

## **Cabinet – 11 December 2013**

### **Independent Foster Agency Regional Framework Contract Extension**

**Portfolio:** Councillor R Andrew – Children's Services

**Service:** All

**Wards:** All

**Key decision:** Yes

**Forward plan:** No

#### **1. Summary**

This report is to request Cabinet approval for the extension of the Independent Foster Agency Regional Framework Contract which was let by Staffordshire County Council in 2011 on behalf of the West Midland Regional Councils. Independent Foster Care is a service for looked after children and provides them with a family life.

#### **2. Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the use of the West Midlands regional framework contract by Walsall Council to contract for the provision of Independent Foster Care from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2015.

#### **3. Report detail**

- 3.1 On 17 November 2010 Cabinet approved the use of the regional framework contract for Independent Foster Care which was tendered by Staffordshire County Council on behalf of the West Midland Regional Councils:

Resolved:

2.2 That authority is delegated to the Executive Director for Children's Services, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder to enter into contracts with IFAs on behalf of the Council.

2.3 That Cabinet approve that any contracts awarded under the framework agreement are initially for 2 years, with an annual review to take place

This contract commenced on 1 April 2011.

- 3.2 The contract awarded by Staffordshire was for 3 + 1 year, and this was agreed, as delegated, by the Executive Director for Children's Services in 2011 and contracts were sealed. This means the contract was awarded from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2014 with an option to extend by 1 year and officers worked on that basis. During an internal review of contract end dates, the Cabinet approval was revisited and this inconsistency was noted - that Cabinet approved a 2 year period, rather than the actual contract term of 3+1 year. Clear approval for the contract is required from 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2015.
- 3.3 The Regional Contract offers the council value for money as it shares the burden of procurement across several councils and secures better prices. The 2013 Cipfa Benchmarking Club shows that the average IFA price in Walsall is £775 compared to £817 average prices across 68 other councils.

#### **4. Council priorities**

**Improving Safeguarding, Learning and the Life Chances for Children and Young People;** the provision of this service will ensure children have access to foster care and helps the council meets its sufficiency duty for looked after children.

#### **5. Risk management**

The council's use of the regional framework contract reduces risk to the council by avoiding the need to spot purchase services that have a high impact on vulnerable children. Working with a regional framework also reduces the risk that the council would have to pay higher prices through spot purchasing.

#### **6. Financial implications**

Walsall Council currently has approximately 119 children looked after in Independent Foster Agency (IFA) placements. The annual cost of these is approximately £4.7m per annum. This is an average of c£770 per week.

#### **7. Legal implications**

This report provides the clarity required on the Cabinet approval to the continuing use of the Regional Framework Contract for Independent Foster Care.

#### **8. Property implications**

None

#### **9. Health and wellbeing implications**

Securing foster care for looked after children is essential to improve their outcomes.

## **10. Staffing implications**

None

## **11. Equality implications**

None

## **12. Consultation**

Democratic Services and Legal services have advised on the required action and this report.

## **Background papers**

Cabinet Report 13 October 2010 Walsall Fostering Framework Agreement

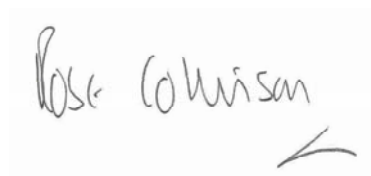
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**Rose Collinson**  
**Interim Executive Director**  
**2 December 2013**



**Councillor R Andrew**  
**Portfolio Holder**  
**2 December 2013**