

SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Function:</u>	Children's & Family Services
<u>Date:</u>	6 December 2023
<u>Title of Update:</u>	Commissioning of Family Support Services
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Background

In December 2022, the Council approved a business plan which set out the proposal to commission an 'alliance' for the provision of early intervention support to children, young people and families as part of the wider work being undertaken to develop a 'Family Support Model' for Aberdeen City. The contracts will commence on 1st April 2024, with a value not exceeding £9,552,534 over a six-year period.

The aim of the Family Support Model is to ensure that services delivered to children, young people and families are data informed, effective, prioritise early intervention and are aligned to The Promise and UNCRC. The changing landscape in national policy and legislation as well as the increasing demand on services due to Covid-19, the cost of living crisis as well as the squeeze on budgets requires a more responsive, integrated and agile system to meet the needs of children and families.

The rationale for a formal alliance was to try and address the key themes identified within the initial scoping to develop our family support model within the context of an extremely challenging financial landscape. It also drew on the learning from the Independent Care Review and delivering the Fit Like Service. This included:

- A whole systems approach to ensure service alignment, reducing siloed working, be evidence based and maximise capacity across providers.
- The need to engage with young people, children and families to design services on an iterative basis.
- Workforce – being mindful of the significant recruitment and retention issues across children's social care and social work in Aberdeen.
- Ensure staff utilise trauma informed approaches in their work with children, young people and families.
- Maximise resources to avoid duplication and over supply.
- Future proofing – responsive to changes in demand and policy e.g., The National Care Service, Children (Care and Justice) (Scotland) Bill and

reform of the Children's Hearing system.

Update

From November 2022 – July 2023, the Council undertook a series of engagement events with Third sector partners to inform the development of the service specification and to begin to consider how a formal alliance would be established. Ultimately any alliance would be governed by a separate legal agreement. These events included current 3rd Sector partners and others not operating in the City.

In addition we engaged with and asked Third Sector Partners to seek the views of children, young people and families who were accessing family support services. This included the distribution of a questionnaire.

As part of the engagement it was agreed given the uniqueness of the 'Young Carers Service' that this would not form part of the proposed alliance but would remain a standalone service. This decision had corresponding reduction to the budget for the remaining family support services.

Despite the best efforts of everyone who engaged in the above process there was a sense of unease about the proposed intention to develop an "Alliance approach" to deliver family support. This was shared with the Council in mid July 2023. It was recognised that the absence of an ACVO representative within the engagement events mitigated against partners feeling able to raise their sense of unease. However in July 2023 ACVO appointed a Senior Development Officer, utilising CORRA funding aligned to delivering The Promise. This appointment enabled 3rd Sector providers to come together and share their concerns.

In response a further stakeholder session was held in early August where the Council listened to the concerns and set out the options for the way forward, within the agreed timescales. It was decided that a formal Alliance approach may be too ambitious for Aberdeen given the capacity of the third sector and the Council and that a procurement approach via an open tender would be the most appropriate way forward at this time.

As a consequence there was collective agreement to move forward via three separate lots for the tender.

- Lot 1 - The Fit Like? Family Wellbeing Service
- Lot 2 - Targeted Family Support
- Lot 3 - Priority Families

There is no restriction on how many providers can bid for a lot. For example a consortium may bid or a standalone provider may submit bids. The tender was published on Monday 9 October 2023. Deadline for submissions was 20 November and the estimated contract award date is mid December 2023.

Collaboration

The commitment to partnership working and collaboration remains a key principle to the delivery of family support services. This is reflected within the

Service Specification with an explicit expectation that partnership and collaborative working would be at the heart of service delivery. This is thought to provide a mechanism to reduce anxiety around any 'alliance model' in the future.

Successful bidders will be asked to sign a collaboration agreement once the new contracts have been awarded. There is also an expectation that providers commit to regular operational meetings with the Council. This forum will seek to support and strengthen relationships but also explore new ways of working and how services can flex and be responsive to changing demand and need.

Additionally there is an expectation that providers develop relationships with community based services across Aberdeen City to build capacity and share specialist support and/or training.

Funding

Due to the change in the financial climate and the need to align with the 2023 – 2026 refreshed Children's Services Plan and future planning cycles, the contract will be for a two-year period with the option to extend for three years. In addition resettlement funding has been secured for Early Intervention and enhances the Fit Like Wellbeing and Priority Families lots for the first two years.

Evaluation of Impact

There is an increased expectation for commissioned services to more effectively demonstrate the impact of improving outcomes for children, young people and families. This will move us away from reporting being based around key performance indicators to include quantitative and qualitative reporting. It will however also require a shift in how the Council evaluates the impact of commissioned services.

Reporting on the impact of Family Support Services will be shared with the Children's Services Board and inform our continuous self-evaluation. Identified learning or gaps in provision or practice will directly contribute to the annual review of the impact of the statutory Children's Services Plan with required actions being built into the plan.

In 2024 the Council will launch its refreshed "Request for Assistance" application. This will provide for a single point of referral route ensuring all requests for target Tier 2 support will be collectively reviewed by representatives from the three Lots alongside Children's Social Work colleagues. In addition the Request for Assistance process will enable the Council and providers to more effectively track referrals and outcomes.

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Should you require more information in relation to the above please contact Graeme Simpson, Chief Officer Children & Family Services – gsimpson@aberdeencity.gov.uk