

Record of operational decision

Decision title:	The provision of Independent Visitor Service for Children and Young People who are Looked After
Date of decision:	23 rd November 2023
Decision maker:	Corporate Director – Children and Young People
Authority for delegated decision:	<p>The Financial Procedure Rules, Section 7, state that Service Directors (or above) should approve revenue payments for contracts that have an aggregate value of between £250,001 and £500,000.</p> <p>‘The local authority has a statutory duty under the children and young person’s act 2009 to appoint an independent visitor service for looked after children’ and, under section 139, this is the responsibility of the Director for Children and Young People or Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Family Support.</p>
Ward:	Countywide
Consultation:	None
Decision made:	Award a contract to the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) for an Independent Visitor Service from 1st February 2024 to 31 January 2027, with an option to extend up to 31 January 2029 at a total value of £265,000.
Reasons for decision:	<p>Both the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) and Section 23ZB of the Children’s Act 1989 state:</p> <p>(1) A local authority looking after a child must appoint an independent person to be the child's visitor if—</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">(a) the child falls within a description prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State; or</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">(b) in any other case, it appears to them that it would be in the child's interests to do so.</p> <p>(2) A person appointed under this section must visit, befriend and advise the child.</p> <p>Following an open tender exercise in September 2023, conducted in line with the council’s Contracts Procedure Rules and The Public Contract Regulations 2015, three bids were received and two were deemed compliant. Both were evaluated in line with the criteria set out within the tender documentation, resulting in NYAS achieving the highest final moderated overall score.</p> <p>On an annual basis this service will be provided to at least 30 Children or Young People who are placed in the care of Herefordshire Social Care Services, both within and out of county. In exceptional circumstances, the budget holder may agree for Care Leavers to be supported.</p> <p>In line with Achieving the best for our children - Herefordshire's corporate parenting strategy 2020-23, this service will also support children and young people to ‘flourish, to enjoy good health, to be safe and happy, to do well at school, to enjoy good relationships with their peers, to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards</p>

	adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as happy, healthy, successful and financially secure adults’.
Highlight any associated risks/finance/legal/equality considerations:	<p>There is a risk that demand for the service will continue to increase. The contract provides support for 30 Children and Young People who are Looked After, which is currently less than 10% of Herefordshire’s care experienced population.</p> <p>The total contract value is £159,000 for the three year contract period, then an additional cost of up to £106,000 should the two year extension be utilised (£53,000 each year).</p> <p>If additional Independent Visitor capacity is required to support more than 30 Children and Young People who are Looked After, costs have been provided as part of the bidders’ tender response. Head of Service agreement would be required to both fund and utilise this additional capacity, which will determined on a case by case basis.</p> <p>This is a volunteer based service which in turn provides good social value, supporting Herefordshire Council County Plan 2020-2024 pledge to ‘strengthen communities to ensure that everyone lives well and safely together’. Professional support, safer recruiting and DBS checks are in place as evidenced in the bidders’ tender response.</p> <p>There are no health and safety implications or other risks to consider.</p> <p>The service will be monitored via quarterly contract management meetings as a minimum to ensure any future capacity risks inform the commissioning plan and budget.</p>
Details of any alternative options considered and rejected:	Do nothing. This is not recommended as the existing contract will cease on 31 January 2024, resulting in the council not complying its statutory duty under Section 23ZB of the Children’s Act 1989. In addition, the reputation of the Council’s corporate parenting strategy could be affected, due to any gaps in this support service which could increase the isolation and vulnerability of care experienced children and young people.
Details of any declarations of interest made:	Not applicable