

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY:
Cabinet Member for
Specialist Children's Services

DECISION NO:
17/00023

For publication

Key decision

Expenditure is over £1m

Subject: Future Commissioning Arrangements for External Fostering Placements

Decision: As Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services, I:

- a) **APPROVE** the approach to commissioning external fostering placements for children and young people aged 0–18 years; and
- b) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, or other nominated officer, to undertake the necessary actions to award the contract and implement the decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

The current commissioning arrangements, in partnership with Medway Council, for external fostering placements are due to expire in September 2017. This has provided an opportunity to carry out a detailed diagnostic of the current commissioning arrangements, along with market engagement. The results of this work has been used to inform the planned implementation of new commissioning and procurement arrangements for external fostering placements for children and young people aged 0–18 years

Financial Implications

The Director for Specialist Children's Services budget line for external fostering for the year 2017/18 is:

Specialist Children's Services £6,576,000

Disabled Children's Services £944,000

Following the transformation of our in-house service and the implementation of a Recruitment Strategy for in-house foster carers, it is anticipated that spend with the external market will reduce throughout the lifetime of the new arrangement.

Equality Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed which indicated a low impact.

Legal Implications

It is anticipated that there will be no legal implications as a competitive procurement process will be undertaken.

KCC is obliged to fulfil its statutory responsibilities regarding fostering as set out in The Children Act 1989, the Sufficiency Duty and other regulations and guidance such as the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The proposed decision was discussed at the Children's Social Care and Health Cabinet Committee on 23 March 2017. Ms K Sharp, Head of Children's Commissioning, and Ms M Hall, Commissioning

Manager, were in attendance for this item.

1. Ms Sharp introduced the report and explained that the County Council needed to commission a small number of external foster placements to supplement its in-house fostering service. Ms Hall added that the renewal deadline for the current commissioning arrangements of September 2017 had brought an opportunity to review the effectiveness of the current arrangements and assess how these could be simplified in the future. With Mr Ireland and Mr Segurola, they responded to comments and questions from Members, as follows:-
 - a) 83% of the market had reported that very little of their custom came from the County Council; most came from children placed by other local authorities, and competing with this, and the rates paid by other local authorities, many of them from London, would be a challenge;
 - b) the type of placement sought was changing, and increasing demand for wraparound care would decrease the use of external fostering placements. The County Council needed to be able to offer choice and range of placements, and this range was as important as the quantity of placements available;
 - c) it was envisaged that the amount of custom given to external providers would diminish over the life of the new commissioning arrangement, but working with a small section of the external market would give better value for money. External providers could be recruited to work exclusively with the County Council and guaranteed a volume of trade;
 - d) in response to a question about the amount of spot-purchasing over the last financial year, *Ms Hall undertook to provide this information outside the meeting;*
 - e) in response to a question about the extent of competitive tendering which was possible within the market, Mr Ireland explained that the market was limited to a finite number of accredited/approved foster carers and the County Council had to compete with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) to engage them. The extent to which foster carer could be matched was limited by the number of foster carers available at the time, and would need to take account of the needs of the child and the foster family; and
 - f) in response to a question about the possibility of reducing costs by not using an agency but employing external foster carers directly, Mr Segurola added that, to be able to accommodate all the children in care it was asked to place, the County Council had necessarily to work with external providers. It was vital that it could be confident that external providers were of good quality.
2. RESOLVED that the decision proposed to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services, to:
 - a) approve the approach to the future commissioning of external fostering placements for children and young people aged 0–18 years; and
 - b) delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, or other nominated officer, to undertake the necessary actions to award the contract and implement the decision,

be endorsed.

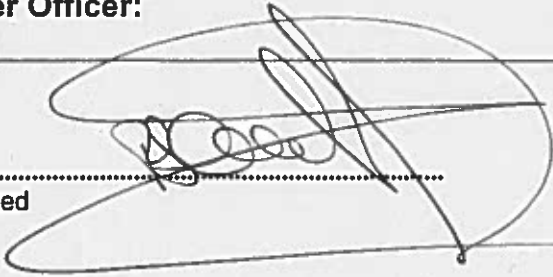
Kent County Council and Medway Council have hosted engagement events with the market in order to outline future demand, requirements and provide updates on service developments.

Any alternatives considered:

As part of the business case analysis other options were considered, but for the reasons outlined in the accompanying recommendation report, they were not considered to be the most beneficial to the Council.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None

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signed

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date

25 - 4. 17

