

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

21 June 2022

Subject: Children's Centre Services Contract Extension

Cabinet Member: Cllr Laura Mayes Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education and Skills

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

Children's centre services are a vital resource for parents with very young children (aged 0-5). They provide advice and support to families and have been delivered in Wiltshire for 18 years.

There are 11 children's centre buildings operating across the county, and further community spaces where services are delivered across each area, as well as offering services in family homes. National charity Spurgeons are commissioned in the south, east, and west of the county, and local charity The RISE Trust are commissioned in the north of the county to deliver these services.

The children's centre services contracts are due to expire on 31st March 2023.

This paper proposes to extend the contract by one year to allow the development of a Family Hub model to replace children's centre services, which will offer 0-19 services across the county from 1st April 2024 in line with the Government's ambition.

Proposal(s)

It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet agrees to the negotiation of a one-year contract extension with the current children's centre commissioned providers (Spurgeons and The RISE Trust) until 31st March 2024. This will allow officers to undertake due diligence and a full consultation with parents and partners organisations to ensure that the development of Family Hubs in Wiltshire meets the needs of local communities.
2. The decision to award a one-year contract and authority for the completion of all necessary legal documentation is delegated to the Director of Procurement & Commissioning in consultation with the Corporate Director of People, and the Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills. A paper will be presented to Cabinet to recommend

the future Family Hub model following the consultation events later this year.

Reason for Proposal(s)

The Government has committed to championing Family Hubs, which are a way of joining up locally and bringing existing family help services together to improve access to services, connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and putting relationships at the heart of family help.

Family Hubs bring together services for families with children of all ages (0-19) or up to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with a great Start for Life offer at their core. They can include hub buildings and virtual offers, but the following principles are key to the family hub model:

- **More accessible**

- through clearly branded and communicated hub buildings, virtual offers, and outreach.

- **Better connected**

- family hubs drive progress on joining up professionals, services, and providers (state, private, voluntary) – through co-location, data sharing, shared outcomes, and governance. Moving from services organised for under-fives to families with children of all ages reduces fragmentation (even though an emphasis on early years and the ‘Start for Life’ offer will remain).

- **Relationship-centred**

- practice in a Family Hub builds on family strengths and looks to improve family relationships to address underlying issues.

For Family Hubs to be effective and ready to run from March 2024 there is a requirement for a period of consultation and redesign and so an extension to the current children’s centre services contract would be necessary to allow sufficient time for these developments.

The Government is making funding available to Local Authorities to transform their services into Family Hubs. Wiltshire will submit bids for this funding. If the funding bids are not successful there is still a desire to move to a Family Hub model from April 2024.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. This report outlines the reasons why a one-year extension to the children's centre services contract would help to maintain the current early help services offered by the incumbent children's centre contract holders and allow preparation for transformation to a Family Hub model.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The proposal is relevant to the following priorities and objectives laid down the Council's Business Plan¹:

The people of Wiltshire are empowered to live full, healthy, and enriched lives

- We get the best start in life
- We stay active
- We are safe
- We live well together
- We ensure decisions are evidence-based
- We have the right skills to prosper
- We have vibrant, well-connected communities

Background

3. When the current children's centre services were commissioned in 2016 following a competitive tender process, the successful organisations were offered a contract for a period of five years (expiring 31st March 2021). The contract included an option to extend for a further two years. This option was exercised in April 2020 and the contract will now expire at the end of March 2023. Therefore, an exemption is required to extend the contracts for a further 12 months.
4. The value of the contract for 2022/23 is £2.777 million, which is a decrease of 18% on the original contract.
5. This paper proposes to extend the current contract by one year to allow the development of a Family Hub model to replace children's centre services, which will offer 0-19 services across the county from 1st April 2024 in line with the Government's ambition.

¹ [Business plan - Wiltshire Council](#)

6. The Government has committed to championing Family Hubs, which are a way of joining up locally and bringing existing family help services together to improve access to services, connections between families, professionals, services, and providers, and putting relationships at the heart of family help.
7. Family Hubs bring together services for families with children of all ages (0-19) or up to 25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with a great Start for Life offer at their core.
8. The current children's centre services deliver most of the core components of the Government's Best Start for Life vision:
 - Midwifery – appointments are held at some children's centre venues, and they link with midwifery services
 - Health visiting – many clinics and appointments with health visitors are held at children's centre venues and the two services work together very closely
 - Mental health support – IAPT sessions are held at children's centres venues and the staff work with agencies to support parental mental health
 - Infant feeding advice with specialist breast feeding support – Peer to peer breast feeding support is offered at children's centre venues and through virtual support
 - Safeguarding is a children's centre priority
 - Children's centre services work closely with District Specialist Centres and those services relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

This makes the transformation from children's centre services to Family Hubs a logical next step.

Main Considerations for the Council

9. The children's centre services contracts require an exemption to enable them to be extended by 12 months, from 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.
10. To transform the services from a children's centre to a Family Hub model will require a due diligence exercise and a period of public and partnership consultation.
11. Following consultation, it will take a period of time to specify and commission the new service. A paper will be presented to Cabinet outlining the plans following the consultation process later in the year.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

12. The proposal will be presented to the Exemptions Panel.

Safeguarding Implications

13. Safeguarding is a priority of both children's centre services providers and is a core element of the current model. They regularly monitor cases and work with families at all levels of need from universal through to families who are at risk of breakdown or who are already separated. There will be no increased risk to children and families through these proposals.

Public Health Implications

14. Public Health contribute £0.600million per year to the children's centre contracts. There is also a contribution of £0.059 million for the service to deliver the Baby Steps programme, this is an innovative perinatal education programme for parents who may need additional support. It helps get parents off to the best start, enabling them to build supportive relationships and care for their baby.
15. Children's centres are a critical partner in delivering the national Healthy Child Programme, an evidenced-based programme of prevention and support for families and children 0-19 years (24 years for those more vulnerable). They work closely with Local Authority funded Public Health Nursing Services and there would be negative implications for service delivery and for the wellbeing of families and children if there was a gap in provision before Family Hubs are established in 2024.

Procurement Implications

16. Any extension or award of contract will be completed in line with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 (PCR2015) and Part 10 of the Council's Constitution.
17. Advice has been sought from the to the Commercial and Procurement Team to ensure compliance with the PCR 2015 as above.
18. We will work with the Commercial and Procurement Team to develop a procurement plan and timeline that meets the requirement to have a new contract in place by the 01.04.2024

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

19. The equalities impact of the proposed decision is believed to be low against all criteria on the Equalities Risk Criteria Table and, therefore, a full Equalities Impact Assessment is not required.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

20. It is anticipated that the energy consumption and associated emissions will not alter from their current levels as a result of this proposal.
21. The current contract holders work to reduce the impact on the environment by reducing paper use and travel.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

22. If the proposed decision is not taken, the contract will expire in March 2023 without sufficient time to consult or develop a replacement service with families and partners. Therefore, posing a risk to family early help support services

during the critical first 1001 days in a child's life. This would result in an increase in demand for internal support and safeguarding services, which would have an increased financial impact on the Council.

23. The council would not meet the government's desire to have Family Hubs in operation by the end of the current parliament.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

24. There is a risk that the current providers would decline the request to extend the contract. To mitigate this there have already been discussions with the current providers about the potential to extend the contract, and the value of the extended year would need to be equal to the current annual contract rate.

Financial Implications

25. Since the original contract was negotiated in July 2016, there have been annual negotiations with the providers around service efficiencies and flexible delivery models that could be made whilst prioritising and protecting the service levels provided to Wiltshire families. The contract value reduction is 18% (£0.424m) over the course of the contract with a limit on the level of back office and management overheads chargeable to the contract. In order to reduce exposure to risk and future service levels and taking into account the Government's proposals around Family Hubs, it is not proposed that the financial value of the contract should not change from its current value for the proposed extension period.

Legal Implications

26. Any extension or award of contract should be conducted in accordance with the requirements set out in Part 10 of the Council's Constitution, the SPH Manual and the Public Contract Regulations (2015). Legal Services will need to be engaged throughout this process, with the relevant legal and procurement advice sought.
27. Wiltshire Council's Legal Services must draft robust legal documentation for this matter. Legal Services will need to be consulted to review the final documentation before execution.
28. Cabinet should delegate authority to enter into the extension contract and any relevant legal documentation to an appropriate individual.

Workforce Implications

29. The current uncertainty around the recommissioning of the service has an impact upon the staff working for the contracted service and some have left as they are in need of security. The extension will ensure certainty for a further year, during transformation to Family Hubs.

Options Considered

30. The options are to:

1. Do nothing

This is not a viable option as early support services are required to meet the needs of many families across the county and reduce the risk of the need for statutory services. Legally the Council cannot do nothing as the contracts cannot be automatically extended.

2. Extend the contract by one year

This will allow the development of a Family Hub model in consultation with families and partner organisations, and a smooth transition to the new model.

3. Not to extend the contract and for it to end on 31st March 2023

This would leave us without an effective service for families with children under the age of five from 1st April 2023. This would increase demand on services from Health Visiting and the internal Support and Safeguarding Teams.

Conclusions

31. There is a clear direction from central government to move to a model of early support through Family Hubs, and Wiltshire Council are developing this model with families and partners organisations, with the aim of being operational by 1st April 2024.

It is recommended that:

1. Cabinet agrees to the negotiation of a one-year contract extension with the current children's centre services commissioned providers (Spurgeons and The RISE Trust) until 31st March 2024. This will allow officers to undertake due diligence and a full consultation with parents and partners organisations to ensure that the development of Family Hubs in Wiltshire meets the needs of local communities.
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