

Open Report on behalf of Debbie Barnes OBE, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report to:	Councillor Mrs P A Bradwell OBE, Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services
Date:	30 July 2018
Subject:	Edge of Care Support Service
Decision Reference:	I015858
Key decision?	No

Summary:

This countywide service currently offers support to struggling families with a view to stabilising these families in times of crisis; preventing the escalation of need, lowering the risk of child abuse and neglect, and reducing the number of children taken into care. The families will have been identified by Children's Social Care and Early Help Teams as requiring support at 'step down' or to prevent a case escalating further.

The service is currently delivered by Safe Families for Children (SFfC), a volunteer organisation (currently there are 227 Lincolnshire volunteers) working in the main with local churches to recruit these volunteers and carrying out an early intervention approach. This approach is targeted mainly at secondary prevention, offering support to struggling families with a child aged under 12 years and providing 'edge of care' support as an alternative to a short stay in foster care. The contract will end on 31st March 2019.

Overall performance indicators for the service are good and the support provided has been shown to have positive benefits for diverting children from care and successfully supporting families through times of crisis. Feedback from Early Help Workers, Social Workers and Service Areas is good and children and families have communicated through a variety of feedback methods that they value the support given to them by the service. From the analysis undertaken in Lincolnshire, it appears to be supporting direct or indirect de-escalation of need for families both at the 'early intervention' and 'edge of care' levels, and has also prevented some cases being re-opened.

The current contract ends on 31st March 2019 and the recommendation is that this contract is re-procured by means of an Invitation To Tender.

Recommendation(s):

That the Executive Councillor:

1. Approves the continued provision of an 'Edge of Care Support Service' to be commissioned through re-procurement by means of a competitive tender
2. Approves the making of a 3 month extension to the existing contract (if required) by way of direct award Safe Families for Children to allow sufficient lead-in time for the new service (Total value: £18,750)
3. Delegates to the Executive Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Adult Care, Health and Children's Services, the authority to determine the specification of the service and approve the commercial and contractual terms and the entering into of any contract to give effect to the commissioning of the service.

Alternatives Considered:

1. Decommission the Service. The service provided is not a statutory service, therefore the Council could decide to decommission the service and cease the funding of this support for vulnerable families in Lincolnshire. Key implications of decommissioning the service would be:
 - The Council would no longer be able to refer families to this service, and could potentially have more families needing Early Help or FAST support or requiring temporary fostering accommodation
 - The Council would no longer be able to offer the same opportunity for community volunteers in Lincolnshire to provide this facilitated support
2. Insource. The Council could consider whether it is in a position to insource the service. From a resource perspective, this would specifically involve recruiting community volunteers, assessing eligible families who could benefit from this support and matching them with the right volunteers, managing these relationships, supporting volunteers and monitoring the outcomes for individual families. Key considerations for insourcing the service would be:
 - The Council would need to employ staff to undertake this role, including the associated on-costs, and there may also be TUPE implications
 - The Council does not have the same level of experience and expertise in recruiting and maintaining this scale of community volunteer network
 - Existing volunteers recruited through the Service Provider, may be dedicated to that organisation and therefore not willing to volunteer directly for the Council
3. Re-procure by means of an exception to directly procure the service from the existing provider.

Whilst this option was considered, such a course of action would fail to determine if there are any other potential providers in the county who can deliver a volunteer network, with the requisite infrastructure, meet the requirements of service delivery, and provide better value for money.

Reasons for Recommendation:

Based on the above considerations, it is recommended that the Council goes out to the market at this time and extends, if appropriate, the existing contract for three months to allow sufficient lead-in time post-tender.

Key considerations in recommending this option are:

- Although the market for delivering this service is uncertain and untested, there needs to be an opportunity for other organisations in the market to offer to deliver the service
- By going out to market, LCC will be able to specify the outcomes required and establish if there are other organisations who can deliver more effectively than the existing model
- Any ITT will need to ensure sufficient lead-time is offered. i.e. at least 6 months, to allow providers to identify and recruit a volunteer network
- By inviting other organisations to tender it will ensure the Council achieves value for money.

1. Background

Overview

The Service Provider will work with families in crisis by providing timely and appropriately targeted support for families who are experiencing adversity and providing 'edge of care' support to these struggling families as an alternative to a short stay in foster care.

This type of support is most beneficial in cases where:

- There is a short to medium-term crisis or need that is affecting or likely to affect the wellbeing of the children
- Either 'hosting' the child/ children or supporting the parent/ carer is beneficial to enable sustained healthy parenting (respite can be overnight stays or day time support, both one-off and recurring)
- The parents/ carers are choosing to become involved with the provider under no pressure or coercion.

Currently families are referred by FAST and Early Help teams, who continue to work with and assess the needs of families during the Service Provider's support. A family can choose to take-up support from a volunteer acting in one or more of the following roles:

- Family Friend – acting as befrienders or mentors to families, helping parents/ carers to increase the stability of their lives, home environment and their parenting, in order to improve the wellbeing of their children
- Resource Friend – donating much needed resources to families in need
- Host Family – taking children into their home, giving the child's parents/ carers time and space to resolve short-term crises.

The strategic outcomes the service will support are:

- The Children and Young Peoples Plan (CYPP) 2013-2016
 - Children and Healthy & Safe
 - Children develop their potential in their early years and are ready for school
 - Children learn and achieve
 - Children are ready for adult life

Outcomes

The provider shall support families in crisis through befriending support, providing resources or services, or by arranging short stays for children with host families in accordance with Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

The key outcomes for this user group are:

- Families have social networks and support that they need and want, feel settled and happy where they live, with access to the facilities that are important
- Families have good wellbeing, happiness and emotional health
- Families have increased confidence and self-esteem to parent, go to new places, make new friends and achieve things they would like to do
- Families' home environments are safe, comfortable and appropriate
- Families have good relationships with other family members, feel connected to their children, can express love to them and offer them attention and encouragement
- Families feel positive about their parenting and have the right practical tools and knowledge to parent their children as they would like to.

The key outcomes for the service are:

- There will be a sustained volunteer base in Lincolnshire
- There will be a reduced demand for greater levels of service intervention where families are supported by the service and their levels of need de-escalate
- There will be a reduction in the flow of children into foster care as a result of volunteers hosting children through the service in accordance with the Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.

Existing Contract - Current Commissioning

The service is currently provided by Safe Families for Children (SFfC) who were initially funded through the Department for Education (DfE) Innovation Fund, to develop 5 regional SFfC hubs (North East, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, East Midlands and West Midlands). This funding meant that for the initial 6 months during 2015/16 no funding was required from the Council. This period was intended to encourage local authorities to test the model and support scaling of the programme whilst the service became established and to provide an evaluation of its effectiveness. It also provided unique benefits for the Council in terms of the ability to establish the infrastructure at no cost to the authority, working strategically alongside regional partners, and seek to support families in crisis in the local community to help keep children out of the care system.

The Council has since commissioned the service on an annual basis, with the current contract due to expire on 31 March 2019, on the understanding that evaluative information and performance data would be provided during this time to inform the future commissioning of this service.

From October 2015 to date, the service operated in Lincoln and Boston, and from October 2016 it commenced in Grantham. Under the current contract, from April 2018, the operational area was extended and the service is now offered countywide.

At April 2018, 1093 volunteers had been recruited across the Midlands; of which 227 are in Lincolnshire. The volunteers are a balanced mix of both male and female, providing a wide range of support methods and role modelling options to suit particular families and their varied needs.

Lincolnshire Performance

At April 2018,

- The provider had received 128 referrals for 244 children
- Of the 128 referrals:
 - 75 were Category 1 'Early Intervention' (59%)
 - 49 went on to receive support from the Service Provider
 - 53 were Category 2 'Edge of Care' (41%)
 - 40 went on to receive support from the Service Provider.
- Of the 39 that did not receive support, the reasons include: support declined by parent/ carer; rejected by the Service Provider due to: risk posed to volunteer; non-engagement by family; out of scope etc.
- The 89 supported families have been helped by 80+ family friends and 20+ host friends and include delivery of 119 bed nights.

A joint audit review was undertaken in September 2017 of all individual cases by the Council and the Service Provider and identified 56 children who, without the support from the Service Provider, may have been accommodated if they had not been supported through volunteer intervention. (A subsequent update highlighted 83 children from 37 families may have required accommodation without the intervention of the service.)

At the point of the audit, 16 children (29%) were considered to be 'direct' avoidance of care (would have required immediately accommodating); this would have been for a short period of time due to the parent/ carer being incapacitated in some way (e.g. hospital stay or short term crisis). For the remaining 40 children (71%), the audit deemed it likely that the children would have entered care for a longer period as the issues related to ongoing family stress, coupled with limited support networks.

In all cases, it is the view of the lead Children's Services Team Manager that the intervention of the Service Provider avoided these children being accommodated.

By avoiding 56 admissions into care, SFfC reduced the flow of children in care by 8% over this 23 month period:

Calculation:

Flow of Children into care over 23 month period	633
Plus Number of children Diverted from Care	56
	689
New Total Divided by Number Diverted from Care = 56/689	8%

A further analysis of the data provided showed that:

- 142 children (93%) either maintained or de-escalated in their status within Children's Services
- 85 children (56%) de-escalated and of these 68 are now closed to Children's Services
- 57 children (38%) remain at the same level
- 10 children (6%) have escalated in their level of need
- 100% of cases remain closed at March 2018.

Financial Evaluation:

Currently the service funds 60 referrals at a cost of £1,250 per referral (£75k per annum).

Of the 25 supported families referenced above in the joint audit, the estimated cost avoidance for those families for the period of October 2015 to September 2017 was calculated at £647,730 (See Appendix B). In comparison, the direct cost to the Service Provider was the equivalent of £187,500, with the Council incurring only limited additional indirect costs in overseeing the contract and the families referred.

Proposed Future Service

The edge of care support service will deliver significant benefits to struggling families in Lincolnshire; stabilising these families in times of crisis and preventing the escalation of need, lowering the risk of child abuse and neglect and reducing the number of children taken into care.

The service provides benefits for the Council in terms of the ability to work strategically alongside regional partners and seek to support families in crisis in the local community to help keep children out of the care system.

The re-commissioning of the service is likely to follow the overview above in terms of the desired outcomes and the nature of service delivery. Given the performance discussed above and, in order to provide greater security of tenure for the chosen provider, the contract will be let on a 3 + 1 + 1 (5 years) basis. The indicative value of the service will be £75,000 - £90,000 per annum (£375,000 - £450,000 over five years).

Legal Issues:

Procurement

The re-procurement of the service will be conducted through an Invitation to Tender based on an Open Competitive process and will follow OJEU guidance and be compliant with the UK Public Contract Regulations 2015.

Extension

The proposed three-month extension to the existing contract has a contract value of £18,750 and, while this falls within the scheme of authorisation of the Chief Officer, the Executive Councillor is invited to approve this potential extension as part of any decision to continue to commission the service. Given this constitutes a direct award, and even though it is below the threshold for the application of the EU procurement regime, the Council needs to satisfy itself that the contract extension would not be of cross-border interest – of interest to a contractor in another member state. In light of the very low value and short-term nature of the contract, it is not considered that this would be of cross-border interest and it is within the powers of the Executive Councillor to authorise the requisite extension award.

Equality Act 2010

Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Equality Act 2010 section 149(1). The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation 149(7)

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having

due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding

Compliance with the duties in section 149 may involve treating some persons more favourably than others

A reference to conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act includes a reference to:

- (a) A breach of an equality clause or rule
- (b) A breach of a non-discrimination rule

The duty cannot be delegated and must be discharged by the decision-maker. To discharge the statutory duty the decision-maker must analyse all the relevant material with the specific statutory obligations in mind. If a risk of adverse impact is identified consideration must be given to measures to avoid that impact as part of the decision making process.

An initial desktop Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached at Appendix A; this is a live document and continues to be updated. This assessment identifies that there are likely to be more significant impacts on those with protected characteristics if a course of decommissioning the service is followed, by comparison with little or no specific impacts on those with protected characteristics based on the (re)commissioning of the proposed Edge of Care service.

Joint Strategic Needs Analysis (JSNA) and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)

The Council must have regard to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and the Joint Health & Well Being Strategy (JHWS) in coming to a decision.

The proposals contribute to the following themes of the JSNA/ JHWS.

JSNA

Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing (CYP) – the families supported by the service may include some with issues such as substance and alcohol misuse and mental health problems. The support offered will be tailored to the needs of the families and young people and empower them to address such issues.

Obesity - childhood obesity presents immediate and long-term negative effects on a child's physical and social wellbeing, educational attainment and mental health. The service will work with families and educate and support them with healthy eating and physical exercise, giving them practical tools and knowledge to enable them to do this.

Stay Safe - this service will support families with their home environment and physical needs, assisting the family to ensure their home provides a safe, comfortable, stable and appropriate environment.

Enjoy and Achieve – the service will work with families to increase their confidence, and self-esteem, to go to new places, make new friends and achieve things they would like to do. Where necessary, resources will be provided to improve day-to-day life, for example garden improvements to encourage outside play; improved learning environments to enhance education; or household appliances to support everyday tasks. The service will work with children and young people to make sure they feel happy, stay safe and make good choices about their lives.

Positive Contribution – the service will support and empower families to access universal services, including community activities, support groups and children's centres. The service will work with a family to identify outcomes they wish to achieve and support them in achieving these.

JHWS

Improve Health & Social Outcomes for CYP and reduce inequalities

The service will give families information and support to help them make healthy choices, thereby enhancing life chances and reducing inequalities. It will also empower families to build up resilience through relationships and support networks both within the family and the wider community through access, where applicable, to universal and targeted services.

Tackling Social Detriments of Health

The service will work with families to address health inequalities, creating conditions for them to take control of their own lives, including social isolation, budget advice, education, home environments and mental and physical health support.

Crime and Disorder

Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area and re-offending in its area.

The service may from time to time be in contact with families who may be experiencing or partaking in crime and disorder and consideration has been given to support those most at risk and indirectly prevent crime and disorder.

2. Conclusion

The Executive Councillor responsible for Children's Services is asked to approve the recommendation to re-procure by means of an Invitation To Tender. This offers the best commissioning option for securing 'edge of care' services in Lincolnshire whilst opening them to competition.

The Executive Councillor is also asked to delegate to the Director of Children's Services the authority to agree the detailed specification of the 'edge of care' service model that may be required and the commercial terms and conditions of the contract.

An extension to the existing contract is recommended (if required) for 3 months to ensure there is time to implement the service successfully and allow sufficient lead-in time. This will allow the Council to secure continuity in the services.

3. Legal Comments:

The Council has the power to enter in the proposed contract and implement the proposed extension to the existing arrangements. The detailed procurement law considerations are dealt within the Report.

The decision is consistent with the Policy Framework and within the remit of the Executive Councillor.

4. Resource Comments:

The recommendation in the report to re-procure by means of an open tender will enable the continuation of a service in supporting families on early intervention and edge of care levels. Base Council budget funding exists to fund this service going forward, and the investment delivers good outcomes for families and reduces the need for high cost services provided through the Council such as early help or FAST.

The recommendation to extend the current contract for 3 months will allow for a sufficient lead-in time to ensure the best commissioning arrangements are entered into.

5. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

No

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes

c) Scrutiny Comments

The report will be considered by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 20 July 2018 and the comments of the Committee will be reported to the Executive Councillor prior to her reaching her decision.

d) Have Risks and Impact Analysis been carried out?

Yes

e) Risks and Impact Analysis

See the body of the Report

6. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	EIA
Appendix B	Cost avoidance data

7. Background Papers

No Background Papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this Report.

This report was written by Jo Fox, Children's Commissioning Officer, who can be contacted on 01522 553410 or joanne.fox@lincolnshire.gov.uk.

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