

CALL IN – FINAL AWARD OF CONTRACT FOR INTEGRATED PRE-BIRTH TO 19 HEALTH, WELLBEING AND FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES: FP/657/11/16

**Informal meeting held on Thursday, 24 November 2016 at 11.00 a.m. in
Committee Room 4**

Present

Councillor Mike Danvers, Councillor Ivan Henderson, Councillor Dick Madden

Officer: Robert Fox, Chris Martin, Peter Randall

Introduction

Councillor Danvers outlined the reasons for the call-in. This decision FP/657/11/16 had been called in on Friday, 18 December 2016. Within the template Councillor Danvers called-in the decision on the grounds that insufficient consideration has been given to alternative uses that could help the council deliver its policy objectives, for example:

- The initial Cabinet decision to go out to procurement stated:

3.6: In 2015 ECC carried out engagement with families and practitioners who said:

Current services are fragmented and confusing. This can lead to parents receiving inconsistent support and to a heightened risk that families will not receive the support they need at all

3.19: The proposed model focuses on the needs of children and families and will provide support that is easier to understand and makes more efficient use of the skills and experience of the workforce as well as seeking to utilise, capitalise and build upon the existing capabilities of families, neighbourhoods and communities. It will cover the period from conception to age 19 (or 25 in the case of people with special educational needs or a disability). The mandatory services will continue to be delivered and we will expect the current services to be provided as effectively as the current services although the mode of delivery may be different

3.21: It is proposed to create an integrated service which will:

Allow the services to continue to increase the percentage of families in priority groups and greatest need reached by the services, allowing a greater opportunity to intervene early and help to create strong, resilient families who are able to identify when things need addressing

- Virgin Care is a huge national organisation, with contracts in counties right across the country. Over the past five years, the corporation has been awarded contracts valued at over £1 Billion

- We feel that the decision to tender to Virgin Care makes it harder for ECC to meet the goals outlined above, further severing the link between communities, and the organisations that provide services. Essex residents are not an instrument for profiteering
- There are several outstanding care providers already active within Essex, delivering services to families with crucial links to, and understanding of their communities that we should be focusing on, and resourcing to ensure the best outcomes for Essex residents. The needs of residents differ greatly across the County, and we have had assurances from members of the administration in the past that we will be placing greater emphasis on local focus. This appears to have been forgotten
- Isolation is of great concern to us. Our own 0-19 consultation discovered that parents across Essex are increasingly feeling lonely and isolated, further compounding other health, mental, support needs they might have. Tendering services to a large, national, monolithic organisation further isolates them from the support they desperately need

Councillor Danvers stated the Cabinet Member Action (CMA) was called-in mainly around concerns over the provider selected, for whom he had concerns over their track-record. Councillor Danvers, referring to the original Cabinet report on the procurement, of 21 June 2016, said the focus was on localism, however, the eventual provider selected is an international company. Therefore, he stated, it is hard to see how they will be aware of the isolation of families in parts of the county. Councillor Danvers expressed the Equalities Impact Assessment (EQiA), which was appended to the CMA, had concerns on the type of service, including isolation of families, and the lack of support for home visits.

The track-record of the provider, Councillor Danvers stated, is one of concern and given this contract is a pilot for the company – they do not have any experience of this type of provision – and, additionally, there seems to be a history of withdrawing from contracts.

Councillor Danvers referring to the Cabinet paper of 21 June 2016, stated that there appears to be no acknowledgement of the key issues raised in the consultation, for example the 80% of respondents who expressed concern over the plans within the consultation. The award of the contract, he argued, did not appear to address the issues raised in the Cabinet paper.

Councillor Danvers queried whether due diligence had been carried-out around the preferred provider? Also, he stated, there is no acknowledgement of the four areas referred in the original Cabinet paper as the provider is to supply a pan-Essex solution.

Councillor Danvers stated, in his opinion, the service could have been provided in-house as a cheaper solution and referred to a statement by the Leader of the Council that there would be in-house pilots.

The initial call-in had six bullet points. It was agreed that Councillor Danvers withdraw the final bullet point, of which the relevance was questioned by Councillor Madden.

General response by Councillor Dick Madden

In response to Councillor Danvers, Councillor Madden stated

- from his perspective the engagement with scrutiny had been ongoing for three years
- he sat comfortably with the procurement and the process undertaken in the award of the contract, which has been through due legal process
- the award of the contract is not just about children's services and is based upon evidence and analysis. The county had 23 providers which were reduced into quadrants which has seen an improvement in delivery. He stated he was confident there would be a continuation of the improvement with the award of this contract. Local providers did have the opportunity to pull together for a joined-up bid

Discussion

Chris Martin stated that when the process started there were a set of services that marginalised families were not accessing and, therefore, the County Council needs outcomes for these groups. The current offer is not reaching these families.

Focussing on outcomes an improved offer can be provided within the existing financial envelope. The importance is on these outcomes not on the provider. The selected provider had the strongest bid and it was a thorough selection process involving partners as well as in-house commissioners.

Councillor Henderson stated that Harwich Homestart are increasing their workload as this is being used as opposed to the service offered by ECC – he invited Councillor Madden and Chris Martin to attend Harwich Homestart. He stated the tender documentation made it difficult for smaller providers to be successful; the larger providers being able to absorb capacity above other organisations who might be able to provide a better quality service. Councillor Henderson asked whether any evidence existed on past practice from the selected provider to deliver on the contract?

Chris Martin answered that it was not possible to provide such evidence as there is no other authority providing what ECC is about to do. He stated the selected provider would bring a momentum to the activity. Councillor Danvers raised his concern that

ECC was being used as a 'guinea-pig' by the selected provider given they had no experience or knowledge of local need in Essex; and that, if anything were to go wrong, the biggest losers would be the families who access services not the selected provider or ECC.

Outcome

Given the differences of opinion it was agreed the contract award be considered at a full meeting of the People and Families Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 8 December 2016 at 10.00 a.m. in Committee Room 1. Chris Martin would provide the Key Performance Indicators on the contract in advance of the Committee meeting.

Action: Chris Martin

Robert Fox
28 November 2016