

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services

DECISION NO:

23/00003

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); or
- 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: Reception and Safe Care Centre

Decision:

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

- a) approve the delivery of additional Reception and Safe Care Centres via the procurement of the provision of premises, landlord and management services (hard and soft facilities management).
- b) following a compliant process, delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Integrated Children's Services to negotiate, finalise, award and enter into the required contracts; and
- c) delegate authority to the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education, to take other the necessary actions including but not limited to negotiating, finalising and entering into contracts or other legal agreements as required to implement this decision. relevant legal agreements such as the award of the contract, as required to implement this decision.

Reason(s) for decision:

- Decision required because total value of the contract will exceed £1m and impact across multiple districts of the Local Authority.

Background:

- 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.

- 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.
- 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%.
- The National Transfer Scheme was also mandated and has had varying success.
- 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).
- 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.
- 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.
- Summary points of the key service delivery expectations (pre-procurement) are set out in the associated report.

Financial implications

- 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.
- 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

Legal implications

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Equalities implications

- An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) screening has been completed and has concluded that the proposed decision does not present any adverse equality impact.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

This decision will be considered by Children’s, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee at its meeting on 17 January 2023.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

1. Continue only with current provision
2. Expand the site in Cranbrook to accommodate all needs
3. Advise the Home Office that KCC no longer delivers a Reception and Safe Care Service
5. KCC directly secures a lease or freehold for a property and manages it itself
6. KCC directly secures a lease or freehold for a property and procures an operator

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None

Signed

Date.....