

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 10 December 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Education & Social Care

SUBJECT: Parent to Parent Volunteer Family Support Programme: Request for Waiver of Standing Orders

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Request for Waiver of Standing Orders:

A request for a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders is sought to allow the continuation of a contract with The Venus Project to deliver, on behalf of the Council, the Parent to Parent Volunteer Family Support Programme, for a period of one year from 1 February 2021 to 31 January 2022 with the option of a further one year extension from 1 February 2022 to 31 January 2023.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That: Executive Board

- i) Note the contents of this report; and
- ii) Consider giving approval to the recommendation that the contract with The Venus Project should be extended for a further twelve months with the option to extend for a further 12 months without going through the Procurement process, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 (non-emergency procedures – exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Venus Project has been commissioned to deliver the Parent to Parent Volunteer Family Support Programme since April 2015. The service recruits, trains, supervises and develops the skills of local volunteers who are parents themselves, so that they can provide support and practical assistance to families under stress. Under normal circumstances, volunteers support parents primarily through 1 to 1 home visiting programmes and also deliver family and specialist group work, direct support to children and young people,

and a range of community activities. The service also delivers the Intensive Cleaning Experience (ICE) Programme, which supports parents/carers to put in place and maintain household cleaning and decluttering routines.

Families are referred to the service through Early Help and a range of partner services, with referrals to ICE largely from Children's Social Care.

- 3.2 The service has adapted to Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions by continuing to provide daily or weekly support to families via telephone, email and video consultations. It also provides families with emergency/essential items, distributes activity resources for children and young people, and during the summer break provided food and family activities as part of Halton's Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) programme.
- 3.3 The existing contract ends in January 2021. The request for authorisation of a waiver rather than implementing a tender process is due to the following:
 - i It is proposed to include a parents/carers' interview and evaluation panel in the tender process, as this indicates the competence and approach of a potential provider in working with volunteers and families. It would not be possible to include this at present, which would reduce the effectiveness of the process for this specific service.
 - ii The current service is well known and well regarded within Halton communities and attracts a high level of interest from potential volunteers, who then go on to train and work with families. In the current situation it would be difficult for a new provider to become established, as it could not host its own events or attend those held by schools or community organisations in order to recruit volunteers. A change in provider can lead to existing volunteers leaving their role, thus disrupting the service, and have previous experience of this happening with other provision.
 - iii The Venus Project is commissioned separately to deliver support to refugee and asylum seeker families, providing an Arabic speaker from their base in Sefton. In the current circumstances there are concerns regarding the viability of this commission if another provider were to be awarded the contract for the Parent to Parent Volunteer Family Support Programme.
 - iv The Venus Project will be supporting the establishment of a social supermarket in Ditton Community Centre through the volunteer element of the service. This could be compromised should a new provider not be able to establish a strong

volunteer recruitment presence in sufficient time to offer an appropriate level of support.

- v The Venus Project brings significant additionality to its services in Halton, specifically in terms of sourcing training for volunteers and specialist skills from the provision it delivers in other areas, ensuring excellent value for money. It is also proactive in sourcing external funding to support its Halton delivery and is currently completing several substantial bids, one of which is likely to be granted in the near future. It would therefore be advantageous to its Halton services if the contract were to be extended for two years to maximise the benefits of both the existing additionality and the potential for extra funding.

3.4 The value of a contract extension for one year to 31 January 2022 is £75,000, which has been secured via the Troubled Families initiative. The option for a further contract extension of one year, to 31 January 2023, would cost a similar sum; this has not yet been secured. However, a waiver for two years would provide the flexibility to continue services without disruption should funds become available.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The stability of the service will support all aspects of Early Help with a focus upon some of the most vulnerable children, young people and families across the borough.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The funding for the first year of the waiver is within current budgets. Funding for the second year is an option that will only be utilised if funds become available.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The delivery of the service supports Halton's focus upon Early Help and the priorities within Halton's Children and Young People's Plan.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Volunteers with the service gain valuable training, skills and experience that equips them to go on to further training and/or employment

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The service supports the physical health of children and young people through helping families to attend medical appointments and access a range of activities linked to exercise and healthy lifestyles. It supports the mental health of all family members through a specific focus upon emotional wellbeing.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**
The service provides support to vulnerable families by helping them to access appropriate service provision within their local communities. This links to satisfaction with services and overall perception of the area in which people live.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
None.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Disruption to the service would reduce the type and level of support that can be offered to vulnerable families across the borough, together with the likely loss of additional resources and the potential to secure external grant funding in the near future.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The current proposal would not impact upon any equality and diversity issues as all relevant protected characteristics would be unaffected by the proposal.

9.0 **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

1 February 2021.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Current contract	Rutland House	Julie Karmy