

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Sue Chandler, Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

DECISION NO:

23/00112

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

Key decision: YES

Decision required because the total value of the contract will exceed £1m and affects more than two Electoral Divisions.

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

External Fostering Placements – Re-opening the Kent and Medway Independent Fostering Services Framework Agreement.

Decision:

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

- i) Re-open the Kent and Medway Independent Fostering Services Framework Agreement to allow new providers to join from April 2024.
- ii) Delegate decisions and necessary actions, including the award and the implementation of any contract, contract extensions and re-openings of the Framework, allowable within the terms and conditions of the contract, to the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education, or other Officer as instructed by the Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member.

1. Reason(s) for Decision:

- 1.1 The proposed decision is to re-open the existing Kent and Medway Independent Fostering Services Framework Agreement to allow new entrants to the market and existing spot providers to join this contract Framework.
- 1.2 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 proposed decision directly relates to this duty by aiming to provide a greater 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.

2. Preferred Option

- 2.1 The flexibility to re-open the Kent and Medway Independent Fostering Services Framework Agreement gives the Council an opportunity to encourage new entrants to the market and those who previously missed the tender deadline to work in partnership to meet the needs and

outcomes of children and young people in our care and to meet our Sufficiency Duty.

2.2 The preferred option is the Kent and Medway Fostering Services Framework Agreement is re-opened to allow new Independent Fostering Providers (IFPs) to join effective from 1 April 2024. Contract term and any extensions will dovetail with those previously issued.

2.3 The benefits of working with IFPs through this arrangement allows for clear pricing mechanisms linked to placement types and categories of need. Strong contract management arrangements ensure the service is delivered in accordance with agreed performance and quality levels. This type of arrangement makes it easier to maintain and develop strong supplier relationships.

3. Framing Kent's Future – Our Council Strategy 2022-2026

3.1 Priority 4 – New Models of Care and Support

3.2 The recommendations within this report support the Council's commitments:

- To support the most vulnerable children and families in our county, ensuring our social work practice supports manageable caseloads, reflective learning, joined up safeguarding and effective corporate parenting arrangements.
- To reshape our commissioning practice to ensure we build strategic partnerships with our providers, through earlier engagement, more consistent and proactive commissioning practice, and a stronger focus on co-designing services.

3.3 From an operational perspective this means we will protect vulnerable children and families from harm, act as a good Corporate Parent and work with commissioned providers to ensure sufficiency of fostering placements.

3.4 The recommendations and decisions sought in this report also support the requirements for service transformation identified in Securing Kent's Future:

3.5 Objective 2: Delivering savings from identified opportunity areas to set a sustainable 2024/25 budget and MTFP.

3.5 CYPE placement strategies: Work to assess the opportunities that exist around the sufficiency strategy, ensuring the right mix of placements and working towards bringing placement costs down. Although it is recognised that market and placement costs in Kent are impacted by UAS children and other factors beyond the Council's control.

4. Consultation

4.1 No formal public consultation was undertaken as we are not proposing any changes to this statutory service. Local consultation was undertaken with key partners including the VSK, Area Directors, Service Managers, Medway Council and Providers before the key decision was taken to procure the existing Kent and Medway Independent Fostering Services Framework Agreement.

5. Equalities Assessment

5.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening was completed as part of the governance requirements when the tender was first published with no high negative impacts identified. The EQIA will continue to be reviewed as this project progresses.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The majority of the funding for external fostering placements is in existing budgets within Integrated Children’s Services, with some in Disabled Children and Young People’s Services. Furthermore, there are placements which are paid for under the grant conditions agreed with the Home Office for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UAS children).
- 6.2 The spend for the last financial year 2022/2023 on all external fostering placements, including UAS children is £20,199,057. This is reported within the following Key Service Lines in the budget: Looked After Children – Care and Support, Looked After Children (with Disability) - Care and Support, and Asylum. These budgets are funded by either the UAS children Grant or the Council’s revenue base budget, as appropriate.
- 6.3 All price review processes have been agreed with Finance and are embedded within the terms and conditions of the contract. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) is used as the indicator for price increases with some recognition of the impact of National Living Wage increases for younger staff working in the IFP’s. These increases are in line with other price reviews on all services within KCC and nationally and are funded from Pay and Price Pressure monies.

Cabinet Committee Recommendations and Other Consultation:

This decision will be considered at the meeting of the Children’s, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on 16 January 2024.

Any Alternatives Considered and Rejected: None.

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