

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub Committee

DATE: 29th March 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children & Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Waiver of Procurement Process for
Company Delivering Level 3 & 4, Children &
Young People's Workforce Qualification

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To request the suspension of the relevant Procurement standing orders (4.1; 4.2 & 4.3) under the exceptional circumstances set out in this report, which places a requirement on the Council to tender or obtain 3 quotes for services set up with external providers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1 in light of the exceptional circumstances set out below, for the purpose of Procurement standing orders 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 be waived on this occasion in order to extend existing contracts with Heirs and Graces Childcare Training Solutions for the provision of delivering Level 3 & 4 Qualifications for the Children & Young People's Workforce; and**
- 2 the Strategic Director, Children and Young People be authorised, in conjunction with the portfolio holder for Children Young People and Families, to enter into the above contracts for one year from April 2012 to the end of March 2013.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Children & Enterprise have a clear commitment to raising the level of qualification and expertise in our Early Years workforce. This closely links to meeting our targets of expansion of free entitlement to fund placing of vulnerable two year olds for 10 hours (soon increasing to 15 hours) education and care.
- 3.2 The numbers of our workforce need to be increased dramatically to meet this target (we currently fund 100 two year old places/term and this needs to increase to 500 places by September 2013 and 1,000 by 2014.) As a result we need to increase the numbers entering our workforce and also the level of qualification (minimum Level 3).

- 3.3 An increasingly skilled workforce will improve outcomes for children across all our Early Years Sectors.
- 3.4 The up skilling of the work force has been and continues to be a major target for our Early Years strategy. As such, the procurement process was adhered to strictly last year. The result of this procurement process was that the training provider, Heirs and Graces, were awarded the contract to deliver the level 3 & 4 Qualification. Many colleagues started studying a 2 year course with this company last year and are continuing this year. As we are confident in the quality of the training being delivered; the flexibility of start dates; good levels of communication with the provider and consistency of approach and quality, it is essential that we continue to use the training delivered by this provider. As we had been through this process last year our understanding was that the procurement process had been completed and that we could continue with the same provider this year.
- 3.5 Based on the above understanding, we now have 30 colleagues who have applied and have been notified that they have been accepted on the course. The provider is in the process of registering the colleagues and has allocated places to start. A large amount of our workforce development budget has been allocated for funding this qualification from the 2011/12 budget. If this waiver was not successful, £60,000 of funding earmarked for the training of our Early Years work force would be forfeited. Crucially this also impact upon the number of early years practitioners that we would be able to fund next year, limiting our opportunity to train more of our colleagues to a higher level. As a consequence this would have a detrimental impact on our ability to provide places for our vulnerable two year olds and potentially impinge on availability of the workforce to support the 3 & 4 year old Nursery Education Grant (NEG) funded places.
- 3.6 Colleagues who are dedicated and keen to continue their studies to improve outcomes for children may leave the workforce or become disheartened and choose not to continue further study.
- 3.7 We also risk the current effective relationship with our existing provider, who has been consistent in delivering high quality training.

4.0 BUSINESS CASE FOR WAIVING STANDING ORDERS

4.1 Value for money and Competition

Having followed the procurement process last year, Heirs and Graces were awarded the contract following a number of considerations including value for money. The cost of the course has not increased since last year and clearly presents value for money backed up with proven, quality training. Alternative competitors were considered last

year, but this provider was deemed the most competitive. Having colleagues already working with this provider now has additional benefits as a result of the links already established and students who can 'buddy' and mentor colleagues now undertaking this qualification using similar routes. If another competitor were to be found, these benefits would be lost. As a collaborative workforce, we aim to support peer mentoring wherever possible as it has positive effects for both the work force and the children that they support.

4.2 Transparency

In order to ensure transparency, it is proposed that the service provider will continue to liaise closely with Early Years Improvement officer and the Two Year Old Funding Officer, to ensure that standards and quality of training are maintained. Results and details of applicants completing the qualification and continuing onto higher qualifications are also shared. Colleagues from the work force who have studied with this trainer complete evaluation forms detailing the quality and significance of impact this training is providing.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton:

Meeting the needs of our early years children and their families is crucial. This includes providing quality places for 3&4 year olds on the NEG grant funding and also meeting the increasing numbers of vulnerable two year olds who need to be placed in high quality provision. Whilst all children need quality early years provision, the vulnerable nature of some of our families require even more highly experienced practitioners. This can only be achieved through our on-going commitment to providing quality trainers delivering high level training, so that our workforce are able to support our young children and their families.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton:

The provider will directly support practitioners to gain new knowledge and skills particularly relating to children and young people. Improved levels of qualifications increases the work forces confidence, self esteem and employability. This often in turns leads to an increased desire to continue developing skills and many of the practitioners continue to study obtaining foundation and full degrees. Improving standards amongst the workforce improves a practitioners ability to develop children's skills and the knowledge and expertise to initiate Early Help when necessary. Many of our practitioners are Halton residents as well as Halton employees.

5.3 A Healthy Halton:

Increased confidence, value and self worth improves the emotional health and well being of our work force. This provider values the dedication of colleagues and supports them in their learning. The courses also link directly with providing healthy lifestyles for children and developing awareness of multi agency health professionals and services that can support Halton's community.

5.4 **A Safer Halton:**

This provider is committed to the safe guarding of adults and their training provides extensive information regarding children's safety. Information is provided includes strategies to keep children safe and the multi-agency links can support practitioners in keeping Halton's children, young people and adults safe.

5.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal:**

None.

6.0 **RISK ANALYSIS:**

- 6.1 The current training provider was expected to continue providing training for our Level 3 & 4 qualification. Should the waivers not be agreed, the services will not be provided; there will not be time to source an alternative (quality assured) provider and the £60,000 of funding earmarked for the up skilling of the Early Years work force will be lost.
- 6.2 30 practitioners will be informed that the funding for the qualification will not be available and that they will not have a course place. This will lead to an increasingly demoralised workforce impacting on the quality of provision available for our young children.
- 6.3 The opportunity to provide higher level training for our colleagues will have been lost and will impact negatively on the numbers that we are able to offer training to next year.
- 6.4 Good will and quality working relationships with our external training provider could be lost. This could impact on our Early Years colleagues already working towards their qualifications. Opportunities for peer mentoring and networking with other early years members will be lost.
- 6.5 This may lead to the Council being unable to fulfil its statutory duty to place vulnerable two year olds in quality early years provision. Failure to have this service in place may lead to already vulnerable families being placed under increased pressure.

The key risks/opportunities associated with the proposed action and an outline of the key control measures proposed in relation to these

risks should be included.

A statement must be made as to whether proposals are so significant as to require a full risk assessment. If a full risk assessment is required, please describe high risk areas and control measures. (NB all key decisions automatically fall into this category of requiring a full risk assessment.)

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES:

If we are unable to fund the training for our Early Years practitioners within this financial year this would lead to inequalities of opportunity. In previous years colleagues have been funded. If we are unable to honour our current commitment there is a potential for discrimination.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act