

Children's Services Commissioning Spring Report

Report of Commissioning Liaison Scrutiny Member Cllr Richard Hosking

1. Introduction

1.1 The Commissioning Liaison member meets regularly with Officers to review the current and future children's services commissioning activity. This is in line with the recommendations of the 2016 'Scrutiny in a Commissioning Council' Scrutiny Task Group. Cllr Hosking is the Commissioning Liaison Champion for Children's Services.

1.2 The opportunities for scrutiny will be greater when there is need for service redesign through changing need or issues with the current delivery model/service, than when a service which currently works well is being recommissioned. Scrutiny involvement in commissioning at the earliest stage will allow Members to help shape delivery models, services and outcomes.

1.3 The role for Commissioning Liaison is set out in the Protocol at Appendix A. Scrutiny have a key role in bringing the voice of the service user to commissioning. It has been agreed between Children's Commissioning and Commissioning Liaison members that a briefing is made to Scrutiny twice a year, in the Spring and Autumn. Allowing opportunity in the Spring to signal progress on tenders and expected contract award dates, and in the Autumn to outline opportunities for pre-procurement activity ready for the following financial year.

2. Commissioning in the Context of COVID-19 - Priorities Spring Summer 2021.

2.1 The emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the first lockdown that started in Spring 2020 saw team and corporate resource needing to be diverted from the planned commissioning and procurement activities. This meant that some commissioning activity paused, where appropriate, and all activity remained under review in the context of the necessary emergency response and the learning from this.

2.2 As restrictions began to ease in the summer and incident management arrangements adapted, some planned activity resumed, albeit amid a different landscape. However, the rising cases and new variant that triggered lockdowns before and after the Christmas period have brought new challenges and again necessitated the need for a further consideration on what, and where, resource and capacity is best targeted. In short, an agile approach to commissioning work planning has been needed to ensure departmental and corporate priorities are met ongoing.

2.2 The team continue to support the continuing response to COVID-19 including assisting with the vaccination programme and supporting the sustainability of the market. There also continue to be priority areas to achieve impact for Children's Services – namely

sufficiency and the improvement plan actions, services for children with SEND and effective joint commissioning.

3. Commissioning Programme

3.1. The Commissioning Programme for the year ahead is outlined below. For reference a diagram of the commissioning cycle is set out at Appendix B. Commissioning activity is undertaken across the Commissioning cycle throughout the year.

3.2. The following are priority areas for Spring/ Summer 2021.

- Education and Inclusion (Current Provider Babcock, Commissioner Children's service's and Schools)
- SEND Joint commissioning Plan
- Sufficiency Strategy refresh including market development for areas of pressure (Suitable accommodation for Care Leavers)
- Commencement of design for re-commissioning of the Peninsula fostering framework
- Short Breaks (Multiple current provider's, Commissioner Children's service's and NHS Devon CCG).

3.3 With clarity on the roadmap to move to recovery we will be able to re-commence the commissioning work plan. In addition to the above priorities the contracts below in para 3.4 which will expire in 2022 will need pre-procurement design work undertaken. As our lead in time on any re-commissioning is very long and to ensure we undertake robust design and engagement work the dates below are well in advance of the expiry date of the existing contracts.

3.4 The Commissioning Liaison briefing in the Autumn will provide further details on this commissioning plan, in each area below the timescales set out cover only the design and market engagement phases this is not the whole re-procurement timeline. Throughout this time there will be opportunities to engage Members:

Only Design and Market Engagement timeline set out here for to re-commission these existing contracts:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| • Homelessness prevention | Apr 21 – Nov 21 |
| • Child Death Overview Panel Sub-regional commissioning arrangements | Apr 21 - Aug 21 |
| • SEND commissioned OT Services | May 21– Sep 21 |
| • RAA Adoption Support Fund | Jun 21 – Feb 22 |
| • Supported Living Framework – Evaluation and due diligence | Jul 21 – Aug 21 |
| • Children's Homes Framework | Oct 21 - May 22 |
| • Young Carers | Oct 21 – Aug 22 |

4. Commissioning Priority: Education and Inclusion

- 4.1. We have an ambitious partnership vision for all children in Devon. The services considered as part of the recommissioning of Education & Inclusion are significant for the delivery of universal school improvement and therefore impact on attainment goals and aspiration for all children in Devon. They also impact on some of the most vulnerable children, improving life chances and achieving our strategic priority of inclusion, through high quality SEND support services.
- 4.2. The re-commissioning work for Education and Inclusion Services began in summer 2019 with consultation, engagement and co-design sessions with parents and schools. The main themes arising from this were to create better integration by SEND services being brought together around achieving better outcomes for key groups of children. Throughout the engagement and then supported again in the recent public consultation, the message to integrate services for SEND is the strongest. This is supported by a wide range of stakeholders.
- 4.3. An options appraisal considered the way that the services within the current contract work together and how they are connected to other services outside the contract to provide the whole system of support to schools, children, young people and their families.
- 4.4. Work to reform and transform the SEND offer in Devon has been underway since Spring 2020. The SEND services within the Education and Inclusion Services contract form a substantial part of the SEND system of delivery and are therefore integral to this transformation. The purpose of the SEND Transformation Programme is “to improve parents and young peoples lived experience of SEN support in Devon by designing and implementing an integrated service that works together, and with families, to ensure young people receive the right support at the right time.” This piece of work sits as part of our wider SEND improvement plan.
- 4.5. The project board have ensured that the all options are fully considered. Two additional Children’s Standing Overview Group meetings have also considered the options and the recommendations. Final recommendations will be put to the Cabinet meeting in March.
- 4.6. This is in line with the priorities of our Children and Young People’s Plan and our SEND strategy, where we set out our commitment to improving life chances, ensuring all children and young people in Devon have the right to achieve their potential with opportunities to thrive.

5. Commissioning Priority: SEND Joint Commissioning Plan

- 5.1. Work towards a joint commissioning plan linked with wider SEND transformation is underway and is within the governance of the established Joint Commissioning Group which includes membership from Devon County Council (Public Health and Children’s Services), NHS Devon CCG, Office of the Police Crime Commissioner and District Councils. Our vision for children and young people with SEND in Devon is that all children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are supported to dream, believe, achieve and fulfil their potential.

- 5.2. In turn, our ambition for joint SEND Commissioning is that commissioning in Devon supports the delivery of our vision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Working together to ensure outcomes for children are improved.
- 5.3. Partners in Devon have been jointly commissioning together over many years. Examples include the commissioning of Community Health Service's in 2018 contract awarded to Children and Family Health Devon, short breaks services for disabled children and jointly commissioning individual and specialist placements. This plan will set out work so far, assess gaps and set the development plan for the years ahead.

6. Commissioning Priority: Placement Sufficiency

- 6.1. The Sufficiency Strategy refresh was undertaken during 2020 and agreed at Corporate Parenting Board in October 2020. However, the impact of CV-19 and emerging need in the now third lockdown has caused a review and pause in publication. A CV-19 Interim Sufficiency Plan will be published in March. This will address the capacity necessary to accommodate the rise in Children in Care and to meet specific needs such as Autism and challenging behaviour. A full refresh of the Sufficiency Strategy will be written in line with the refresh of the Corporate Parenting Strategy by Summer 2021.
- 6.2. Market development work for key areas such as Children's Homes and Fostering has continued with projected growth through 2021 for both areas. Some additional focus on meeting the needs of children with autism and learning disabilities for both areas to ensure that current and pipeline capacity can meet need.
- 6.3. Focussed work is currently taking place in partnership with districts for developing suitable accommodation for care leavers, aligned with the improvement plan and managed through a separate market development plan; working to ensure sufficiency in this area including increased support to sustain tenancies and reducing the need for care leavers to be entering unsuitable accommodation.
- 6.4. Sufficiency during the pandemic has brought about some additional challenges for placement finding. Increased communication with provider markets and processes for 'Risk Mapping' are ensuring that we are able to as far as possible pre-empt any market/ provider failure that may affect placements. These mechanisms will continue for as long as are required. In addition, the Emergency Provision Incident Management Team was re-established to assess current and future risk and to plan for contingency in these circumstances.
- 6.5. The coordination of the vaccination roll out to external providers has been supported. This programme has successfully ensured offer of vaccination to all those providers and services who's work includes engagement with Clinically Vulnerable young people, this has included 1481 staff or roles across 85 providers offering a range of services.
- 6.6. Quality Assurance work for placements and services has continued during the pandemic. Devon and Peninsula Local Authorities took responsibility for foster carers

from a fostering provider who had received an Ofsted suspension in October 2020. A monitoring programme was established to support the provider to make the necessary progress for development. As of January 2021, the provider has made all the necessary improvements and assurance is now achieved. The provider has had suspension lifted. Throughout this process placement disruption for children has been avoided.

7. Peninsula fostering framework

7.1. Work streams are being developed in readiness for design and implementation of our fostering framework renewal which will be due April 2022. It is felt that largely the framework as a Peninsula Authority collaboration will remain very similar, however we will be wanting to ensure greater focus and to develop strength on the following areas: -

- Step down from residential settings
- Increased offer for same day placements (Emergency Placement)
- Increase capacity to meet disabled children and young people's needs

8. Commissioning Priority: Short Breaks for Disabled Children

8.1. During 2019 we began a review of our Short Breaks offer. Extensive engagement with families began over the Autumn and winter of 2019/20. This was then paused in Spring 2020 with the hope to re-start in Summer. This has not been possible. Families were communicated with to this effect.

5.3. Since then there has been a focus on market risk mapping and resilience in what has been a challenging time for families and providers. Much of the market has needed to adapt the offer due to fluctuating demand, attributable to both the caution that families have exercised and the changes to restrictions. A handful of organisations have received a small amount of financial support, in line with the corporate supplier relief process, in order that they may continue to remain viable.

5.4. A regular short breaks provider forum is also now in place with good attendance. Whilst the recommissioning activity has been paused due to the emergency response, it is planned to resume this during the Spring/ Summer 2021 including any interim arrangements that may be needed to ensure continuity. The insight and relationships that have been strengthened during the pandemic will serve to be beneficial throughout the recommissioning.

Electoral Divisions: All

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes

Chief Officer for Children's Services: Melissa Caslake

Contact for Enquiries: Fiona Fleming Head of Commissioning

Appendix A

Commissioning Liaison Member Protocol Summer 2017

This is a guidance document prepared by the scrutiny team to support the effective working of the nominated Commissioning Liaison Member/s from each scrutiny committee. The role was established following a recommendation made by the 'Scrutiny in a Commissioning Council' Task Group 2016. The full report and recommendations can be viewed [here](#).

Purpose:

The task group felt that nominating a member from each committee to develop positive relationships with Cabinet Members and Lead Officers to find out about commissioning activity would strengthen the effectiveness of scrutiny. The Commissioning Liaison Member will undertake to:

1. Understand the Council's commissioning processes and priorities;
2. Act as a link between Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee and bring to the attention of the Scrutiny Chair and Committee:
 - significant commissioning activity
 - performance or service delivery issues relating to services commissioned through external providers
3. Support the Scrutiny Committee to examine the commissioning of services within the wider context of the Council's strategic vision and purpose

This does not affect the legal duties around commissioning and provider relations particularly in relation to health scrutiny.

Approach:

To carry out this role in the most effective way the Commissioning Liaison Members from each committee have agreed to meet as a group on a regular basis to:

1. Receive commissioning training
2. Ensure a consistent approach is taken to the Scrutiny of commissioning
3. Champion the approach to Scrutiny's involvement in commissioning across the Council and Health

The group will also use receive details of forthcoming commissioning activity and individually take this back to each scrutiny committee to report at the work programme with suggestions about how the committee might be involved in commissioning activity.

Review and development:

It is proposed that the effectiveness of this role could be reviewed in line with the task group recommendation after six months of operation.

In future there may be the opportunity to undertake specific scrutiny investigations relating to commissioning as directed by each relevant scrutiny committee.

Appendix B Commissioning Cycle

