

Executive Decision Making by an Officer with Delegated Powers

Decision to be taken by: *Sarah Scott, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health*

Pursuant to an Authorisation from Cabinet:

Decision: To delegate authority to the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities and the Executive Director for Corporate Resources to allocate the Local Authority Contain Outbreak Management Fund in order to deliver the objectives in the Local Outbreak Management Plan in accordance with the Council's standing orders and procurement legislation.

Taken by: Cabinet 27.01.21

Came into force: 04.02.21

Report title: Enabling the best start in life for young children negatively affected by the pandemic

<p>The decision</p>	<p>Having consulted with the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities and the Executive Director for Corporate Resources in accordance with a Cabinet decision dated 27th January 2021:</p> <p><u>DECISION</u></p> <p>To approve the allocation of £237,556 to invest in additional resource for Early Years services and Public Health Nursing in order to fund the council's response to the additional development needs of young children (age 2-4) created by the Covid-19 pandemic, as described more particularly in the "Objectives of the Proposal" section of this report (the "Objectives"). This will build resilience in communities and the council's workforce in order to manage potential future waves of COVID-19 as well as building on the council's ambition to give all children in Gloucestershire the best start in life.</p> <p>The proposed variations to existing contracts described in the main body of this report that are required for the purpose of implementing the Objectives shall be carried out in accordance with the council's obligations under public procurement law.</p>
<p>Background Documents</p>	<p>Gloucestershire Outbreak Management Plan</p> <p>https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/covid-19-information-and-advice/gloucestershire-covid-19-local-outbreak-management-plan/</p>

	<p>COMF Cabinet Paper</p> <p>https://glostext.gloucestershire.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=1608</p>
Reasons for the decision	<p>The Department for Health and Social Care requires that each top tier local authority has a Local Outbreak Management Plan (LOMP) in place and has allocated funding (COMF) to implement the plans.</p> <p>The past 18 months has had a significant impact on young children and their families due to limited childcare and social isolation, strain on families, reduced access to support services which would usually be able to identify and respond to concerns early on, lack of informal family support, the impact of digital poverty amongst others.</p>
Resource implications	<p>£237,556 allocation, for additional investment in Early Years Services and Public Health Nursing, will be funded from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) of £17.9 million that has been allocated to Gloucestershire County Council from the Department for Health and Social Care, for the purpose of implementing the Gloucestershire Local Outbreak Management Plan</p>
Who has been consulted?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cabinet Member of Public Health and Communities, Cllr Tim Harman • Cabinet Member for Children’s Safeguarding and Early Years, Cllr Stephen Davies • Executive Director for Corporate Resources • Executive Director for Children’s Services • Finance Business Partner • Head of Legal Services • Communications Business Advisor - Covid • Gloucestershire Covid-19 Health Protection Board • Gloucester City Council
<p>What were their comments?</p> <p>Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities, Tim Harman, has considered the proposals and has approved the allocation of funds from COMF.</p> <p>The Cabinet Member for Children’s Safeguarding and Early Years and Executive Director for Children’s Services have considered the proposal and approve the arrangements</p> <p>All consultees are supportive of the proposed decision.</p>	

Background/Context

During the 2020-21 Autumn term, Ofsted carried out a programme of research interviews with early years providers which concluded that professionals felt young children had fallen behind in communication and language skills, literacy and mathematics and, in particular, personal, social and emotional development.

We know that these issues affect those that are socially and economically disadvantaged to a greater extent and lead to inequalities throughout life.

This also exacerbates pre-existing inequalities. In Gloucestershire, whilst the proportion of children achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception is in line with the national picture (Gloucestershire 71.9 and England 71.8, PHE, 2018-19), there was still a large attainment gap for children with free school meal status (proportion of children with free school meals status (FSM) achieving a Good Level of Development at the end of Reception for Gloucestershire 52.4% compared to 56.4% for England as a whole). There are also concerning disparities amongst those from BAME communities.

In response to this Gloucestershire identified “Best Start in Life” as one of seven priorities of its Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy, 2020-2030. We have a longstanding multi-agency partnership working to deliver this objective. This proposal builds on the existing priorities and responds to the additional need created as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The threat of further waves and emerging variants of Covid-19 continues to put more vulnerable communities at greater risk of infection and negative consequences of illness. Cases are anticipated to rise over the winter period, which will be exacerbated by increases in other respiratory viruses which pose a particular threat to young children.

Current provision

Gloucestershire County Council is responsible for ensuring there is sufficient, high quality Early Years childcare provision in the county. We also allocate the funding for those children eligible for free childcare provision from age 2 due to social and economic disadvantage and provide additional resource and support to children with additional physical and learning needs. Despite the known benefits of early years childcare in building the skills required to thrive in school and in helping to identify and respond to emerging delay and additional needs, the free childcare provision is not always taken up. For example, we know there are currently 94 2 year olds open to social care in Gloucestershire that are not taking up their entitlement.

Gloucestershire County Council also commissions our Public Health Nursing Service. Health Visitors undertake a 9-12 month and 2 year check for all children in Gloucestershire in addition to baby hubs and parent support groups. These services provide invaluable support to families in building parenting skills and identifying and responding to additional needs or delays early. However during the pandemic the service had to adapt its approach. Initially many staff were redeployed to general nursing roles and face to face contact ceased unless required to ensure a child’s safety. These changes, coupled with a reduction in contact from other professions, have

created a backlog and additional need.

The Council will continue to provide funding for GHCHSFT (via the Council's Section 76 Agreement with the CCG) in order to provide Public Health Nursing Services for a further period of two years (to expire March 2024). The value of the contract is projected to be £13.4 million based on the 2020-21 service provision expenditure of £6.7 million. This funding will be in addition to the contracted amount.

Objectives of the proposal

The proposal aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Promote the health, wellbeing and development of young children that are most disadvantaged in Gloucestershire
 - Review all young children that have not received their 9-12 month and 2 year check and triage their level of need. Those with identified concerns will be contacted and visited. This will be achieved through an increase in Public Health Nursing Children's Nursery Nurse and admin capacity, to be arranged via a variation to the council's existing contract for the supply of Public Health Nursing services with Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)
 - Increase the numbers accessing their free early years entitlement funding at age 2 through creating an additional Early Years Advisor post within the council. This post will also provide additional support, advice, guidance and training to Early Years settings as referrals for this has increased as children have returned to settings displaying emerging needs.
 - Increase the Early Years Inclusion Funding budget. The nationally allocated funding for this provision has not increased despite an observed increase in demand. This funding is provided to settings for children with additional needs to enable them to access their full entitlement of EY provision.
 - Increase provision of and access to community stay and play groups in the most deprived areas of Gloucester City. This will be achieved through an additional Family Co-ordinator post recruited by the Home Start charity. An SLA will be agreed to reflect the purpose of the funding and its intended outcomes. The post will also provide support to families in the home to build confidence and support recruitment of Home Start volunteers
- Equip professionals that work with young children to be able to identify, respond and escalate emerging health, wellbeing, developmental and additional needs as early as possible
 - Pilot a dedicated Speech and Language Therapy triage/advice line for Early Years settings to support children where speech, language and communication needs have been identified. Such services shall be provided under the council's existing agreement for the supply of a speech and language therapist one day per week to provide an advice line and setting visits where needed [. If this is successful longer-term funding will be sought from alternative routes. This will respond to the growing number of children who are entering school without the language and communication skills needed to support their learning and development and is a primary concern of the children most adversely affected by the pandemic and lost opportunities that have resulted.

- Extend the length and number of training sessions provided by the supplier known as KCA Training (Knowledge, Change, Action) under its exiting contract with the council for the supply of the following forms of training to Early Years settings and community organisations:
 - Building Community resilience half day interactive session
 - ACEs/understanding and supporting trauma in young children
- Provide additional school readiness Microsoft Teams webinars for schools and other professionals to be delivered in June, Sept and Oct about common concerns such as continence, speech and communication, behaviour issues, Such services shall be provided under the council's existing agreement for the supply of Public Health Nursing services with the CCG, hence it will be necessary to vary the terms of such agreement in order to add the proposed new services to the services already provided thereunder.
- Prepare young children that have been disadvantaged by the pandemic for school by
 - Target the 33 schools in Gloucestershire which have >25% Free School Meal children to offer the following over the 21/22 school year:
 - School based sessions for new reception parents when they visit school in autumn – 2 visits per school (33 schools x2 = 66 sessions)
 - School Readiness hubs via MS Teams to be delivered monthly throughout the year
 - School Readiness hubs in person in wards of highest deprivation (children's centres).Such services shall be provided under the council's existing agreement for the supply of Public Health Nursing services with the CCG, hence it will be necessary to vary the terms of such agreement in order to add the proposed new services to the services already provided thereunder.
 - Build on the 'School Readiness' leaflet sent to all children in Gloucestershire starting school in September 2020 and 2021, with additional information and online resources for children due to start school in September 2022.
- Build resilience in vulnerable communities and our early years services to prevent transmission of Covid-19 and other infectious diseases, particularly during the winter period by:
 - Increasing parental and practitioner knowledge and understanding of infectious diseases, including Covid-19, affecting young children and their prevention through immunisation, good hygiene practices and early identification.
 - Providing signposting for families to schemes that are available in the community to support vulnerable families to be able to self-isolate and follow other covid-19 control measures.

Alternative options considered and why they were rejected**Not to allocate funds to fund additional staff in a taskforce focussing on health inequalities in Barton and Tredworth**

The option **not** to allocate funds for this purpose and not invest in additional Early Years Services was considered. This option was rejected on the grounds that the impact of Covid 19 on this cohort warrants additional investment.

Risk Analysis

This project poses a risk to statutory services, due to the potential increase of referrals to them. Due to the pandemic community services are already facing a backlog of referrals and waiting listings for assessments and treatment and this project may exacerbate the issue further. In order to mitigate this risk, the details of the project have been shared with the Deputy Service Director for Children and Young People in the Trust, who has agreed that the benefits of this project out weigh the risk of increasing referrals and that this project will have a positive impact on early intervention and preventative approaches for children and families who may otherwise have gone unnoticed.

By not undertaking this project there would be a risk that young children may go on to suffer health inequalities that could have been identified and dealt with at an early age. This could then mean that they require intervention from specialist services, potentially over the longer term, as they grow older, causing a future capacity risk to health services.

There is a risk in respect of any contract variation that it may be subject to legal challenge under the Public Contract Regulations 2015. On this basis, comprehensive procurement and legal advice will be sought in respect of each of the proposed contract variations described in this report before they are implemented.

Equalities considerations

A Due Regard statement has been completed for the LOMP.

The Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health and the Cabinet Member for Public Health and Communities have read and considered the Due Regard Statement in order to satisfy themselves as the decision makers that due regard has been given.

Has an Equality Impact Assessment been completed? Yes

If 'Yes', please attached the signed Equality Impact Assessment.

<p>Has any conflict of interest been declared by any Cabinet Member consulted on the decision?</p> <p><i>The council's Monitoring Officer should be consulted, in the first instance, if any conflict of interest is declared by a Cabinet Member.</i></p> <p>If any conflict of interest declared, was a dispensation granted by the Audit and Governance Committee of the Council?</p>	<p>No</p> <p>Date of dispensation:</p>
<p>Does this decision report form or any supporting papers provided contain confidential or exempt information?</p> <p><i>(Refer to Democratic Services Unit for advice if necessary)</i></p>	<p>No</p> <p><i>If Yes, please provide details of document(s) that are confidential or exempt</i></p>
<p>Does this decision need to be published on the GCC website?</p> <p><i>(Refer to guidance on "Executive Decisions taken by Officers").</i></p>	<p>Yes</p>

In coming to this decision I have given due and full regard to the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty contained in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ("the Act") by reference to the law itself and also the relevant Equality Impact Assessment, which was/were prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Act.

Having fully considered all available information, I have decided to reject any alternative options and take the recommended decision(s), for the reasons set out in this report.



Signed

Sarah Scott, Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health

Date 16.11.21

Contact details for further information:

Officer: Siobhan Farmer, Deputy Director of Public Health

Tel: 01452 324249

Email: Siobhan.farmer@gloucestershire.gov.uk

(include relevant officer's contact details)