


## REPORT TO CABINET

27 May 2020

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Subject:</b>                                       | <b>Children's Centres Contracts</b>   |
| <b>Presenting Cabinet Member:</b>                     | <b>Councillor Joyce Underhill, Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life</b>  |
| <b>Director:</b>                                      | <b>Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's Services</b>   |
| <b>Contribution towards Vision 2030:</b>              |   |
| <b>Key Decision:</b>                                  | Yes   |
| <b>Cabinet Member Approval and Date:</b>              | Councillor Joyce Underhill - Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life: 29.4.20   |
| <b>Director Approval:</b>                             | Lesley Hagger, Executive Director of Children's Services: 29.4.20   |
| <b>Reason for Urgency:</b>                            | The Coronavirus 'shut down' has meant that consultation on future provision and an associated procurement process are not possible. |
| <b>Exempt Information Ref:</b>                        | No exemption provisions apply   |
| <b>Ward Councillor (s) Consulted (if applicable):</b> | Ward councillors have not been consulted  |
| <b>Scrutiny Consultation Considered?</b>              | Councillor Rajbir Singh, Chair – Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board   |
| <b>Contact Officer(s):</b>                            | Peter Forth, Senior Commissioning Manager<br>peter_forth@sandwell.gov.uk<br>0121 569 2034   |

### DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

**That Cabinet:**

1. Authorise the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to agree a 12-month extension to the existing children's centre contracts until 31 March 2022.

## **1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The current contracts for the operation of the core Children's Centre services in Sandwell expire at the end of March 2021. A re-procurement process should start in May 2020 but this is not possible.
- 1.2 Unfortunately, the Coronavirus (CoVid-19) situation has led to major delays in undertaking the necessary consultation with elected members and the local community.
- 1.3 SMBC Procurement have duly advised that in these circumstances Cabinet should be asked to approve an extension to the existing children's centre contracts for a further 12 months until 31 March 2022.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is for Cabinet to approve the extension of the contracts for 12 months.

## **2 IMPLICATION FOR THE COUNCIL'S AMBITION**

- 2.1 Fundamentally the children's centre service provides a strong base for the council's ambitions in relation to children benefitting from a good start to life.
- 2.2 This ranges from antenatal education groups for new parents-to-be, through to baby clinics run by Health Visitors and joint work with colleagues for the delivery of Baby Massage classes for parents with young babies designed to encourage attachment and promote communication and early language.
- 2.3 The Council's new Corporate Plan 'Big Plans for a Great Place' makes a commitment to the continued provision of early years services through an Early Years Transformation Academy approach.

## **3 BACKGROUND AND MAIN CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 In 2016 a tender process was undertaken to identify suitable organisations to operate the core children's centres in Sandwell. The contracts subsequently awarded commenced on 1 April 2017. The contracts were for a total of 4 years and had a total contract value of £15,322,980.
- 3.2 There are seven core children's centres in the borough. One in each town with two in West Bromwich due to the size of the area.
- 3.3 The core centres are then grouped together into three lots to reduce administration and management costs. The three lots are:

- Oldbury and Smethwick
- Rowley and Tipton
- Wednesbury and West Bromwich

3.4 The three lots are currently operated by two voluntary sector organisations namely Action for Children (who run two lots) and Murray Hall Community Trust.

3.5 Summary of core centres

| <b>Name of centre</b>                | <b>Address</b>                    | <b>Lead agency</b>             |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Burnt Tree Children's Centre         | Tividale Street<br>Burnt Tree     | Action for Children            |
| Cape Hill Children's Centre          | Corbett Street<br>Smethwick       | Action for Children            |
| Rowley Springfield Children's Centre | Dudley Road<br>Rowley Regis       | Murray Hall<br>Community Trust |
| Tipton Children's Centre             | Ridgeway Road<br>Tipton           | Murray Hall<br>Community Trust |
| Friar Park Children's Centre         | Dorsett Road<br>Wednesbury        | Action for Children            |
| Hillside Children's Centre           | Connor Road<br>West Bromwich      | Action for Children            |
| Greets Green Children's Centre       | Off Claypit Lane<br>West Bromwich | Action for Children            |

## 4 THE CURRENT POSITION

4.1 Core children's centres in Sandwell provide a range of early years services namely:

- Information and advice about local services
- Antenatal education and support
- Early Years support to families with a particular focus on speech and language development
- Access to Health Services eg Midwifery and Health Visitor clinics and general health promotion
- Family Support at differing levels dependent on need
- Benefits advice and support through Sandwell Consortium
- Promotion of active volunteering to help people to take steps towards further education and employment

4.2 If Cabinet agree to extend the current contract as per the recommendations of the report the role of centres will continue as detailed above.

## 5 **CONSULTATION (CUSTOMERS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS)**

- 5.1 The issues noted in the report have been subject to consultation with colleagues internally.
- 5.2 Wider consultation with other stakeholders and families will take place later in the year as part of the development of an options appraisal and subsequent tender process.

## 6 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

### 6.1 **Immediately commence a re-procurement exercise**

An alternative solution would be for Cabinet to approve the commencement of the procurement process for a new provider of children's centre services with immediate effect.

- 6.2 This option would fail to capture the direction of travel for the future delivery of children's centres as part of the Council's new Corporate Plan due to the lack of time available to consult on options. That consultation would include elected members, partner agencies and parents. The necessary specification for the service would need to be drawn up prior to the commencement of the tender process.

### 6.3 **Bring the service in-house**

An alternative solution would be to bring the operation of core children's centres into the local authority. This would require the TUPE transfer of existing children's centre staff that meet the TUPE requirements into the local authority.

- 6.4 By bringing the service in-house it would remove the requirement to go out to tender to seek appropriate providers. This would save time in the long run and give stability so that staff have greater certainty about their long-term security however it would greatly impact the voluntary and community sector offer.
- 6.5 Bringing the service in house would however be extremely complicated and would require considerable input from legal, finance and Human Resources services at a time when the council's focus must be elsewhere.

## 6.6 **Extend contracts but for a shorter period**

A further option would be to extend contracts for a shorter period for example 6-9 months.

- 6.7 This option was considered but was discounted due to the current lack of certainty about when the necessary consultation could be completed. The longer 12-month timescale gives more assurance that the work can be completed and carefully considered prior to the next Report to Cabinet in 2021.

## 7 **STRATEGIC RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Subject to the Cabinet's decision to extend the contracts, the sum for 2021/22 would be the same as the core children's centre budget for 2020/21 as set out in the table below. This will take first call and will be accommodated within the Children's Directorate budget allocation for 2021/22.

|                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Oldbury/Smethwick        | £1,111,838        |
| Rowley/Tipton            | £ 964,860         |
| Wednesbury/West Bromwich | £1,118,222        |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>£3,194,920</b> |

- 7.2 An additional £3,194,920 will be added to the original contract value. The total contract value will now be £18,517,900.
- 7.3 It is envisaged that demand for children's centre services will increase due to the economic recession brought about by Covid-19. The local authority will duly work with the existing service providers to prioritise the different aspects of service delivery as necessary.

## 8 **LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS**

- 8.1 Section 5A of the Childcare Act 2006 states that local authorities must make arrangements, as far as practicable, for 'sufficient provision of children's centres to meet local needs.' The proposals in this report do not conflict with that duty.
- 8.2 The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR 2015) Section 72 (1) (c) allows for modification of existing contracts without a new procurement procedure being undertaken where all of the following conditions are fulfilled:
- i) The need for modification has been brought about by circumstances which a diligent contracting authority could not have foreseen;

- ii) The modification does not alter the overall nature of the contract;
- iii) Any increase in price does not exceed 50% of the value of the original contract.

In this particular case, the reason for the modification is the impact of Covid-19 on the consultation process, which could not have been anticipated. The overall nature of the contract remains the same. The original contract value was £15,322,980 and the increase in contract value that results in this modification is £3,194,920 which does not exceed 50% of the original contract value. The requirements of PCR 2015 Section 72 (1) (c) are fulfilled.

## **9 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) initial screening has been undertaken. The screening identified that there will be no adverse impact on people or groups with protected characteristics because of the proposals contained within the report.
- 9.2 The extension of the contracts as proposed in this report will enable children's centre services to be continued to be offered across the borough as currently.
- 9.3 A full EIA is not therefore required.

## **10 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 10.1 The proposals in this report will not affect the existing data protection arrangements working with the contracted voluntary sector agencies.

## **11 CRIME AND DISORDER AND RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 11.1 There are no significant crime and disorder implications in extending the current contracts with providers as proposed in this report.
- 11.2 The Corporate Risk Management Strategy (CRMS) has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision / project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.

Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that no significant risks have been identified.

- 11.3 The proposal to extend the contracts for a further 12 months falls outside the usual contract and procedure rules. This is addressed however as detailed in 8.2 of the report in relation to the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.
- 11.4 As existing providers with no major concerns about performance over the past 4 years there are limited risks in extending their contracts for a further 12 months

## **12 SUSTAINABILITY OF PROPOSALS**

- 12.1 The proposal in this report enables the authority to continue to offer children's centre services as detailed while the originally planned review and consideration of future options is considered.
- 12.2 A further report about children's centre services will be tabled for consideration by Cabinet in early 2021 with an options appraisal in preparation for conducting a tender process later that year.

## **13 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIAL VALUE)**

- 13.1 Children's Centre have a very broad remit in supporting young children and their families. A range of activities and services are designed to offer both early help at a universal level and targeted support as necessary working alongside our partner agencies.

## **14 IMPACT ON ANY COUNCIL MANAGED PROPERTY OR LAND**

- 14.1 There are existing leases between the local authority and the existing providers in relation to the core children's centres. These would continue to run in tandem with the associated children's centre contracts.

## **15 CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 15.1 The current contracts expire at the end of March 2021 and a re-procurement process should start in May 2020 but this is not possible.
- 15.2 The recommendation will allow time for future consultation with elected members about the future role of children's centres as part of the Corporate Plan.
- 15.3 The recommendation to authorise the extension of existing contracts would stability and consistency to current children's centre providers over this period and ensure that families can continue to access services.

## 16 BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 None

## 17 APPENDICES:

### Appendix 1 of 1 - Sample performance data

## Lesley Hagger Executive Director – Children’s Services

## 17 APPENDICES:

### 17.1 Sample performance data

### 17.2 Antenatal Education Groups

In 2019/20 there was a total of 428 bookings for our Antenatal Education Groups with a completion rate of 75% for those attending the courses.

17.3 The evaluation of the courses showed a major increase in attenders confidence in caring for their baby, bonding with their child and being a parent. They also had greater awareness of where to go for support.

### 17.3 Play, talk, read (PTR) programme.

In Quarter 3 of 19/20 our proactive pre-school PTR programme, designed to support and encourage parents in developing their child’s language, worked with 1397 children and their parents.

17.4 The evaluation in Q1 showed that parents reading or sharing a book with their child rose by 19%; parents singing songs and rhymes to their child rose by 13% and children making marks, drawing and painting at home rose by 12%

### 17.5 Family Support programmes.

In 2019/20 the centres had a caseload of over 500 families per quarter. In each quarter the centres had an average of 150 cases where a member of children’s centre staff acted as the Lead Professional for the associated multiagency support package

17.6 The service uses the Outcomes Star to measure the impact of the centre’s work with families. Over 85% of families had a positive score at the end of their involvement with the service.



## 17.7 Joint work with Sandwell Consortium

Sandwell Consortium work from the children's centres to deliver welfare rights advice and support to local families.

In 2019/20 (to February 2020) a total of £112,996 of additional benefits have been claimed by children's centre families.

## 17.8 Volunteers

17.9 Children's Centres encourage parents to come forward as volunteers for the service to develop their own experience, learn new skills, undertake training and build their self-confidence. This can be a vital stepping stone towards further education and future employment. We now have a number of staff that have come through that route into posts within the service.

17.10 There are currently 61 regular volunteers working across the children's centres in the borough.

## 17.11 Impact of Covid-19

17.12 Although the children's centres are largely closed at present the service has continued to operate. Regular contact has been maintained with our family support cases on at least a weekly basis with some families being contacted on three times a week as necessary

17.13 Other families that utilise services are being contacted and duly supported as necessary. Families are expressing their gratitude for the proactive contact from centre staff.

17.14 Staff are adapting to the situation and many of our groups are starting up again but are now being provided on line. All parents that were due to start a parenting group have been contacted and 60% have signed up to do the course by telephone or video calls.

17.15 Parents due to start the latest PTR programmes are being sent 6 weekly packs accompanied by staff telephone support and a series of live feeds eg singing, story-telling

17.16 Follow up sessions for children who have been subject to Wellcomm (speech and language) screening are also being offered through video calls. Again these are being well received and each child is given tailored support as necessary.

**Lesley Hagger**  
**Executive Director – Children’s Services**