

WIRRAL CHILDREN'S TRUST BOARD – 20 NOVEMBER 2009

CONNEXIONS SERVICES CONTRACT

Introduction

This report provides the Trust Board with the outcome of the Competitive Dialogue Process for the commissioning of a Connexions Service for the six Merseyside Authorities for the period January 2010 to 31 March 2012.

This shared approach to managing a service has involved extensive consultation across the Merseyside Authorities and a robust commissioning process managed by external contractors Mott McDonald. The outcome of this process is that all six authorities are seeking approval to award the contract to Greater Merseyside Connexions Service (GMCS).

1. Background

- 1.1 On 25th March 2008, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families wrote to Local Authorities notifying them of interim arrangements for the delivery of 'connexions services' and assessments for young people with learning difficulties from 1st April 2008. The Education and Skills Bill brought about the transfer to Local Authorities of the statutory responsibility of 'connexions services'. Specifically these include :-
- i. The provision of 'connexions services' under Section 114 of the Learning and Skills Act;
 - ii. The conducting of assessments relating to learning difficulties under Section 140 of the Act; and
 - iii. The provision of careers services under Sections 8 and 9 of the Employment and Training Act 1973.
- 1.2 In 2008 legal advice received by the participating Local Authorities indicated that the commissioning of Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership could only occur for 2008 / 2009 and that European Union procurement regulations would need to be followed from 2009 onwards. As a consequence work has been underway to secure the commissioning of 'connexions services' from 2009 – 2012.

It was agreed that Halton Borough Council would act as the lead from this work and that Halton would be the contract holder with the supplier under the new arrangements. Other Authorities would enter into funding agreements with Halton to provide for their share of the costs. This parallels successful existing arrangements for the current contract where Wirral Borough Council acts as the lead.

This work has been overseen by a Transition Steering Group (TSG, chaired by the Chief Executive of Halton, which has comprised of :

Chief Executives – Halton, Liverpool, St Helens
Directors of Children’s Services – Knowsley, Sefton, Wirral
Chair – Chief Executive of Halton Borough Council

and a Competitive Dialogue Team (CDT) made up of Senior Officers from the six authorities, legal, financial and children’s services representation.

- 1.3 Funding had been secured through the Merseyside Improvement Partnership (MEIP) to fund external consultants to both support the process of competitive dialogue and to ensure an independent view. Mott MacDonald were appointed to take on the role of consultants. Following preliminary discussion with the six Merseyside authorities the competitive dialogue started with the establishment of evaluation criteria in March 2009.
- 1.4 During the months of May, June and July 2009 the Competitive Dialogue Team made up of representatives from Merseyside Authorities working under the guidance of Mott MacDonald held workshops for interested providers.

2. Summary

- 2.1 After several rounds of dialogue in early September the final specification was completed and the two providers invited to submit a Best and Final Offer (BAFO). Submissions were received and scored by Mott MacDonald against the evaluation criteria. On 23rd September a Best and Final Offer evaluation report was considered and challenged by the Competitive Dialogue Team.
- 2.2 The recommendation of the team went to the TSG on 24th September and it was agreed that a contract should be agreed with Greater Merseyside Connexions Service.
- 2.3 The contract also allows for the negotiation of Enhanced and Accelerated Services if required and if funding permits. Plans are in place to ensure a successful transition and part of the role of the Integrated Youth Support strategic manager will be to ensure a contract compliance.

3.0 Recommendations:

- 3.1 That Wirral Children’s Trust Board note the resolution of Cabinet to award the contract for a Connexions Service to Greater Merseyside Connexions Service for the period July 2010 to March 2012.

Report Author: Peter Edmondson

Contact: 666 4305

Title: Head of Branch (Participation and Inclusion)

E-Mail: peteredmondson@wirral.gov.uk