

Issues of Direct Awards to existing Providers of Targeted Short Breaks and Fun Activities

Date: 26th February 2024

Report of: Commissioning Manager, Children & Families Directorate

Report to: Director, Children & Families

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- The report seeks approval to issue a Direct Award to the commissioned Providers in order to continue the delivery of targeted short breaks and fun activities and ensure this support remains in place for C&YP with SEND and their families/carers. The Direct Award will cover the period from 1st April 2024 for six months at a value of up to £158,750. There will be no options to extend once the agreements end on 30th September 2024.
- Targeted short breaks and fun activities provide children and young people (CY&P) with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access to fun activities either after school, at the weekend or over the school holidays.
- There are currently 8 providers delivering 15 different activities across the city as detailed in Appendix 1. The providers were awarded grant agreements on 1st April 2020 following a competitive award process with an original end date of 31st March 2022. Grants were further extended in April 2022 following the Covid pandemic as it was preferable to undertaking a competitive grants process at that time when it was unlikely that there were new providers who could have delivered these types of activities.
- The purpose of these Direct Awards is to maintain high quality and varied targeted short breaks activities for C&YP with SEND in compliance with the principles of the Children and Families Act 2014 while the review of current provisions is completed.
- These services will help delivering the local ambition of becoming an inclusive Child Friendly City as detailed in the Best Council Plan 2020 to 2025 – to make Leeds the best city in the UK for children and young people to grow up in.

Recommendations

- a) Approve the issue of Direct Awards in order to continue offering a range of targeted short breaks and fun activities to C&YP with SEND in line with Contracts Procedure Rules 9.4 and 27.1, relevant and current law. The period covered by the Direct Award will end on 30th September 2024.

- b) Approve the expenditure of up to £158,750 for the six months period with no option to extend after the 30th September 2024. This is 50% of the annual Grants value that was previously allocated to the commissioned providers.
- c) Approve payment in advance to the Direct Award recipients. Payment in advance is crucial to small, third sector organisations so that they can effectively manage budgets and cash flow to deliver the service. This has been the payment method used over the last nine or so years for services commissioned via the competitive grants process. Payments will be made for the full six months in April 2024. Providers will be subject to a financial checking process using the CreditSafe facility.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

- 1 Short Breaks are activities for children and young people with SEND that enable them to have fun, spend time with friends and build their confidence and skills in a safe environment. As well as promoting best outcomes for the child, the Children Act 1989 Schedule 2 requires Local Authorities to provide services designed to assist family carers of disabled children 'to continue to [provide care], or to do so more effectively, by giving them breaks from caring'. Providing a range of targeted fun activities, reduces the likelihood of crisis and family breakdown and thereby reducing the need for more expensive specialist provision or Social Work intervention.

The numbers of CY&P in Leeds (and nationally) with additional needs are increasing. As well as an increase in numbers of CY&P with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), there is projected to be a sustained increase in pupils who are SEND without EHCP by 2027. In January 2022, 16,769 pupils were classified as SEN Support (Reception to Key Stage 5). Based on those data, projections show that the total number of pupils with SEND is likely to increase to circa 17,622 SEN Support Pupils overall, however the increases to begin to flatten off by 2027 with a projected slow reduction in Primary age but continued projected increase in Secondary ages. Without targeted activities across the city, more pressure will be put on specialist activities and services such as direct payments.

- 2 The 8 commissioned short breaks providers continued to deliver activities for C&YP as well as keeping contact with their families providing ongoing support. They worked collaboratively with schools and social care colleagues to ensure concerns were highlighted and addressed promptly. Various range of activities are delivered and in order for these activities to continue seamlessly for C&YP, it is believed that extending the current agreements is preferable to undertaking a tender process at a time when a full review of the Short Breaks and Fun Activities provision is taking place. Resources would be better utilized by undertaking a full tender process once the review is completed.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards affected: all

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

- 3 Unlike other cities, in Leeds, targeted short breaks can be accessed by families directly without recourse to Social Workers or Lead Professionals. The current offer of activities is geographically spread across the city enabling C&YP to access them in their local community. 838 C&YP accessed targeted services over a twelve-month period in 2022-23. Those numbers continued to rise in 2023-24 financial year with 1052 C&YP engaging with targeted services within the first 2

quarters (period from Apr – Sep 2023) and a total of 16,089 hours have been delivered so far. Without activities specifically targeted for C&YP with SEND, there will be increased pressure on more expensive specialist provision or Social Work intervention.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

- 4 The current grant recipients have been consulted and they are all prepared to continue delivering the current activities.

CY&P with SEND were on the tender panel scoring a question in November 2019 and EPIC Leeds (Empowering Parents Informing Choices) were on the working group developing the specification as well as being on the evaluation panel.

Consultation with C&YP has been undertaken both, online (via Teams) and face to face in October and November 2023.

Online surveys were made available for C&YP and Parents/Carers in December 2023.

What are the resource implications?

- 5 The total cost of the existing grant arrangements is £317,500 per annum (see Appendix 1 for a breakdown by provider), with a value of £158,750 for 6 months from 1st April 2024 to 30th September 2024.
- 6 This option represents best value for money because it secures vital services to enable disabled children and their families to access targeted short breaks with the aim of preventing family breakdown. The availability of targeted activities should reduce the need for more expensive specialist support such as Independent Support Workers or direct payments.
- 7 Payment will be made in one instalment. Payment in advance is crucial to small, third sector organisations so that they can effectively manage budgets and cash flow to deliver the service. Regular contract management activities will take place to protect the interests of the Council, allowing the Council to implement actions promptly in case of unsatisfactory performance.
- 8 There is a total budget of £158,750 in place to cover the value of this decision.

What are the legal implications?

- 9 Without activities specifically targeted for C&YP with SEND, Leeds City Council could be exposed to a compliance breach with the principles of the Children and Families Act 2014.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 10 If the decision is not approved and we cease the delivery of targeted short breaks there is a significant risk that more expensive specialist services will receive an increased demand from families.
- 11 Short breaks are a statutory service and the Local Authority could be in breach of legislation should these services cease.

- 12 Some personal data will be processed as part of this contract delivery and a privacy impact assessment will highlight how any risks will be mitigated.
- 13 There is a risk identified with payment in advance should services not subsequently be delivered. This risk is mitigated by engaging with providers regularly and identifying potential areas of improvement at an early stage where support can be put in place, if needed, for them to deliver according to targets. Quarterly performance management will identify whether this funding is being spent correctly or not. Quarterly monitoring returns will include outcomes for disabled children and how many short breaks hours were delivered as a result.

Does this proposal support the council's three Key Pillars?

- Inclusive Growth Health and Wellbeing Climate Emergency

- 14 Short breaks are viewed as a preventative strategy and can prevent family breakdown or escalation to specialist services. Ensuring C&YP with SEND have access to fun activities in their local community has a positive impact of health and wellbeing.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

One option considered was to undertake a competitive tender process as it has happened in previous years. However, taking into consideration that a full review of the Short Breaks and Fun Activities provisions is currently taking place it is advisable to extend current arrangements until this is completed which is also the option that gives best Value for Money. Commissioned providers seek feedback from families and C&YP at regular intervals to ensure their services are still meeting need and it is felt the current mix of services maximise the impact of the budget envelope. A full competitive tender exercise will be completed once the review delivers its outputs.

Ceasing delivery of targeted short breaks is not felt to be a viable option.

How will success be measured?

- 15 All grant recipients have quarterly monitoring meetings with a Commissioning Manager/Officer and have to deliver a specific numbers of sessions to a specific number of C&YP as well as monitoring user satisfaction and supporting RADAR or other reviews where relevant.

What is the timetable for implementation?

- 16 The direct awards will commence on 1st April 2024 and end on 30th September 2024. There will be no gap in service delivery from when the current grants cease on 31st March 2024.

Appendices

- 17 Appendix 1 – breakdown of targeted short breaks grants by provider

Background papers

25 EDCI screening form

**Appendix 1 – breakdown of Targeted short breaks Direct Awards by provider
Six months period from 1st Apr 2024 to 30th Sep 2024**

Aireborough Supported Activity Schemes	£27,374.47	holiday activities
BID	£7,939.79	Youth Club (sensory impairment)
Leeds Mencap	£49,364.88	Youth club & holiday activities
Leeds Weekend Care Association	£9,394.18	Youth club
South Leeds Hub	£6,495.12	Youth club
Endorphins	£42,907.50	Weekend & holiday activities over 3 wedges of the city
Sunshine & Smiles	£3,834.25	Youth club
West Leeds Activity Centre	£11,439.88	After school club School holiday activities
TOTAL	£158,750	