

Record of Officer Decision

Decision title:	Digital provision for seeking children and young people's views when they are supported by social care or early help services
Date of decision:	16 June 2020
Decision maker:	Director for Children and Families
Authority for delegated decision:	<p>Under the Chief Executive's Scheme of Delegation (updated April 2020), Commissioning for children's services including schools, early years, colleges, adult learning, social care and vulnerable children may be undertaken by the Director for Children and Families (SA19, page 22).</p> <p>The Council's corporate Contract Procedure rules 'Guidance Notes' (2018) state that: 'where a contract provides for an extension, the service director shall be consulted prior to the extension of a contract with an aggregate total value of less than £100,000'.</p> <p>The contract value, including the proposed extension period, will not exceed £100,000. The recommended decision to extend the contract is, therefore, in line with the corporate guidance.</p>
Ward:	All wards
Consultation:	Provider has been consulted and would be in agreement to extend the subscription.
Decision made:	<p>To extend the council's subscription for Mind of My Own for up to 12 months from 1st June 2020 to 31st May 2021. This will be at a maximum cost of £7,605. During the extension period, a review of commissioning options will be undertaken to include the following options to inform a new commissioning decision:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risks and opportunities for making use of freely available social media platforms • developing a bespoke on-line application in-house • undertaking a tender exercise for a costed off-the-shelf tailored application • decommissioning the service.
Reasons for decision:	<p>Both the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004 set out general statutory duties for local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of looked after children and where practicable to ascertain the wishes and feelings of these children before making decisions relating to their education or care.</p> <p>The Children and Families Act 2014 sets out similar statutory duties to ascertain the wishes and feelings of children with special educational needs and who have or who may require an Education Health and Care Plan.</p> <p>The Children and Young People's plan sets out in its vision a promise</p>

to “listen to the voices of children and young people about their needs and how we can meet them”. Mind of My Own app is a tool that will enable this to be more effectively achieved for all children and young people who receive a service from Children’s Social care.

As part of the extension, the app will be opened up to Childrens Early help and Social care staff along with all children who they are supporting. Approximately, there are 101 social workers, 49 family support workers and 24 early help workers who will be able to access the app and support 1934 children and young people who are open to social care and early help. These figures are correct as of 18/05/2020.

Mind of My Own app is a tool for children and young people open to children services to communicate in a way that they are comfortable and familiar with. The app aims to improve communication between young people and professionals in the social care system. The app can help children and young people to express their views and feelings, and make it easier for social workers to record these, and help inform decisions about their care. The app can be used on phones and tablets, so it is seen as more accessible for children and young people.

Since implementation in July 2017, this app has been available to all LAC children and young people. In total there have been a total of 186 accounts created, of which there are 42 young people accounts and 144 Herefordshire Council worker accounts. Overall, 73% of usage is from young people accounts. At the time of the launch there were 320 LAC children and young people, thus meaning there was a 13% uptake of young people accounts.

There have been total of 160 statements made via the app during the first 12 months. This usage was slightly above average compared with other neighboring local authority data. A statement is where a child or young person has expressed a view, opinion or comment using the app. The majority (40%) of the app usage has been during a social worker visit followed by 23% where children and young people have shared their good news with the workers thus improving the quality of reviews by focusing on children lived experiences.

In response to negative publicity in the media in relation to the ‘MOMO Challenge’ (Feb 2019), which had no links to the app, the decision was made to suspend its use by the council’s children’s social care. The provider’s response to the negative association was to swiftly rebrand and relaunch the app under the name of Mind of My Own. New promotional materials were created to enable organisations to continue hearing the children’s voices through the app, without any negative associations.

Social care have highlighted the advantage of having a variety of different methods to communicate with children and young people, especially during the current Covid 19 pandemic. Social care is working on raising awareness again of the Mind of My Own app following the period of no use. An independent reviewing officer (IRO) has been identified as a champion to promote the use of Mind of My Own. The Head of Safeguarding and Review will be working

	<p>with the IRO to explore methods of raising awareness and successful promotion of the app.</p> <p>During the first 3 months of the extension, a review will be undertaken to analyse the effectiveness of methods employed to obtain children and young people's views. Due to the app not being used since Feb 2019, this data will provide valuable support to help inform commissioning options going forward.</p>
<p>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</p>	<p>A relaunch is currently being undertaken using the following on from this negative association, to mitigate the association with the 'MOMO Challenge'. Other local authorities who use the app were satisfied with the changes made by Mind of My Own and relaunched the app within their authority during March 19. The directorate has received updated posters, leaflets and refreshed plans from Mind of My Own to help mitigate association. Social care are satisfied with the new marketing information.</p> <p>To support a successful relaunch and continued usage of the app, social care will identify a named person(s) responsible for monitoring progress and usage. Otherwise there is a risk the app will not be used or valued by social care professionals and young people.</p> <p>The subscription for the app will be funded from the children and families Safeguarding contract reserves budget for the 12 month extension.</p>
<p>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Do nothing. The current subscription with Mind of My Own would cease from 31st July 2020 and Herefordshire's children's social care will cease to be able to use the app as one of its communication tools which provides children and young people a chance to express their views. This is not recommended as during the current Covid-19 pandemic, communication with the children and young people is vital and any opportunity the Council has to strengthen this should be utilised. 2) Herefordshire Council could seek to develop the function from within its own ICT services however, due to the demand Covid-19 has put on the local authority there is insufficient capacity to explore this option further within the required timeframe. However this will form part of the review to be undertaken during the extension period 3) Undertake a competitive tender exercise to award new contract to the successful provider. This is not recommended at this time as other work has had to be prioritised to as result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The review of methods employed by Herefordshire's children's social care to seek children and young people's views, being undertaken during the first 3 months of extension period, will inform the future commissioning options.
<p>Details of any declarations of interest made:</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Signed

Chris Baird
Director for children and families

Date: 16 June 2020