

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN – ADVOCACY SERVICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report makes recommendations for approval to commission a Looked after Children's Advocacy Service. The service is a statutory requirement under 1989 Children Act and clarified in the Adoption Act 2002, which should be provided at arms length from the Council. Its purpose is to ensure that *"Children who are looked after have trusted people to whom they can speak on their behalf to local authorities and others."*

The Advocacy service for Looked After Children and Care Leavers is intended to help and support in giving them a voice, this includes support around complaints. The service is available for all Looked After Children and Care Leavers living both on Wirral and outside of Wirral.

Generally such services are provided by Third Sector organisations or Social Enterprises. The proposed provider will make provision for the service to be available to children who are currently Looked After or have been Looked After. The service provider will also carry out information gathering in respect of the views and wishes of Looked After Children to inform the Council's planning for the provision of services to this group.

1. Background

1.1 The Children and Young People's Department Social Care Branch in partnership with allied commissioning agencies and service providers, is reviewing and re-commissioning the Third Sector services it purchases on behalf of children and their families. Two major exercises in respect of such services have already been carried out in 2009; leaving a small number of previously contracted services to be dealt with on an individual basis.

1.2 In line with this a commissioning process was used to identify the prospective providers. The service was advertised in the usual way and tenders were invited from suitably qualified organisations. A commissioning panel was established to identify a successful applicant from amongst the submitted applications that passed an initial, short-listing stage. The commissioning panel had two applicants to choose from:

- Scs Kinder (formerly known as Safecare Children's Services)
- National Youth Advocacy Services

1.3 The procurement process consisted of advertisements in the press and on-line. This was followed by an invitation to prospective providers to submit a method statement and a Pre Qualifying Questionnaire in respect of their proposed provision of the service. The applications were scrutinised and marked by the lead officer and a member of the Contracts Unit. The second stage of the selection process consisted of an interview during which set questions were presented to the applicants and a ten minute presentation was made by the applicant to the panel. The applicants had been notified of the subject to be addressed in their invitation to appear before the panel a fortnight in advance. The selection panel consisted of officers from the Children and Young People's Department and Independent Chair NHS Wirral, which included the lead officer and two others who had previously not been involved in the process.

2 The Commissioning Process

2.1 The service was commissioned as follows:

- Tender advertised 20th May 2009
- Closing date 25th June 2009
- Desk top evaluations 1st July 2009
- Interviews/Panel 20th July 2009

2.2 A total of two tender documents were received by the closing date; although initially approximately a dozen organisations requested tender packs to be sent to them.

2.3 Both applications were of a high standard and passed the Pre Qualifying Questionnaire. There was a gap of only 3 points between the applicants; Scs Kinder scored 102 points and NYAS 105 points. As a result both tenderers were referred on the next stage of the process.

2.4 At the next stage of the process both organisations had been asked in advance to prepare a ten minute presentation on the following topic: *“Describe the attitudes; attributes and experiences required of a person carrying out the role of an advocate for Looked After Children. How would these contribute to the well being of a Looked After Child?”*

2.5 Both organisations were also asked the same set of questions which were intended to draw out the knowledge and understanding of the organisation in respect of the requirements of an Advocacy Service for Looked after Children. Each organisation was scored on the presentation and the questions. The final scores from both stages of the process.

- Scs Kinder 154
- NYAS 147

3. Recommendation of the Commissioning Panel

3.1 The panel recommends that that the identified preferred provider; Scs Kinder be awarded the contract for one year.

3.2 There is an option to extend the Contract for a second year upon satisfactory completion of the first year's provision of the service.

3.3 That the unsuccessful bidder; NYAS, are given appropriate feedback.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 The funding for the service was advertised as £61, 943 from Social Care Branch (with a yearly increase to take account of inflation if the Council's finances allow) and the applicants included the cost of staffing the service in their tenders.

5. Staffing Implications

5.1 There are no staffing implications for the Council. If the recommended provider is approved there will be no TUPE implications as they are the existing provider and employer of the existing staff.

6. Equal Opportunities Implications

6.1 Looked After Children are amongst the most vulnerable children and young people both on Wirral or in placements outside Wirral and the service is specifically intended to promote equality of opportunity.

7. Community Safety Implications

7.1 The service is intended to promote both inclusion and social cohesion and would be expected to have positive effects in terms of building safer communities.

8. Local Agenda 21 Implications

8.1 There are no significant implications.

9. Planning Implications

9.1 There are no significant implications.

10. Anti Poverty Implications

10.1 Looked After Children have been specifically identified as likely to suffer the effects of poverty throughout their lives unless specific steps are taken to prevent this. The advice and assistance available from this service would be (in part) directed towards this end.

11. Social Inclusion Implications

The planned services will contribute to social inclusion by supporting Looked After Children and Care Leavers in having a voice

12. Local Member Support Implications

12.1 This report affects all wards.

13. Background papers

None.

14. RECOMMENDATIONS:

14.1 That the board recommend the approval of the award of the contract to the identified preferred provider, Scs Kinder for one year.

14.2 That the unsuccessful bidder; NYAS, are given appropriate feedback in respect of their tender.

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