

EXECUTIVE DECISION

From: **Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services**

Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: **Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 17 January 2023**

Subject: **Reception and Safe Care Centre**

Key decision: **Overall service value exceeds £1m and affects more than two Electoral Divisions.**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report provides the Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee with a proposal to tender for additional premises for the Reception and Safe Care Service for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

The intention is to secure accommodation and landlord functions and to support the young people through the in-house support service from the Strategic Unaccompanied-Asylum Seeking Children Service.

Recommendation(s):

The Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision.

1. Introduction

1.1 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) who arrive in Kent are accommodated by KCC as part of the Local Authority's statutory duty for children in care. They are placed in Reception Centres for temporary accommodation for up to eight weeks during which time they undergo a series of assessments including a Children and Family Assessment, a Health Assessment and Age Assessments. They receive basic orientation and independence skills and associated training programmes to support their

transition to independent accommodation. This assessment period is significant in assessing both the risk to self and any risk to others. Having identified facilities makes the risk assessment more robust and supports the Governments PREVENT agenda.

- 1.2 The Reception Centres provide accommodation and support for male UASC entering Kent aged 16-18. Other arrivals, either female or those with clear safeguarding concerns, are placed in foster care.
- 1.3 There are two Reception Centres in Kent. One is in Ashford and one is in Cranbrook. The agreed Protocol with the Home Office has recently been reviewed in light of the increases to the ratio of UASC to Children in Care population which recently increased from 0.07% to 0.1%.
- 1.4 The National Transfer Scheme was also mandated and has had varying success.

2. Current situation

- 2.1 KCC negotiated an Agreement with the Home Office in 2021 for the Kent Reception and Safe Care Service operating at a maximum of 120 (although through Summer this number was exceeded to support with the high numbers of UASC).
- 2.2 The Ashford Reception Centre has 49 single rooms, with 38 single rooms at Cranbrook. In addition, KCC commissions Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)/Semi-independent placements for the under 16 males and under 18 females. The Agreement includes the Home Office funding the costs of the Reception Centres.
- 2.3 KCC manage the support services funded by the Home Office across both Reception Centres and would assume this would be the same in an expanded model.

3. The procurement and contract

- 3.1 Establishing the Reception and Safe Care Service in 2021 has meant that the increase has seen more placements in Independent Fostering Agencies and semi-independent provision. By securing additional premises, this will allow an expanded, yet contained, service for our UASC.
- 3.2 KCC Property have undertaken searches and there is suitable accommodation available to purchase or lease. By tendering the opportunity, KCC would seek to find an organisation who is able to lease or buy the premises and manage the hotel and management functions. KCC would employ the support staff through the Strategic Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children Team already established in CYPE.
- 3.3 It is expected that the property should be a minimum size of 80 single bedrooms to allow a potential growth in the Reception and Safe Care Service.

The provider would be required to undertake all landlord management of the service including security, repairs, catering and laundry.

- 3.4 The accommodation needs to be flexible and good quality, preferably in the East of the County. It is preferable to have bedrooms with en-suites and some shared space including kitchens, lounges and meeting space for staff to carry out assessments and other 1:1 or smaller group activity.
- 3.5 It has to be affordable, commercially viable, contractually sound and offer a better offer to 16/17-year-old male UASC and potentially flexible for other use, should the UASC numbers deplete.
- 3.6 KCC will publish a Prior Information Notice (PIN) which notifies providers of the intention to procure a service. The response to this will feed into the Business Case and will confirm the best route to procure. There are two main options; one is through an Open Procedure which offers KCC the opportunity to procure the service using a single stage procurement process and would be a preferred route if we are unable to identify a provider to deliver the full requirement of a building significantly sized and in the preferred location. The procurement timeline would be between four to six months.
- 3.7 The second option is Competitive Procurement with Negotiation which offers KCC the opportunity to procure the requirement using as a two-stage procedure, to receive initial tenders from providers which shall be the basis of subsequent negotiations. KCC will be able to negotiate initial and subsequent tenders received from providers, except for the final tender to improve their contents. The minimal requirement and award criteria shall not be subject to negotiation. It would be recommended if KCC was looking to commission the requirement from a single provider to secure better rates through volume discounts. The procurement timeline would be between eight to ten months.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Reception and Safe Care Service is funded from the Home Office Grant for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. No Council costs are expected to be met from the Council's General Fund, including the cost of the procurement.
- 4.2 The Reception and Safe Care Services will be subject to the new regulations, being introduced in 2023, for all providers of supported accommodation for children and care leavers aged 16 and 17. The Government has indicated in its latest consultation on the implementation of these regulations that they are planning on investing £120million in Local Authorities to manage the impact of these changes over the next two years. However there has been no further details at this stage, and therefore negotiation may be required on the investment from the Home Office to meet these standards.

5. Options considered

- 5.1 The options considered are listed below:

Option	Pro	Con
1. Continue only with current provision	Minimum disruption to staff and management structures	Limited capacity, need significant investment, continue with high-cost placements where demand exceeds capacity
2. Expand the site in Cranbrook to accommodate all needs	Would be in KCC's property portfolio	This would require significant capital investment, however, is still a consideration should the numbers of new UASC increase and funding is forthcoming from the Home Office
3. Advise the Home Office that KCC no longer delivers a Reception and Safe Care Service	Reduced management and operational delivery for CYPE	Sever relationships with the Home Office, not offering a welcome and local service near the point of arrival
4. Seek new premises through a competitive tender	Legally compliant process, securing suitable accommodation	
5. KCC directly secures a lease or freehold for a property and manages it itself	Greater control of whole service	Acknowledges that KCC accepts local responsibility for a national issue
6. KCC directly secures a lease or freehold for a property and procures an operator	Greater control of the premises	Acknowledges that KCC accepts local responsibility for a national issue

5.2 The preferred option is option four, seek new premises through an open tender

6. Legal Implications

6.1 Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 sets out the general duty of the local authority in relation to children looked after by them; to safeguard and promote the welfare of these children, ensuring effective, individualised support and access to services. This duty is inclusive of both children and young people with care orders and those provided with accommodation.

6.2 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, below the age of 18, are considered Looked After Children and are entitled to the same protections and services as Kent's citizen children. They will become Care Leavers at the age of 18.

6.3 Legal advice will be obtained in relation to the procurement exercise required to secure the property and associated services required to discharge the Council's obligations.

7. Equalities Implications

7.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening has been completed and no high negative impacts have been identified. The EQIA will continue to be developed and reviewed as this project progresses.

8. Other Corporate Implications

8.1 Property colleagues have undertaken searches for accommodation and have supported the options including whether it would be suitable for KCC to directly lease accommodation. Depending on the responses to the Prior Information Notice and subsequent tender process, Property colleagues may be required to continue this work.

9. Governance

9.1 Local management of the contract will sit jointly between the CYPE Directorate and Strategic Commissioning (Children's) with ownership and accountability from CYPE.

10. Data Protection implications

10.1 The Data Protection Impact Assessment will be completed alongside the successful provider so the data flow is clear.

11. Recommendation(s):

The Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services on the proposed decision as set out in the Proposed Record of Decision.

Background Documents

None

Contact details

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