

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF OFFICER DECISION

Executive

DECISION TAKEN BY:

Christine McInnes, Interim Corporate Director, Children,
Young People and Education

DECISION NO:

OD/26/00007

For publication

Subject matter: Independent Fostering Placement Services for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking (UAS) Children – Block Contract

Cabinet Member decision to which this action relates:

This officer decision is taken under point e of Decision Number: 23/00110¹
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking (UAS) children Support and Accommodation – Urgent Record Of Decision by Cabinet Member for Integrated Children Services, decision taken 21 December 2023.

- a) Approve the policy approach to securing and delivering additional accommodation and support for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking (UAS) children
- b) Confirm the revised property and infrastructure requirements for the service
- c) Note the position and measures taken by the Council
- d) Note that the capital costs and operating costs expected to be reimbursed by Central Government
- e) Delegate decisions and necessary actions to the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education to take required actions, including agreeing funding arrangements and entering into contracts or other legal agreements and undertaking relevant service review or design, to establish and enter operational arrangements to existing and new arrangements to ensure lawful compliance of the Council's statutory duties relating to UAS children service provision
- f) Delegate authority to the Director of Infrastructure to, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance, Corporate and Traded Services and the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education, implement the relevant building works, finalise and enter into necessary contracts, funding or other legal agreements (including the completion of land transfers and acquisitions) and reallocate properties from the disposal list, to implement this decision.

Decision:

As Interim Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education, I:

- Agree to proceed with a 12 month extension period for the block contract of Fostering Placement Services for UAS Children based on operational need and budget, noting that it sits under the Independent Fostering Providers Framework (of which the current term ends on 31 March 2027 with a further two year allowable extensions) alongside the existing and planned UAS Children's in-house provision

To note: The below decisions relate to the overarching IFP Framework referenced, which

¹ [Decision 23/00110 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking \(UAS\) children Support and Accommodation](#)

provides the procurement route, but do not provide the delegation for this decision. Delegation is solely from 23/00110.

- key decision [21/00077](#) approved the procurement of the new Kent & Medway IFP Framework from 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2026 (with four x twelve month extensions permitted (end date of contract extensions March 2030). Officer Decision OD/25/00002 (taken under key decision 21/00077) implemented the first 12 month extension until March 2027

Reasons for Decision

Local Authorities, as part of their Sufficiency Duty, must take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within its areas to meet the needs of children they are looking after. The decision directly relates to this duty by aiming to provide a sufficiency of foster care placements which meet demand and the needs of the children and young people and, helps support social workers in matching the requirements to providers and foster carers.

The Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking (UAS) Children's Service is responsible for the care and accommodation of all newly arrived UAS Children in Kent. This is provided under Section 20 of The Children Act 1989. The child's eligibility is the same as for citizen children and this responsibility for KCC continues until the child's case is transferred to another local authority under the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) or to Kent's mainstream Child in Care or 18+ Services.

In January 2023, the Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Directorate Management Team (DMT) approved a proposal to purchase fostering placements for UAS Children through standby short-term placements, until they moved on as part of the NTS under terms and conditions of a Block Contract and Specification, under the IFA Framework. The foster care beds are primarily for those children who are under 16 years old. The contracts became effective from 1 April 2023 for a period of 12 months, and this resulted in a phased introduction of providers and the available beds.

Following regular reviews, in March 2024 and again in March 2025, CYPE DMT agreed to the recommendation to extend the existing block arrangement by a further 12 month period. The current contract runs for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 and applies to five Independent Fostering Agencies.

The providers are party to the Independent Fostering Agency Framework Agreement which has enabled clear pricing mechanisms linked to placement type and category of need. Strong contract management arrangements are in place and regular reviews take place between the UAS Children's Service, Corporate Parenting and Children's Commissioning to review operational issues, share intelligence and ensure the service is delivered in accordance with agreed performance and quality levels.

A late-2025 review of in-house foster beds for newly arrived UAS Children led to a further reduction in UAS Children emergency beds, supported by new KCC Reception Centre and Children's Home capacity. Informed by feedback from key teams, the number of beds was reduced from 23 to 10 by the end of November 2025, allowing more beds to be used for Kent children. As in-house fostering placement capacity reduces, we need to maintain adequate provision through other avenues to continue meeting demand.

CYPE DMT considered the performance of the contract and ongoing operational need, and agreed on 4 March 2026 that it would be appropriate to agree the 12 month extension allowable by the contract terms.

Financial Implications:

This service was commissioned following the implementation of the National Transfer Scheme and was further endorsed due to the High Court judgement in July 2023. The initial intention in 2023 was to commission a total of 30 beds however the market were unable at that time to meet this demand. Over subsequent years the number of beds available through the block contract has gradually increased to the current capacity of 18 beds. This contract is fully funded by Home Office grant.

Summary of Spend by Financial Year:

Year 1: 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 - £519,536

Year 2 (Extension via Direct Award 1): 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 - £1,076,195

Year 3 (Extension via Direct Award 2): 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 - £1,058,113

Year 4 (Extension via Direct Award 3): 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 - £1,079,132 based on the current commissioned bed capacity (progressed via this Officer Decision)

This arrangement sits underneath the IFP Framework and is reviewed on an annual basis therefore the extension decision is required annually.

Legal Implications:

The Commercial and Procurement Division confirmed the block contract can be extended through a direct award under the existing Fostering Framework Agreement as per key decision 21/00077, and will undertake the activity to extend the contract for 12 months.

The IFP Framework allows for Call-off placements on contract without further competition if there is appropriate matching of the child with foster carers. This enables the block contract to be extended under the Framework contract to a length of time that serves the operational need provided it does not exceed the remaining Framework term or allowable extensions.

Equality Implications:

An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening has been completed as part of the Fostering Framework Agreement and no high negative impacts have been identified. The EQIA will continue to be developed and reviewed as the Framework Agreement progresses.

Comments received from any Members or Officers consulted:

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Allow the contract to end in March 2026 and secure placements from the social care market. This was rejected as it is neither efficient nor effective to do so for large numbers of children at short notice and would conflict with the agreement with the Home Office.

Any conflict of interest declared by any executive member consulted by the decision maker and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

No.



signed

Date: 25/03/2026

