

Decision maker:	Cabinet member young people and children's wellbeing
Decision date:	Wednesday 21 March 2018
Title of report:	Bromyard Children's Centre Services
Report by:	Childrens joint commissioning manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

Bishops Frome & Cradley; Bromyard Bringsty; Bromyard West; Hampton; Three Crosses;

Purpose and summary

To approve the direct award of a six month contract for the delivery of children's centre services in the Bromyard area. The current contractual arrangement ends on 31 March 2018.

Initial commissioning intentions for the Bromyard area for beyond April 2018 were developed in 2017. A six-month extension of service will enable additional work to be undertaken so that a long-term decision can be taken for the delivery of services from October 2018.

Recommendation(s)

That:

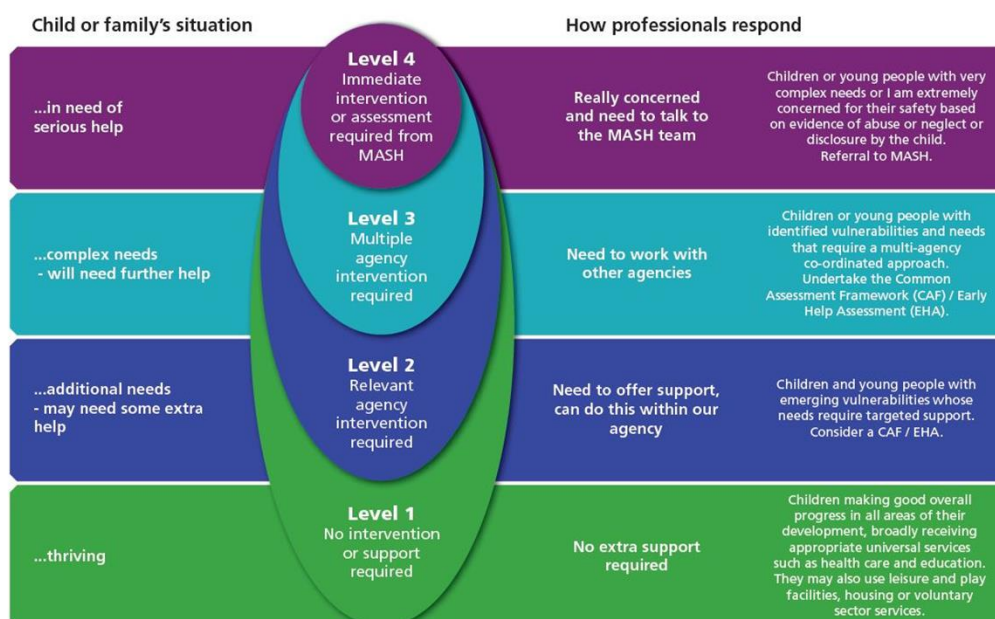
- (a) the Hope Centre, Bromyard, be awarded a six-month contract from 1 April 2018 at a maximum value of £40,000 for the provision of children's centre services in the Bromyard reach area.**

Alternative options

1. Tender the service based on the existing value and service specification. This option is not recommended as the specification dates from 2012 and is no longer current. The specification will, however, be updated to bring it closer to the approaches in the rest of Herefordshire.
2. Tender the service, or bring it in-house, based on a new value and service specification. This option is not recommended at this time. The additional work to be completed will assist the council to determine the type of service and level of resource required in the long term. This option could, therefore, be appropriate in future.
3. Cease the provision of children's centre services in the Bromyard area from 31 March 2018. This option is not recommended because it could negatively impact on the intended beneficiaries and place additional pressure on other services to fill any service gap.

Key considerations

4. The Childcare Act 2006 sets out a duty for councils to improve the wellbeing and reduce inequalities of young children in its area. Arrangements made under this duty must, as far as is reasonably practicable, include sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local need. The Act defines a children's centre as a place or group of places which is managed by, on behalf of or under arrangements made with a council with a view to securing that early childhood services in their area are made available in an integrated manner.
5. The core purpose of children's centre services is about improving outcomes for young children and their families, with a particular focus on the most disadvantaged families, in order to reduce inequalities in:
 - child development and school readiness
 - parenting aspirations, self esteem and parenting skills
 - child and family health and life chances
6. Children's centre services operate as part of a strategic whole family and whole system approach that support families with different levels of need that may require universal, targeted, multi-agency or specialist/statutory support, illustrated below:



7. Part of the core purpose of children centre services across Herefordshire is to provide appropriate support for children aged 0-5 at levels 1 and 2, and in some cases work at levels 3-4 with specific children and families. The range of support can include facilitating midwife and health visiting clinics, supervised contact, adult learning, and parenting support.
8. Bromyard is the only area in Herefordshire where children's centre services have been procured from an external provider. This is for historic reasons relating to Bromyard being a centrally-funded pilot area for children's centre services before a wider roll-out across Herefordshire. In all other parts of the county, services are delivered directly by the council.
9. All frontline staff employed in council-operated children's centre services are qualified early years practitioners who provide a range of evidence-based group support into targeted local areas of deprivation, such as speech and language support, specialist parenting support for early attachment, and behaviour management strategies. Children with needs at level 3 are referred to the council's early help service for coordinated multiagency support that can assist the whole family, including children older than 5-years. Children that require intensive family support at level 4 are supported by the council's social care family support service.
10. The service model in the Bromyard area has developed over several years and is not currently aligned with the approach in other parts of the county. Although group-based activities have been provided, they are not based on the consistent evidence based models used across the rest of the county, until recently, most group work has been provided at a site out-of-town rather than via outreach into the target areas of deprivation. Support for children at level 3 is delivered by the contract provider to children aged 0-5 and their parents, rather than by the council's early help service as part of a whole family approach. The provider also delivers intensive family support to children at level 4.
11. Initial commissioning intentions have been developed for the Bromyard reach area, however further work is needed to finalise a future delivery model. It is therefore intended to temporarily extend current provision by the Hope Centre for six-months. This will allow for further impact assessment, market testing and service redesign work to be completed to inform a commissioning decision for service delivery from October 2018.
12. The current contract was originally awarded for three-years in 2012 and has subsequently been extended to 31 March 2018, over which period the contract value has been c.£790,000. Rather than renew the 2012 contract, it is intended to award a six-month contract using the council's latest standard terms and conditions together with an updated service specification that will help the service to transition closer to the approach in other parts of the county, including:
 - further group-based outreach in targeted areas of deprivation to help children achieve a good level of development in their early years
 - use of evidence based models of support, such as the Solihull parenting approach, speech and language support, baby massage and forest school outdoor play
 - managed transition of existing level 3 cases to the council's early help service
 - identification of families with emerging needs that may need additional support at level 3 for coordination by the council's early help service
 - identification and transition of children with safeguarding at level 4 for intensive family support, as appropriate

Community impact

13. The recommendations support the council's Corporate Plan priorities to
 - enable residents to live safe, healthy and independent lives by increasing family capacity and skills
 - to keep children and young people safe and give them a great start in life by supporting parents to develop their expertise and skills and by providing direct work with children and families focusing on those with emerging need
 - support the growth of our economy through advice and guidance to parents on how to make the most of local opportunities and state benefits
 - to secure better services, quality of life and value for money by establishing new outcome focused contracts and service specifications to make better use of the resources the council spends on preventative services

14. The recommendations support both the council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, in particular the emerging priority to reduce childhood obesity and dental decay, and Children and Young People's Plan's (CYPP) aim to keep children safe and give them the best start in life. The CYPP identifies early years and early help among its priority strategic planning areas by improving outcomes for children, young people and families through:
 - Early years**
 - Integrated approaches and continuity of support
 - Better transitions between services and age groups
 - Early education and childcare
 - Being school ready
 - Delivery of the healthy child programme
 - Effective parent support
 - Early help**
 - Improved early identification
 - Breaking cycles of intergenerational inequality
 - Targeted and co-ordinated interventions with lead workers
 - Improved take-up of community and universal support
 - Delivery of the government's troubled families initiative

15. The recommendations also support Herefordshire's Early Help Strategy 2016-2018, which links strongly to support for early years. Herefordshire's early help approach, including early years support, is based upon being:
 - **Family focused** and designed to address the issues of the whole household in a holistic way
 - **Community focused** drawing on the strengths and services in each locality
 - **Targeted** to ensure the right level of support at the right time
 - **Multi-agency** to reflect the complex and multi-faceted issues that families can often face
 - **Aimed at building resilience in families** to provide them with the tools and skills to help and support themselves in the future

16. The council is committed to providing a healthy and safe environment for all individuals impacted by the council's funded activities. The council endeavours to ensure that the work they and their partners undertake, does not adversely affect the health, safety or welfare of members of the public especially clients. Therefore council partners are expected to work to the same health and safety standards and codes of practice as the council, as far as is reasonably practicable. This requirement will be included in the final contract terms within the extended contract and be part of the ongoing contractor management.

Equality duty

17. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
18. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
19. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires the council to consider how it can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that it is paying 'due regard' in its decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. The council's providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

Resource implications

20. Continuing the current service for the period from 1 April 2018 to 30 September, will cost up to £40k. During the six-month period, the current service will be redesigned and options to re-tender or bring in-house will be further assessed. Once this work is completed, the costs for the period from 1 October 2018 to 31 March 2019 will be clarified. In the interim, the costs for the October to March period are anticipated to be in the region of £10k-£20k. Therefore, costs for the year 2018/19 are expected to be no more than £60k
21. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) includes indicative costs for a new service of £20k per year from April 2018. This contract will create a £40k pressure on the MTFS savings. It is proposed to be funded by the rural sparsity grant, subject to cabinet approval.

Legal implications

22. The council has a duty to provide sufficient children's centres provision under the Childcare Act 2006 and related statutory guidance. This Report proposes continuity of the children's centre provision which is compatible with the council's legal duty and the outcomes of the public consultation undertaken last summer, as explained below.
23. The Report proposes a very short term extension to the existing contract, which is not considered to be a substantial modification under the Public Contract Regulations. This Report explains that there is a commitment to undertaking a re-procurement of this service at the earliest appropriate opportunity which is consistent with the council's obligations under EU law and the council's own Contract Procedure Rules, as well as the wider duty to secure best value in the discharge of all of the council's functions.

Risk management

24.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
Further extensions of contract without an open tender exercise could be challenged by other potential service providers	If it is decided that the future service model would best be delivered by an external organisation, the council will undertake an appropriate competitive exercise, in line with its contract procedure rules

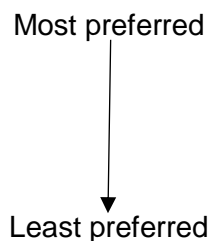
Consultees

25. A consultation was undertaken in August and September 2017 across the Bromyard children centre reach area, which involved an online survey and drop-in engagement sessions at

- HOPE Centre Play Zone and Health Visitor Clinic
- Bishops Frome Parent and Toddler Group
- St. Peter's Primary School, Bromyard

26. The on-line survey received 184 responses and the feedback published on the council's website. 57% of respondents agreed that children's centre services should be delivered in places where communities have the most vulnerable children. Most respondents (40%) thought that voluntary groups or charities would be the best type of provider for children's centre services in Bromyard:

- Voluntary groups/charities
- Other
- A mix of all of them
- Early years providers
- Herefordshire Council
- Schools



27. Although respondents liked services delivered from a children's centre building, there was a notable need for outreach services outside of Bromyard town centre in pre-schools, village halls and schools. This feedback will help inform the updated service specification, which will include further group-based outreach support into the targeted areas of deprivation.

28. Political groups have been consulted and no comments or objections have been received

Appendices

None.

Background papers

None identified.