

Decision Record – Framework of Independent Psychological and Social Work Assessments

Cabinet Portfolio Holder taking the decision	Cllr Peter Butlin Deputy Leader - Finance & Property
Date of Decision (not before 18 August 2017)	29/08/2017

Decision Taken

That the Deputy Leader (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property):

1. Approves proceeding with an appropriate procurement process for the provision of an Independent Psychological and Social Work Assessments Service.
2. Approves and authorises the Strategic Director of People Group to enter into all relevant contracts for the provision of the Independent Psychological and Social Work Assessments Service on terms and conditions acceptable to the Joint Managing Director (Resources).

Reasons for Decisions

Owing to the value of the contract the procurement process requires the permission of the Deputy Leader.

Background Information

Independent expert services are currently used to undertake independent psychological and social work assessments and to provide final reports for use by Children's and Families social workers. These reports are then used in the Public Law Outline (PLO) process or by Legal Services for the court process to inform the care planning for children and their families.

The Family Justice Council identifies the areas for the instruction of expert assessments as follows:

- To describe the factors and mechanisms that would explain the parent's (or primary care givers) harmful or neglectful interactions with the child/ren
- To explain the interventions that have been tried and the consequent result.

The authority currently spot purchase psychological and independent social work assessments. Psychological assessments are to assess whether parents have an understanding of the safeguarding concerns for their children and/or whether they have the capacity to change once they acknowledge those concerns. Social work assessments are usually procured under the direction of the court to provide an independent view on the parent's capabilities or of relatives who might be considered as carers for a child/ren, or to address a specific case management issue such as contact issues or the decision to separate siblings. Occasionally they are commissioned to complete parenting assessments due to lack of capacity within mainstream services.

Using financial information from 2015/16, WCC Children and Families teams spent a total of £390,679 on expert assessments. WCC has seen an increase in the number of expert assessments following the introduction of the Public Law Outline (PLO) process. The PLO process requires assessment reports to be produced prior to going to court, whereas previously a number of assessments would be ordered through the court process and the costs split between the parties.

In addition to anxiety about a spot contract approach to these services there has been concerns about the rates WCC have been charged and the quality of the assessments produced. There is therefore a need to ensure a clear procurement process to achieve better value for money and quality assessments that are completed within the timescales required for care planning in the PLO process and/or the legal process.

The key aim of the tendering process is to bring the costs for expert assessments in line with the agreed Legal Aid rates. In addition the tendering process will stipulate the standard of reports needed and the qualifications and experience required of the experts in order to increase the quality of the assessments.

Financial Implications

The savings targets under the One Organisation Plan 2017 – 2020 for expert assessment are savings of £15,000 in 2017-2018 and a further £15,000 in 2018-2019. Applying the total savings the annual value of the contract per year would be £360,679. Over the life of a four year contract this gives a contract value of £1,442,716.

Report Author	Louise Cunningham
Head of Service	Chris Lewington
Strategic Director	John Dixon
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Peter Butlin

Checklist

Urgent matter?	No
Confidential or Exempt? (State the category of exempt information)	No
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	No

List of Reports considered

Link to published proposed decision report:

<https://democratic.warwickshire.gov.uk/cmis5/CalendarofMeetings/tabid/128/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/645/Meeting/4118/Committee/586/Default.aspx>

List of Background Papers

None

Members and officers consulted or informed – please include any comments

Portfolio Holder – Councillor Peter Butlin

Corporate Board

Legal – Jane Pollard

Finance – John Betts

Equality – Polly Sharma

Democratic Services – Paul Williams

Councillors Butlin, Boad, Timms, Singh Birdi, O'Rourke