

REPORT OF
The Strategic Director for People
TO
Procurement Board
ON
25th November 2020

TITLE: Approval for an Exception to Contractual Standing Orders to award a contract for the Safe Families for Children Service

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Procurement Board approves an exception to Contractual Standing Orders as permitted within the City Council Constitution for the reasons highlighted in the table below and the award of the contract for the Safe Families for Children service as detailed in the table below:

Detail required	Answers
Title/Description of Contracted Service/Supply/Project	Safe Families for Children Service
Name of Successful Contractor	Safe Families For Children
Supplier Registration Number <i>(to be supplied by Corporate Procurement)</i>	TBC
Type of organisation <i>(to be supplied by Corporate Procurement)</i>	Registered Charity
Status of Organisation <i>(to be supplied by Corporate Procurement)</i>	Non-SME
Contract Value	£60,000 Per Annum (estimated average)
Contract Duration	12 months
Contract Start Date	01/04/2021
Contract End Date	31/03/2022
Optional Extension Period 1	12 Months
Optional Extension Period 2	Not applicable

Detail required	Answers
Who will approve each Extension Period?	Strategic Director (extension < £150k)
Contact Officer (Name & number)	Rachel Shearn 686 5257 / Steve Titley 793 2435
Lead Service Group	People Services
Reason for CSO Exception (select all that apply)	<p>The goods / services / works are only obtainable from one provider and there is no other provider available to allow genuine competition <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The execution of works or the supply of goods or services is controlled by a statutory body <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Delivers Best Value to the Council <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Special education, health or social care contracts, if it is considered in the Council's best interests and to meet the Council's obligations under relevant legislation <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>The execution of works or the supply of goods and services is required so urgently as not to permit compliance with the requirements of competition <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Security works where the publication of documents or details in the tendering process could prejudice the security of SCC and Salford residents <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Procurements made through, or on behalf of, any consortium, local authority, statutory or similar body, provided that tenders or quotations are invited and contracts placed in accordance with national or EU legislation. <input type="checkbox"/></p>
Funding Source	Choose an item.
Ethical Contractor	<p>Mayor's Employment Charter <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Committed to sign up to the Charter <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Accredited Living Wage Employer <input type="checkbox"/></p>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to request an exception to Contractual Standing Orders to approve the award of a contract for the Safe Families for Children Service for the reasons detailed below.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Report of the Strategic Director for People to Procurement Board on 8th November 2017 - Approval for an Exception to Contractual Standing Orders to award a contract for the Safe Families For Children Service.

KEY DECISION: No.

DETAILS:

Introduction

The Safe Families for Children (SFFC) programme was developed, tested and supported under a Public Social Partnership (PSP) between Safe Families For Children (developed by The Vardy Foundation) and the Department for Education (DFE), which provided the Innovation Funding that paid for the programme's first year of operation (2015/16). SFFC offers bespoke packages of support delivered through a network of volunteers providing a community solution for families in crisis, or in need of support. The 3 broad areas of support delivered by the project are:

Befriending - providing emotional and practical support to adults and children through family support activities which can include taking the children out to enjoy activities on their own

Short hosting stays for children – no more than 28 days (the limit where private fostering arrangements / regulations come into play)

Practical family resources – donations of basic goods and services to support family life

Early Help Assessments – more recently SFFC has also begun to take the role of lead agency in some Early Help interventions, making first contact and taking the lead in assessment and needs planning with some families to save the Council's Early Help team further time and resources.

SFFC volunteers work with families, alongside Council Family Support Workers (FSW) and Social Workers (SW) to provide less formal guidance, encouragement and emotional and practical support between meetings, supporting the delivery of support plans across all thresholds of social work need. Care is taken to avoid duplication with any wider multi-agency support. SFFC also provide qualified social worker input / supervision for cases that their volunteers work on and SFFC staff also attend Team Around the Child/CIN/CP and LAC meetings to ensure that their work is embedded into the plan for the family.

Procurement Board previously approved an exception to award a contract extension with SFFC from 01.04.18 to 31.03.21, continuing the original provision beyond its initial start date of 01.11.15. In light of the successes of the current delivery, the unique and complementary support that the programme provides and the added value gained from more recent integration of the provision into wider Early Help provision (further described below) the request is that the contract is extended as requested.

Another key element of the request has been the effect of Covid 19 on the vulnerable families helped over the last 6 months who will continue to be impacted during the second wave. SFFC kept cases open through the first wave that were due to close to continue to provide support and reduce social isolation and provided £8,500 in food and other goods for families over the period.

It would be a risk to families at this unpredictable time to potentially break relationships formed with SFFC and with the proposed extension having a notice period of 3 months at any time, rather than the usual 6 months, this gives still further flexibility with the contract. Children's Services would continue to monitor delivery and would return to Procurement Board in 20/21 to request a competitive process to further test the market (rather than action the optional extension up to 31.03.23) if that were the prudent decision in light of Covid 19 developments and market conditions at the time.

A specialist service that has delivered valuable outcomes

- The service continues to be a unique and complementary one to more formal/intensive Council interventions such as DISC and Helping Families. It is also unique among external market options such as Homestart or Family Action that can't provide the same level of responsive volunteer mentoring or evening or weekend support *along with* overnight hosting. A scan of the market has not found a similar combination of provision.
- This uniqueness has enabled the service to make a significant contribution to family and children outcomes. Since 1st April 2018, 170 families (including 386 children, with 177 overnight hostings) have been supported in some way and, as part of that, SFFC is on target to have materially contributed to the progress of 129 families against at least two Troubled Families framework outcomes over the current 3 years of provision to 31.03.21.
- The SFFC service has also more recently in 20/21 broadened its offer to take the lead on Early Help Assessments with some families, so becoming the first point of contact and lead agency for 22 families to date.
- The SFFC service is also able to utilise its large cohort of 85 (Social Work manager-supervised) volunteers to provide extra support, often at unsocial hours (estimated 7,160 hours since 01.04.18, with 70% of hours in evenings or weekends), as well as offering a long term (on average 8.5 months, up from 6 months at the start of the current contract) relationship with the family in order to sustain and embed positive changes. In addition, volunteers also complete practical tasks that other interventions can't help with, such as house cleaning and decorating which help to further stabilise families and also source charitable donations to help with household expenses.

Value for money reasons

- The estimated 7,160 hours of support given to the 170 families helped to date on the current contact equates to a notional cost of £113,844 in staffing costs at the cost of a Council Family Support Worker of £15.90 an hour.
- In addition it is worth noting that although overnights are welcome added value not all 177 provided would have been deemed essential under standard Early Help assessments External fostering costs an average of £118 per night.

- It's estimated that 48 of the cases that SFFC have helped with to date (with more potentially to come) have contributed to successful Troubled Families outcomes against the funding claim from that programme.
- From 01.04.18 to date, £13,000 worth of goods and resources has been given to vulnerable families via SFFC fundraising, £8,500 of which during the Covid 19 crisis when fundraising and help was stepped up at a particularly difficult time for families.
- SFFC becoming first point of contact for 22 families during 2020 to date and leading on Early Help Assessments has also saved further time and resources for Early Help teams in the Council.
- The Early Help service is in the process of setting up an Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) programme in Salford whereby volunteer parents train to become parenting mentors for families that need support and SFFC is now working with Early Help to see how it can help with the recruitment, training and support for EPEC volunteers, thus providing further added value from the contract.
- The initial governmental CBA for this provision indicated a £3.78 in return for the LA and partners for every £1 invested and a 10% reduction in the flow of children into care. This research was ultimately not completed due to not enough 'edge of care' cases being processed but did include qualitative findings about positive impacts and concluded that SFFC had great potential to link the resources of civil society to help with the challenges of public delivery.

Continued measurement of impact and management of risk

- Early Intervention and Prevention Services would continue to monitor the impact and outcomes on the families worked with on a monthly basis throughout the life of a new contract.
- The requested extension of up to 2 years based on a 1+1 contract at £60K p.a. would give some stability for both the Council and the vulnerable families it supports, especially during the current uncertainty caused by the Covid 19 crisis.
- The contract will continue be subject to a 3 month rather than standard 6 month notice period, giving still more flexibility and an option for review, including the potential re-tendering of provision in 21/22 as an alternative to the optional extension to 31.03.23, subject to developments with Covid 19 and market conditions at the time.

Other options considered and rejected were

- The option of decommissioning the service at the end of the current contract on 31.03.21 was rejected due to the ongoing need for support for vulnerable families, especially as the uncertainty caused by Covid 19 continues.
- The option of going out to competition for delivery from 01.04.21 was rejected because of the proven, ongoing unique and complementary support the current provider was offering during current uncertain times but the option to go out to competition in 21/22 rather than take up the optional extension to 31.03.23 remains, depending on the situation with Covid 19 and market conditions at the time.

Social Value

- SFFC provision is only made possible by volunteers. SFFC currently has around 85 volunteers (estimated 7,160 volunteer hours, 70% evenings and weekends) dedicated to its Salford provision working from its base at the Audacious Church at Trinity Way, Salford. This contributes to the Council's policy to make a difference in Salford through volunteering through its 10% better campaign.
- The £13,000 in goods and services support since 01.04.18 has also helped alleviate poverty.
- Social Value will continue to be monitored throughout the contract delivery.

Conclusion

- SFFC offers vulnerable children and families in Salford the opportunity to engage with opportunities they may otherwise struggle to access.
- It allows children the chance to live in a more stable family through provision of practical and emotional support to their parents.
- It focuses on helping children and their wider family make stronger connections to the community networks around them in an attempt to provide better protection and support and have less reliance on specialist local authority services.
- The project complements and extends support offered through the local authority, giving children and families a gradual reduction in support with the aim of a longer-term resolution of their support needs.
- It is a unique service that, through providing hours of targeted support and , financial help, is reducing demand and costs for Salford services as well as contributing to improved outcomes for children and families.
- The developments with SFFC taking the lead with 22 families from Early Help Assessment onwards and also supporting the EPEC programme are now adding to the value gained from the contract.
- 7 other GM/NW LAs including Manchester are currently contracting with SFFC and future options for re-commissioning of a service by competitive process will include consideration of the potential for joint commissioning with AGMA/NW authorities to provide still greater value for money and impact.
- The option of a flexible extension from 01.04.21 (including a 3 month notice period) gives the best balance between continued impact, value and stability of relationships and provision at this uncertain time alongside the option of a future competitive tender for provision from (or before) 01.04.23.

KEY	COUNCIL	POLICIES:	Early	Help	Strategy.
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EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:- Take up continues to be representative of the diversity of caseload of the wider Early Help team.

ASSESSMENT OF RISK: If the service isn't extended then there will be an increase on the demands on social work teams, with 67 families being engaged with by SFFC at the current time. Also, as discussed above, with the Covid 19 crisis currently entering a second wave it would be a risk in uncertain times to interrupt the relationships formed between SFFC, early help professionals in the Council and the families they serve.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

Existing budget provision of £60k p.a. within the Locality Team revenue budget (South Team).

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS Supplied by: Tony Hatton, Principal Solicitor, tel. 219 6323

Section 17 of Children Act 1989 provides that It is the general duty of every local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need and so far as is consistent with that duty to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs. This programme is consistent with the local authorities' responsibilities pursuant to s17 Children Act. The Council must satisfy itself that Safe Families has appropriate safeguarding procedures in place and that there is evidence available to the Council and recorded that such procedures are adhered to.

Ordinarily when commissioning contracts for the procurement of goods, services or the execution of works the Council as a 'contracting authority' must comply with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 as well as the provisions of its own Contractual Standing Orders (CSO's), Financial Regulations and the duties of Best and Social value. In addition, whilst these services fall within the "light touch regime", the PCR require that contracting authorities treat candidates equally and in a non-discriminatory way and act in a transparent manner, failing which the award of a contract may be subject to legal challenge.

However in exceptional circumstances where CSO's permit, the Council may dispense with strict compliance of its CSO's, and the report sets out the reasons for the request for the exception, in accordance with paragraph 3.1 of CSO's. Whilst exceptions to CSO's may be authorised by an approval from the Procurement Board, there is still a risk of challenge from aggrieved providers if the usual tender process has not been followed on the basis that it ought to have been advertised and put out to competition.

The risk of challenge increases with the value and duration of a proposed contract being awarded. The report sets out the reasons for the need to enter this contract, the benefits and the social value to the Greater Manchester region, and also states the reasons for the request for exception, such as the urgency required in appointing Safe Families for Children and the specialist nature of the services, which are only available from them.

The Council is also under a best value duty to carry out its functions economically, efficiently and effectively with the objective to achieve value for money in all public procurement. The Council has considered the circumstances in this matter and

concluded that the recommendation to award the contract to Safe Families for Children is considered to be of least risk and of most benefit to the Council.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: Supplied by: Chris Mee, Strategic Finance Manager Ext 0434

The annual cost of this contract extension (£60k pa) can be met from within existing budget provision within the Locality Teams (South Team) revenue budget

PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS Supplied by: Christopher Conway, Procurement Category Manager, tel. 0161 686 6248.

Procurement are happy to approve the recommendation for an exception to allow the council to continue to contract with Safe Families for an additional 12 months for period 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 with an option to extend for an additional 12 months for period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 for the reasons stated in the report.

It is noted that the Commissioning team will be undertaking a review of this contract within the next 6 to 12 months and will exploring potential collaborative opportunities across AGMA prior to any decision being made with regards to taking up the extension option outlined in this report.

HR IMPLICATIONS: not applicable.

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS: Supplied by: Michael Hemingway, Principal Officer, Climate Change tel: 0161 793 3209

Volunteers are recruited from within the local area to reduce travel to and from supported families homes as much as is possible. In addition, increasingly remote support via phone calls and video calls (where appropriate) has been made use of, especially during Covid 19 and this has reduced car journeys.

OTHER DIRECTORATES CONSULTED: Not applicable.

CONTACT OFFICERS: Rachel Shearn, Early Help Locality Manager, 0161 686 5257 / Steve Tittley Commissioning Manager, 0161 793 2435

WARD(S) TO WHICH REPORT RELATE(S): All.
