

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board Sub Committee  
**DATE:** 17 November 2011  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise  
**SUBJECT:** Social Worker Critical Skills Training  
**WARD(S)** Borough-wide

**1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To seek agreement to enter into a contract without conducting a tender exercise or seeking three written quotations in order to comply with procurement standing order 4.1, which places a requirement on the Council to invite quotations or tender for contracts with a value less than £156,442.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- 1. Under Procurement Standing Order 1.8.2 (e) SOs 4.1 be waived in respect of Afta Thought Training Consultancy Ltd; and**
- 2. The Divisional Manager for Child Protection and Child in Need be authorised to enter into a contract with Afta Thought Ltd as the only provider of Social Worker Critical Skills Training of two days x two at a cost of £9,500.**

**3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 In February this year Ofsted conducted a three yearly inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children services. Ofsted made 22 separate judgements, with 12 areas graded as good and 10 as outstanding. This outcome placed Halton Borough Council's services amongst the top performing Councils in the country. However, Ofsted did identify some areas that needed improvement, in particular Social Workers must;

- Ensure that the quality of core assessment and plans for children in need and children in need of protection is consistently good and addresses both the risk and protective factors, as well as the implications of the family history.

3.2 The training needs of Social Workers are addressed by our Tools for Staff Working with Children & Young People training programme, most of which is delivered in house. Occasionally we need to use

external 'specialised' providers. Afta Thought is one of these specialist providers, who we have used before. Afta Thought deliver high quality training to the Public Sector and they are particularly skilled in using actors for training sessions that tackle sensitive issues. This makes their training unique. We are not aware of other providers who are able to deliver this highly specialised training.

3.3 Afta Thought's training is always well informed by current best practice and recent legislation. Feedback from Social Workers is always very positive and there is a high transfer rate to practice. We have found that their use of actors to role play situations with families delivers the best results and improves the practice of Social Workers. It has been identified that the delivery of training workshops by Afta Thought will enable us to comply with the action set out in 3.1.

3.4 When Ofsted published the final report they set a tight deadline for complying with the action set out in 3.1. Whilst part of the action has been addressed by our current in house training programme, (several training events have already been held), we have, after a review, come to the conclusion that we still need this specialist training to give staff the opportunity to develop their skills via role play. Therefore this does not allow time for the formal tendering exercise, if we are to comply with the action set by Ofsted, and we are not aware of other specialist providers. We are also expecting Ofsted to carry out their second inspection of Contract, Referral and Assessment services (frontline child protection social work teams), and therefore there is an urgent need to have all our Social Workers trained, so we can demonstrate we have fully addressed this area of improvement.

## **BUSINESS CASE**

### **4.1 Value for Money**

The training will allow over sixty Social Workers and other practitioners to spend two days with specialist actors developing and enhancing critical skills for working with vulnerable children and young people and their families.

### **4.2 Transparency**

This contract will be subject to issues of confidentiality and be open to scrutiny under the Freedom of Information Act, through the internal and external audit process and through the Policy & Performance Board scrutiny arrangements.

### **4.3 Propriety and Security**

Integrity clauses will be built into the contract document and only staff with a need to know will have information about the contract.

#### 4.4 **Position of the Contract under the Public Contracts Regulations 2006**

This contract is Social Work training and as such is largely exempt from the 2006 regulations. The requirement for transparency and non-distortion of competition are met by the details set out in the earlier parts of the business case. In any event, the value of this contract is below the financial threshold of £156,442,00

#### 4.5 **Accountability**

This would remain with the Divisional Manager awarding the contract and once again the internal and external audit process. Policy & Performance Board will be relevant.

#### 5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None

#### 6.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The funding for this training has been provided by the Children's Workforce Development Council, as part of the Social Work Improvement Fund Grant.

6.2 The contract is subject to annual renewal.

#### 7.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

##### 7.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

This training will enable Social Workers to enhance their assessment skills, to better identify the right care plan and therefore improve outcomes for children and young people.

#### 8.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

8.1 NONE

#### 9.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

9.1 NONE

#### 10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS**

10.1 Ofsted's Inspection of Halton Borough Council's Safeguarding and Looked After Children services dated 25<sup>th</sup> March 2011.