

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	To approve the allocation of £1.397m to two projects in support of the Council's Children's Services Improvement Programme, involving: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Direct award of a 13-week contract to provide a Quality Assurance team to review all open children's social care cases ii. Engage a recruitment agency to deliver fixed-term staffing to provide additional capacity for up to 13-weeks across a range of social care teams, including worker appropriate worker expenses
Date of decision:	25 June 2021
Decision maker:	Interim Director for Children and Families
Authority for delegated decision:	<p>Chief Executives scheme of delegation para 5 appendix 1 SA20.</p> <p>Following the Judgement of The Hon Mr Justice Keehan, published on 16 April 2021 relating to children's social care proceedings heard in the Family Division of the Royal Courts of Justice, the Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council approved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the commission of External Reviews as determined necessary by the head of paid service; • the Financial Provision to support the Review and Improvement Strategy, as set out in para 24 and appendix 3 of the report to Council <p>Minutes of the Extraordinary Council Meeting are published at http://councillors.herefordshire.gov.uk/documents/g8206/Public%20minutes%20Tuesday%2027-Apr-2021%2010.00%20Council.pdf?T=11.</p>
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	The need for, and cost of, the two contracts was discussed and agreed for a 13-week period on 4 June 2021 the Children's Services Improvement Resources Board, chaired by the Statutory Section 151 Officer and attended by the Interim Statutory Director of Children's Services.
Decision made:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct award of contract to Attenti Consulting for the provision of a qualified Children's Social Care Audit team for 13-weeks months at a total cost of £467,870 2. Engagement of Caritas Recruitment agency for the provision of 33 new appropriately qualified staff roles for 13-weeks, administered via the Council's existing Matrix agency staffing arrangements, to strengthen various teams across children's social care at a total cost of £857,704, plus worker expenses of a cost £71k
Reasons for decision:	<p>Following the recent High Court judgement, the council has committed to an urgent and robust review of the council's Children's Social Care Services and is establishing and improvement strategy with oversight from an independently chaired board.</p> <p>Two key activities have been rapidly commissioned to support the council's improvement strategy through external quality assurance work and strengthening the department's workforce:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children's Social Care Audit Team to be provided by Attenti

	<p>Consulting for at least 13-weeks. It is expected that the team will audit all of children’s social care cases open over a 6-12 month period, potentially c.1150 cases, to provide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. assurance that all children and their families are safe, receiving appropriate and timely interventions and that placements are robust and well supported with appropriate levels of intervention ii. an evaluation of the quality of practice, particularly around assessment and planning and the focus on the child’s voice in these processes enabling the auditors to have a constructive understanding within the documents of what it is like to be that child in that family environment and how the planning and interventions are impacted on their situation iii. a view of the quality of management oversight and the appropriateness of support / guidance and advice provided to social workers to undertake the tasks <p>2. Provision of 33 social care agency staff for at least 13-weeks through Caritas Recruitment. Staff will be deployed to strengthen the work of different teams, including the assessment, CIN CP & Court, Children in Care, and Fostering services. Roles will include service managers, team managers, advanced social work practitioners, social workers.</p>
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<p>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</p>	<p><u>Children’s Social Care Audit Team - Attenti</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. The 13-week contract for a Children’s Social Care Audit Team will be funded from £5.2m earmarked by the extraordinary council meeting of 27 April 2021. ii. The team will consist of 15 staff including a project lead, data analysts and auditors at a weekly cost of £35,990. The provider has stated that all roles will fall outside scope of IR35 regulations. iii. There is a risk that additional weeks will be required to complete the audit work and that costs may increase. iv. Should the work need to be extended beyond the planned 13-week period, it is likely to be preferable to retain the incumbent provider to avoid any potential break in delivery. This circumstance would be subject to a further governance decision <p><u>Additional Children’s Social Care Roles - Caritas</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The provision of additional social care roles will also be funded from £5.2m earmarked by the extraordinary council meeting of 27 April 2021. 2. Use of the existing Matrix agency staffing framework arrangements via Hoople Ltd will avoid the risk of an additional administrative burden relating to the approval of worker time-sheets and worker payments 3. The initial scope will be to fulfil an additional 33 roles for 13-weeks. Particular roles may have different start dates but will not be individually agreed for longer than 13-weeks in order to prevent an unplanned overspend of the budget being approved by this decision. 4. There is a risk that the number and type of roles may need to be altered and/or that the contract period may need to be varied. 5. There is risk of additional cost arising from staff accommodation, mileage and parking expenses, which are subject to an additional
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	<p>charge of up to £165 per worker/per week above the contract price. The worse-case assumption would be of £71k additional cost if all 33 workers claimed the full expense allowance for 13-weeks.</p> <p>Given the urgent need for quality assurance of children’s social care, and to manage any risk to the health and well-being of vulnerable children and young people, the councils standing Contract Procedure Rules have not been followed. However, to urgently secure the necessary resources, the Council’s requirements for both projects were shared with a small number of known staffing agencies and costed proposal responses were considered by the Children and Families Directorate Leadership Team:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. For the purposes of expediency Caritas have been appointed at an enhanced rate and will be managed by Hoople Limited through the existing Matrix agency staffing arrangement. ii. The value of the contract with Attenti is above the relevant Public Contract Regulations 2015 (PCR 2015) threshold, and as a Contracting Authority, we are required to comply with the thresholds as set out in the PCR 2015. The need for the audit services provided by Attenti have arisen from the judgement of The Hon Mr Justice Keehan and the need to take action is urgent. It is acknowledged that there is a risk of supplier challenge in relation to the contract with Attenti, however given that some market engagement was undertaken with other suppliers and the nature of the services the risk is considered to be acceptable in these circumstances. <p>Workers involved in both projects will require council IT equipment. Indicative costs for a laptop and necessary licences are £1591, equating to £24k of additional cost for 48 workers in total. In some cases there may be further shipping costs that have not yet been determined.</p> <p>The Children’s Services Improvement Resources Board will maintain oversight of the progress and costs for each project. Should it become necessary to vary or extend either piece of work, the Council’s standing budget governance will apply and the risk associated with the contracts will be reassessed.</p>
<p>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</p>	<p>The work could be delayed to allow time to undertake normal and appropriate procurement and appointment procedures. Given the urgent nature of the work required to provide assurance of, and make improvements to, children’s social care, this option is not a viable one.</p>
<p>Details of any declarations of interest made:</p>	<p>None made.</p>

Signed

Catherine Knowles
Interim director for children and families

Date: 25 June 2021