

Report to Lucy Butler, Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning

February 2022

Award of places on the Framework- Urgent and Specialist Support for Children and Young People

Report by Dan Ruaux, Assistant Director Corporate Parenting

Electoral divisions: All

Summary

In November 2021 the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People approved the commencement of a procurement to establish a framework of providers to enable the Council to source urgent and specialist support for vulnerable children and young people in emergency situations at short notice periods and often the same day (decision [CYP03\(21/22\)](#) refers).

The procurement exercise has been completed, tenders evaluated and the Council is now in a position to award a place on the Framework to the successful provider. Provision remains to enable other providers to seek and gain a place on the Framework on the same terms. There will be no guaranteed spend through the framework, but the estimated spend over the maximum life of the framework (4+4 years) is £8.5m.

Recommendation

The Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning is asked to approve: -

- (1) The award of a place on the Urgent and Specialist Support for Children and Young People Framework to Blue Light Healthcare for an initial period of 4 years commencing on 1st March 2022, with an option to extend the Framework for a further 4 years should the delivery and performance of the Framework be satisfactory.
 - (2) The plan to seek further bids from suppliers to secure a place on the Framework with the same criteria for admission and for successful bidders to be awarded a place on the Framework on the same terms and conditions.
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Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 Urgent and Specialist services are used for a small number of children and young people with very complex and sometimes challenging needs and behaviours, that can involve mental health problems, autism, trauma, and attachment disorders and learning difficulties. Without using these specialist services these children would otherwise be at risk of needing to be housed in a secure placement or admission to Tier 4 mental health facilities - a specialist in-patient service. These services support in stabilising the home environment or placement in the short term, whilst longer term arrangements are identified. This can aid with giving an opportunity to further assess the needs of the child to ensure any future placement is best matched to their individual needs.
- 1.2 Providers of this type of support are staffing agencies who specialise in the provision of registered nurses, including mental health nurses, healthcare assistants (HCAs) and other care/support staff at very short notice in order to create specialist packages of care for children with complex needs, either in the home or in placements elsewhere.
- 1.3 Demand for services such as this on an emergency basis has inevitably increased as a result of COVID-19, for example to take over the provision of care when other providers have had to suddenly limit or close services due staffing shortages. An increase in demand to support discharge from mental health hospitals, again exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic, has also been a particular issue nationally.
- 1.4 The Council has contracted with a small number of providers over the past year for provision of these services and the need for these services is projected to continue.
- 1.5 In November 2021 approval was obtained from the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to commence a procurement to set up a Framework Agreement to source Urgent and Specialist services (Decision [CYP03\(21/22\)](#) refers). The Framework was jointly commissioned with Surrey County Council in the hope that greater total spend would attract more providers and that the providers, that both Authorities currently use, would apply and increase choice for both. As part of the decision, the Cabinet Member also approved the delegation of authority to the Executive Director of Children, Young People and Learning to both implement the Framework Agreement and award contracts to successful Service Providers. This Framework Agreement will be for an initial 4-year period, with the potential to extend for a further 4 years should the delivery and performance of the Framework be satisfactory
- 1.6 The tender featured technical, commercial and compliance elements, with all elements being assessed on pass/fail basis by subject experts. The technical element was weighted 100% of the overall tender and was measured upon evaluation of the bidder's responses to the Method Statement Questionnaire.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 Through procuring this Framework Agreement, the Council will:
 - Provide a compliant means of responding quickly and effectively to unforeseen demand;
 - Quickly provide safe and appropriate care for children and families in crisis;

- Reduce the level of risk involved in this area of spend through improved monitoring and quality assurance, decreased reliance on single providers and improved compliance;
- Increase value for money through a more strategic approach to the market not based on multiple separate waivers or informal, ad hoc spend.

2.2 The procurement process resulted in 4 providers submitting bids. Following evaluation, 3 providers scored less than the minimum score required to pass and one provider satisfied all criteria. It is proposed to award Blue Light Healthcare a place on the Framework Agreement.

2.3 The Framework will commence on 1st March 2022 for an initial period of 4 years; there is an option to extend the Framework for a further 4 years should the delivery and performance of the Framework be satisfactory.

2.4 The Framework Agreement was advertised as an 'Open Framework' for new providers to apply and will remain open for its duration. It is the intention that after the initial award, the 3 unsuccessful providers will receive feedback on the reasons they failed and will be supported to re-submit a revised bid. Other providers that have been used over the last 2 years and those who expressed an interest and participated in the market engagement event will also be approached again to encourage them to apply. All new providers applying for a place will go through the same evaluation process to assess their suitability for admission onto the Framework Agreement; those who meet the criteria and standards required will be awarded places on the Framework Agreement. The opportunity to work with providers of non-urgent/non-specialist support to develop their skill set will be explored e.g. those on the existing Family and Community Support Framework Agreement and enable them to consider applying to join this Framework Agreement too. The framework was developed in partnership with Surrey County Council who are named on the agreement and will be able to access the framework. SCC have previously worked with other providers who did not apply to join the framework and therefore will also engage with them to encourage them to apply to join.

2.5 When a service for a child or young person is required, a suitable provider will be obtained through running a mini-competition process in accordance with the terms of the Framework Agreement. There will be no mini-competition until such time as other providers are successful in being awarded a place on the Framework. The successful provider is one of the most competitive agencies for this type of emergency placement and already works with the Council to offer cost-effective packages for longer term placements.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

3.1 Alternative options were considered as set out in Decision Report ref [CYP03\(21/22\)](#). The only other option at the close of the procurement would have been not to award any places on the Framework and to restart the process but it is considered that the procedure was effective and that the Framework can be established with a view to extending the number of suppliers.

4 Consultation, engagement, and advice

4.1 Consultation was undertaken as detailed in the Decision Report ref CYP03(21/22).

5 Finance

5.1 Revenue consequences

One of the objectives of this proposal is to increase compliance of current spend, rather than requesting any revenue budget changes to account for additional spend. There is also no guarantee of business through the proposed Framework Agreement. The estimated £8.5m for the full life of the Framework Agreement (4+4 years, c. 1.06m per annum) is based on Council spend to date along with estimated spend by Surrey County Council.

5.2 The effect of the proposal:

(a) **How the cost represents good value**

A benchmarking exercise has been undertaken with one other local authority to compare rates that key providers in this area are charging. This indicated that, whilst high, there is no significant difference between rates. Given the small number of providers, the urgent nature of the demand and the level of need of the children (which can often mean there is no other alternative to this service), this proposal is the preferred option for the delivery of this service. This approach will offer flexibility and responsiveness to urgent demand.

(b) **Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

There are no savings to be delivered through this service, the focus of which is providing critical support for children and young people for whom the Council has a statutory duty. There may be efficiencies as a result of partnering with another Local Authority, thereby increasing attractiveness to potential bidders, and increasing competition, which may then influence pricing.

(c) **Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact**

None.

6 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Only one successful tender will limit the scope for competition and cost-effectiveness.	Partnering with another Local Authority (LA) increases the potential to attract more Providers to the Framework, especially the other LA Providers, none of whom tendered. They will be re-approached together with the unsuccessful providers to apply/reapply to the Framework. There is also the opportunity to work with providers of non-urgent/non-specialist support to develop their skill set e.g. those on the existing Family and Community Support Framework Agreement and enable them to

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
	consider applying to join this Framework Agreement too.
Exposure to provider failure / other risks through over-reliance on single/small number of providers	Through market engagement and links with other LAs, providers have been identified outside those with whom the Council has previously done business. This will also be further mitigated through partnering with another LA. New providers will be encouraged to join throughout the term of the Framework Agreement.

7 Policy alignment and compliance

7.1 Legal Implications

As the Framework is an Open Framework it will remain open throughout its term for new providers to join.

7.2 Impact on Council Plan priorities, Equality duty and human rights

This proposal will support the Council in meeting its statutory duties and commitment to protect and support those most in need. It will also underpin a critical commitment to young people looked after or formerly looked after. These placements will help stabilise the lives of vulnerable young people and improve their outcomes in the future. Equality of opportunity will also exist for those children with protected characteristics, for example for children with disabilities who have already been placed in these arrangements.

7.3 Climate change

This proposal will create more appropriate provision in county, helping prevent out of area placements and therefore reducing emissions from staff travel.

7.4 Crime and disorder

All providers with whom the Council places children are encouraged to work with young people in a restorative way, with the aim of building healthy communities, increasing social capital, decreasing crime and antisocial behaviour, repairing harm and restoring relationships.

7.5 Public health

This proposal supports the objectives of the West Sussex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-24, through supporting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of children, young people and families, and through helping provide a safe and healthy home environment for children and young people to thrive in.

7.6 Social value

These services will work with children and young people to help stabilise their lives and home environment, which may well be experiencing a crisis, to avoid

further disruption and harm e.g. because of multiple moves between inappropriate care placements. This in turn will be of benefit to their families and wider community.

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Background Papers - None