

Record of officer decision

Decision title:	Commissioning of Family Mentoring and Befriending services from April 2021
Date of decision:	23 October 2020
Decision maker:	Director for Children and Families
Authority for delegated decision:	<p>Under the Chief Executive scheme of delegation updated 29th September 2020 (SA19), 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.</p> <p>This procurement exercise will be undertaken in line with Herefordshire Councils Contract Procedure Rules through an Invitation to Tender (ITT) via the council's e-tendering portal, Pro-Contract.</p>
Ward:	All wards
Consultation:	<p>The review of existing services included analysis of feedback from recipients of the service and key stakeholders, the outcomes of which have led to greater focus on length of interventions and clear exit planning.</p> <p>The services were discussed with the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, where the funding challenges were recognised, alongside the need to avoid a break in services and achieve sustainable change for vulnerable families. The proposed tender was supported with the caveat that alternative funding would need to be identified and agreed prior to a decision to proceed with awarding contracts if it were confirmed that the national programme ceases at the end of March 2021.</p>
Decision made:	To tender for the provision of Family mentoring and Befriending services. It is intended that the new contracts will commence on 1 st April 2021 for a period of 1 year, with the potential to extend for up to one further year at a total maximum estimated cost of £332,000 for the maximum 2 year period.
Reasons for decision:	<p>Herefordshire's Early Help approach aims to provide early and effective help and support to children and families when they need it, with the long term aim of helping more families in Herefordshire to be able to help themselves' and thus improving their overall well-being and quality of life. Working in partnerships across a range of agencies and partner organisations is key to its success.</p> <p>Recommissioning both services enables the council to maintain its Early Help offer whilst the Herefordshire Early Help strategy is refreshed with local partners and future approaches to delivery are determined in line with available resources.</p>

Early Help enables children and families to access information, advice and guidance and support them through their own network of contacts, through their local community resources and through contact with public and private services.

As part of its Early Help offer, Herefordshire Council commissions two externally provided services:

- Family Mentoring (£100,000 per annum)
- Family Befriending (£66,000 per annum)

The services are funded by an annual commissioning budget of £166,000, £100,000 of which is derived from income from the national Troubled Families programme (known locally as Families First), and £66,000 is funded from the core council budget. While the income amounts can be matched to the contract prices, there is no direct link between them that would mean that a funding change would necessarily impact on one contract or another.

In January 2020, the Government extended the Troubled Families Programme funding up to March 2021. Funding beyond that date currently remains uncertain.

In light of the national funding uncertainties, a competitive re-tendering exercise was undertaken at the end of 2019 for the continued provision of both services for a period of just one year, which due to come to an end in March 2021.

A review of both services was undertaken in October 2019, which highlighted:

- uncertainties relating to the future of the Troubled Families Programme
- the need to ensure early help provision is clearly aligned to Herefordshire’s longer-term strategic approach and the implementation of Signs of Safety

With a greater focus on timely exit planning and submission of sufficient evidence through closure reports, in 2019/20 Troubled Families claim rates for both services have improved from 2018/19:

	2018/19	2019/2020		
	Claim rate	Total Closures	Claims made	Claim rate
Befriending	34%	50	33	66%
Mentoring	25%	46	28	61%

Since the new contracts started on 1st April 2020 service provision has been disrupted by the Coronavirus pandemic. Whilst delivery has continued and new referrals are being accepted, interventions have lengthened for some families due to increased anxieties relating to school closures, increased mental health and employment concerns affecting families.

However both services have been engaging with families regularly and are making progress towards achieving their targets via largely

	<p>virtual means. Most families have responded well to the changing forms of service delivery. Children and young people have reported that they are 'looking forward to my future', have appreciated support via online tools such as video call, having an opportunity to discuss worries and concerns, and have been provided with age appropriate information about Coronavirus. Parents have reported benefiting from home learning, support to maintain routines, and to manage the emotional impact of lockdown.</p>
<p>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</p>	<p>Funding for family mentoring and befriending provision is via a combination of the Councils Early Help Budget and funding received via the Troubled Families Programme. A key financial risk relates to the future of the National Troubled Families Programme. If the council receives confirmation that the Programme is either scaled-back or does not continue beyond April 2020, the council may consider two possible options:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not proceed with/ terminate (providing the contractual three month notice period) the Family Mentoring and Befriending contracts and consider how available council funding can be best utilised to support the local Early Help Offer. • Identify alternative funding to support the continuation of the Family Mentoring and Befriending services for the initial 1 year term at a cost of £100,000. <p>Contract monitoring will be in place throughout the lifetime of the contracts to provide Herefordshire Council with assurance of delivery in line with contract requirements.</p>

Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:	<p>Do not award new contracts. If family mentoring and befriending services come to an end, this will have a significant impact on the councils capacity to provide early help to vulnerable families (services are required to support 140 families during a one year contract period), therefore this option is not recommended.</p> <p>Do not award contracts and bring the service in house. The early help model provides support tailored to families according to need, as identified through the early help assessment. Local family mentoring and befriending models utilise volunteers where appropriate to support families assessed level 3 according to the family first framework. This enables effective matching of families to volunteers with appropriate skills and experience and families can benefit from the considerable experience and local community networks provided by local voluntary organisations.</p>
Details of any declarations of interest made:	N/A

Signed

Date: 23 October 2020

Chris Baird

Director for children and families