

Nottingham City Council Delegated Decision



Nottingham
City Council

Reference Number:

4921

Author:

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Department:

People

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Subject:

Be-friending and Hosting service

Total Value:

£252,000 (Type: Revenue)

Decision Being Taken:

1) To approve the procurement of the Be-friending and Hosting service to award a maximum 4 year contract (with effect from 16 July 2023) 2) To approve the budget expenditure of up to a maximum of £252,000 (£63,000 per year) to fund delivery of services 3) To delegate authority to the Director of Commissioning and Partnerships to award contracts in accordance with the outcome of the tender for 2+2 years and to agree any extension request at the end of the initial term 4) To delegate authority to the Head of Commissioning to sign the Contract until such time as the Head of Quality, Contracts and Personalisation is recruited.

Nottingham City Council commissions the Be-friending and Hosting service which uses a community based volunteer led model to support families in crisis who have limited support networks who are 'at or close to' Edge of Care, or where 'problems are emerging' at the Early Help stage of intervention from Children's services. The key outcomes are preventing escalation of need and diverting children from care, reducing the numbers of children requiring statutory intervention or accommodation with the local authority.

A review of the service from 2021-2022 was undertaken by the current provider which has identified a significant economic benefit through preventing the requirement for children to be accommodated by the Local Authority. The Head of Service for Children's Fieldwork has verified that the 24 families (59 children) identified as part of the review were likely to have been accommodated had the service not been available. Based on current care placement costs the economic benefit is around £775,975 pa (full year impact). This is a much more efficient use of resources as the early intervention with families reduces the likelihood of family breakdown which reduces the need for long term or more intensive intervention from Children's Services.

Commissioning this preventative service has been shown to provide Best Value for the Local Authority as well as the long-term benefits of keeping children with their families and out of the care system. The volunteer 'family friends' which support families are seen as impartial and are trusted by families often having had similar experiences, so they understand what families are going through. Volunteers can offer more flexible support, they can attend groups and activities with parents and support them with confidence, their home and living conditions, and taking children out to do activities to give parents a break to support their wellbeing. Some volunteers continue to support families when the service led support ends, creating sustainable community connections and friendships. The other service which has a similar be-friending offer for Nottingham families has much tighter criteria, to access children must be under 5 and families must reside in 1 of 3 named Wards, therefore the majority of families referred into the Be-friending and Hosting service are not eligible. There are no other local services available to families which offer hosting which is defined as short stay overnight accommodation between 2 nights and 2 weeks in any 12-month period. Whilst the cohort of families which access hosting is small, the minimum economic benefit estimated for 2021-2022 was £27,000.

The Soft Market Testing (SMT) response from the current provider referenced the demographics of families accessing hosting in the last year, this showed that they have protected characteristics under equalities

legislation, The Equalities Act 2010. Not commissioning a hosting service would create a risk in terms of a negative impact on citizens with protected characteristics. The SMT indicated that it was not viable for the current provider to offer hosting on a spot purchase basis. The only alternative to hosting would be foster care which is much more expensive and there are significant challenges with placement sufficiency which may mean need cannot be met. SMT has indicated that there are providers interested in bidding to provide this service and that the volunteer led service model is Best Value for the local authority. Service models that solely rely on paid staff estimated a required annual budget of more than twice the budget envelope at £200,000 per annum. In order to ensure that the opportunity is open to as many potential providers as possible, the tender will allow providers without existing hosting services implementation time in order to recruit and train volunteers to provide the small hosting function. This allows the hosting function to continue and promotes Best Value competition within the market by encouraging bids from a diverse range of providers. Hosting will ensure that the statutory intervention of fostering is prioritised for families who require this level of intervention and additional pressure is not placed on an area which is already facing significant challenges.

Other Options Considered: Option 1) Do nothing. This would result in no Be-friending and Hosting service being re-commissioned, with the current service ending after the 15 of July 2023. Significant budget relief has been identified from the current service intervention. Children's services indicated that without this intervention during the contract year 2021-2022 59 children would have likely been accommodated into care placements, at a significant cost to the local authority and with the negative outcome of separating children from their families. Re-commissioning this service is likely to prevent further children being accommodated into care keeping children with families and resulting in further budget relief for the local authority. Therefore, this option is not recommended. Option 2) Re-commission a Be-friending only service without a hosting function to enable responses from a wider pool of providers. This option was rejected as although the hosting element is currently small, it is an efficient and economic use of resources. The citizens who were supported by the hosting service last year all had protected characteristics and not continuing this service would create a risk.

Background Papers: None.

Published Works: None.

Affected Wards: Citywide

Colleague / Councillor Interests: None.

Consultations: Date: 09/11/2022
Other: Consultation with parents who use the current service.
Five parents who use the current service were consulted with, the parents had had support from the service ranging from a period of 8 months up to five years. Parents had various support needs ranging from struggles maintaining their home, low confidence, mental and physical health, substance addiction, isolation, bereavement and having children with disabilities. Support was given through volunteers taking children out to do activities, attending support groups and appointments with parents and supporting parents with confidence, bereavement and children's diagnosis's and school processes. Parents valued the service having formed strong trusting relationships with the volunteers they felt able to be vulnerable with and likened to friends/ family members. The volunteers matched with parents had similar relatable experiences and therefore could understand what parents were going through.

Those not consulted are not directly affected by the decision.

Crime and Disorder Implications: N/A

Equality: Please login to the system to view the EIA document: Befriending and Hosting service Final EIA.docx

Decision Type:	Portfolio Holder
Subject to Call In:	Yes
Call In Expiry date:	03/05/2023
Advice Sought:	Legal, Finance, Procurement, Equality and Diversity
Legal Advice:	<p>This report seeks to procure a befriending and hosting service. In undertaking the procurement exercise, the requirements of the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and the Council's constitution must be adhered to.</p> <p>In delegating authority to execute contracts and extensions to contracts, the Council must act in accordance with its constitution and, presumably for a potential extension, not authorise that if there is a change in the costs or a proposed change in the contractual terms unless such a change in contractual terms has been reviewed by Legal Services and agreed by the Council.</p> <p>The nature of the activity means that suitable provisions concerning safeguarding, CRB checks, etc, will need to be included in the proposed contract and regular monitoring of compliance with these requirements undertaken.</p> <p>Anthony Heath, Contracts and Commercial, 15th March 2023 Advice provided by Anthony Heath (Senior Solicitor) on 15/03/2023.</p>
Finance Advice:	<p>This service has been commissioned for the last three financial years and there have been clear benefits for the families involved as well as providing best value to the Council.</p> <p>There is a substantive budget of £63,000 available for the financial year 2023/24, but the balance of £1,000 is not material. It is likely that this can be mitigated via other cost savings elsewhere. Advice provided by Clare Rickett (Senior Commercial Business Partner) on 04/04/2023.</p>
Procurement Advice:	The procurement of the Be-friending and Hosting service to award a maximum 4 year contract will be managed by the Procurement Team and will ensure best value and compliance with procurement legislation. Advice provided by Nicola Harrison (Procurement Lead Officer) on 09/03/2023.
Equality and Diversity Advice:	The Equality Impact Assessment has been reviewed. There are positive and negative impacts to some of the protected characteristics. Where a negative impact has been identified the author has included mitigations. Advice provided by Rosey Donovan (Equality and Employability Consultant) on 04/04/2023.
Signatures	<p>Cheryl Barnard (Portfolio Holder- Children, Young People, Schools)</p> <p>SIGNED and Dated: 25/04/2023</p> <p>Catherine Underwood (Corporate Director for People)</p> <p>SIGNED and Dated: 20/04/2023</p>