

Finance Urgent Key Decision



Decision of: Section 151 Officer

With advice from: -

Directorate: Children and Education Directorate

Decision no: 034

Subject: Acceptance of £825,416 Grant Funding from DfE for the delivery of Family Finding and Befriending for children in care and care leavers.

Key decision: Yes

Reason Acceptance of funds over £500,000

Background

In August 2023 Children and Families Services submitted two bids to the DfE for funding to deliver:

1. Befriending Service for Care Leavers to be delivered by one of our commissioned service providers via a contract variation (£258k until 31 March 2025)

Social networks have been shown to be as powerful predictors of mortality as common lifestyle and clinical risks such as smoking, alcohol consumption and obesity. It is therefore anticipated that by increasing our care leavers social networks, this will reduce the likelihood of them requiring intervention from both health and adult care services in the future. A cost-benefit study conducted by found that for every £1 of cost, befriending activities generated £2.87 of benefits¹.

2. In house Family Finding for Children in Care (£560k to 31 March 2025).

The programme aims to achieve the following outcomes:

- Children and young people have positive support networks to help during their time in / after care.
- Positive feedback from children
- Improved well-being
- Increased rates of planned reunification.
- Increased placement stability.

An analysis of the twelve highest costing placements for children in care found that all 12 young people had placements made out of authority, and that the majority of them experienced periods of continued placement instability due to multiple breakdowns.

¹ [Microsoft Word - 151215 SVP impact assessment](#)

As well as supporting the children and young people on the programme to develop meaningful relationships, we hope to develop placement stability, enable these young people to continue to be managed in lower level, and lower cost, provision. We have 60 children who have experienced more than three placement moves in the last 12 months, as instability increases we see needs escalate and placement costs rise. Placement cost trajectory will be monitored over the life of the programme, alongside cost avoidance of additional services such as respite carers (instead using family networks) and return home interviews for missing episodes.

Increasing stability also includes the possibility of the child stepping down to lower level provision, reunification, SGOs or kinship care etc. through newly formed relationships. This would save money on expensive out of area residential placements, as well as improving the outcomes for the young people and demonstrate value for money. If just one young person in a residential children's home is reunified home, or exits to Kinship Care / Special Guardianship Order this could save between £180,000-£400,000 per year.

Due to the short bidding window, there was not sufficient time to gain Cabinet agreement to bid and the opportunity to go after the fact was missed. We have since found out the bids were successful. There were delays in the DfE notifying successful authorities and there is now a time pressure to accept and sign grant funding arrangements. Additionally, we are embargoed from publicly announcing our success until approx. February 2024 due to DfE / Treasury restrictions meaning we are seeking an urgent finance decision which can then be publicly reported to Cabinet in February.

Decision

Agreement to accept and spend £825,416 grant funding from the DfE to deliver Befriending to Care Leavers and Family Finding to children in care.

Financial implications

Income generation of £825k until end March 2025 to deliver a programme which has the potential to bring about savings to the children's placement budget.

Legal powers and implications

None anticipated.

Consultation

The bid was put together in consultation with teams across Children and Families Services, Finance and Procurement colleagues.

Risk management

Any additional recruitment undertaken to scale up the in-house teams will be done on a fixed term or secondment arrangement so there is no long term financial risk.

We have consulted with procurement around varying existing contracts for the commissioned element and this is in line with Public Contract Regulations.

Equality implications

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? Yes – no anticipated negative impacts.

Climate change and environmental implications

If children are supported to return home to Bristol, there will be positive environmental implications due to reduced social worker travel and associated emissions.

Corporate implications

This programme aims to support the Children's Transformation programme, by stabilising and reducing the number of children in care this will improve outcomes and impact for our children and young people, whilst reducing our cost of services.

Signatories

Decision maker

Signed:

Note: if an electronic signature is used, an email from the Director confirming a decision and allowing the use of an electronic signature must be attached

S151 Officer

Title: **Director of Finance/S151 Officer**

Signed: D. Murray

Date: 6 December 2023

Consultees

Title: **Deputy Mayor and Cabinet member for Finance, Governance, Property and Culture**

Signed: Cllr Craig Cheney

Date: 5 January 2024

Note: if an electronic signature is used, an email from the relevant certifier confirming consultation and allowing use of electronic signature must be attached. If a consultation is undertaken verbally the Director must record date and time of the conversation and any agreement/concerns raised by the consultee.