

Cabinet – 13 December 2017

Walsall Contact Services Framework Agreement - Update

Portfolio: Councillor A Nawaz

Related portfolios:

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: No

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary

- 1.1 Walsall Council, as a Local Authority, has a responsibility to monitor (supervise) children who are looked after children or subject to a child protection plan when they have contact with certain adults (for example, parents, family members and siblings). This supervision will be for the purpose to either: (a) assess safe parenting; (b) prepare for a return to the family unit; or (c) maintain a long-term relationship with a significant adult or sibling when remaining in care. The Council has a duty under Section 34 of the Children Act 1989 to allow any child in its care reasonable contact with parents and 'other persons' prescribed within section 34 (1) of the act.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to update Cabinet regarding the ongoing developments and progression of the previously reported tender and to seek Cabinet approval to further extend the current contracts for supervised contact services in order to ensure continuity of services pending the completion of a compliant procurement process.
- 1.3 Cabinet, at their meeting on 15 December 2010, delegated authority to the Executive Director for Children's Services to accept tenders and enter into contracts with Contact Service providers on behalf of the Council [*using the Walsall Contact Services Framework Agreement*]. Following an initial delay in the procurement process, contracts were awarded for an initial 4 year period on 12 December 2011. These contracts were subsequently extended, up to 31 January 2017, in order to ensure continuity of service for families whilst the Council prepared for a comprehensive tender.
- 1.4 At the Cabinet meeting on 26 October 2016, Cabinet were updated regarding the implementation of a Supervised Contact procedure, guidance and

operational toolkit. That Cabinet report also outlined the intention to publish a tender for the provision of new contract arrangements from 1 April 2017, and sought delegated authority to the Executive Director, Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to accept tenders and enter into new contracts with service providers. To support this, a contract variation was agreed with two providers in order to ensure continuity of service to 31 January 2018.

- 1.5 Over the last 12 months work has been ongoing to finalise the service requirements and prepare for the retender of supervised contact services. Delays have occurred in the completion of this work and there is therefore a need to extend the current contractual arrangements, to enable continuity of services, pending completion of the tender.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves an extension to contracts with two providers for the provision of children's contact services, for the period 1 February 2018 to 31 July 2018, with the option to extend for a further period of up to six months, from 1 August 2018, pending completion of a compliant procurement process.
- 2.2 That Cabinet delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services to subsequently authorise the sealing of any deeds, or signing of contracts or other related documents for the extension of such services.

3. Report detail

Current Supervised Contact Arrangements

- 3.1 The number of children and young people looked after by the Council's Children's Services has increased steadily since the end of the last financial year to 669 at 30 October 2017. This is an increase of 26 from 31 March 2017. We know that contact is maintained for children, where appropriate, in different ways but that Children's Services directly supervises contact arrangements for approximately 50% of all Looked After Children and young people.
- 3.2 Supervised contact is currently delivered by contact workers through the Council's casual pool and contact workers provided by external providers through the contract arrangements outlined.

Supervised contact review

- 3.3 While a substantial amount of work has been undertaken in relation to the supervised contact service, there has been a delay in the anticipated tender completion due to:

- The need to undertake a comprehensive review of supervised contact arrangements to determine the service model required which will most effectively deliver supervised contact arrangements;
- Establishing the impact on the service of the increased number of looked after children;
- Reviewing individual supervised contact arrangements to ensure they are meeting the needs of looked after children and to engage a wider range of partners in supporting existing supervised contact arrangements; and
- Robust planning and preparation required for the recent Ofsted Inspection.
- Changes in management have led to changes in approach and delay in contact planning and delivery.

Transition arrangements

- 3.4 Current contracts with two providers are due to expire on 31 January 2018, and will need to be extended for a short term period, in order to ensure continuity this statutory service. This will prevent disruption to some of our most vulnerable children and young people, pending completion of a compliant procurement process.
- 3.5 The option to further extend the contracts for a further period of up to six months from 1 August 2018, will allow sufficient time to complete a review of the service model and conduct a compliant procurement process following the review.
- 3.6 A tender pre-market engagement (including publication of a priority information notice) has already been completed by Procurement Services. The service model and payment model are being developed and will be informed by the market engagement exercise and review of the contact service.
- 3.7 It is anticipated that the procurement process for provision of the new service arrangements will commence in early in 2018.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 *Children are safe from harm, happy and learning well with self-belief, aspiration and support to be their best*

The provision of supervised contact for looked after children and their families supports this priority and ensures that 'children and adults are safe from harm.'

- 4.2 *Safe, resilient and prospering communities*

Contact with families ensures that looked after children have the reassurance about their birth families and supports the loss they may experience and better develops resilience.

4.3 *Make a positive difference to the lives of Walsall people*

The Supervised Contact procedure and tendered service specification supports this priority by establishing a clear procedure of the expectations around contact provision and aims to ensure that where in the best interest of the child, contact has a positive impact on their lives.

5. Risk management

5.1 The effectiveness of working jointly with other agencies is actively risk managed, both corporately and within Children's Services. Specifically, attention is paid to the legal, financial and governance aspects of agreements to protect Council resources and ensure that the current and future needs and rights of the Council are appropriately protected as is its right to act as a democratic autonomous body as and when this may be necessary.

6. Financial implications

6.1 The current 2017/18 budget for Contact Services is £512,574 (Contact Services 330,319, Mgr & Resource C-Coordination 126,302, Stroud 55,953) As part of the 2017/18 budget setting process, saving proposals of £64,000.00 (on contact services) for 2017/18 and a further £64,000.00 (on contact services) for 2018/19 were approved. The delivery plans for these savings include internal service re-design, a review of service demand and the revision of a new policy which will contribute towards delivering this level of cost reductions.

6.2 The current forecast for this service after the use of reserves is an overspend of circa £26,000.00. Further work is underway to review and identify where additional cost reductions can be achieved as per the original saving delivery plans.

7. Legal implications

7.1 Children's Services will liaise with Legal Services to ensure that all existing contractual arrangements will be extended using the most appropriate methods.

8. Procurement Implications/Social Value

8.1 It is proposed that the current contracts should be extended, however Legal and Procurement Services advise that these extensions should run for the shortest possible practical period and that it must run concurrently with a compliant

procurement exercise for the new service provision, in order to minimise risk of challenge to the Council.

9. Property implications

9.1 The Council's dedicated contact venue, Stroud Avenue, remains the main venue for all current and future contact arrangements. The centre management and contact bookings are undertaken by the Contact and Resources Team based at the centre. A capital bid to improve the physical environment and extend the range of services available is currently being considered.

9.2 An exercise is being undertaken as part of the service model review to determine appropriate venues in the wider community which may be appropriate for the delivery of supervised contact.

10. Health and wellbeing implications

10.1 The Council has a statutory responsibility to promote the health and wellbeing of its population. The extension of the current contracts for contact services supports the Corporate Plan priorities for the Council by ensuring that these services protect and promote the health and wellbeing of all vulnerable looked after children. The quality of the service to be provided will contribute to reducing health and wellbeing inequalities by providing children in care and other children with healthy, stable life experiences, an explicit objective of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

10.2 All the services provided under the current and proposed new service provision fall within the National Statutory Fostering Minimum Standards and, therefore, are specifically designed to improve the health and wellbeing of children and young people, with a primary focus on safeguarding and improving outcomes.

10.3 The current service will also adhere to the objectives of the Marmot Review:

- Give every child the best start in life – by providing care and support;
- Enable all children, young people to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives – by providing stable care and support and transition to adulthood;
- Create fair employment and good work for all – by providing local work opportunities, where appropriate, in those regions where fostered.

11. Staffing implications

11.1 There are currently no staffing issues as the current review will determine the future structure for the Supervised Contact Service.

12. Equality implications

- 12.1 The provision of supervised contact ensures the diverse needs of individual children and families are met through assessment of need for contact and are explicit in the contact plan.
- 12.2 An Equality Impact Assessment of the contact procedure and toolkit has been conducted, the outcome of which is that “No major change is required”.

13. Consultation

- 13.1 The current review of the Supervised Contact Service is being informed by consultation with key stakeholders and builds on that undertaken previously on the supervised contact procedure. This includes dedicated sessions with staff, feedback from parents, carers and young people and consultation with providers.
- 13.2 A provider market engagement questionnaire was undertaken in October 2017 and these responses are informing the service review and tender specification.

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Sally Rowe
Executive Director
4 December 2017



Councillor Nawaz
Portfolio Holder
4 December 2017

Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) for Policies, Procedures and Services

Proposal name	Contact Framework and Procedures		
Directorate	Childrens Services		
Service	Children and Young People		
Responsible Officer			
EqIA Author	Laura Wood		
Proposal planning start	October 2017	Proposal start date (due or actual)	April 2018

1	What is the purpose of the proposal?		Yes / No	New / revision
	Policy			
	Procedure		Yes	Revision
	Internal service		Yes	Revision
	External Service		Yes	Revision
	Other - give details			
2	What are the intended outcomes, reasons for change? (The business case)			
	To undertake a further review and redesign of contact arrangements for Looked After Children which respond to an increase in numbers, the implementation of the contact procedure and determines the level of service required from external providers.			
3	Who is the proposal potential likely to affect?			
	People in Walsall	Yes / No	Detail	
	All			
	Specific group/s		Looked after children and young people Foster carers will be expected to assume an increased responsibility for transporting and facilitating contact between the children and young people that they care for and their families.	
Council employees		There will be a reduced demand for the use of casual workers; Recruitment of dedicated Contact		



			Workers																				
			Social Work Staff – Placement and resources staff – Children's Homes staff																				
	Other																						
4	Evidence, engagement and consultation (including from area partnerships, where relevant)																						
4.1	<p>At the time the updated Contact Procedure was introduced, consultation took place with;</p> <p>New Belongings Group (Care Leavers) in order that the new procedures and guidance takes account of their “lived experience” of contact throughout their care experience.</p> <p>Legal Services to ensure that the procedures and guidance meet the requirements of our legal and statutory duties and obligations.</p> <p>Children Services employees, including social workers, managers, sessional staff and contact workers to ensure that the new procedures and toolkit support good practice and decision-making for children, young people and their families.</p> <p>This consultation has been updated and enhanced with further sessions with</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Type</td> <td>Staff consultation</td> <td>Date</td> <td>25/10/17 And 01/11/17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Audience</td> <td colspan="3">Casual contact workers Contact Resource Coordinators</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Protected characteristics</td> <td colspan="3">Attendees were Local Authority employees and casual employees who both arrange supervised contact for Looked After Children and supervise the individual arrangements</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">Feedback</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4"> <p>The purpose of these sessions were to discuss the review of the contact service, to seek views on the current service and ways of working and to look at what works well and identify things which need to be improved to ensure that contact is meaningful for children and young people.</p> <p>Discussion focused on the need to ensure a quality service for children and young people through improving communications between social workers and contact workers and that this can inform reviews of long term contact to ensure it still remains a positive experience for children and young people. The need to ensure changes in individual contact arrangements are only made in exceptional circumstances. These currently generate a lot of unnecessary work for contact coordinators without any tangible benefit to children and young people.</p> <p>Ways of exploring different ways for delivering contact were also discussed. Core skills and training programme for Contact Workers was discussed along with the training which would need to be included.</p> </td> </tr> </table>			Type	Staff consultation	Date	25/10/17 And 01/11/17	Audience	Casual contact workers Contact Resource Coordinators			Protected characteristics	Attendees were Local Authority employees and casual employees who both arrange supervised contact for Looked After Children and supervise the individual arrangements			Feedback				<p>The purpose of these sessions were to discuss the review of the contact service, to seek views on the current service and ways of working and to look at what works well and identify things which need to be improved to ensure that contact is meaningful for children and young people.</p> <p>Discussion focused on the need to ensure a quality service for children and young people through improving communications between social workers and contact workers and that this can inform reviews of long term contact to ensure it still remains a positive experience for children and young people. The need to ensure changes in individual contact arrangements are only made in exceptional circumstances. These currently generate a lot of unnecessary work for contact coordinators without any tangible benefit to children and young people.</p> <p>Ways of exploring different ways for delivering contact were also discussed. Core skills and training programme for Contact Workers was discussed along with the training which would need to be included.</p>			
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Type	Market Engagement	Date	Oct/Nov 2017
Audience	External providers of supervised contact services		
Protected characteristics	Organisations involved in the delivery of supervised contact		
Feedback			
<p>This market engagement exercise sought suggestions and comments about procurement models or call off arrangements for the delivery of supervised contact which would support that which was commissioned from external providers. This provided information on the skills and expertise which exist in the external market and interest in working with the Council to deliver supervised contact in the future. This also included information on the cultural mix and ability to meet the diverse needs of local communities. Providers who responded are also working with other Council's to deliver contact and there is learning which can be bought in to inform local options.</p>			

Type	Children and young people	Date	Dec 2017
Audience	Looked after Children and young people		
Protected characteristics	Children and young people who received supervised contact		
Feedback			
<p>Feedback mechanisms being built into the contact service which ensure that the experience of children and young people informs the ongoing development of the service. Although views of children and young people are sought at certain points this will ensure regular feedback is incorporated into the contact service.</p>			

4.2 Concise summary of evidence, engagement and consultation (including from area partnerships, where relevant)

Social workers and managers are particularly in support of carers undertaking a more active role in facilitating transport of contact for the children they cared for and the implementation of contact set up meetings along with regular monitoring of contact to ensure contact needs were being appropriately assessed. Contact workers were supportive of the work to standardise training and development for delivery of supervised contact across all providers.

5 How may the proposal affect each protected characteristic or group? The affect may be positive, negative or neutral.

	Characteristic	Affect	Reason	Action needed Y or N
	Age	Neutral	No impact	N
	Disability	Neutral	No impact	N
	Gender reassignment	Neutral	No impact	N
	Marriage and civil partnership	Neutral	No impact	N
	Pregnancy and maternity	Neutral	No impact	N
	Race	Neutral	No impact	N
	Religion or belief	Neutral	No impact	N
	Sex	Neutral	No impact	N
	Sexual orientation	Neutral	No impact	N
	Other (give detail)			
	Further information			
6	Does your proposal link with other proposals to have a cumulative affect on particular equality groups? If yes, give details below.			(Delete one) No
7	Which justifiable action does the evidence, engagement and consultation suggest you take? (Bold which one applies)			
	A	No major change required		
	B	Adjustments needed to remove barriers or to better promote equality		
	C	Continue despite possible adverse impact		
	D	Stop and rethink your proposal		

Action and monitoring plan

Action Date	Action	Responsibility	Outcome Date	Outcome

Update to EqIA

Date	Detail