

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

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

To: Scrutiny Committee – 18 March 2025

Subject: **Scrutiny of Key Decision – 23-00100 Commissioned Youth Service Contracts**

Classification: Unrestricted

1. Background

- 1.1 The proposed decision (Key Decision [23/00100](#)) to cease and not re-commission alternatives for the contracts for 12 District based youth contracts was presented to the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee on [21 November 2023](#). The Decision was taken by Cabinet on [30 November 2023](#). This decision was called into Scrutiny Committee on [19 December 2023](#). The Scrutiny Committee resolved to express comments but did not require reconsideration of the decision.
- 1.2 It is considered best practice for Scrutiny Committee to revisit decisions that it has previously scrutinised. Following a request from Mr Brady the Scrutiny Committee will examine the impact of the Key Decision [23/00100](#) to cease the contracted youth provision.
- 1.3 Scrutiny Committee have asked the Executive to provide information on the current Kent County Council (KCC) Youth offer as well as the impact of the cessation of the commissioned provision on both the young people and the contracted organisations, specifically:
 - The impact of the decision on those children who were accessing service provision - set out in Section 4
 - What has happened to the providers who were delivering the service - set out in Section 5
 - What the communication with the ex-providers looks like - set out in Section 4
 - The impact on the providers to offer similar services, or not, following the decision, and what that looks like - set out in Section 5

2. Kent County Council (KCC)'s Commissioned Youth Offer – 2016 to 2024

- 2.1 KCC's commissioned Youth offer was in place from 1 December 2016 to 31 March 2022. The wider offer included both internal and externally commissioned provision which provided a mixture of activity, support and advice through Open Access Hubs and targeted additional support for young

people who required individual interventions. The offer was aimed at children aged 8-19 as well as those with disabilities up to the age of 25. This typically included group sessions on weekday evenings that were free at point of delivery with music, cooking, dance, sport and crafts being common activities.

- 2.2 In 2019, following a restructure of the Early Help provision, the KCC youth offer had two distinct elements:
- In-house, targeted youth offer: Each district had a KCC-run youth hub, from which the internal offer was delivered. Whilst offering some universal open access sessions for all young people, the in-house offer was primarily focused on targeted work with young people who had additional needs.
 - Externally provided, open access commissioned youth offer. In December 2016, in line with our role as a commissioning authority and as part of a drive to rationalise and improve the commissioned Early Help offer, twelve district-based youth contracts were let across the county to seven providers.
- 2.3 The internal provision sat within the wider Early Help offer and was delivered across the districts from Youth Hubs and was not part of the scope of the decision that went to Scrutiny.
- 2.4 As set out below, there were seven providers delivering the commissioned Youth Services across the 12 Districts. Contracts ranged from £75,000 to £137,000 per annum.

District	Provider	Contract value p.a.
Ashford	The Canterbury Academy	£95,749.80
Canterbury		£109,331.40
Dartford	Play Place	£87,990.00
Dover	Pie Factory	£99,980.40
Thanet		£136,947.96
Folkestone and Hythe	Salus	£86,700.00
Maidstone		£91,700.04
Tonbridge and Malling		£81,799.92
Tunbridge Wells		£75,799.92
Gravesham	The Grand	£99,999.96
Sevenoaks	West Kent Extra	£75,000.00
Swale	Optivo	£133,950.00

3. Ceasing the Commissioned Youth Services contracts

- 3.1 Whilst KCC acknowledged the value of the work carried out by the providers during the life of their contracts, the extent of the financial challenge the Council faces led to difficult decisions being necessary.
- 3.2 The annual cost of the commissioned Youth Service contracts was £1.2m, and the savings made by not continuing to commission these services from 1 April 2024 was £913k from the base budget. The remainder c£321k of the funding enabled a reduction to the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) overspend.
- 3.3 Continuing with the Youth Service contracts delivering discretionary services beyond March 2024 would have required greater cuts in other parts of the Council's CYPE budget. Having considered alternative options to achieve the savings, the Executive decided that cessation of the discretionary contracts, while regrettable, was the appropriate way to deliver savings while protecting other statutory services.
- 3.4 The decision to cease the commissioning of Youth Services aligned with Securing Kent's Future, and the development of a whole family 0-19 delivery model via Family Hubs, which refreshed KCC's youth offer.
- 3.5 The [Family Hub consultation](#) set out the rationale behind the programme and proposed changes to youth services which included the proposal to no longer continue with commissioned youth services in March 2024. The reasoning and consideration of relevant consultation feedback featured within the decision-making when Cabinet took both the Family Hub implementation and Commissioned Youth Contracts decisions on 30 November 2023.

4. KCC's Youth Offer delivered through the Family Hub – 2024 onwards

- 4.1 KCC remains committed to meeting the needs of vulnerable young people in Kent. Under S507b of the 1996 Education Act, the local authority has a duty to undertake an annual assessment, to ensure 'adequate provision' for 13-19 years (up to 25 for those young people with SEND) to access facilities and leisure-time activities for improvement of well-being and promote personal and social development.
- 4.2 The Cabinet decision was informed by the view that KCC's in-house provision, including the developments within the Family Hub model, the Family Hub Network, and the offer across the Council's wider services including that provided by schools, would be sufficient for KCC to meet relevant statutory requirements without the commissioned Youth Services.
- 4.3 Information about the Statutory Youth Assessment and Kent's first iteration was presented to the Start for Life and Family Hubs board in December 2024 (See Appendix 1).
- 4.4 The assessment has been discussed with Voluntary Sector partners, including by the Assistant Director with responsibility for Family Hubs, at the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategic Partnership Board in January 2025. Attendees

of this meeting included representatives from the formerly commissioned provider, Pie Factory.

- 4.5 The Family Hub Partnership and Participation Manager remains a key link for the voluntary sector with Family Hubs, and has participated in the voluntary sector led Intelligence Sharing and Networking event in February 2025; the voluntary sector led 'CYP Steering group' and other forums involving formerly commissioned providers Salus and Pie Factory.
- 4.6 The Local Childrens Partnership Groups continue to be district-based forums which include invitations, but are not limited, to those VCS organisations which held the commissioned contracts.
- 4.7 Work is ongoing between Family Hub District Managers and partners to fully reflect the insight and service delivery to collate and to keep an up to date directory of information about what is available in each locality. This will support Family Hubs to continue to signpost children, families and providers to appropriate services.
- 4.8 Community profiles, developed by Family Hub District Managers, and the statutory Youth Assessment, will be two of the iterative tools used by Family Hubs to help collate the county directory. It is recognised that this will not provide an exhaustive list of all services available, and will be iterative, updated twice yearly. Local knowledge and expertise will also be available from Family Hub practitioners and partners working within the Family Hub network.
- 4.9 Kent's Youth Assessment reflects KCC's Family Hub model, which includes a hub-based, outreach and digital youth provision. The offer includes direct support, participation, volunteering and the digital offer. The digital offer is available on the internet to anyone who wishes to access it.
- 4.10 Each Family Hubs has a timetable of activities that are offered in the area and this can be accessed at [Activities in family hubs - Kent County Council](#). The web pages explain what activities are offered, where and what the process of signing up for these activities is.
- 4.11 KCC's delivery of youth intervention in groups is shaped and informed by the voice of children and identified local and county need. These insights determine a core offer which is delivered in every district, with additional provision according to local need. For example, on-line safety intervention is available in every district as part of the core offer, whether delivered by KCC or a partner.
- 4.12 Young people with SEND continue to be able to receive a universal support service via the existing KCC channels and are supported in accessing wider groups and support through the Family Hub network.
- 4.13 Work is ongoing with KCC's Supporting Independence Service to further develop the bespoke offer in the Family Hubs for young people with learning difficulties (13-24), young carers, and those with special education needs and disabilities (SEND).

- 4.14 Street based youth work is planned, delivered and reviewed in response to contextual safeguarding need. It is delivered in community spaces that have been identified as areas that young people spend their time and at times when they can be particularly vulnerable e.g. parks or high streets. This makes support accessible to vulnerable young people who are unlikely to attend building-based services.
- 4.15 An analysis of demand for Children Services since the cessation of the commissioned youth contracts indicates that there has been a decrease in demand for statutory children’s services for those children aged 10 to 17, exclusive of those children seeking asylum. Statutory children services refer to those services offered under the Children Act 1989 for children who are assessed as being in need, in need of protection or children in care.
- 4.16 KCC noted a decrease in referrals for this cohort of children, a decrease in the number of children aged 10 to 17 who need to receive support under child in need or child protection plans and a decrease in the number of citizen children aged 10 to 17 who enter care. We have also seen a decrease in the number of children aged 10 to 17 who need intensive early help support for prevention and diversion from the criminal justice system (i.e. who receive out of court resolutions).

Fig. 1 Demand for children services for citizen children aged 10 to 17

Financial Year	Referrals	CIN Plan Starts	CP Plan Starts	LAC Starts	EH Starts - EYOT
01/04/2023 to 31/03/2024	9918	1874	392	294	1033
01/04/2024 to 31/01/2025	8169	1492	284	227	604

- 4.17 KCC reflected on whether the decrease in demand is due to lack of visibility and we note that six of the seven providers are still operating and working with children and continue to have a duty to refer them to Children Services when they require additional support.
- 4.18 Data provided by Management Information and Intelligence shows that from the total number of referrals received Voluntary and Commissioned Services have seen a decrease which aligns with the general decrease in referral numbers.

Fig. 2 Referrals from Voluntary and Commissioned Services

Financial Year	Referrals from Voluntary and Commissioned Services
01/04/2023 to 31/03/2024	263
01/04/2024 to 31/01/2025	217

5. Impact on Providers

- 5.1 Providers of all contracted services are aware of when the contract, and therefore funding, ends before the contract is awarded. Therefore, the financial

planning and sustainability of their organisation remains the providers responsibility.

- 5.2 One year on from the cessation of the commissioned Youth Services, six of the seven providers are still operating. The exception is West Kent Extra, which was dissolved after the end of the contract into its parent company, West Kent Housing Association.
- 5.3 In six of the 12 districts (excluding Ashford, Dover, Dartford, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells) a level of open access youth provision is still in place from these providers.
- 5.4 Of the former contracted providers, those engaged with Family Hubs report the following:
- Salus - continue delivery in Hythe and Tonbridge and Malling; the latter with funding secured from the Borough Council. Salus have withdrawn their service in Tunbridge Wells, however other providers are delivering, including YMCA in Paddock Wood.
 - Pie Factory Music – they continue delivery.
 - Gravesham Network Development CIC (The Grand) - they have continued with reduced youth provision.
 - Brogdale CiC (Vibe) - they have continued most of the provision that was previously funded by KCC, using Safer Streets funding.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 Scrutiny Committee is asked to NOTE the report.

7. Background documents

[Full consultation Report including an executive summary](#)

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