to support ongoing collaboration.

4. Equalities Assessment

4.1 An equalities impact assessment was completed for the programme. There is nothing obvious from the proposal to extend the delivery date which suggests this needs to be revisited.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Currently the majority of staff dedicated to Reconnect have contracts which finish on 31 August 2022. Some, but not all, contracts would need to be extended in order to provide the capacity required to deliver the final commissions. The costs can be covered within the existing budget.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

Cabinet discussed the decision on 21 July 2022.

Members of the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee have been regularly updated on the progress of Reconnect through the verbal updates of the Cabinet Members.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Reconnect ends as planned and surplus funding is returned to the Covid reserve. Existing services to flex to meet the additional demands having had the advantages of time and the mitigation of Reconnect to ensure they are well placed to do so.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None

...21 July 2022.....
date