

Walsall Early Help Community Activity Reducing Exploitation Programme (CARE)

Portfolio: Councillor Wilson: Children's Services

Related portfolios: Councillor Towe: Education and Skills

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Aim

To pilot an innovative approach to provide respite care/short breaks to young people aged between 11 and 18 yrs. who have disabilities and/or additional learning needs (diagnosed and undiagnosed) who due to their vulnerabilities are at risk of low level exploitation and poorer outcomes compared to their peers.

2. Summary

2.1 Identifying young people at risk of health and social inequalities is not always easy as they are less likely to be engaged in conventional universal services. For young people with disabilities and/or additional learning needs, their isolation can lead to further vulnerabilities, making them at greater risk of poorer outcomes and, their chances of success are disproportionately low unless they can access appropriate early intervention and support.

2.2 Children's Services have been successful in securing a bid to the Department of Education (DfE) Respite Innovation Programme of £965,888 to establish new respite/short break provision created to address gaps in current services for young people with disabilities and/or learning needs who are at risk of exploitation.

2.3 The programme will work with and support the young person and their wider family at a local level, providing positive activities and a mentor to work on a one to one basis with the young person and their family to act as an early

prevention service to alleviate crisis intervention and/or criminal activity, to raise awareness of exploitation risks and to reduce isolation.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 That Cabinet delegates authority to accept tenders and award contracts for the provision of Early Help Community Activities Reducing Exploitation (CARE) services, for a period from 20th June 2022 to 31st March 2023, with the option to extend on an annual basis for a further period of up to two years (subject to securing funding) to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, following completion of the tender.
- 3.2 That Cabinet delegates authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to enter into contracts for these services and to subsequently authorise the sealing of any deeds, contracts or other related documents for such services.
- 3.3 That Cabinet delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services to authorise any variations to the contractual arrangements or other related documents for such services should this be required throughout the duration of the term of any contracts, provided they are in line with the Council's Contract Rules and any relevant legislation, including Public Contract Regulations 2015.

4. Report detail – Know

4.1 Context

The DfE Respite Innovation Programme 2022-2025 launched in February 2022 an opportunity for Local Authorities to bid for the first year's funding to establish new respite provision via innovative programmes created to address gaps in current services. The focus of the project is to support and provide services for children with disabilities and/or additional needs, to act as an early prevention rather than be used to fund crisis intervention services. The funding secured cannot simply be used to expand current respite provision. The guidance set out the aims of the project to improve health, education and wellbeing for children, young people with additional needs, and to support their wider family network, with a specific focus on needs which may, if unmet, result in an escalation of severity leading to exclusion, unplanned move or school placement breakdown.

The timeframe for the application process was and is as follows:

- Deadline for applications – 6th March 2022
- Funding notification of outcome to applicants – 22nd March 2022
- Grant letters issued – 31st March 2022
- Project initiation – May 2022

The bid was sent into the DfE on the 4th March 2022. However, the DfE did not advise Walsall of the successful outcome until the 7th April 2022. We are awaiting further confirmation for the project start date and anticipate a requirement to commence the programme quickly, therefore, working to a start date of the 28th June 2022, following the completion of the requisite procurement processes.

- 4.2 Respite care/short breaks are provided by a variety of means but overall, it allows young people to develop skills, wider social networks and independence and it creates an environment to improve health, education and wellbeing outcomes for young people. Whilst Walsall have a short break offer that includes resources for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), there is no provision or bespoke package of short breaks for young people aged 11 plus who may be at risk of exploitation.

Many of these young people experience difficulties with communication and interaction, as well as social, emotional, mental health and/or physical needs and difficulties, leaving them struggling to understand, form and maintain social relationships. Their desire for friendship combined with poor social understanding can mean that these young people are more likely to engage in inappropriate behaviour. Many do not access universal youth provision due to their additional needs and become isolated and vulnerable. This can lead to bullying, abuse and risks of exploitation. Their needs, if left unmet, result in an escalation of severity, leading to disruption to the young person's educational placement (for example, placement breakdown, exclusion or unplanned move), health and social inequalities.

- 4.3 A recent government inquiry by Professor Alexis Jay into Child Sexual Exploitation evidenced that children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are at a heightened risk of sexual exploitation and in the inquiry's sample of individual young people's experiences one third had a disability.
- 4.4 Walsall is seeing a significant rise in the referrals to Children's Social Care of young people that are exposed to criminal and sexual exploitation and professionals involved have limited resources at their disposal in which to support these young people and their families at an earlier stage. Evidence shows that early identification and intervention for young people and their families significantly improves their long term outcomes, decreases emotional behavioural and adolescent mental health problems. The programme will support the priorities set out in the Exploitation Strategy and Early Help Strategy, specifically around prevention and the early identification of objectives.
- 4.5 Early Help are also seeing a significant rise in referrals for young people with complex needs. Additional vulnerabilities include significant concerns around behaviour. School exclusion rates show that 78% of secondary aged permanently excluded young people in Walsall have additional needs, many of whom have an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP).

4.6 The recent success of the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) in Walsall engaged local voluntary and community services to pilot activities for young people with additional needs and/or disabilities who were previously excluded from attending these universal activities. Feedback from the young people who attend and their parents/carers has been extremely positive and local providers report feeling confident in supporting more young people with additional needs and we need to take the opportunity to strengthen this.

4.7 Provision of the Early Help CARE Programme

The Early Help CARE programme is seeking to commission local providers to deliver local short break services to young people aged 11 plus who show early signs of potential vulnerabilities to exploitation. Local services will provide positive activities to the young people through difficult transition times and mentoring support to both the young person and their family.

4.8 There will be a local offer within each of the 4 localities across Walsall and each young person will have access to

- 1x after school club per week (term-time)
- 1x weekend activity per week (term-time)

The positive activities will include sports, arts, cooking, life skills, ICT and other diversionary activities designed to develop health, wellbeing and resilience, as well as supporting the development of positive friendships and peer support.

Support through the holiday period will be provided via the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) project.

4.9 Families will receive one to one mentor/trusted adult throughout the programme, including during the holiday period with the mentor providing information, training, support and a positive role model for the young person. The mentor will link into the existing locality 0-19 Family Hubs and the Exploitation Hub and will develop bespoke young people and family plans taking into account individual needs.

4.10 In addition to the commissioned provision, the 4 locality based 0-19 Family Hubs will deliver long-term support for wider family needs through the Early Help Partnership, completing Early Help Assessments along with schools, health partners and wider family support to understand contextual safeguarding, additional vulnerabilities, signs of exploitation, associated risks and interventions.

4.11 The Multi-agency Early Help Steering Group will provide overall governance for the programme and will monitor performance and potential opportunities to further bid for year 2 and 3 of the DfE funding rounds in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Evaluation of the programme will be commissioned out as part of the monitoring and learning process.

4.12 Council Plan Priorities

The short break programme contributes to the Council's priorities and ensures inequalities are reduced and all potential maximised as follows:

Economic

- provides the voluntary and community sectors with investment and ensures education, training and skills provided to young people to fulfil their potential

People

- have a good quality of live and feel they belong know what makes them healthy and are encouraged to get support when they need it

Internal

- services deliver quality and adapt to meet needs of customer facing services

Children

- thrive emotionally, physically, mentally and feel they are achieving their potential
- grow up in connected communities and feel safe everywhere

4.13 Risk Management

The risks associated with the programme have been considered as set out below

- Risk of claw back of a percentage of the programme, should the number of young people not be supported as set out in the bid
- Risk of a reduced grant given the lateness from the DfE advising of the successful bid, the programme was aimed and written to deliver a full service for 12 months

To mitigate the risks a risk register has been completed. Please see Appendix A.

4.14 Financial Implications

The overall grant to be provided by DfE is £965,888 to support 50 young people over a 12 month period.

Activity	Budget Total
4 x Local Activity Providers	£830,000
Training Providers	£20,000
Transport for young people	£17,550
Management & Administration Costs	£93,338
Publicity & Marketing	£5,000
Total	£965,888

Costs include: £16,600 per young person for 1 x after-school activity (term-time) and 1 x weekend activity per week (term-time) as well as a 1-2-1 mentor throughout the year.

4.15 **Legal implications**

Procurement are assisting with publishing the tender to ensure compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (the 'Regulations') and the Council's Contract Rules. The proposed contract is in a format approved by Legal Services and comprises of the Council's standard form Contract for Goods and Services Long Form with appropriate adjustments, agreed in conjunction with the service area.

4.16 **Procurement implications/social value**

The procurement process being used is an open tender process under the Light Touch Regime, which is detailed in regulation 74 to 77 of the Regulations 2015.

The procurement exercise is being undertaken in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015, the Council's Contract Rules and Social Value Policy.

A contract notice will be issued via the Find A Tender Service and further posted to the Council's E-Tender Portal, to alert the market to the tender, in accordance with the requirements of the Public Contract Regulations and Council's Contract Rules. Procurement will ensure that all subsequent notices that are required in relation to this contract are published in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015. Tenders will be opened in line with Walsall Council's Contract Rules using a formal opening ceremony on the Council's E-Tender Portal.

The contract will run from June 2022 until 31st March 2023 with the possibility to extend for a period of 2 x 12 months.

The procurement is being evaluated to find the 'most economically advantageous tender' to deliver this service and the evaluation will consider both price and non-price criteria.

The tender will seek bids from organisations to deliver the Early Help CARE services in each of the 4 locality areas of Walsall. Providers may tender for more than one locality area of the borough and there will opportunities for them to enter into consortia arrangements at the point of tender to support delivery in each locality. We will evaluate each providers' ability to develop capacity and build on existing community networks in their tender evaluation.

The evaluation panel will consist of key stakeholders of whom will form a steering group to monitor the delivery of the contract.

4.17 **Property implications**

There are no property implications for the Council.

4.18 **Health and wellbeing implications**

This programme enables the Council to meet its statutory requirements to support the more vulnerable young people in our borough and ensure they have access to safe support from appropriate agencies, greater access to one to one support and are offered respite/short break provision, providing care givers a

break from their caring responsibilities. This programme gives vulnerable young people the opportunity to maximise their capabilities and have opportunities to be involved in the same universal types of activities as other young people do who do not have disabilities and/or additional needs.

4.19 **Reducing inequalities**

The implications for reducing inequalities has been taken into account and assessed as set out in a detailed Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) in Appendix B.

This project will engender a sense of community and belonging, raising aspirations and expectations of participants. Walsall has high levels of deprivation (19th most deprived LA nationally, 48/167 (29% of) LSOAs amongst the 10% most deprived, 15th highest nationally). Nationally, disadvantaged pupils are behind their peers in their development. Statistics show the gap in Walsall is even greater, with pupils aged 5 being nearly 6 months behind their peer's vs. 4 months behind nationally. By the age of 16, the gap is even wider, with disadvantaged young people being nearly 2 years behind vs 19 months behind nationally. Young people with additional needs and/or disabilities (SEND) often achieve lower outcomes compared to their peers without SEND, impacting on future opportunities and preparation for adult life.

4.20 **Staffing implications**

The programme will support the voluntary and community services and provide local employment. Early Help will employ 1.5 FTE Administrative Support and Project Support staff. To support the administration and monitoring and ongoing performance of the proposed contracts.

4.21 **Climate impact**

There are no specific climate change implications contained within this report.

4.22 **Consultation**

A public consultation has not been required for this programme, however, prior to the grant being applied for consultation was undertaken with young people, their parents/carers in order to understand the type of activities they felt should be delivered at a local level.

Internal consultation has been undertaken with Procurement, Public Health, Legal Services, Equalities, Finance, Access & Inclusion, Children's Services Director of Social Care, Director of Early Help & Partnerships, Director of Access & inclusion. A record of consultation is attached.

5. **Decide – options considered**

Cabinet is requested to approve delegated powers to award the tender to deliver the Early Help Community Activities Reducing Exploitation (CARE) Service and subsequent delegated authority as set outlined in section 3.

6. **Respond**

Subject to Cabinets approval of the recommendations, Children's Services will

- a) Award the contracts to the successful tender applicants
- b) Consider further opportunities to bid for the 2 x 12 month extension options if required.

7. Review

The Early Help Steering Group will monitor impact and lessons learnt through this programme and consider as part of the review the potential to bid for year 2 and year 3 of the DfE Respite Innovation Fund

Appendices

A: Risk Register

B: Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

Copy of the Respite Innovation Programme application

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