



Bristol City Council

Commissioning Services for Vulnerable Parents with Young Children

June 2018

v. 12.04.18

Contents

Contents	2
Section A - Introduction and context.....	3
Purpose of this document	3
What are we trying to achieve	3
Local strategic context.....	3
Section B - Analysis.....	5
Parent and child assessment placements.....	5
Homelessness prevention services.....	7
Section D – Commissioning Intentions	10
Parent and child placements – Residential assessments.....	10
Parent and child placements – Foster care	11
Homelessness prevention services.....	11
Section E - Whole-system improvements.....	13
Section F – Other information for providers	14
Indicative timescale	14

Section A - Introduction and context

Purpose of this document

This plan sets out proposals for commissioning a set of related services for parents with babies and young children. These services are:

Parent and child assessment placements – These are short-term placements, usually of about 12 weeks, for families where there are concerns about the parents' ability to safely parent their child(ren). Placements are often ordered by the court in child protection court proceedings to inform the court about whether or not the child(ren) should continue to live with their parent(s). These placements are either in residential centres or with foster carers.

Homelessness prevention services – These services are for vulnerable parents with babies and young children who are at risk of homelessness. They include floating support and short-term supported accommodation.

We consulted on a draft version of this plan between 11th October and 6th December 2017, and have revised this plan accordingly¹.

What are we trying to achieve

We are seeking to commission a coherent range of services for vulnerable parents and aim to achieve the following:

- Reduced spend, particularly on costly residential assessments.
- Good procurement practice with robust contracts and clear quality standards.
- Local assessment placements, so that parents do not have to leave their communities.
- Effective homelessness prevention, including helping younger parents to stay living with their families.
- A coherent range of connected services, enabling suitable and timely move-on from assessment placements with recommendations that follow the family.
- Quality services and assessments, achieving the right outcomes for children and families and providing good value for money.
- Minimised use of emergency accommodation for homeless families.
- Homelessness prevention accommodation targeted at the most vulnerable parents, with families housed in the lowest cost supported accommodation able to meet their needs.
- Maximised opportunities for holistic commissioning, collaborative working and improvements to the whole system.

Local strategic context

Budget pressures – With a rapidly growing population and increasing demand for council services at the same time as ongoing reductions in central government funding, Bristol City Council faces a substantial budget gap of around £120 million between 2017 and 2022. This means we have less funding to commission services for vulnerable parents with babies, which makes it crucial that we have effective prevention measures and that the services we commission are cost effective and targeted at the right people.

¹ There is more detail about the consultation and responses in the 'Consultation Response Summary'

Corporate strategy 2017-2022² - The council's corporate strategy was agreed in February 2017. It contains a number of objectives that are relevant to this plan including:

- Getting involved early to reduce risk later – early intervention reduces the impact of problems later on.
- Promoting independence – supporting people to live as independently as possible in their community.
- Safeguarding the most vulnerable – fulfilling the statutory responsibility of the city to protect vulnerable children and adults.
- Reducing health inequalities through focussing on prevention and early intervention and the causes of ill health.
- Addressing inequality – doing all we can to make sure families do not live in poverty in a city of wealth and opportunity; ensuring nobody is left behind because of the circumstances of their birth.
- Creating resilience – supporting individuals to help themselves to find solutions to difficulties and adversities, helping families to stay together and building resilient communities.
- Housing as a springboard to achieving a high quality of life.

Bristol's Strategy for Children, Young People and Families 2016-2020 – This strategy sets out the commitment of the Bristol Children and Families Partnership to ensure that Bristol children:

- Have the best possible start in life; protected from abuse, neglect or harm, at home, at school and in the community, with a secure and supportive network of family or carers and friends.
- Live in a nurturing home, in a family setting, with additional help or adaptations if needed, or, where necessary, in a suitable care setting.
- Live in safe and stable accommodation, free from financial exclusion and fear, indoors and out; giving the permanence and security upon which they can build.

Housing and homelessness – Homelessness, and in particular family homelessness, has been increasing in Bristol for the last five years due to a combination of welfare benefit reform and the availability and affordability of accommodation especially in the private rental sector. Since 2011-12 people seeking advice from the council's citizen service points has doubled from 6,000 to 12,000 each year; homelessness acceptances under the 1996 Housing Act have increased fivefold and the number of households with children in temporary accommodation at the end of each quarter has increased from 50 to 411 (31st December 2017) ³.

The council's net spend on temporary accommodation far exceeds the allocated budget. We carried out another commissioning process recently which identified the need to increase the amount of affordable supported accommodation for families and decrease the use of more costly spot purchased temporary accommodation.⁴ Within the context of this commissioning plan, this means that wherever possible we need to use the supported accommodation available for vulnerable parents as a flexible resource to help meet the council's duty to provide temporary accommodation for homeless families with young children and support needs.

² <https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/1188753/Corporate+Strategy+2017-2022+D5/c545c93f-e8c4-4122-86b8-6f0e054bb12d>

³ P1E Homelessness Statistics

⁴ Preventing Homelessness Accommodation Pathways – families and adults (22+) -

https://www.bristol.gov.uk/en_US/housing/commissioning-homelessness-prevention-services

Section B - Analysis

Parent and child assessment placements

Overview

Parenting assessments are used where there are serious concerns about the ability of parents/carers to meet the needs of their child(ren). The family is subject to a period of observation and assessment to identify any issues of concern and support them to make changes in their parenting. The assessment informs evidence-based recommendations to safeguard the child(ren) and is used to determine whether parents can safely care for their child(ren) in the community. Sometimes the court will request an assessment in the context of care proceedings. Assessments might take place with the family living in the community, in a residential setting or in foster care.

Residential assessments usually take place in residential family centres. These are defined as establishments where accommodation is provided for a child and their parents, the parents' capacity to respond to the child's needs and safeguard their welfare is monitored and assessed, and parents are given such advice, guidance or counselling as is considered necessary. They are regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000 and Residential Family Centres Regulations 2002. They are required to register with Ofsted and are subject to Ofsted inspection and the National Minimum Standards for Residential Family Centres.

Increasingly, assessments take place with the child(ren) and parents living with foster carers. The assessment may be carried out by the foster agency, or by a local authority social worker with the foster carer contributing by providing observation logs as well as supervising and supporting parents.

Current provision and spend

Please see Appendix 1 for the detailed needs analysis.

In the last three years, the council has placed about 33 families per year in an assessment placement. Approximately half of the families were placed with foster carers and half in residential assessment centres or residential substance misuse rehabilitation centres. A few families (about 5 each year) were placed in both residential assessments and foster placements. The average duration of placements last year was 11 weeks in residential and 10 weeks in foster care.

The council spot purchases residential assessments from a number of providers in the Southwest and Midlands. There is no residential assessment centre in, or close to Bristol, with the closest being 50 miles away in Taunton.

We purchase parent and child foster placements from independent foster agencies (IFAs) on the sub-regional IFA framework agreement. We do not generally commission assessments from IFAs. Instead, the council's social worker carries out the assessment.

Placement costs are high. The average weekly cost of a residential assessment placement in 2016/17 was £4,500 and the average total cost of a placement was £40,360. For parent and child foster placements (excluding assessment) the average weekly cost was c. £1,400 and the average total placement cost was £17,300.

The council's spend on assessment placements has increased significantly since 2013, but reduced last financial year. Last year we made 17 placements into residential assessments (total cost of c. £490,000) and 21 parent and child foster placements (total cost c. £370,000).

2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
£575,851	£707,914	£952,596	£857,725

Profile of families in parent and child assessment placements

The majority of parents placed are mothers, however between 2015 and 2017 there were also 12 couples and 2 single fathers in assessment placements.

The average age of parents in assessment placements has increased in recent years, from 17 years in 2011/12 to 26 years in 2017/18. There are also increasing numbers of parents aged 25+. The age of the child in placement ranges from unborn to 4 years at the point of first placement. The average was 4 months old.

Analysis of Bristol cases (2015-17) indicates the following range of needs of parents in assessment placements:

- Domestic violence or abuse as a current or historical concern (64%)
- Substance abuse (39%)
- Previously had a child removed (33%)
- Mental health issue (32%)
- Learning difficulty (21%)
- Care leaver (21%)
- Alcohol abuse (18%)
- Lack of engagement with professionals (11%)
- Received or offered help with anger management (10%)
- Homelessness (10%).
- Parent at risk of sexual exploitation (5%)

Demand and projections

The number of placements has remained consistent over the last three years, at 32 or 33 per year. In 2016/17 we usually had 6 families in a parent and child foster placement and one or two (but up to five) families in a residential assessment placement at any one time.

While the population of Bristol is increasing, the birth rate had slowed at 2014/15. We do not anticipate an increase in the number of placements needed.

In June 2017 Pause Bristol⁵ started to work with women in the city who have had two or more children removed from their care. It is an 18-month pilot aiming to work with 20 women, using the Pause model successfully adopted in other areas of the country, to support women to break the cycle of having their children removed from them. It works with women when they have no children in their care, providing an opportunity to take a pause from the usual periods of chaos, anger and reaction to care proceedings and helps them to take control of their lives and develop new skills and responses. Pause Bristol is hosted by the charity One25 in collaboration with Bristol City Council. This project should help to reduce the number of assessment placements required as nearly half of parents in assessment placements have had previous children removed.

⁵ <http://one25.org.uk/pause-bristol/>

Homelessness prevention services

Overview

Increasing levels of family homelessness acceptances has led to a massive increase in the number of families in temporary accommodation in the city. The council has a duty to provide temporary accommodation under part VII of the Housing Act 1996.

Current provision and spend

- Specialist young parents homelessness prevention service** – In September 2013, we commissioned an integrated city-wide homelessness prevention service for young parents aged 16-25 years. This contract is delivered by two providers, Elim Housing Association and Places for People, working in partnership as Bristol Young Parents Alliance (BYPA). Between them they provide 36 accommodation units and Elim provides a linked floating support service. The integrated service is commissioned to support a minimum of 150 new clients each year. The accommodation is based in Southmead, Easton and Knowle providing a geographical spread so that clients can live near their support networks.

Scheme	Provider	Accomm type	No of units	Age and other restrictions	Family size
Lanercost & Wigton	Elim Housing Association	Self-contained	11	Babies <18 mths & mother/father/couple	Up to 2 adults & 2 children
Bristol Mother & Baby project (Priory)	Elim Housing Association	Self-contained	10	Babies <18 mths & mother/father up to 25yrs	1 adult 1 child
Bristol Mother & Baby Project (328 Wells Rd)	Elim Housing Association	Shared	5	Babies <18 mths & mother up to 25yrs	1 adult 1 child
Kilburn Court & Owen Street	Places for People	2 Self-contained 8 shared	10	Babies <18 mths & mother/father/couple up to 25yrs in self-contained units and mother only in shared units.	1 adult 1 child

The budget is £404,000 p.a. for this integrated service, which is roughly evenly split between accommodation based support and floating support.

- Other supported accommodation for homeless families** (please note this element is not part of this commissioning plan) – These services are referred to as level 4 accommodation (low support accommodation) and provide the council with an alternative to bed and breakfast accommodation, with 2-3 hours of support per week. The services also offer resettlement support to families to assist them in settling into their move-on accommodation.

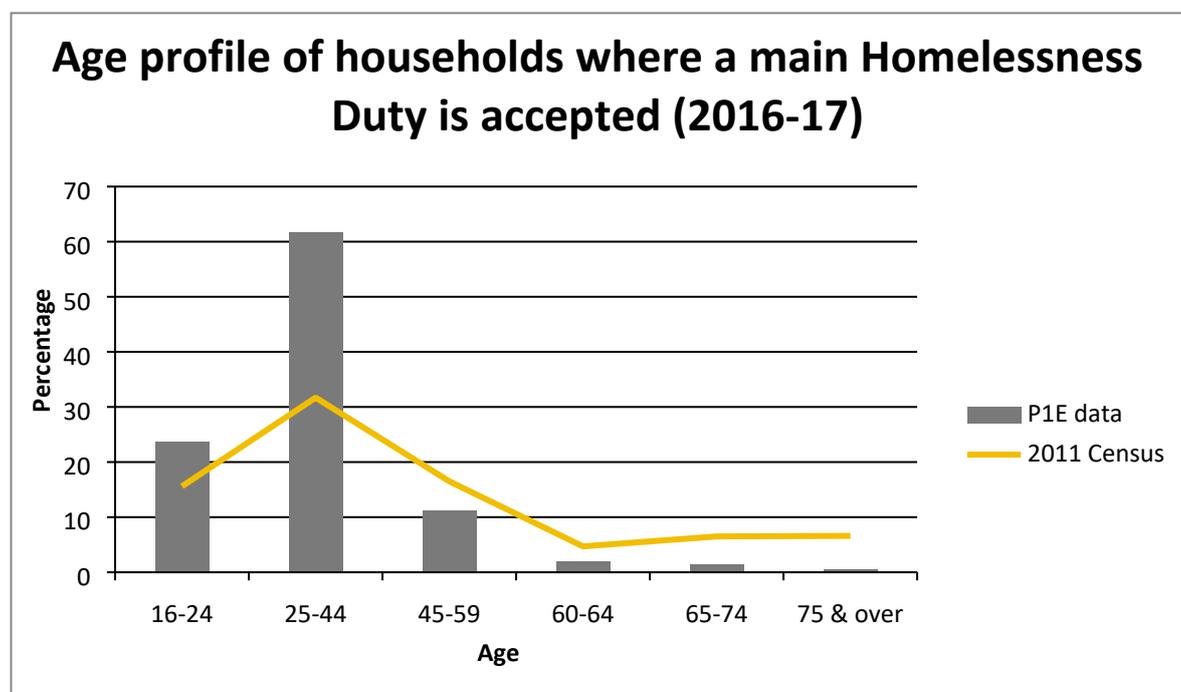
There are currently 86 accommodation units plus one 'crash pad'⁶ from 3 providers in the city: 51 units are internally provided by the council (two hostels and satellite units) with a further 35 units and a crash-pad provided by two external providers (a hostel and satellite units). These are available to families of any age or level of need.

⁶ A crash-pad is a bedroom that is used as an alternative to Bed and Breakfast within a supported scheme for which the provider receives Housing Benefit but no additional resources for support.

In a separate commissioning plan entitled, 'Preventing Homelessness Accommodation Pathways – families and adults (22+)' we have identified the need to increase supported family accommodation.⁷ This is being achieved through re-modelling some units within other supported housing contracts (originally for single people) to provide additional units for small families, and increasing the number of units of supported family accommodation in existing contracts. The aim is to reduce the need to spot-purchase expensive accommodation for families. As part of a move towards more flexible use of commissioned provision, 53 units of young people specialist supported accommodation can now be used by young parents (28 units within the specialist provision and the remainder are within generic services).

Profile of homeless families (all ages) presenting to the council

- **Level of support needs** – Many homeless families require housing but do not have support needs. However, a small number of households do have significant support needs that providers can find difficult to respond to given the level of support that they are able to offer.
- **Age** – Households to whom the council accepts a main homelessness duty (shown in the chart below as 'P1E data') have a much younger profile than the general Bristol population. This is largely because younger people are likely to have lower incomes, are less likely to own their own homes and therefore struggle to maintain or afford private sector accommodation in the city.



NB. P1E data is the statutory data returned by local authorities on their responsibilities under homelessness legislation.

- **Young parents** – In 2016-17, a total of 295 young parents aged 16-24 years presented to the council as homeless. The age breakdown at presentation:
 - 12 aged under 18 yrs
 - 136 aged 18 -21yrs
 - 147 aged 22 -24yrs

There has been a reduction in teenage pregnancies (in Bristol and nationally). The age profile of young parents who present as homeless to the council has changed. The head of the household is now more likely to be older, often in their early to mid 20s. The age of parents entering

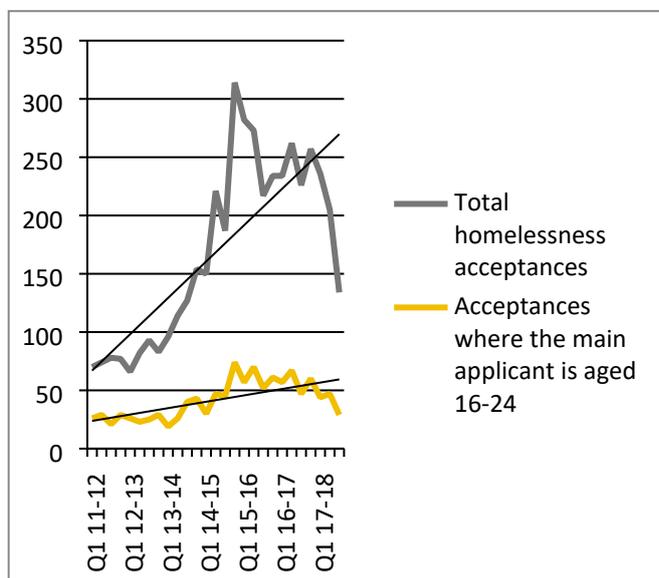
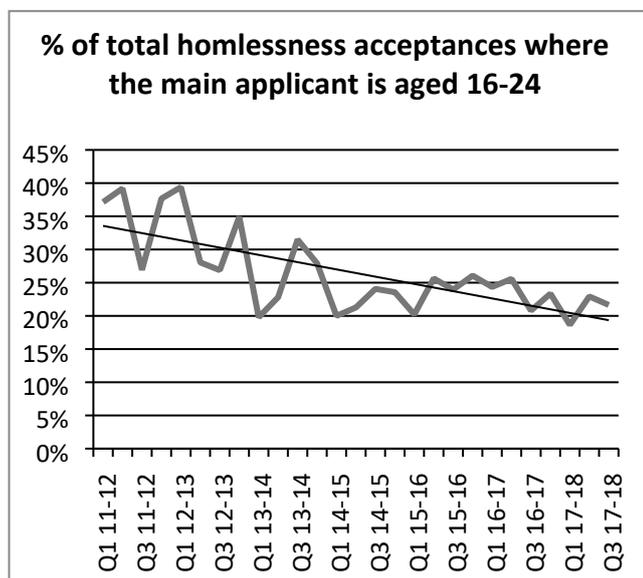
⁷ https://www.bristol.gov.uk/en_US/housing/commissioning-homelessness-prevention-services

homelessness prevention services has increased over the life of the current contract. Currently, only 1 person on the waiting list is under 18 years of age, with 57% aged 21 years or over. Also, now one in five parents in the BYPA young parents accommodation are couples. The main reason for homelessness amongst this client group is that they have been asked to leave by family, friends or relatives.

- **Support needs** – The council records information about the support needs of the people in supported accommodation on a quarterly basis. The information submitted shows us that families and young parents in supported accommodation do have significant needs in the following areas:
 - One third of all clients had mental health needs, although only half of this group are accessing mental health services. The level of need is twice as high as amongst the general population.
 - 39% have experienced domestic violence or abuse, although only half of these households have accessed support or advice in relation to this.
 - High numbers are struggling with debt (29%).
 - Over 40% of households are accessing support at local children’s centres, roughly half of whom are families with a child protection plan;
 - Reported drug and alcohol support needs are low for these client groups.

Demand and projections

There has been a significant increase in the number of households contacting the council’s citizen service points for homelessness advice, with demand doubling over a five year period to 2016-17. Homeless acceptances for households containing children have also increased dramatically during this period increasing from less than 30-40 per quarter to over 200 per quarter. Demand has not increased evenly amongst different age groups, with proportionately less of an increase amongst parents aged 16-24:



The overall increase in homelessness acceptances has led to a huge increase in demand for temporary accommodation (TA) for families. Households containing children who are placed in TA has risen significantly during this period from less than 50 households at the end of the quarter in 2012-13 to more than 450 in 2016-17. There is some indication that demand has levelled out recently. However the impact of Universal Credit roll-out in the near future is likely to add further pressures.

Section D – Commissioning Intentions

Parent and child placements – Residential assessments

Key aims

- Have a residential assessment centre local to Bristol so that families don't have to move away from their support networks and are assessed in a more realistic environment.
- Reduce spend on residential assessment placements by:
 - Making fewer residential assessment placements, using community-based and foster placements instead where possible;
 - Limiting the number of court-ordered residential assessments, by ensuring there are alternatives that have the confidence of the court;
 - Making sure residential assessments take no longer than necessary to complete and that families move on once assessments are completed;
 - Having a clear contract with external providers, including clear costs and fixed prices for an initial period.
- Commission timely, good quality assessments that the council and the courts can rely on to inform their decisions for children.
- The residential assessment centres where we place families link into the whole-system of assessment and support for those families. This includes making recommendations that follow the family once they leave the placement, and providing seamless moves into supported housing where necessary.

Commissioning intention

We will establish an open framework of providers of residential parenting assessments, and purchase placements from this framework. Organisations that wish to sell residential assessment placements will be asked to apply to get onto Bristol's residential assessment framework, and will be asked to provide relevant policies and a transparent pricing structure. Placements will then be provided as specified in the agreed framework documentation. It is anticipated that all placements will be purchased from this framework, but there may still be rare occasions when spot purchase of placements will be needed outside of this framework. There will be no obligation on the council to make purchases from the framework, and the terms will be sufficiently flexible to allow for changes or termination. The framework will be open ended, with no fixed end date.

The framework will be available for use by other local authorities.

In addition, we will work in partnership with an external provider to develop a new 5 or 6 unit residential assessment centre in Bristol. The scheme would have to be registered with Ofsted as a residential family centre. The council will spot purchase placements in this centre as required.

Because we are not offering a contract, or block booking any places in the centre, we will work with any willing provider, and do not need to follow a selection process. The council will not be responsible for any up front costs and will not carry any risks related to voids or reputation.

Parent and child placements – Foster care

Key aims

- Have good quality local parent and child foster placements able to accommodate families with a range of needs and levels of risk, including parents aged 24+, single fathers and couples.
- Make increased use of parent and child foster placements in order to reduce our use of residential assessment placements, and reduce overall spend on assessment placements.
- Reduce the average weekly and total cost of parent and child foster placements.
- Commission good quality assessments that the council and the courts can rely on to inform their decisions for children.
- Foster placements and assessments that are linked into the whole-system of assessment and support for the families placed, including making recommendations that follow the family once they leave the placement.

Commissioning intention

We will establish a council-run parent and child assessment foster scheme managed within the council's existing foster agency. We will recruit five specialist foster carers to each provide an average of four parent and child assessment placements a year, including to some single parent fathers and couples where appropriate. The scheme will include a senior practitioner social worker to carry out assessments and a social worker to supervise foster carers. Foster carers will contribute to assessments by providing observation logs and other input, as well as supporting and supervising the family. The assessment team will also include a clinical psychologist. This scheme would be able to deliver about 20 assessment placements per year of average duration. The total cost of the scheme will be £265,559 per year. It is expected that this will generate savings of between £130,000 and £200,000 each year, because of the cheaper cost of in house placements when compared to those purchased from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA), and because having a well regarded in house foster service will reduce the number of placements that have to be made in residential centres.

If additional parent and child assessment placements are required, we will purchase these from suitable providers on the existing sub-regional IFA framework with the assessment being completed by a Bristol City Council social worker.

Homelessness prevention services

Key aims

- Balance potentially competing aims of targeting supported accommodation for vulnerable parents with the highest support needs versus the need to use supported accommodation for homeless families who otherwise would need to be housed in higher cost temporary accommodation.
- Limit spend on temporary accommodation for homelessness families.
- Make sure that families in parent and child assessment placements (both residential and foster placements) are able to move on to supported accommodation without delay if this is the best home for them.
- Ensure that there are effective and flexible floating support services to:
 - prevent vulnerable parents with young children from becoming homeless;
 - provide resettlement support to families moving on from the service's supported accommodation;

- provide additional support to meet the needs of a small number of families living in the service's supported accommodation who have particularly high support needs.

Commissioning intention

We propose to have one contract to provide an integrated supported accommodation and floating support service for vulnerable parents with young children aged up to two years (with some flexibility around this upper age, where necessary). The service will be for parents of any age. The contract will be to provide:

- Support at the 36 units of accommodation used for the current specialist parents homelessness prevention service. We will require a higher level of support at 15 units of accommodation, but not with a 24 hour staff presence (there will be utilisation of CCTV cameras and parents will have access to 24 hour support via telephone). One of the three locations will specialise in supporting young parents, but this will not be a rigid division as there will be a need to balance demand.
- Floating support service that is linked to the supported accommodation units to prevent homelessness in parents, help vulnerable families settle into accommodation and link into support networks in their local community and will provide additional 'bolt-on' support to vulnerable families in lower support accommodation where needed.

The proposed service will be for vulnerable parents (of any age) with babies (up to the age of 2 years) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, as well as providing move-on accommodation and/or support to families moving on from parent and child assessment placements. In relation to the latter families, the support the service provides will be informed by any recommendations from the assessment placement and work in partnership with the family's social worker and other practitioners working with the family.

The current level of funding for the floating support element of the integrated service will reduce to allow for additional funding to be provided for additional supported housing in the city for families. The maximum budget envelope for the new integrated service will be £368,000.

Procurement proposal

We propose to commission the integrated homelessness prevention service for vulnerable parents by negotiating with the current provider of the specialist young parents homelessness prevention service (BYPA). We are doing this as market testing has demonstrated that there is a limited market of organisations that can bring suitable accommodation and skills to provide what we seek to procure.

During the consultation for this commissioning plan we sought responses from organisations able and interested in providing 36 units of suitable accommodation, and with the knowledge and skills to provide a medium/high support service to vulnerable families with young children. We issued a PIN (Prior Information Notice) to determine if there were other providers with suitable accommodation and the ability to provide a quality support service to the client group.

This process determined that there were no credible organisations interested in providing, and able to provide, these services, other than the current provider, so we will negotiate with BYPA for the new contract.

The contract will be for three years with the option to extend for up to a further two periods of one year each.

Section E - Whole-system improvements

In addition to the commissioning recommendations set out above, we are working on a number of improvements to the whole-system of assessment and services for vulnerable parents with young children.

	Service improvement
1	BCC social workers will identify how to improve the assessment process for families in assessment placements. This will include how best to identify what will be needed from the family and any services supporting that family if the outcome of the assessment is to be that the family stay together.
2	BCC children's services will liaise with current providers of homelessness prevention services for young parents to agree how to work better together, including making sure assessments and recommendations follow the family as they move on from residential or foster placements as well as how to enable better communication between practitioners. A working protocol may be developed.
3	In order to facilitate timely move on from residential assessments into supported accommodation (reducing spend on residential assessments) commissioners will consider options for covering the costs of voids.
4	Improve the system of referrals into the current BYPA floating support service. Increased focus on working with the wider family (family, friends and relatives who may have asked the family to leave their accommodation) to prevent homelessness.
5	Improving and rationalising the waiting lists on the Housing Support Register so that they more accurately and transparently prioritise nominations into the current BYPA supported accommodation service to households with support needs.

Section F – Other information for providers

Indicative timescale

Activity	Timetable
Service improvements implementation	June 2018
Cabinet approval gained for the commissioning plan	June 2018
Lead in for new in-house services	
New in house fostering service starts	
New residential assessment framework agreement starts	November 2018
Work with new provider to establish residential assessment centre in Bristol	Summer 2019

Social value

The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 places a duty on authorities to consider in their procurement and commissioning processes how public contracts can create wider social, environmental and economic value for the community they serve. In line with our [Social Value Policy](#) any procurement exercises we carry out will consider what social benefits we would expect as a minimum from a provider and in addition, will use our evaluation criteria to review the innovative ideas that will bring added social value to service delivery.