

**Written statement of a key decision**  
**Cabinet member children and families**

<b>Title</b>	<b>West Midlands Regional Foster Care Framework</b>
Decision maker	Cabinet member children and families Information about cabinet, including the names and contact details of the cabinet members, can be found here: <a href="http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=251">http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=251</a>
Date of decision	28 February 2020
Report exemption class	Part exempt
Reason for being a key decision	<p>This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.</p> <p>This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.</p>
A notice was served in accordance with Part 3 (Key decisions) of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.	
General exception or special urgency (as defined in the constitution)	No
Purpose	<p>To approve the adoption of the West Midlands Regional Foster Care Framework for the provision of foster care services from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023; with the option to extend for up to a further year at an estimated spend of up to c.£3.5 million per annum. Actual spend will depend upon demand from the number of children looked after by the council and the capacity of the council's in-house fostering service to meet that demand.</p> <p>The current framework agreement expires on 31 March 2020 and there is no option to extend. Sandwell Children's Trust has taken the lead on behalf of the region on a re-procurement exercise for a new framework which is due to go live on 1 April 2020. Joining the</p>

	<p>framework ensures that Herefordshire can continue to achieve good value and quality when placing looked after children with independent foster care providers. Joining the framework allows access to a pool of regionally approved fostering agencies. It does not commit the council to spend via the framework. The council will search for placements for individual children via the framework, and will purchase from the framework if a suitable match is found for that child. If a suitable match can not be identified, the council would extend its search to, and may purchase from, the wider market of agencies that have not joined the framework.</p>
<p><b>Decision</b></p>	<p><b>That:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>(a) the West Midlands Regional Foster Care Framework Agreement until 2023 for the provision of foster care services be adopted to facilitate the purchasing of independent agency foster care;</b></li> <li><b>(b) the Director for Children’s and Families be authorised to take all necessary operational decisions to implement the above recommendation and utilise the framework agreement;</b></li> <li><b>(c) the Director for Children’s and Families and relevant Assistant Directors be authorised to take all necessary operational decisions to spot-purchase placements outside the framework should the need arise for individual children.</b></li> </ul>
<p>Reason for the decision</p>	<p>As set out in the report. Documents relating to this decision are available at  <a href="http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=50032974">http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=50032974</a></p>
<p>Options considered</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do nothing. As there will be no framework or similar arrangements, Herefordshire will spot purchase all independent foster care placements as and when required. Spot purchase costs generally tend to be higher than framework costs and spot purchasing can create an additional administrative pressure as a result of the additional pre-placement checks and contracting preparation. Framework providers will have already been subject to a regional evaluation and the same contractual terms and conditions, which would minimise the need for local checks and contracting arrangements. Also this approach does not comply with the public contract regulations (PCR2015), unless used as an emergency with a compliant route being exhausted beforehand.</li> <li>2. To place all children and young people with the council’s in-house foster carers. This is not an option as, although the number of in-house general foster carer households has increased from 107 to 113 since May 2019, there are insufficient carers available to support all children and young people requiring a foster placement. At the end of 2019, there were over 220 being fostered, excluding those placed in kinship fostering arrangements.</li> </ol>

	<p>3. Commission a Herefordshire only foster care framework agreement. This is not recommended because Herefordshire is a relatively small local authority with limited purchasing power. Most fostering agencies are unlikely to be willing to undertake a separate tendering process when there are more significant business opportunities with larger authorities or regional approaches. Previous framework agreements have demonstrated that collaboration with regional partners achieves better placement prices.</p> <p>4. Participate in a sub-regional fostering framework. As all other West Midlands councils either have, or are in the process of agreeing to join the new framework, this would not be an option.</p> <p>5. To commission independent foster care placements on a block contract arrangement. This option is not recommended at the current time as it could create direct competition with the in-house fostering service for the recruitment of additional carers. In-house provision generally costs less than the independent sector. Through its placements sufficiency strategy, the council has prioritised the growth of the in-house service as a way to manage costs and deliver placement capacity in Herefordshire. Block contracting with IFAs for local carers could be considered in future if the in-house service is unable to meet the expected capacity levels.</p>
Declarations of interest (see below)	
Call-in expiry date (decisions are not subject to call-in where special urgency provisions apply)	5 March 2020

Councillor: .....	Date 28 February 2020
Cabinet member children and families (Councillor Felicity Norman)	

- a record of any conflict of interest declared by any executive member who is consulted by the member which relates to the decision;

and

- in respect of any declared conflict of interest, a note of dispensation granted.