

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Sue Chandler

Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

DECISION NO:

23/00071

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); and
- 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

Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, I agree to:

- A) Agree to become a member of the Fostering Recruitment and Retention programme.
- B) Agree to enter into relevant agreements with the DfE to join/ a Pathfinder Region for the delivery of the creation of end to end improvements in the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Programme (Agreements to include the acceptances of relevant Memorandums of Understandings and associated funding, and partnership agreements with other local authorities in the assigned regional cluster)
- C) Delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services, to take other relevant actions, including but not limited to, finalising the terms of reference and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

Background

1.1 The Department for Education (DfE), published Stable Homes, Built on Love – an Implementation strategy and consultation on 2 February 2023, the consultation was backed by £200m additional investment. DfE have engaged with each of the Regions and are seeking Local Authorities (LAs) to be engaged in designing and piloting the Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs)

1.2 Regional Care Co-operatives are viewed as a radical shift in the care system and are part of a broader package of measures the DfE is beginning to deliver to transform the care placement

market.

1.3 Joining a partnership to develop a regional focus on the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers involves the development of a national hub where all enquiries will be directed to Local Authorities.

1.4 DfE has confirmed that, following an Expression of Interest in joining the Fostering Recruitment and Retention programme, KCC has been accepted at Stage 1 of the process. Partners are required to develop a full proposal for submission in the second week of September 2023. KCC will need to work with the assigned improvement partners, and in line with the funding allocation to develop a fully costed proposal which is to be implemented by April 2024. At this stage no LA is bound to be part of the bid, however from when the fully costed proposal is submitted in September, final membership will need to be confirmed.

1.5 Currently, it is proposed that the cluster will include Portsmouth (Lead LA), Brighton and Hove, Kent, Oxfordshire, West Berkshire, Medway, Wokingham, Slough, Bracknell Forest, Surrey, Hampshire, Southampton, Isle of Wight, West Sussex and East Sussex, Achieving for Children and Brighter Futures which equates to 15 LA Partners and two Children's Trusts.

1.6 There will be funding for successful Local Authorities that become part of the programme; it has been calculated that the South-East Region could bid against funding in the region of £4.3m for the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Project. It has been indicated that the Fostering Hub would ultimately sit within the Regional Care Cooperative, and therefore it would make sense that the same Local Authorities/Children's Trusts would align with the regional clusters. KCC has sought support from the South-East Sector Led Improvement Partnership (SESLIP) to identify willing partners for the RCC partnership.

1.7 KCC has well established partnership working as evidenced through the Adoption Partnership South-East where it is the authority of the Regional Adoption Agency. As detailed below, we have been successful in securing additional funding from the DfE through grants for programmes as follows:

Grant income	Early Permanence Project	Family Finding (Matching Needs Project)	Centre of Excellence	Total
2022/2023	£48,610.00	£43,725.00	£ -	£92,335.00
2023/2024	£100,565.00	£119,952.00	£103,050.00	£323,567.00
2024/2025	£72,565.00	£119,952.00	£95,400.00	£287,917.00
Total	£221,740.00	£283,629.00	£198,450.00	£703,819.00

Financial Implications

3.1 There will be funding for successful Local Authorities that become part of the programme; it has been calculated that the South-East Region could bid against funding in the region of £4.3m for the Fostering Recruitment and Retention Project. It has been indicated that the Fostering Hub would ultimately sit within the Regional Care Cooperative, and therefore it would make sense that the same Local Authorities/Children's Trusts would align with the regional clusters. KCC has sought support from the South-East Sector Led Improvement Partnership (SESLIP) to identify willing partners for the RCC partnership.

3.2 It is unlikely that KCC will receive significant amounts of funding, however, the ability to quickly respond and enter into agreements, should we be successful in our allocations, would be required.

Legal Implications

- 4.1 Partnership Agreements will be required in establishing an RCC. It is assumed a lead Local Authority will be required to manage the funding and employ staff to deliver the programme.
- 4.2 Legal advice will be sought in relation to any subsequent contractual activity in developing the pilot projects.

Equalities Implications

- 5.1 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.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The Children’s and Young People Cabinet Committee consider the decision on 12 September 2023.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

An alternative option is not to consider participating as a Pathfinder for the RCC, Fostering or both – KCC has significant pressures and challenges finding affordable placements for Children in Care and have attempted a number of initiatives to develop access to affordable placements. The Regional Residential Project involved three Local Authorities tendering for placements for Children with Complex Lives and no providers bid for any of the contracts. The reasons for this are being explored. This market is extremely difficult to engage with, and the reports of the collapse of a framework in the North-East is further evidence that something different is required urgently.

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