

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 16th MARCH 2010

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT 0-19 COMMISSIONING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report responds to the recommendations made at the meeting of the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 April 2009, convened to consider the call-in of the 0-19 Parenting and Prevention Commissioning process. Members identified a number of areas for development to be learnt and specifically requested a report in due course on the outcome of the LINK Forums review of the procurement process.

1. Background

This report responds to the issues identified at the meeting of the Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 20 April 2009 to consider the Call In of the 0-19 Parenting and Prevention Commissioning process. This was the first time that the Children and Young People's Department and NHS Wirral had embarked on a joint commissioning process, aligning relevant budgets from each agency totalling £3,024,713.00

Members highlighted that although there were some "elements of the process that were unsatisfactory and would need to be addressed in the future, those elements had not caused any real disadvantage. They stated "...In effect, the shortcomings in what was otherwise a robust process had not made a difference to the outcome". The LINK Forum canvassed their members (and held a meeting in June 2009 to consider their views about the process, and produced a report. This report has been considered at the regular meetings held between the Local Authority and LINK Forum Management Team to ensure that their views and findings were incorporated into future commissioning exercises. The LINK Forum's report recognised that although there is "still a way to go" significant progress had been made.

The four areas for learning highlighted by Members are shown below and they are also the key themes from the Link Forum Review. Each of these issues will be dealt with in turn, so that the significant learning can be shown.

- the timing of the process
- the overall timing allowed for tendering
- slight confusion in the wording of the tender documents
- and delays in providing answers to queries and feedback

2 The Four Areas for Learning

2.1 The Timing of the Process, Including the Overall Timing Allowed for Tendering

Since the 0-19 Parenting and Prevention commissioning process there have been a significant number of other commissioning activities, such as Aiming High for Disabled Children, Positive Activities for Young People, the Activity Fund and the timing of these processes has been managed much better. The original issue, raised through

the process subject to the call-in, was that organisations were given only 5 weeks from advert to the completion and submission of their tenders and the process spanned the Christmas holiday period. We have taken this learning into account in subsequent commissioning processes and have been mindful of the need to allow more time, wherever possible and to ensure that there are no significant holiday periods during the time allocated.

The timeline for all commissioning processes since this date have been shared with the Link Forum representative in advance of the date of publication in the local press. Documentation has been issued in sufficient time to allow 28 days for completion and submission, in accordance with the contract Procedure rules. A recent example of this has been the commissioning of the Activity Fund Plus which had a timeline of 11th November 2009 for advert, closing date for Pre Qualifying Questionnaire 15th December, 2009. Short listed applicants received the tender documentation on 12th February with a closing date of 14th April 2010, allowing just over eight weeks for submission.

2.2 Slight Confusion in the Wording of the Tender Documents

The slight confusion in wording of the tender documents caused anxiety which meant that revised documents were issued due to unfortunate ambiguity in wording. Since then our quality assurance processes has meant that there have not been any queries raised about the wording of tender documents since the 0-19 Parenting and Prevention commissioning process. There has also not been any need to re-issue tender documents or to make addendum's to them. As a direct result of the feedback from the Link Forum, the documentation has been changed. An example of this has been the commissioning process for a family support service for Black and Minority Ethnic Families; in this instance, the method statement was reduced substantially. In the Activity Fund Plus commissioning process, if the organisation submitting a tender, was seeking to increase the work they currently provided the process was simplified, so that they were not required to submit a Pre Qualifying Questionnaire as this information they had already provided. The organisation only needed to provide 'An additional funding application'.

2.3 Delays in Providing Answers to Queries and Feedback

There were delays in providing answers to queries and feedback but since the 0-19 Parenting and Prevention commissioning process a new system to deal with queries and providing answers has been established. Any query is now emailed to a central point and on average has been answered within one day. This answer is then relayed by email, not just to the person asking but to everyone who has received a tender pack as they may also have experienced difficulty with this item. This ensures a fair and consistent approach to any issues raised.

2.4 Additional Issues Raised in the LINK Forum Feedback Report

Another significant issue raised by the Link Forum was that the Local Authority had made changes independently of the Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector (VCF) and in order to ensure this does not happen again, further workshops with the VCF sector have taken place. To further improve communication, the VCF Link Worker has been based in the Children and Young People's Department, for half a day each week with the Youth Commissioning Principal Manager, to ensure an ongoing dialogue.

3 Continuous Improvement of Procurement

- 3.1** In order to ensure that commissioning processes continuously improve the Children and Young People's Department continues to work closely with Corporate Procurement Team in relation to each tendering opportunity. The Corporate Procurement Team are about to launch a new electronic system for tendering and quotations (known as The Chest). This system will allow existing and potential suppliers to view forthcoming contract opportunities for Wirral and other Councils in the North West. The CYPD Contracts Team has been briefed about this new process.
- 3.2** The new process is that any organisation interested in supplying a service to Wirral Council can register online to receive e-mail alerts for all opportunities. Organisations will be able to download documents from the portal and when they have been completed they will be able to upload their finished documents back to the portal. Organisations will be able to amend their submission as many times as they think necessary up until the date and time that the opportunity closes.
- 3.3** The portal is a secure site and organisations will receive an e-mail notification that their submission has been received. There is no charge to organisations for using this service and The Corporate Procurement Team is in the process of emailing the above information to suppliers to advise them of the new procedure and will be providing a training session for the members of the Link Forum to discuss this further and answer any questions they may have before this system goes live.
- 3.4** One of the benefits of this new scheme is that organisations will no longer have to 'trawl' through newspapers looking for adverts as they will be alerted as opportunities arise.

3. Summary

Significant learning has taken place since the first joint commissioning exercise, the 0-19 Parenting and Prevention Commissioning process. This has been informed by feedback from the LINK Forum and elected members consideration of the process at call-in. Regular meetings with the LINK Forum take place to ensure continuous joint learning, and a joint conference is scheduled for late spring. A testimony to the improvements made has been the Aiming High for Disabled Children commissioning process, clear documentation, adequate timescales, and full parental engagement in the panel process, along with partner agencies, including the VCF sector, has resulted in a range of new services being delivered which have received universally positive feedback from children and carers. A presentation has been made to Overview and Scrutiny about Aiming High and this was positively received. It is intended that a further report will be presented in June 2010.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1** There are no direct financial implications arising from this report, however, good commissioning and procurement processes are essential to purchasing services which meet customers needs in a cost effective manner.

5. Staffing Implications

- 5.1** There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

6. Equal Opportunities Implications/Health Impact Assessment

- 6.1 This report demonstrates how the Children and Young People's Department has responded to the concerns by the Link Forum about the commissioning and procurement process which will help to ensure that all organisations are treated fairly and with equity.

7. Community Safety Implications

- 7.1 There are no Community Safety implications arising from this report.

8. Local Agenda 21 Implications

- 8.1 There are no Local Agenda 21 implications arising from this report.

9. Planning Implications

- 9.1 There are no planning implications arising from this report.

10. Anti-poverty Implications

- 10.1 There are no Anti-poverty implications arising from this report.

11. Social Inclusion Implications

- 11.1 There are no Social Inclusion implications arising from this report.

12. Local Member Support Implications

- 12.1 There are no Local Member Support implications arising from this report.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1 Minutes of Children's Services and Lifelong Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 20th April 2009.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That:

- (1) Members note and comment on the improvements made to the commissioning and procurement process.

Howard Cooper
Director of Children's Services