

OFFICER DECISION FORM

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY: DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN FAMILY AND EDUCATION SERVICES

KEY DECISION Yes

DIRECTORATE: CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL WARDS

SUBJECT: DIRECT CONTRACT AWARD VIA YORKSHIRE PURCHASING ORGANISATION (YPO) FRAMEWORK WITH REED TALENT SOLUTIONS LTD.

1.0 DECISION:

The Director of Children, Family and Education Services has approved that a direct award is made to Reed Talent Solutions Ltd. via the YPO Framework Managing Consultancy and Professional Services lot, to provide locum educational psychologists for children and young people undergoing the education, health, and care plan needs assessment process within statutory time frame for a 15 month contract at an estimated cost of £926,250.

2.0 REASONS FOR THE DECISION

- 2.1 Educational Psychologists are critical in identifying special educational needs and disability (SEND) and providing a statutory contribution to Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA). When the Council carries out EHCNA they must obtain all the information set out in Regulation 6(1) of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 (the "SEN Regs"). This includes "psychological advice and information from an educational psychologist" (regulation 6(1)(d)). The advice provided must be given within six weeks of the date of the request.
- 2.2 There is a national shortage of educational psychologists. The Council currently has eight Educational Psychologist vacancies, and this, along with an increasing demand of requests, and an increase of complex needs in Wirral children, has led to a backlog of outstanding assessments and advices required to meet statutory requirements for children with SEND in the EHCNA process.
- 2.3 As of September 2024, the number of final plan Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued has increased steadily from 141 in 2019 to the latest full year reporting for 2023, to 368. This is an increase between 2019 and 2023 of over 260%. Educational Psychology advices completed in 6 weeks have seen rates below 30% the past two full years with the trajectory reducing into 2024/25. The latest data from Q1 2024/25 shows 11.6% of advices within 6 weeks. Advices in Social care have remained well above 90% for the same time period and for health advices the

levels have fluctuated between 100% compliance to lows of 24% for the six services offering this support.


- 2.4 There are specific actions and success measures identified in the Wirral Improvement notice (May 2024) issued by the Care Quality Commission to strengthen the quality and timeliness of Education, Health, and Care assessments and annual reviews before the next Ofsted Local Area SEND inspection.
- 2.5 The Wirral SEND strategy sets out strategic priorities for Wirral's children and young people. One of these priorities is to 'Ensure early identification of special education needs and high-quality intervention particularly for children and young people exhibiting social, emotional, and mental health issues.'
- 2.6 For the financial year 2024/25, Reed Talent Solutions Ltd. was commissioned to deliver 350 assessments across a 12-month period for the Council. By December 2024, Reed has overdelivered on this target and the existing budget has been exhausted. It is necessary to re-commission this service early in order to maximise the service deliverables.

3.0 STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The decision was made further to legal advice from the Deputy Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been completed. The decision reflects the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

4.0 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

Signed: 

Officer: Elizabeth Hartley

Title: Director of Children, Family and Education Services

Date: 06.01.2025

A list of background papers on this issue is held with:

Contact Officer: Catherine O'Connor

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