

Record of officer decision

Decision title:	Extension of regional fostering framework agreement
Date of decision:	21/02/2018
Decision maker:	Director for Children's Wellbeing
Authority for delegated decision:	<p>A decision was undertaken by the cabinet member for young people and children's wellbeing on 16 February 2016 to join the West Midlands Regional Foster Care Framework authorising;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (a) the West Midlands regional foster care framework be adopted for independent agency foster care searches; and ▪ (b) subject to satisfactory completion of final procurement/supplier checks, the providers listed in appendix A, be accepted onto the framework from 4 April 2016 for two years, with the option to extend for up to a further two years.
Ward:	All wards
Consultation:	No consultation has been undertaken at this time. However Birmingham Children's Trust, as lead authority for the region on this framework, will be formally consulting with the service providers as part of the re-grading exercise, at which point their position in the tiers may change. This will be based on their current fees, plus their social value charter accreditation and their Ofsted rating at the end of December
Decision made:	To exercise the option to extend the framework agreement for a further two years
Reasons for decision:	<p>The current West Midlands Regional Foster Care framework is due to expire in March 2018, and there is an option to renew for 2 years. The 13 other councils have or are considering the independent decision to renew the framework for 2 years to March 2020. During which time it is proposed that the region will undertake a joint re-procurement exercise to improve on the existing framework and ensure that there would be a continuation of such arrangements once the agreement expires.</p> <p>Since joining the framework in April 2016 and up to 31 August 2017, approximately 23,800 agency foster care bed-nights have been purchased, of which 80% were purchased through the framework agreement. The average weekly cost of a framework placement is £780 compared to £920 for placements on a spot purchase agreement.</p> <p>It is estimated that costs avoidance in the region of £600,000 have been achieved since joining the framework in 2016 up to March 2018.</p> <p>Commissioners are satisfied with the quality of the framework and the monitoring processes, which continue to be developed with the West Midlands councils.</p>

	The projected budget for agency foster care in 2018/19 is £2.3m, with in the region of 70% being spent via the framework.
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	<p>The existing foster care framework ceases in March 2018 and if the option to renew for a further two years is not exercised, all agency foster placements will transfer to spot purchase arrangements.</p> <p>Prior to and during the life of the framework contract agreement, there are robust quality assurance processes in place to ensure providers deliver a quality service and meet the needs of the children placed. The framework is monitored by the 14 West Midlands councils, who have signed up to the framework.</p>
Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do nothing. Herefordshire would spot purchase all independent foster care placements as and when required. Spot purchase arrangements are likely to be on average £140 per week more expensive than pre-agreed framework rates. This could equate to an additional £630,000 pressure per annum. • To place all children and young people with the council's in-house fostering team carers. This is not an option as although the number of in-house carers has increased from 120 to 145 since 2014, there are insufficient carers available to support all children and young people requiring a placement. During the period 1 April 2017 to 31 December 2017, 86 children and young people required placements with independent foster care provides, with approximately 14,500 bed-nights being purchased. • Commission a Herefordshire only foster care framework agreement. This is not recommended because Herefordshire is a relatively small local authority with limited purchasing power. Previous framework agreements have demonstrated that collaboration with regional partners achieves better placement prices ; • Participate in a sub-regional fostering framework. As all other West Midlands councils either have, or are in the process of agreeing to renew the framework for 2 years, it would be difficult to identify potential partners to support this process. • To commission independent foster care placements on a block contract arrangement. This option is not recommended as it could result in funding places which are not required. It is unlikely that one provider would be able to meet the needs of all our looked after children (LAC) who require foster care placements, so alternative provision would have to be sourced on a spot purchase arrangement.
Details of any declarations of interest made:	N/A

Signed

Date: 21/02/2018