

Record of officer decision

Decision title:	Contract for an online Foster carers handbook
Date of decision:	6 th July 2021
Decision maker:	Interim Director for Children and Families or Assistant Director for Safeguarding Quality and Improvement
Authority for delegated decision:	<p>Under the Chief Executive's Scheme of Delegation (updated 7 June 2021), 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 21).</p> <p>The contract value is a maximum £6,000 and does not exceed £500,000 threshold for Assistant Director approval and is in line with the corporate guidance and Section 7 of Financial Procedure Rules</p>
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	N/a
Decision made:	Award a 2 year contract to Signis Group Ltd to provide a web based foster carers handbook that includes local information, for 2 years from 1 August 2021 to 31 July 2023 at a cost of £3,000. The contract will have an option to extend for a further 2 periods of up to 12 months each at a further cost of £1,500 per 12 month, therefore the maximum contract value is £6,000 over 4 years.
Reasons for decision:	<p>Herefordshire's fostering service supports in the region of 190 approved carers (including kinship). Foster carers play an important role in the lives of children in care and their families, so it is important that they have access to up to date guidance, advice and information to support them.</p> <p>The current contract for the handbook is with Tri-X (owned by Signis Group Ltd, which in turn is a subsidiary to the Antser Holdings Limited) who produce and maintain an on-line foster carer handbook that provides practical guidance on how to deal with the day to day issues newly approved and existing foster carers may encounter. The handbook includes links to key guidance such as the "National Minimum Standards" and although there is a facility for it to contain local information it currently does not.</p> <p>The new contract will enable the resource library section of the handbook to include Herefordshire Council's local policies and procedures, to support its in-house foster care service carers.</p>

	<p>The contract will be directly awarded to Signis Limited from the Crown Commercial Service’s Digital Marketplace framework, (commonly known as the GCloud framework). This is an OJEU compliant online framework for public sector organisations, through which to identify and procure specialists for specific digital based projects. Only one supplier was identified as being able to meet the service requirements within the available budget . No other suppliers were identified as being able to meet our needs through the GCloud framework’.</p>
<p>Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:</p>	<p>If the decision is not approved, children and families social care managers would be required to develop and maintain a system for ensuring all foster carers are made aware of the breadth of policies and procedures as and when updated, and that these are easily accessible for future reference. As social care managers have limited capacity to monitor this, it could potentially result in approved foster carers not having access to up to date local guidance. This potentially would not only impact on foster carers ability to safeguard the child (or children) they support but also have a negative impact on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the council’s reputation as it would leave foster carers and the service vulnerable to criticism, and 2) outcome of Ofsted inspections. <p>There is a risk that the handbook will not be updated in a timely manner to reflect changing legislation or issues that affect foster carers and children. To minimise this risk , the provider will advise of a plan for alerting manual users to the changes as quickly as possible after their implementation until this can be incorporated as part of the next planned update</p> <p>As responsibility for ensuring local information is accurate and the reliability of external links supplied by the council lies with children and families social care service area managers, there is a risk that local content is not accurate. Appointing a named operational lead within children and families social care will help to mitigate this risk.</p> <p>Finance have confirmed funds have been allocated for this contract from the Safeguarding contract budget.</p>

<p>Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:</p>	<p>Do nothing. The current contract will cease in 31 July 2021 and there is no option to extend. This is not recommended as it is important that foster carers have easy access to local information. Whilst the Tri-X foster carer handbook is available on-line, this is specifically for statutory information and does not include local contents.</p> <p>The Council's children and families managers could ensure all foster carers have access to local content via a different mechanism. This is not recommended, as due to safeguarding and other operational priorities, social care managers do not have capacity to undertake this responsibility, which could result in foster carers accessing, and following, out of date advice and guidance.</p>
<p>Details of any declarations of interest made:</p>	<p>N/a</p>

Signed

Cath Knowles

Director of children and families

Date: 6th July 2021