

Nottingham City Council Delegated Decision



Nottingham
City Council

Reference Number:

4961

Author:

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Department:

People

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Subject:

Department for Education FY23/24 Improvement Funding - Liquid Logic Consultancy Investment

Total Value:

£328,523 (Type: Revenue)

Decision Being Taken:

Approval to spend DFE grant monies to enable Children's Integrated Services to implement the recommendations from a diagnostic review of its Liquid Logic case management system, which was undertaken in January 2023. The spend relates to engaging a consultant with specialist technical expertise and knowledge of local authority children's services requirements, along with other supporting activities to implement key recommendations from the diagnostic report, such as purchase of service pack days from Liquid Logic to enable system configuration changes, form development capacity and training capacity.

These activities are vital to enable the service to establish clear governance arrangements and management of change requests, optimal operation of the system, reduce duplication and inefficiencies, increase resilience and ensure the system is fit for purpose. There is an expectation from the DfE to spend the monies on the identified activities and to be able to evidence that it has been spent on the approved activities. There are no key performance measures related to the spend and therefore the risk to the authority is minimal.

Reasons for the Decision(s)

Nottingham City Children's Services received its Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in July 2022 at which it was judged to be inadequate. Children's Integrated Services has been closely liaising with the Department for Education (DfE) around additional support and resources it would require to support its improvement journey to deliver good services to children and young people in need of help and protection. A bid was put in and approved by the DfE to provide funding to support some key pieces of improvement work (eDDM ref 4930). The areas identified have been selected as areas of work that will reach the maximum number of the workforce as possible to support wider, continuous improvement. The activities will support the whole workforce deliver quality services to children and families through the reduction of bureaucracy through a more efficient and effective functioning of the case management system - enabling the workforce to focus upon more direct work with children and families.

In January 2023 the service, through DfE funding, commissioned an independent consultant to undertake a diagnostic review of the Liquid Logic case management system. That report contained a number of recommendations that would need to be addressed to ensure optimal operation of the system and reduce duplication and inefficiencies and ensure the system is fit for purpose both now and in the future. The DfE have approved further grant monies to enable the service to commission an expert consultant to support implementation of those recommendations as a key element of the service's improvement journey. The consultant will bring the technical expertise that is lacking within the Local Authority, as well as experience of working within other local authority children's services departments and the ability to adopt good practice.

Other Options Considered:

Option 1: Do not commission an external consultant and undertake the change management work internally. This is not a preferred option as the local authority does not have the necessary expertise or resource to be able to undertake this work. The DfE has agreed to provide grant funding to enable us to commission an external expert consultant to undertake the implementation of the recommendations as it sees this as key to supporting the at pace improvement work the service needs to undertake. A condition of the grant is that this will only be spent on the approved area of spend and therefore the Local Authority would not be able to draw down this funding. It would create a reputational risk with the DfE if the activity were not commissioned, which would jeopardise future bids. The service would also be unable to implement the at pace improvements that are required as a fully optimised case management system supports both the direct work the front line workforce and their managers undertake, reduces the time they are spent on administrative tasks, freeing them up for direct work with children and families, and enables efficient performance reporting. Without a fully optimised case management system, the service will struggle to achieve good outcomes for children and families and would be at risk of further adverse judgements at future Ofsted visits.

Option 2: Do nothing. This is not a preferred option. As noted above the DfE have already committed the funding and have an expectation that the Local Authority will spend the money on the improvement activity identified. It would create a reputational risk to refuse the monies - both in terms of potential future bids, but also the need to move at pace to make practice improvements. The diagnostic review undertaken in January 2023 indicated that significant changes would need to be made to the Liquid Logic case management system, governance and change processes to make the system fit for purpose and increase its resilience. A well-functioning case management system is vital to removing duplication, ensuring efficient working practices and freeing up social worker and business support time on recording, which would enable workers to focus more time on direct work with children and young people. This is integral to our improvement journey and without this piece of work, Children's Services will struggle to deliver key practice improvements at pace and risk being able to make the significant improvement required to support good outcomes for children and families and satisfy Ofsted and provide them with assurance at future inspection visits.

Background Papers:

N/A

Published Works:	N/A
Affected Wards:	Citywide
Colleague / Councillor Interests:	None
Consultations:	<p>Date: 19/04/2023</p> <p>Other: Children's Executive Improvement Board</p> <p>The item was discussed and agreed at the Board. This Board is chaired by an independent improvement advisor (DfE) and is attended by the Chief Executive, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education and the Corporate Director for People.</p> <p>Those not consulted are not directly affected by the decision.</p>
Crime and Disorder Implications:	N/A
Equality:	EIA not required. Reasons: This relates to spend of DfE grant monies for implementation of recommendations for the effective functioning of Children's Integrated Service's case management system.
Any implications affecting IT:	Yes
Decision Type:	Portfolio Holder
Subject to Call In:	Yes
Call In Expiry date:	15/06/2023
Advice Sought:	Legal, Finance, Procurement, IT
Legal Advice:	Given the total estimated value of the contract, at least 3 tenders in writing must be obtained for the consultancy services in order to comply with the Contract Procedure Rule 18.55 and public procurement rules. Alternatively, a framework agreement could be used to call off the services provided that the procedure for call-off is fully complied with. Advice provided by Sarah O'Bradaigh (senior solicitor) on 30/05/2023.

Finance Advice:

The cost of this decision is £328,523. The work will be fully funded from the Department for Education Improvement Grant. There is no impact on the General Fund. There are robust budget management protocols in place to ensure Nottingham City Council will achieve best value in the expenditure of this money. Advice provided by Clare Rickett, Senior Commercial Business Partner on 05/06/23

IT Advice:

IT support the continued development of key corporate systems to support enhanced digital delivery of services. Although not engaged in the creation of the report and the formulation of actions, some of which require subsequent review as a consequence, a jointly agreed route forward is now in place to support the development and use of the Liquid Logic platform and crucially the ongoing governance arrangements for the platform. Advice provided by Simon Salmon (Head of IT) on 05/06/2023.

Procurement Advice:

A compliant route to market will be identified to get the consultants on-board with the necessary skills to deliver the recommendations. There are no procurement concerns. As a side note, the Liquid Logic contract is currently in place until 2027 and is delivered on-premise. Advice provided by Louise Dobson (Lead Procurement Officer) on 23/05/2023.

Signatures

Cheryl Barnard (PH- Children, Young People & Education)

SIGNED and Dated: 08/06/2023

Catherine Underwood (Corporate Director for People)

SIGNED and Dated: 06/06/2023