

## **Family Information Service and Parent Partnership Service Review**

### **Purpose of Report**

1. To provide a summary of the Family Information Service and Parent Partnership Service Review and subsequent dialogue with the current provider of the services, as requested by the Chair of Children's Services Select Committee.

### **Background**

2. **Strategy**  
In the Family and Parenting Support Commissioning Strategy, approved by Cabinet in November 2010, one of the priorities was to review the Family Information Service (FIS) and the Parent Partnership Service (PPS) during 2011/12. These services (provided by a VCS organisation called 'ask') cover general information for parents and carers, child care information and information/advocacy for families with a disabled child or a significant special educational need. 'Ask' has provided these services under the current contracts for five years (under three year contracts with potential to extend for a further two years).
3. The Family and Parenting Support Commissioning Strategy stated that the review would involve parents and professionals and that the outcome of the review would inform the future commissioning of the Family Information Service and Parent Partnership Service from April 2012 (current contracts due to end 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012).
4. **Review**  
The review was completed by a cross functional working group which included officers with detailed knowledge of both the Family Information Service and the Parent Partnership Service. Consultation took place with parents and carers of both disabled and non-disabled children. The review established that there is significant duplication around provision of information for parents and carers, particularly parents and carers of children with disabilities/special educational needs. The following services all have a role in providing information to parents and carers:
  - ask
  - Wiltshire Parent Carer Council
  - Carers' Support
  - Children's Centres

- Parenting Support Advisors

5. In July 2011 the Family and Parenting Support Commissioning Group therefore decided that we needed to make significant changes to the FIS and PPS service specifications and contracts. To remove duplication, it was proposed that from 2012/13:
- Childcare information should be provided from within the Council, as this is already partly undertaken by the Early Years Team within Children's Services. The Early Years Team need to hold all this information to fulfil their statutory duty to ensure there is a good choice of childcare options across Wiltshire.
  - Specific information on support for disabled children and those with significant special educational needs could be provided by Wiltshire Parent Carer Council since over the last two years this organisation had become the 'first port of call' for many parents and carers with a disabled child/child with SEN.
  - The Advocacy and Mediation Service (PPS) for parents of children with special educational needs should continue to be provided by an independent provider.
  - The Family Information Service needed to be redesigned to remove duplication with various other services.

**6. Discussions with the current provider**

A letter was sent to ask in August 2011, stating that Children's Services had sought agreement within the Council to further extend our contracts with them. However, it was also made clear that we wished to revise the service specifications in line with a reduced level of funding. A meeting was held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011 in which the findings of the review were shared with ask. An outline of the planned service changes were shared and an indication of the proposed reduction in funding (in line with the significant reduction in areas of activity within the new service specifications). The current value of the two contracts for FIS and PPS contracts is approximately £331,000 per annum. It was stated that the minimum future funding for the services, based on significantly reduced service requirements from 'ask', would be £160,000.

7. It was made clear to ask that our preferred option was to continue to work with them through contract extensions, and to reach mutual agreement on what could be delivered within a reduced financial envelope. This included the potential to increase the £160,000 financial envelope if it became clear that the services required from 'ask' could not be delivered for this figure.
8. Since September 2011, two further meetings have taken place with 'ask' to discuss current service delivery, future service requirements (including ensuring that effective information and advocacy support will continue to be provided Wiltshire's parents) and funding levels.
9. To enable sufficient time to conclude the service redesign discussions it was agreed that the two contracts would be extended by 3 months until

30/6/2012 at the current contract price and it was Wiltshire Council's intention that the new services would commence on 1 July 2012.

10. In a letter to ask dated 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2012, Wiltshire Council offered revised contract prices of:

- £120,000 per annum for FIS (£153,475 for 2012/13)
- £70,000 per annum for PPS (£71,915 for 2012/13)

The letter also provided a clear rationale for the revised contract prices. The following elements (which make up significant parts of the current FIS) are not included in the new service requirement as these elements are all provided by other organisations:

- An Outreach Service
- Child Care Information and Reporting Service
- Benefits Advice and Calculations
- Information on Services for Disabled Children
- General Support and Advice (over and above information and signposting)

### **Main Considerations for the Council**

11. The review highlighted a number of areas of duplication and concluded that FIS (and to a lesser extent) PPS needed to be redesigned to complement but not duplicate with other services. This decision was approved by Wiltshire's Children's Trust Partnership.
12. The current contracts with ask were due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 but a 3 month extension to both contracts has been offered so the contracts will end on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2012.
13. The Council's preferred option is for ask to deliver the new services through to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014, in accordance with our Contract Regulations via an Exemption. This option offers a sustainability solution for ask at a time when three contracts with the Council, comprising the majority of their organisation's income, are all due to end.
14. Whilst it is right that Wiltshire Council works collaboratively with providers and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS), it is ultimately the Council as the Commissioning Authority who should decide on how services funded by public money should be provided to ensure that resources are used most effectively.
15. Peter Baxter, Chair of the Wiltshire Compact, has confirmed that Wiltshire Council has operated in accordance with the Wiltshire Compact. In particular ask has been given 9 months notice of service/funding changes compared to the minimum of 3 months stipulated in the Compact.
16. Revised service specifications for both services have been developed. It is believed there are a number of VCS providers who would be interested in tendering to deliver these services within the new budgets of £120,000 and £70,000 respectively.

17. If 'ask' decides that it does not wish to deliver the services based on the revised specifications and funding levels, then the opportunity will be provided for other VCS organisations to run the services. The council will continue to ensure that it meets its statutory responsibilities and provides effective information, signposting and advocacy support for all families.

### **Environmental Impact of the Proposal**

18. None.

### **Equalities Impact of the Proposal**

19. An Equalities Impact Assessment was completed as part of the review process. It was noted that the transition to the new service specifications would need to be managed to ensure services remained available to families in Wiltshire, particularly families who may find it more difficult to access information and support.

### **Risk Assessment**

20. The following risks have been considered:
- Financial risk
    - The risk to the Council that possible savings are missed can be avoided by implementing the recommendation of the review. The likely cost of TUPE is understood and is in line with the anticipated cost.
  - Risk to quality of service
    - The leaner, clearer specifications should provide a basis for a service that works more efficiently. Elements which are not going to continue within the specifications have been considered and it is understood where the duplication exists and where families will receive the support in the future. Planning has started to ensure smooth transition.
  - Sustainability risk to ask as an organisation
    - The original proposal to extend the contracts aimed to minimise this risk to ask. If ask choose not to provide the services then the Council will ensure that parents continue to have access to good quality information, signposting and advocacy.

### **Financial Implications**

21. The re-design of the Family Information Service and the Parent Partnership Service will result in some savings to the Council which can then be re-invested in more targeted services for family and parenting support.

## Legal Implications

22. In respect of the provision of Child Care Information moving to the Early Years Team there is a TUPE liability for staff moving from ask to Wiltshire Council. This has been discussed with ask and HR and ask has provided outline information at this stage indicating that between 1-3 staff may be eligible. This process will be managed with guidance and support from HR.

## Options Considered

23. At the time of the review alternatives to the proposed service redesign were considered and rejected. These included:
- a) Continue with the current specifications 'as is'.**  
This option was rejected because it represented poor use of resources and public money due to duplication. This option would not have realised any savings and would not have streamlined FIS to fit with other commissioned services.
- b) Partially implement the recommendation.**  
The recommendation included the need to remove the following elements from the FIS specification:
- An Outreach Service
  - Child Care Information and Reporting Service
  - Benefits Advice and Calculations
  - Information on Services for Disabled Children
  - General Support and Advice (over and above information and signposting)
- Each of these elements has been considered individually. In each case the arguments for removing them from the specification outweigh the arguments against leaving them in. In particular each element of the current service listed above is duplicated with other services. To implement the recommendation in part, by leaving some of these elements in the specification, would be a less efficient use of resources and public money than the recommendation to remove all these elements from the specification.

## Conclusions

24. A review of the Family Information Service and Parent Partnership Service was undertaken in summer 2011. The results of this review are now being implemented. The Council will ensure that parents continue to have access to effective information, signposting and advocacy services.

**Carolyn Godfrey, Corporate Director**

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Report Author: Julia Cramp, Service Director – Commissioning and Performance, 01225 718221, [Julia.Cramp@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:Julia.Cramp@wiltshire.gov.uk)

**Background Papers**

None.

**Appendices**

None.