



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director of Children's Services

Report to:	Executive
Date:	05 July 2022
Subject:	Re-commissioning of Best Start Lincolnshire Services: Early Years and Family Service and Inclusion Service, for children in their early years and their families within Lincolnshire
Decision Reference:	I025706
Key decision?	Yes

Summary:

Lincolnshire County Council's Children's Services currently commissions the Best Start Lincolnshire Services: Early Years and Family Service and Inclusion Service via two separate contracts that commenced in July 2017 and were extended to 31 March 2023. These services were procured through a single open competitive tender process with two lots. The combined annual value of the current contracts is £1,936,712.

The Best Start Lincolnshire Services provide support for children aged 0 to 5 years and their families and are primarily delivered in Lincolnshire's 48 children's centres.

A commissioning review of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services commenced in August 2020 in anticipation of the contract end date.

This report makes recommendations for the re-commissioning of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services from 1 April 2023.

Recommendation(s):

That the Executive:

1. Approves the re-commissioning of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services: Early Years and Family Service and Inclusion Service, via an open competitive tender process with two lots, to commence 1 April 2023 for three years initially, with an option to extend for up to two years to 31 March 2028.
2. Delegates to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety and Procurement, authority to take all decisions necessary to conduct the procurement process up to and including the award and entering into of the contract.

Alternatives Considered:

- **Do Nothing:** This is not a viable option as the current contractual arrangement is due to expire on 31st March 2023.
- **Decommissioning:** This is not a viable option as the Best Start Lincolnshire Services support the Council in fulfilling statutory duties under Section 1 and Section 3(2) of the Childcare Act 2006. Decommissioning both services would be likely to result in significant gaps in provision and put more pressure on existing services. There would be no benefits to children and families in Lincolnshire of de-commissioning the services and further work would be needed to ensure statutory duties were being met to make arrangements for the delivery of integrated early childhood services. De-commissioning could result in vulnerable families and their children not being supported which could negatively impact on their future outcomes and likely result in them requiring more costly specialist provision in the future.
- **Influencing:** Commercial aspects of the services cannot be delivered without funding, and it is not feasible to think that the services could be delivered through influence/partnership alone.
- **Insourcing:** The Council could consider insourcing the Best Start Lincolnshire Services and integrating the services into the wider Early Years Hub. However, this is not a recommended option due to the following identified risks:
 - TUPE implications and costs associated with voluntary sector staff and then moving onto Local Government Terms and Conditions creating reduced value for money. Increased costs are likely due to needing to give transferring employees' access to LGPS which will mean future outsourcing options are restricted.
 - Potential reduction in workforce if staff chose not to TUPE. Although the Council does have its own early years teams, the capacity of these teams is taken with other functions and therefore would not have the capacity to deliver these services without additional recruitment.
 - Recruiting to new services can be difficult. There is no guarantee that any in-housed services will be ready to launch with a full staffing complement that are sufficiently upskilled to deliver the service(s). Given that there are two services that in-sourcing could be given consideration to this puts even more vulnerable children and their families at risk of not receiving the right support quickly enough.
 - There is likely to be a public perception that the services are aligned to social care services which may impact on engagement (most likely of vulnerable families). Anecdotally, vulnerable families report that they like to engage with non-Social Care providers for these services.

Reasons for Recommendation:

- The current Best Start Lincolnshire contracts are due to end on the 31 March 2023 and a commissioning review has recommended the re-commissioning of both Best Start Lincolnshire Services to ensure a key focus on supporting the educational attainment of children in their early years and increasing parental

awareness of the importance of the early years; as well as encouraging ethnic minority families to access early childhood services.

- Re-commissioning of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services will continue to support the Council to meet its statutory duty under Section 1 and Section 3(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.
- The current Best Start Lincolnshire Services were commissioned through an open competitive tender process via two lots, with bids received from four different organisations for the Early Years and Family Service and one bid received for the Inclusion Service, and therefore the market has already been tested. There are likely to be providers that would be interested in delivering these services.
- Re-commissioning of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services through an open competitive tender will stimulate the market and promote innovation and value for money in line with the Public Contract Regulations 2015. There is also the potential to broaden the marketplace in Lincolnshire.
- External providers may be able to attract additional funding streams to a service that the Council cannot access.
- The recommended model for the Best Start Lincolnshire Services will ensure that there is reduction in duplication and increased evidence-based provision for the Early Years and Family Service and expansion countywide for the Inclusion Service, whilst also ensuring future Best Start Lincolnshire provision is better aligned to national and local priorities across health, education, and social care.

1. Background

The Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service comprises:

- early childhood activities mainly run from children's centre buildings. Children and parents/carers attend play-based sessions that support early learning and development and positive parenting skills. Universal sessions are available as well as more targeted sessions for vulnerable children and their parents/carers.
- skills development for parent/carers with vulnerable children aged 0-19 (0-25 with SEND). The service helps parents/carer of their pathway to employment by signposting to available courses and volunteering opportunities and co-delivering with other professionals such as the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver employment readiness courses. Creche provision is available to help facilitate parents/carers to access skills development activities if another childcare cannot be accessed.

The Best Start Lincolnshire: Inclusion Service supports ethnic minority families with children aged 0 to five years to access the Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service and offers translation support. It covers three Lincolnshire districts: Boston, South Holland, and Lincoln. Delivery includes multinational groups within children's centres, home visits and attendance at key meetings such as ESCO (Early Support and Care Coordination), housing, etc. In addition, the Service provides 16 translations per quarter of

documents for families that will support them to engage within their community. Six core languages supported by the Service are Romanian, Russian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Polish and Bulgarian.

A commissioning review of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services commenced in August 2020. The review has considered local and national policy requirements, local need (both pre and during Covid), feedback from service users/professionals, the performance of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services, comparisons against other local authorities and the supplier market.

The Commissioning Plan ([Appendix 1](#)) provides an overview of review findings in relation to the future commissioning of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services which are summarised below.

Current Commissioning Arrangements

The Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service is currently delivered by Early Years Alliance (EYA), trading as Pre-school Learning Alliance. The current annual value of the contract is £1,871,712.

The Best Start Lincolnshire: Inclusion Service is currently delivered by PAB Languages Ltd. The current annual value of the contract is £65,000.

Both services are commissioned via a contract for services following an open competitive tender process. The contracts commenced 1 July 2017 and were due to cease 30 June 2022. Both contracts have been extended to 31 March 2023 by an exception to the Council's Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules (CPPRs) because of delays to the review caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. There is an option to extend both Best Start Lincolnshire contracts for a further 3 months to the maximum agreed exception period of 30 June 2023.

Statutory Duties

The Council has no explicit statutory duty to provide the Best Start Lincolnshire Services, but the services support the Local Authority's statutory responsibilities under **the Childcare Act 2006** outlined below:

- **Section 1:** Duty on local authorities to improve the well-being of young children in their area and reduce inequalities between them.
- **Section 2:** Explanation of the meaning of early childhood services.
- **Section 3:** Duty on local authorities to make arrangements to secure that early childhood services in their area are provided in an integrated manner in order to facilitate access and maximise the benefits of those services to young children and their parents.
- **Section 5A:** Arrangements to be made by local authorities so that there are sufficient children's centres, so far as reasonably practicable, to meet local need.
- **Section 5C:** Duty on local authorities to ensure each children's centre is within the remit of an advisory board, its makeup and purpose.
- **Section 5D:** Duty on local authorities to ensure there is consultation before any significant changes are made to children's centre provision in their area.

Needs Summary

- The Lincolnshire early years population is decreasing, however, there is a significant rise in children with an ECHP in this age group.
- 12% of Lincolnshire's population live in the 20% most deprived areas in the county.
- There has been a 20% increase in children in their early years from ethnic minorities since 2017, there has been an increase across most areas of the county. The table below shows the percentage increase in each Children's Services locality:

Locality	BME Population Aged 0 to 5 years 2016	BME Population Aged 0 5 years 2019
Boston	2,505	3,525 (+40%)
South Holland	1,922	2,517 (+30%)
Lincoln	2,056	2,530 (+23%)
West Lindsey	903	890 (-1.4%)
North Kesteven	867	1,390 (+37.6%)
South Kesteven	1,985	2,262 (+13.9%)
East Lindsey	1,377	920 (-33.1%)
Total	11,615	14,034 (+20.8%)

- Children's centre registration is very high, including for children with SEND, but attendance is not as high, even pre-pandemic. Recent data shows 55% of the GP registered population attended a children's centre between October-December 2021.
- Health Visitors see high numbers of children in their early days and months but checks at 12 months and 2-2 ½ years need to be higher. The pandemic has significantly impacted this with many parents opting out of assessments (in 2020/21 46.5% of children received a 12-month review and 81.7% of children received a 2-2 ½ year review, NHS Fingertips, Child, and Maternal Mental Health-Early Years Profile). Local Health Visitor service delivery data reports between July and September 2021 showed an improvement, 81.9% of children received a 12-month review.
- Immunisation rates have reduced (fallen below the threshold of 95% of the target population), and breastfeeding rates are below the England average (children breastfed at birth 63.5% as at 2020/21: England average 67.4% and 6-8 weeks 41.1% totally or partially breastfed: England average 47.6%).
- Lincolnshire continues to have more pregnant women smoking at time of delivery than regional and national comparators.
- Although Covid-19 has had an impact, Lincolnshire has more children accessing their Early Years Entitlement at 2 years (63% as at Summer 2021; compared to 62% nationally) and is in line with the national average for eligible 3- and 4-year-olds (90% as at Summer 2021 locally and nationally).

- Lincolnshire is just below the national average in Good Level of Development (GLD) for all children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, including children eligible for Free School Meals and SEN, and is below the statistical neighbours' average for most of the comparators (Early Years Outcome Dashboard, 2019).

GLD Foundation Stage FSM Eligible Children	England	54%	56%	56.6%	57%
	East Midlands	52%	52%	54%	55%
	Statistical Neighbours	52.6%	52.8%	54.2%	53%
	Lincolnshire	54.1%	52.8%	52.4%	56%
GLD Foundation Stage All Other Children	England	72%	73%	73.8%	74%
	East Midlands	67.6%	68.8%	69.8%	70.3%
	Statistical Neighbours	71.8%	72.6%	73.1%	74%
	Lincolnshire	73.3%	72.6%	72.1%	72%
GLD Foundation Stage SEN Pupils without EHCP	England	26%	27%	28%	29%
	East Midlands	26%	26%	26%	26%
	Statistical Neighbours	26.56%	26%	26%	26.89%
	Lincolnshire	27%	25%	24%	25%
GLD Foundation Stage SEN Pupils with an EHCP	England	4%	4%	5%	5%
	East Midlands	4%	3%	4%	4%
	Statistical Neighbours	7.25%	5.4%	4.56%	4.11%
	Lincolnshire	6%	Not available	5%	2%

**Performance: red- worse than comparators, amber- on a par with comparators, green- better than comparators.*

Although the Health Visitor 2-2 ½ check indicates more Lincolnshire children are achieving a good level of development when compared to regional colleagues and are on par with the national average. There is a disparity between the Early Years Outcome data and the Public Health England profiles for child development.

- The increase in children aged 0-5 with SEND is evident in rising referrals to services such as Portage (48% increase in referrals as at end of July 2021 compared to July 2020) and higher requests for school transition support for children that are autistic or have learning difficulties (40% of the referrals to the Autism and Learning Difficulties Service in 2020/21 academic year). As evidenced from the IMPOWER review, earlier support for families with young children may prevent, reduce, or delay the need for an EHCP.

Evidence Summary

There is a strong link between maternal health and infant health: antenatal education can help to manage and reduce maternal mental ill health during pregnancy and early childhood. The first two years of a child's life have a profound impact on their future development and long-term outcomes: not enough parents know that early childhood is an important time for development and the key link between parental mental health and the subsequent long-term development of children. Integrated working between professionals has many benefits including reducing the word gap for children, improving

cognitive development, improving physical health, improving behaviour, supporting parent/child interactions, and reducing duplication and costs.

Any future Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service should offer high-quality and evidence-based early years provision that contributes to raising the GLD of children in their early years in Lincolnshire and empowers parents and carers to become their child's first educator. Whilst any future Best Start Lincolnshire: Inclusion Service should focus on high-quality intervention which empowers ethnic minority families to access wider community-based provision to support their child's early development.

Service Performance

Both services are rated as Good in terms of performance and have received positive feedback from service users who have accessed them.

Best Start Lincolnshire Early Years and Family Service

- The service had c. two years and seven months of delivery prior to the pandemic.
- Pre-Covid-19 the number of sessions delivered was rising particularly for vulnerable children and in outreach venues widening the reach of services. The pandemic significantly impacted on the number of sessions delivered.

Session Type	July 2017 to March 2018		18/19 FY		19/20 FY		20/21 FY	
	Number	Quarter Avg	Number	Quarter Avg	Number	Quarter Avg	Number	Quarter Avg
Universal sessions	4,342	1,447	18,855 (+225%)	4,714	17,532 (-7%)	4,383	4,968 (-72%)	1,242
Vulnerable sessions	88	29	339 (+193%)	85	1,167 (+244%)	292	929 (-21%)	232
Outreach sessions	0	0	250 (+250%)	62	330 (+32%)	82	129 (-61%)	32
Total	4,430	1,107	19,444 (+77%)	4,861	19,029 (-2%)	4,757	6,026 (-68%)	1,506

- The total number of children and families accessing sessions (including virtual sessions) was also significantly impacted due to Covid-19 (NB: children may be included more than once):

Attendance Type	July 2017 to March 2018		18/19 FY		19/20 FY		20/21 FY	
	Number	Quarter Avg	Number	Quarter Avg	Number	Quarter Avg	Number	Quarter Avg
Families	73,423	24,474	112,338 (+14.7)	28,084	112,387 (+0.04%)	28,096	13,272 (-88%)	3,318
All children aged 0 to 5	84,877	28,292	130,304 (+15%)	32,576	130,041 (-2%)	32,510	13,272 (-90%)	3,318

Vulnerable children aged 0 to 5	1,783	594	4,865 (+105%)	1,216	5,680 (+14%)	1,420	1,221 (-78%)	305
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- Performance reporting between July and December 2021 showed that 45% of attendees at outreach sessions had not also attended a session in a children's centre building showing this mixed model was engaging different families.
- 3,965 KIT calls were made between July 2020 and March 2021 to vulnerable families.
- In 2020/21 An average of 53% vulnerable children aged 0-5 known to Children's Services attended sessions (an increase of 6% compared to the previous financial year).
- The development of children open to Children's Services and those identified as being below their expected development for their age is tracked. The percentage of children making progress within both cohorts of children has decreased since 2018/19.
- Stakeholder feedback collated by the Service between December 2020 and May 2021 showed that an average of 92% of families who provided feedback following face-to-face sessions said the sessions benefited their child and family.
- The demand for creche provision has been low with 33 creches provided since the start of the contract with an average of 2 children per creche provision.

Skills Development Service Offer:

- Referrals for skills development reduced by 53% in 2020/21 compared to the previous year but those parents/cares that then enrolled onto courses reduced at a lesser rate. The table below provides a summary of referrals received since the start of the contract:

Data Type	Skills Development Service Offer			
	July 2017 to March 2018	2018/19 FY	2019/20 FY	2020/21 FY
Number of new referrals received	135	501	321 (-36%)	151 (-53%)
Number of parents/carers enrolled onto learning*	90	230	227 (-1.3%)	173 (-24%)
Number of parents/carers secured employment*	17	46	43 (-6.5%)	16 (-63%)
Avg % of parents/carers who achieved outcome** on their pathway to employment	73%	70%	75.9% (+5.9%)	71.5% (-4.4%)

*Can include parents/carers being supported from previous financial years

**An outcome is based upon achievement of their goals when they joined the skills development programme, e.g., enrolment onto training or securing employment.

- Since the start of the contract 64.9% of those referred enrolled onto learning and 11% secured employment.

Best Start Lincolnshire: Inclusion Service

- The table below demonstrates there has been a growth in the number ethnic minority families registered and engaging with children's centres across all areas since including those where the Inclusion Service does not cover (grey= covered, orange= not covered).
- Indications are that overall children's centres are engaging ethnic minority families successfully. The pandemic significantly impacted on engagement with children's centres in 2020, due to restrictions in place at the time. Engagement in 2021 generally increased to above pre-pandemic numbers. Children's centre reporting in January 2022 showed engagement in Boston and South Holland has now risen to 961 (above pre-pandemic comparisons).

Area	Number of BME families registered with children's centres				Number of BME families engaging in all children's centre services			
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2018	2019	2020	2021
Boston & South Holland	2,890	2,973 (+2.8%)	2,952 (similar)	2,952 (same)	845	934 (+9.5%)	165 (-82.3%)	778 (+371%) (-16.7%, 2019)
Lincoln	454	754 (+66%)	1,073 (+42%)	1,489 (+39%)	241	309 (+28.2%)	93 (-70%)	434 (+367%) (+40.4%, 2019)
West Lindsey	298	323 (+8%)	328 (similar)	412 (+25.6%)	119	123 (+3.4%)	15 (-88%)	140 (+833.3%) (+13.8%, 2019)
North & South Kesteven	569	837 (+47%)	1,077 (+28%)	1,374 (+28%)	258	309 (+19.8%)	65 (-79%)	421 (+548%) (+36.2%, 2019)
East Lindsey	323	375 (+16%)	460 (+19.3%)	549 (+19.3%)	132	145 (+9.8%)	52 (-64%)	208 (+300%) (+43.4%, 2019)
Total	4,534	5,262 (+16%)	5,890 (+12%)	6,776 (+15%)	1,595	1,820 (+14%)	390 (-78.6%)	1,981 (+408%) (+8.8%, 2019)

(Sources: Synergy November 2018, November 2019, November 2020 and November 2021 Hard to Reach Reports).

- The inclusion Service received 62 referrals (+25% compared to previous financial year); referrals are from a wide range of professionals including Social Care, Early Help, Health Visitors, ESCO. Parents/carers can also self-refer.

- 2,846 contacts made with 317 families. (+607% compared to previous financial year linked to telephone contact increase during the pandemic).
- Between April 2021 and December 2021 an average of 21% of children sustained attendance in the Inclusion Service (new performing reporting metric). Sustained attendance isn't always positive as the service should be transitioning families to the Early Years and Family Service.
- 108 units (e.g., documents, posters, leaflets, etc) were translated into the six different assigned languages.
- Approximately 65 multinational groups were co-delivered with the Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service, attended by approximately 109 families and 155 children (may include double counting as attendance is counted from both services).
- 90% of parents/carers who provided feedback felt the service had improved their confidence.
- 80% of parents/carers who provided feedback felt able to access support without ongoing assistance from the Service.
- The service has successfully engaged with vulnerable and hard to reach families. On average 92.9% of vulnerable ethnic minority children aged 0-5 accessed the Inclusion Service (new performance reporting and includes children open to services as well as children living in 0-30% IMD areas).

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement identified that both services are highly regarded by service users and that families liked being able to access the services both outdoors and in the wider communities. Targeting services based on local needs was important and evidence based early learning sessions were highly rated. Partnership working between professionals was highly valued but could be strengthened for children with SEND and a stronger focus on inclusion is needed. The need for support for ethnic minority families is felt to be increasing but the offer is not the same across the county: better use of the Council's corporately commissioned translation service is needed.

Duplication between the commissioned skills development offer and the Council's internal Adult Skills and Family Service has been identified. The Adult Skills and Family Learning Service has a high percentage of learners that achieve a qualification and is also working with much higher volumes of service users: some of whom will have been signposted by the commissioned skills development offer. Pathway mapping undertaken with the Adult Skills and Family Learning Service has identified that there would be no gaps in provision if a skills development offer was not included with any future commissioned Early Years and Family Service model. The current commissioned skills development offer signposts parents/carers to the offer already available through the Adult Skills and Family Learning Service, as well as other relevant services. The Adult Skills and Family Learning Service brokers a wide range of courses from adult learning training providers and has confirmed they have sufficient capacity to meet the demand from parents/carers and directly promote their offer within children's centres. Other professionals, e.g. Early Help, Health Visitors, can also directly signpost to the Adult Skills and Family Learning Service and other relevant services.

Recommended Model

Modelling of the service was conducted based on review findings. The recommended model is summarised below with Appendix D of the Commissioning Plan providing further detail.

Early Years and Family Service

The Early Years and Family Service should continue to provide high-quality early learning sessions for children aged 0-5 years and their parents/carers across all children's centre sites and identified outreach community-based locations (including outdoor locations). There will be a core menu of universal sessions available with bespoke sessions tailored to the needs within each Children's Services locality. There will also continue to be sessions targeted at vulnerable families. Sessions will primarily be face-to-face, with some virtual webinars offered where these are most beneficial to families. Sessions will continue to be available Monday to Saturday to allow for parents/carers different working patterns.

There will continue to be collaborative working with the Council's Early Years Teams and a strong emphasis on continued partnership working with the Council's Children's Health 0-19 Service and midwifery services. In addition, there will be robust partnership working with early years, SEND and children with disabilities services to provide a fully inclusive early years offer to all Lincolnshire children in their early years and their families within their local communities.

There will no longer be a commissioned Skills Development Service offer within the future model as there is a high-quality provision already available to families through the Council's Adult Skills and Family Learning Service.

Universal session delivery

Universal sessions should continue to be available from antenatal to age 5 years (early years), with a stronger emphasis on sessions targeted at children up to the age of 3 years. There will be a strong emphasis on supporting parents/carers to be their child's first educator as well supporting parents/carers to understand and normalise their child's behaviours at key developmental stages. A more varied programme of evidence-based sessions will be available.

Sessions will have the ability to be flexible to meet the needs of families within each Children's Services locality but will be aligned to the three prime areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum: Communication and Language, Physical Development and Personal, Social and Emotional Development and will also be aligned to relevant Public Health Outcomes to ensure key messages are shared and support the direct link of good health to good levels of development.

There will continue to be mixed age group sessions available to enable families with more than one child up to the age of 5 years to access provision and a "Readiness for School" programme will also be available during the Spring Term to help parents/carers to support their child transition into primary.

Existing session provision will be accessible for children with additional needs and/or disabilities and tailored sessions will also be available for families to attend and gain further support and track their child's development via Tapestry where appropriate.

Targeted session delivery

In addition to continuing to offer sessions targeted at supporting vulnerable families, there will be a greater emphasis on utilising more evidence-based programmes to better support the early childhood development of vulnerable children and support their parents/carers to be their first educators.

There will continue to be robust partnership working with the Council's Early Years Teams to track both vulnerable children and children identified below age and stage to offer tailored support and guidance to families to improve that child's early life chances.

Inclusion Service to support ethnic minority communities

Lincolnshire's population is becoming increasingly diverse and there is evidence that families from ethnic minority communities already access the Early Years and Family Service which must continue to be inclusive and meet the needs of all families. The Inclusion Service offer for ethnic minority communities with children aged up to 5 years should continue but with a refined focus. However, this should be an equitable countywide offer and not just focussed on three areas.

The service will work with a range of professionals to identify vulnerable (open to services and/or as identified by an early years professional) and hard to reach families/communities (not engaging in the Early Years and Family Service offer) and support them through direct engagement to access children's centres and the community. This will include ensuring a presence within relevant children's centres when midwifery and health visiting services are being delivered to support ethnic minority families early and promote the services available to them.

Co-delivery with the Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service should continue with a key focus on supporting ethnic minority families to engage. The Service will continue to offer home visits for up to 6 months to vulnerable ethnic minority families of children up to the age of 5 years who require more bespoke and intensive support with a focus of parents/carers then accessing provision within their community.

Translation support will continue to be provided when working with ethnic minority families to better support them to access services within their local communities. This will include translation support of documents, letters, leaflets associated with the early years offer available within local children's centres and/or other community venues. However, referrals to provide sole translation support for Social Care Teams and meetings such as Children in Need (CIN), Child Protection (CP), Team around the Child (TAC), etc. will no longer be accepted as the Council already has a corporate translation contract in place to support such translation requests. Where the Service is already supporting an ethnic minority family to engage in the community, and it is a requirement for the Service to support the family to attend a Social Care meeting in these circumstances the Service will provide translation support within the meeting where appropriate.

Funding Recommendations for future Best Start Lincolnshire Provision

The current combined funding for the commissioned Best Start Lincolnshire Services is £1,936,712 per annum. £20,000 of the funding for the Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service is from the 2-year-old Trajectory Funding.

The table below outlines the overall funding required to fund the recommended model outlined in this report from April 2023 onwards:

Service	Current full FY Commitment per annum	Proposed full FY Commitment per annum for recommended option
Best Start Lincolnshire: Early Years and Family Service	£1,871,712 (Excluding VAT)	£1,594,712 (Excluding VAT) £1,913,654.4 (Including VAT)
Best Start Lincolnshire: inclusion service for ethnic minority communities	£65,000 (Excluding VAT)	£130,000 (Excluding VAT) £156,000 (Including VAT)
Total	£1,936,712 (Excluding VAT)	£1,724,712 (Excluding VAT) £2,069,654.40 (Including VAT)
Reduced level of investment per annum		£212,000

It is recommended that skills development is provided via the Council's Adult Skills and Family Learning service which would reduce funding by approximately £277,000. However, the recommendation is to increase the Inclusion Service offer to a countywide offer which will require additional staffing resource. This will therefore require additional funding for any future commissioned Best Start Lincolnshire: Inclusion Service for ethnic minority communities. It is anticipated that an additional investment of £65,000 would be required for a future Inclusion Service. This would still allow for a net efficiency saving for the Council against the current Best Start Lincolnshire Services funding of £212,000 per annum. It has been confirmed by the Interim Head of Service for Early Years that the £20,000 contribution from the 2-year-old Trajectory Funding can continue and therefore there will not be impact on this efficiency saving.

Whilst staffing models for commissioned contracts would be at the discretion of the successful supplier(s), it is anticipated that there would be a reduction of FTE associated with the change in the skills development service offer. The minimum FTE requirement for a Best Start Lincolnshire: Inclusion Service for ethnic minority communities across the County would increase.

2. Legal Issues:

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 Act.

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.

The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation.

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.

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 Equality Impact Assessment has been initiated as part of the service review and whilst this is working document, the current draft EIA is attached as Appendix E with the Commissioning Plan. Given that the recommendation is to re-commission Best Start Lincolnshire Services and although a change to the skills development commissioning is being recommended, there are no identified gaps in provision nor will be any persons be negatively impacted on because the support is available through other Council services.

The Equality Impact Assessment will be further developed should this be required following decision-making processes.

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 first two years of a child's life has been proven to have a monumental impact on long-term outcomes for children, poor access to early education and support by parents/carers to promote early development increase the likelihood of poor educational attainment and future adult hood outcomes such as secure employment and achieving economic wellbeing.

Ensuring that the right support is available at the right time for children in their early years and their families, is essential to effectively meeting their needs and improving their early educational outcomes and later life chances.

The re-commissioning of Best Start Lincolnshire Services will ensure that there is no gap in provision for children in their early years and their families and children continue to be supported to improve their early development and parents/carers continue to be supported to be their child's first educator.

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.

Re-commissioning of Best Start Lincolnshire Services will ensure that children in their early years continue to be supported to access early education provision, thus helping to support their long-term outcomes into adulthood.

3. Conclusion

The evidence is clear that the Council's commissioned Best Start Lincolnshire Services are highly valued and strong performing services that should continue to be commissioned with some limited amendments. The Best Start Lincolnshire Services are supporting the Council to increase attendance at children's centres and outreach venues, in particular vulnerable families thus reducing the need for more intensive intervention support for children in their early years and their families.

The review has identified duplication with the Council's Adult Skills and Family Learning Service and the recommended model seeks to reduce the duplication by no longer commissioning this element. This will ensure best value for money for both the Council and service users. The recommended budget should be sufficient to deliver the

recommended future model for the Best Start Lincolnshire Services, whilst still affording some efficiency savings to the Council.

The Best Start Lincolnshire Services should be procured through an open competitive tender process with 2 lots with a new contract in place from 1st April 2023. Previous procurement and current market knowledge indicate there will be sufficient interest.

The Best Start Lincolnshire Services will continue to support children in their early years and their families to access high-quality early education provision to contribute to increasing the GLD of children in their early years in Lincolnshire and support parent/carers to be their child's first educator.

4. Legal Comments:

The Council has the power to enter into the contracts proposed.

The proposals are compliant with the Council's procurement obligations.

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

5. Resource Comments:

The recommendation in the report to approve the re-commissioning of the Best Start Lincolnshire Services (Early Years and Family Service and Inclusion Service for ethnic minority communities), via an open competitive tender will assist in delivering value for money for each service tendered. The continuation of the service provision will provide support for children and parents; deliver on local priorities along with supporting the Council's statutory duty under Section 3(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

The service is currently funded as a base budget through Council core funding, along with a small contribution that comes from the 2-year-old Trajectory Funding in the Dedicated Schools Grant. The completion of the robust review of service requirements has identified an opportunity to achieve an efficiency saving of £0.212m from April 2023 compared to current spending levels.

6. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

N/A

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes

c) Scrutiny Comments

At its meeting on 17 June 2022, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee considered the report and unanimously agreed to support the recommendations to the Executive.

In response to questions raised by the Committee, the following points were confirmed:

- The market engagement undertaken so far had indicated that there was a sufficient market to have multiple providers bid for the contracts and there would be an element of competition. For the current contracts, there had been four provider bids for the Early Years and Family Service, but only one provider bid for the Inclusion Service, which was the reason why the tender process would again consist of two lots so that the market was not restricted for the Early Years and Family Service.
- A maximum contract price would be included when the tender goes out to market so that bidders know that they have to be within that financial envelope. As detailed work was undertaken in advance around feasibility and the cost of the service based on what needed to be delivered, then the evaluation of the bids could be weighted towards quality rather than price. Assurance was provided that even with the efficiency saving, the financial envelope would be sufficient and there had been no cost pressures within the current service. There had been underspends in the current contract relating to staff turnover which would have been either reinvested back into the contract or clawed back into the Council.
- Bringing the services in-house had been explored but a key barrier was that historically these services had been delivered by the community and voluntary sector. If the services were in-sourced, there would be significant implications on the staffing costs for those transferred to the Council as they would be eligible for the Local Government Pension Scheme. This would mean that the volume and capacity of support that the Council could offer would be reduced. In addition, families like working with these community and voluntary organisations and see their independence from children's social care as positive.
- As part of the engagement strategy, social media was key for communicating with families. This was very targeted about children's centres and promoting sessions on a daily basis. In addition, there was promotion of children's centre activities within the communities such as in local shops and doctors' surgeries. It was suggested that the promotion of children's centres should be improved as this would help increase attendance, and in response it was confirmed that this expectation would be clearly articulated within the specification and when the tender goes out to market, and the Council would work with future providers to improve communications and make it feel more local to local communities.
- The initial contract period would be for three years with an opportunity to extend

it for up to a further two years depending on performance. A five-year contract length was standard across the Council as many things could change within five years and there were restrictions on varying a contract within procurement regulations.

- The proposed saving of £212,000 would support budgetary pressures elsewhere in Children's Services. This proposal would not have a detrimental effect on families as skills development would be provided by the Council's Adult Skills and Family Learning Service instead and a range of other services were still being maintained. These services would also sit alongside the proposed Family Hubs and the Supporting Families programme.
- The pandemic had affected young children's development in communication and language skills and social skills, as the lockdowns had limited their exposure to other people. Sessions were being held in children's centres which were focused on communication and language skills to help young children catch up and be ready for school. There was currently no progress data available, but once released there would be an opportunity to evaluate and benchmark where Lincolnshire was compared to the national figures and prioritise accordingly. It was recognised that this was an issue across the country which was being considered at a national level.
- Connections with primary schools were being made at a strategic level through the different service areas, and through children's centres which were mainly based on school sites so were well connected within local communities. Feedback was being obtained from primary schools to understand where there may be progress gaps in young children starting school. 90% of three-year-olds were in an early years setting accessing the free 30 hours so there was also a connection between primary schools and early years settings around transition. More young children who were not in an early years setting were being seen at a children's centre, but it was recognised that an area that could be strengthened going forward was the provider working more with local schools.
- Hard to reach families would be engaged through trusted professionals, such as health visitors, family health workers and early health workers, who would try to guide and assist families to access support in children's centres. In addition, if siblings of families were attending schools or early years settings, then a pop-up children's centre could be held to bring services into the community so that families could access support.
- Children's centres was a strong national brand which was widely understood by families. However, it was recognised that the term 'children's centres' had negative connotations for some Eastern European communities. The inception of Family Hubs would provide an opportunity to revisit the branding.
- As of January 2022, there were 37,284 under fives registered with children's

centres. Of these, 9.8% identified as White, Eastern European, or Eastern European or White Other; 71% identified as White British; 9.2% identified as other ethnic community groups and 10% chose not to identify their ethnicity.

The Committee requested that an update report be brought to a future meeting on the impact of the pandemic and post pandemic recovery including detailed information on progress data, immunisations, and health visiting.

d) Risks and Impact Analysis

To not re-commission Best Start Lincolnshire Services would:

- Likely result in further decrease in GLD of all children across Lincolnshire, having an impact on future educational attainment and future adult life chances.
- Likely create a gap in support and put more pressure on existing services, such as 0-19 Children’s Health Service, Early Help and Social Care.
- Not support the Early Childhood Strategy nor the Early Help Strategy.
- Be a high risk of increased pressure on the Council (reputational and financial) in relation to meeting its statutory duties.
- Not support national and local priorities across health, education, and social care to ensure even more children in their early years and their families access the right support at the right time.

7. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix 1	Best Start Lincolnshire Commissioning Plan

8. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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