

Monday 2 October 2023

COMMISSIONING WITHIN CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Purpose of report:

To provide the Select Committee with an overview of how the commissioning process takes place in Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL), how the best outcomes are achieved for children and families and how we work with partners within this process.

To provide the Select Committee with an overview of the recommissioning activities, process and next steps for the Family Centre Recommission and Family Resilience services.

Explain the aims and objectives of the Family Centre and Family Resilience Recommission.

Describe the procurement process Surrey County Council is following in order to award contracts.

PART A: OVERVIEW OF COMMISSIONING WITHIN CFLL

Introduction:

1. Surrey County Council works alongside our partners across the Surrey system and with families and children with the aim of commissioning excellent provision that supports children and young people aged 0-25yrs old to live healthy and fulfilled lives, in line with our Community Vision for 2030.
2. The Joint Commissioning Strategy ([Joint Commissioning Strategy for Children, Young People and their Families in Surrey 2022 \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk)) developed in 2022 sets out our principles around how we will commission in partnership and identifies key strengths to build on in our joint commissioning arrangements, as well as nine priority areas for change.

Commissioning Context

3. Surrey County Council has a wide range of statutory responsibilities relating to children and families. Whilst many of these responsibilities are fulfilled through services, support and interventions delivered in-house by the Council, we also partner with a large number of diverse organisations including hundreds of external providers from the private and third sectors to providers to meet the needs of children and families in the county. This includes providers such as Independent Fostering Agencies, Independent special schools, locally based charities that support particular groups (e.g. young people or children with disabilities), and local nurseries – to name just a few).
4. These services must be commissioned to ensure both quality and value for money. The timescales for these arrangements are determined by our statutory duties, changes to existing statutory duties and the length of existing contracts (which due to procurement regulations will expire on an agreed date, therefore requiring re-commissioning).
5. For clarity, the Institute for Public Care defines commissioning as “the process of identifying needs within the population and of developing policy directions, service models and markets, to meet those needs in a cost-effective way”. An alternative way of defining commissioning, which is set out in the Council own Strategic Commissioning Framework, which was published in 2019, is: “Using all the resources available, including the capacity and capabilities of our residents and communities, to bring about change and enable better long-term resources”. [The Council’s Commissioning Framework](#)
6. To manage these different provider markets, the Council has thematic commissioning teams that focus on particular areas of statutory responsibility within Children, Families and Lifelong Learning (CFLL). These include:
 - Corporate parenting
 - Additional needs and disabilities
 - Early years and childcare
 - Domestic abuse
 - Family resilience
 - Health and wellbeing
7. Examples of the range of services and provisions managed within the CFLL Integrated Commissioning team are:
 - Domestic Abuse – Outreach Services and Domestic Abuse Training
 - Domestic Abuse – Safe Accommodation

- Early Help / Family Resilience new services
- The collaborative commissioning between Surrey Heartlands and Surrey County Council of the Children's Community Health Services Contract
- Children's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health services (Mindworks) contract
- Externally managed Children's homes
- Independent fostering agencies
- Supported accommodation for young people
- Short breaks services for children with disabilities
- Translation services
- Advocacy services
- Independent assessments
- Forensic testing

Outcomes and service priorities

8. The Commissioning service takes an outcomes-focused approach to all aspects of commissioning, with commissioners in different areas defining and commissioning against outcomes for children, young people and families – which would be informed by national and local research, engagement with people from the relevant target groups.
9. For example, Early Help/Family Resilience services support the Council's corporate ambitions to ensure no one is left behind and support the prevention of health inequalities and the recommission of this has adopted the DfE's Supporting Families Outcomes:
 1. Getting a good education
 2. Good early years development
 3. Improved mental and physical health
 4. Promoting recovery and reducing harm from substance use
 5. Improved family relationships
 6. Children safe from abuse and exploitation
 7. Crime prevention and tackling crime
 8. Safe from domestic abuse
 9. Secure housing
 10. Financial stability
10. CFLL Commissioning has an overall set of values and behaviours, linked to the 7 Corporate Parenting Principles and 8 strategic commissioning intentions, as set out below.

Our Values & Behaviours

We must always be the strongest advocates for our children and consistently ask 'would this be good enough for my child?' There are 7 Corporate Parenting Principles:

1. To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people
2. To encourage those young children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
4. To help those children and young people gain access to and make the best use of services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
5. Seek to secure the best outcomes for those children and young people
6. For those children and young people to be safe and stable in their home lives, relationships and education or work
7. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living

Strategic Commissioning Intentions

- C.I 1. Children and young people should live, learn, and reach their ambitions in Surrey. For those children for whom we are corporate parents this means we will bring them 'home' and stop them having to go to school or be cared for away from their families and community
- C.I 2. Children with SEND should have the same access to education and training in Surrey as every other child. This means that we will be developing our local offer, always favouring inclusion so minimising children with SEND having to be educated outside of maintained settings and especially out of the County, away from their families and communities.
- C.I 3. Recovery for Covid-19 - understanding the impact on CYP and families in the short and longer term and what this means in terms of needs and demand. Ensure that the learning is utilised in immediate recovery planning and for service design in the future
- C.I 4. No one gets left behind - we will close the gap and tackle inequalities in terms of access, service experience and outcomes
- C.I 5. We will increase the range of and access to earlier help and timely interventions for children and families and in doing so drive better the outcomes
- C.I 6. Improve services for CYP and their families by integrating children and health commissioning functions and teams, playing an active part in the development of new ways of working and models of care/support in Surrey including more multi-disciplinary approaches/ teams and more digitally enabled solutions
- C.I 7. Continue to develop our 'Commissioning Community' with our partners and providers by implementing more co-production, promoting innovative models of service delivery that recognises the importance of relationships and subject matter expertise in all areas of our system.
- C.I 8. Maximising the assets, we have in Surrey and the things we purchase so we are extracting every ounce of value available from them on behalf of CYP and their families

Identifying Demand

11. As part of our standard commissioning practice, informed by the IPC “Analyse, Plan, Do, Review” cycle, commissioning projects would typically start with an in-depth needs assessment, that explores issues like current and future demand patterns, the profile of needs within a target population and how this is changing over time. This will involve review of national research and datasets, as well as locally generated information, intelligence and insights, derived through both qualitative and quantitative research approaches (within the resources allocated and scope of each commissioning project). This needs assessment would be supplemented by data about demand in terms of current usage of existing services, which would typically be collected and routinely monitored through contract monitoring and management arrangements, where there is an existing service in place.
12. Needs assessments for related children’s areas can be found on Surrey I - <https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/jsna/>



Figure 1: the IPC approach to commissioning. Procurement sits within the centre of this cycle

13. This information would inform the development of delivery options, models and the allocation of resources available, as part of any commissioning process undertaken.

14. Once contracts have been established, during the lifetime of the contract, regular contract management reviews are conducted. Commissioned services would typically have a contract management plan that includes the key performance indicators (KPIs) agreed and how these will be reported on and managed.
15. These KPIs get reported on within the CFLL management structure and any performance variations escalated to the relevance Associate Director and then Director where appropriate. In most instances, working in collaboration with providers resolves any performance challenges, but in some instances a more formal contract management process can be instigated.

Partners

16. The Council works with hundreds of providers from the private and third sectors, to deliver high-quality services that fulfil our statutory duties and enable better outcomes for children and families. The specific providers we work alongside vary between thematic commissioning area and are summarised in detail in our contracts register. We work to cultivate strong relationships with our key local providers over time.
17. In different market areas there is different levels of competition between providers, as there are different supply and demand pressures (and other factors) in play. For some market areas, for example, providers are tightly regulated and there are more barriers to entry (for example children's homes, where there is a requirement to be Ofsted registered), whilst for others markets are more open. This does mean levels of competition vary between different thematic areas.
18. In commissioning, we are often looking to strike the right balance between competition, to maximise value for money, but also collaboration between ourselves and partner providers – which is often desirable during the lifetime of contracts to enable the best outcomes for children, young people and families.
19. We employ a range of commissioning models and routes to market, specifically chosen to meet the needs of different provider markets and ensure the best providers of a variety of sizes and types are able to successfully bid for the resources on offer. Some examples of these include: Dynamic Purchasing Systems or Framework Agreements; block contracts; individual spot purchasing; more collaborative models such as alliance commissioning or grant funding processes.
20. In line with procurement regulations, when providers tender for an opportunity (dependent on value of the contract), the process must be competitive. Competitive Procurement means a procurement process followed in order to

provide an equal opportunity to multiple providers, whether by invitation or by advertisement to the public, to bid on a contract as set out in tender documentation. Competition helps to drive best value for money and improved quality of goods and/or works and/or services.

21. In line with procurement regulations, the Council adapts its processes to suit the needs of the different provider markets it manages and the level of statutory risk and responsibility held in relation to different service areas. Within these parameters, CFLL commissioners work hard to ensure that commissioning processes are run and delivered in a way that appropriately enables providers of all types to participate, from large private organisations to small local third sector organisations – which means looking to remove unnecessary barriers to participation, whilst also ensuring an appropriate level of scrutiny and information is secured to comply with regulation and enable fair and balanced decisions to be taken. In all our work, we aim to enable the providers that offer the best value for money and enable the best outcomes for children, young people and families to contract with us, within the resources we have available.
22. Alongside our relationship-based model of working, promotion of commissioning opportunities is done via a number of routes to ensure a wide range of partners consider applying for opportunities:

Market Engagement:

- Commissioning teams work with procurement to invite Providers to a Market Engagement by publishing a Prior Information Notice (PIN) on Find A Tender and/or Contracts Finder websites (subject to estimated contract value). These are national government websites where all Providers registered will receive an alert for any notice published under the relevant category of work.
- Contracts Finder notices are generally used for lower value opportunities. Within this notice, you are able to select if the opportunity is suitable for Voluntary Community Social Enterprise organisations and Small Medium –sized Enterprises to specifically alert providers registered as this to the opportunity. In addition, opportunities are sent to all providers held within existing contact lists developed by commissioning services over time.

Contract Value

22. Contract values are set for a range of reasons, which vary depending on the type of service being commissioned and the market you are working within.

23. For many services we commission, we are working with a pre-agreed fixed budget. Where this is the case, the job of commissioners is to maximise the benefit that can be gained (often this is capacity and quality of service) for our target populations in Surrey.
24. For other services, decisions are made on a more individual basis about placements that best meet the needs of children, in line with our statutory duties and responsibilities.
25. A range of approaches will be used by commissioners to try and secure the best possible value for money and outcomes with the resources we have available. Some examples include:
 - Establishing a baseline for unit costs against existing service costs;
 - Benchmarking prices with other local authorities or using nationally recognised tools (such as CareCubed;)
 - Collaborative models where we work with other local authorities through regional frameworks to increase our collective purchasing power and have greater influence on the provider market; and
 - Robust evaluation of price through any tender processes undertaken.
26. The Annual Procurement Forward Plan contains information on the anticipated aggregate contract value of contracts being procured and is reviewed and signed off by Cabinet before the start of each financial year.
27. Eventual contract values are set through the appropriate governance route, in line with our procurement standing orders and established processes. This would typically include both sign off via the relevant budget holder or director and completion of the required procurement reports to authorise spend.

Future Challenges within Commissioning

27. There are a range of challenges in relation to future commissioning including:
 - Market demand and supply – the current provision available across additional needs and disabilities and looked after populations attracts high unit cost and is limited in number. This means local authorities are often limited in the terms agreed upon in terms of placement terms and conditions and associated cost.
 - Recruitment and retention issues for external providers.
 - Inflation and financial pressures creating uncertainty around provider sustainability.

- Competition from other LAs for limited services – this is particularly pertinent around children’s residential schools and homes.
- National legislative and regulatory changes, often without accompanying budgets and guidance (an example of this is the recent changes to high needs funding guidance and the impact this has had on EHCP looked after funding).
- Demand pressures following COVID-19 (for example, increases in social, emotional and mental health (SEMH), rise in school absences or access to alternative provision (such as outdoor education)).
- Increased complexity of need resulting in high cost placements many of which are residential.

Commissioning Structure

28. Throughout the recommissioning process the Council has been following Procurement Contract Regulations 2015 that determines that procurement needs to be conducted in accordance with the principles of equality, non-discrimination, transparency, proportionality and competition. When the bidding opportunity closes the evaluation panel must treat each bidder equally and approach the scoring in a consistent, non-discriminatory and fair manner. This means that the panel must only score the bidder submissions on the information contained in them and any clarifications received. The panel cannot take into account any other information they may have already received by any means, including personal experience of working with existing providers (although quality questions relating to track record and local knowledge of Surrey’s communities can be asked of all providers). The scoring criteria does not provide an advantage to larger providers compared to small organisations.
29. Whenever bids are evaluated, the following aspects would be assessed: price; quality (typically assessed through a series of quality questions); social value; and environmental impact.
30. Evaluation of price and quality elements will be done separately, in support of ensuring the process is fair and transparent, and quality would typically be assessed by a mixed panel of evaluators, including commissioners, relevant professionals and often individuals who are well placed to represent the views of service user and/or service users themselves. Evaluators will initially assess bids individually and then come together in a moderation process, which will be independently facilitated by the Council procurement.

Service Specification

31. One of the core roles of commissioner is to own the service specification and ensure that it appropriately specifies the requirements and characteristics of the service that is being commissioned, drawing on appropriate expertise to do so. However, as we work across a range of provider markets and commission a large variety of different services, there are many considerations that affect how services are specified.
32. The starting point for Council-led commissioning processes is an existing Council-model specification template, that has been co-designed by commissioners across the council with facilitation from the Strategic Commissioning Team. This overall model would then be adapted to suit the needs of the specific service area.
33. In some other situations, different specification models may apply, for instance where a commissioning project is Health-led or where the Council is collaborating with other LAs as part of regional arrangement, where services will be specified in partnership with other LAs or national contracts might be used.
34. In addition, within any approach there are choices to be made about how tightly specified a service is in terms of requirements, with a spectrum ranging between lighter, outcomes-oriented specifications (where providers have greater flexibility about how they set-up their delivery model to enable outcomes with the resources available) or detail-oriented specifications that are much more precise in terms of what needs to be delivered to fulfil statutory requirements. To illustrate, there might be a wide range of ways a service provider can deliver interventions that enable early help or preventative outcomes for children, young people and families (taking account of the specific needs and preferences of a population group and particular geographic locations within Surrey), whilst in the case of Ofsted-regulated children's homes, there is tightly defined national regulation that determines how services are delivered. Whilst there is scope for innovation in both cases, the regulatory burden is likely to lead to a more detailed set of requirements in the specification.
35. There are also a range of reasons why services are commissioned or recommissioned that feeds into how they are specified. For example, this could be:
 - An identified gap in service following an increase in need. For example, the Council produces a full additional needs and disability and looked after children sufficiency plan that is refreshed annually. Any changes to demand – for example, increases in persistent absence or accessing to alternative provision – would indicate an area of service development to consider (for example, the development of an

independent alternative provision framework to improve access to education, minimise school absence, support re-integration into education or improve absence from a low base).

- Existing services “spot purchased” from the market (individually commissioned) may be determined that better quality and value can be sought by developing block contracts, frameworks, alliances to ensure providers deliver to fixed pricing schedules and align to the county’s wider strategic vision (for example, “closer to home” provision).
- User feedback – for example, the re-commissioning of Supported Accommodation noted the importance of high-quality internet speeds to support young people in care. This requirement was built into the specification for all supported accommodation.
- Statutory requirements in the specific service area; for example, mediation services are required in line with SEND legislation to support children, young people and families before going to tribunal.

Prioritisation of Demand

42. Overall, the Council has statutory duties around financial governance and ensuring it delivers a balanced budget and, whilst the Council is currently operating from a relatively strong financial position, there remains significant pressure associated with our budget position. This means that inevitably hard choices have to be made about which services are funded and what level of capacity is affordable, within our budget and the scope of our statutory duties.
43. There are a range of considerations that go into determining the level of services that can be commissioned. There are some overall types of services that it is helpful to summarise here, where the statutory basis for services for the service significantly affects how budgets are allocated and managed to meet demand.
 - Demand-led statutory services - Some services are demand-driven, whereby if a child is assessed as meeting a particular level of need then the Council is required by law to meet that need. Typical examples of these services include placements for looked after children and children with additional needs and disabilities. A high proportion of the Council’s children’s services budgets goes on these services. In addition to placement services, there are also other specific statutory services that the Council must have in place, where there is limited discretion about how these can be provided – for example forensic testing services, appropriate adults services or regulation 44 visitors.

- Services funded via dedicated national funding formulas – for some services we commission, funding is allocated in response to national funding formulas. For example, in the case of early years provision, the Council receives a formula-driven allocation of funding, which is then passported through to providers within certain nationally set parameters.
 - Services with a statutory basis but where the Council has discretion with regards to delivery model and capacity – some of the services we commission have a clear statutory basis, but the Council, as a local authority is given significant discretion within national legislation and guidance to determine how its statutory duties are met and the capacity of provision that it commissions in response. Examples of these kind of services include short breaks for children with disabilities, youth provision, some domestic abuse services and some early help services. These services often have a strong preventative benefit with regards to demand for higher-end specialist provision.
 - Services with limited direct statutory basis but that have a significant impact on demand for statutory service – lastly there are some services that the Council commissions where there is not a strict statutory duty, but the cost and outcomes benefit afforded by having a service in place means that investment is made.
44. It is really important that we balance these competing statutory demands on the Council's budgets in determining the funding allocation to particular services, whilst also reconciling this against changing patterns of need and demand over time – so that we make best use of the resources we have available to support children and families. This means considering both the statutory basis for a service and the level of impact it has in enabling positive outcomes and preventing demand elsewhere in our complex system.
45. Decisions on specific budgets will be made by Senior Officers, in consultation with the relevant Members, within the financial parameters agreed by Cabinet and Full Council in setting the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Monitoring

46. As a routine part of the commissioning process, CFLL commissioning will establish clear performance metrics and outcome for all services it commissions. This will be informed by a range of considerations, with examples including:
- Any performance frameworks in place for existing services

- Examples of good practice from other parts of the Council or elsewhere
 - National guidance or model contracts
 - Feedback and learning generated locally from engagement with providers and relevant service-user groups
 - National research into what works
 - Evidence-based models of delivery
47. Performance and outcomes are monitored throughout the lifetime of the contract. Monitoring frequency is determined at the point of commissioning the service and may be determined via several different factors (for example, education providers may have termly monitoring against other provision that may require quarterly monitoring). The frequency of monitoring is in addition determined by the scope and value of the contract itself.
48. The review of performance, and subsequently impact on commissioned outcomes, is a key component of the “Review” phase (outline in the “best practice” section).
49. Demand for a particular service will typically be monitored as part of contract management and service review arrangements. Providers would be asked to supply relevant information to commissioners as part of this process. The nature of demand and how the Council needs to respond varies significantly in response to the different service areas we commission. Whilst we want to maximise the value of resources we have and capacity to meet need, for some services the Council is not funded or statutorily required to meet all demand for particular service types, whereas in other areas we do have statutory duties to meet all demand.
50. Some examples of the kind of demand management that takes place include:
- Number of referrals into a service, successful assessments and how this has translated into a full service intervention.
 - Monitoring referral rates coming into the Gateway to Resources Service over time for different provision types.
 - Monitoring of occupancy and vacancy levels within block contracted provision (for example supported accommodation for young people)
 - Monitoring level of vacancies in a specific non-maintained independent school

51. Contracts are often designed with the flexibility to respond to increase demand (where this is appropriately approved).
52. CFLL Commissioning implements robust terms and conditions across all its contracts, with these always subject to review and sign-off by Council Legal services. The Council's terms and conditions would always include provisions that allow for break causes in a range of different circumstances (with specified notice periods in response to different situations) and clauses that allow for variation to services in response to changes in requirements or levels of demand.
53. Any contractual variations that are put in place would require appropriate sign-off by the relevant the Council budget holder and appropriate processes legal and procurement processes being followed.
54. In terms of groups to prioritise, the Council's standard service specification template includes a section where target groups for each commissioned service are required to be specified. Providers will deliver services in line with specifications and this will be monitored by Council Commissioners, as a routine part of contract management. Often services have specific referral processes or criteria attached to them, where a range of appropriate professionals will be involved in determining which children, families and young people are referred to access services.

Best Practice

55. Commissioning practice within the CFLL Directorate draws on a number of sources of best practice nationally, including a solid foundation of professional qualifications delivered through the Institute for Public Care (IPC) [Institute of Public Care Commissioning approach](#), which are held by the majority of commissioners within the service, with regular opportunities afforded to new starters to participate in this training (within budgets allocated to commissioning through the Children's academy).
56. In addition, CFLL commissioning uses its training budget to bring in external expertise for particular specific items of training over time. Examples from the current financial year include: a "Commissioning for Communities" programme delivered by Collaborate CiC and the Ideas Alliance, which focusses on co-production approaches, collaborative commissioning models and system stewardship; a specific training programme from the New Economic Foundation linked to measuring outcomes and impact; a training programme from IESE on negotiation skills; and training for the Analysis and Evaluation Team around generating insight to inform commissioning.

57. Alongside the training offer, the Council draws on good practice resources from across the Council and other Local Authorities. An example of this is the Council's own strategic Commissioning Framework, which was co-designed with commissioners from across the Council and published in 2019, that sets out a standardised set of key commissioning principles and approaches that can be drawn on throughout the commissioning cycle. This draws heavily on commissioning models from Essex County Council and Cornwall County Council specifically, as well as a wide-range of research and resources from other LAs and national organisations about what works in commissioning.
58. The Council is also active in a range of national networks and initiatives that support the improvement of commissioning practice and share experience and knowledge between local authorities. For example, CFLAG Commissioning is now represented on the Steering Committee for the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG), which pulls together practical tools and resources that inform our commissioning practices within Children's Social Care and Additional Needs and Disabilities. Commissioners from the Council also attended the National Children's Commissioning Conference in June 2023. These are just two examples of the professional networks that we are actively participating in across CFLAG Commissioning.
59. Hertfordshire are the lead authority that host the CCRAG network mentioned above. This network supports children's commissioners from over 30 local authorities to work together, develop shared practice and provide peer support, through a range of focussed networks. The Council is one of the regional representative authorities that sits on this Steering Committee for CCRAG, which Hertfordshire chairs.
60. Essex County Council is an active member of the CCRAG network, and Surrey County Council drew extensively on their commissioning model to inform the development of its own Strategic Commissioning Framework. This included specifically hosting workshops delivered by senior commissioners from Essex County Council, who came to Surrey to share with commissioners from CFLAG and other directorates their commissioning model. The Council's Commissioning Framework provides a set of clear commissioning principles and a recommended range of best practice tools and approaches to support commissioning, which are flexibly applied by different commissioners across the CFLAG directorate to support their work.
61. As a neighbouring large authority, the Council has current links with commissioners in Hampshire, but also a range of other comparable authorities – including West Sussex, East Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire and others. These links exist through the proactive work of commissioners for across the service, but also through the formalised joint commissioning

arrangements we have in place in terms of regional frameworks that the Council actively participates in.

Commissioning 2024/5 and beyond

62. CFLL Commissioning has been making real strides to strengthen our commissioning arrangements in recent years across a range of key commissioning areas. This has included:
- The introduction of multiple new, long-term framework or dynamic purchasing system arrangements, to strengthen contractual levers to control quality, outcomes and price;
 - Increased collaboration at a regional level with other local authorities, to better respond to national market challenges and supply and demand pressures;
 - Increased collaboration with partners across the Surrey Heartlands and Frimley ICB geographies on joint programmes.
 - Strengthened uplift management processes and new tools to secure value for money, to mitigate against macro-economic pressures that have been driving unprecedented levels of inflation;
 - Improved grip on our commissioning pipeline, supported by the Annual Procurement Forward Plan;
 - Investing in professional training for commissioners across the service, to strengthen the fundamentals of our practice, as well as stretch our capabilities into areas such as outcomes-led commissioning, co-production, negotiation and collaborative commissioning models; and
 - Reshaping services within constrained budgets to enable the best possible outcomes with the resources we have available.
63. These changes have been delivered at a time when we have faced genuinely significant pressures in terms of:
- Inflation running at levels that have been unprecedented in recent decades;
 - Recruitment challenges affecting supply of statutory services within social care, health and education services (both independent and publicly-run);
 - The COVID-19 pandemic and its legacy effects; resulting not just in increased demand but increased complexity requiring multi agency solutions;
 - Tightening national regulation in key areas of our business; and
 - Increased demand in terms of volume and complexity of need, which is outstripping funding levels available.
64. As we look ahead to 2024/25, we anticipate a period of greater stability in terms of inflation forecasts, as well as some major longer-term recommissioning projects being completed (noting there are others on the horizon), whilst

acknowledging we will continue to face significant demand pressures and regulatory change across key service areas. This will allow for strengthened consistency of approach, enhanced collaboration with our provider partners and development of further innovative, alternative service models and approaches.

65. The increasing complexity and the need for multi agency solutions, is being addressed by deepening and strengthening the work with health to jointly scope and commission services with health colleagues, as is evidenced by the joint development of Section 75 agreement and the informal consultation on a more Care and Health focussed commissioning directorate.
66. In response to this report, we would welcome specific feedback from the CFLL Select Committee with regards to how our current commissioning practice could be strengthened as we move into 2024/25 and would also suggest a separate informal workshop is arranged to provide members of the Select Committee with an opportunity to learn more about key areas of CFLL's commissioning approach.

Conclusions:

62. Commissioning within CFLL is a complex and multi-faceted process which involves collaborative working across health, education and social care.
63. We work hard to ensure we are continually improving our processes and take on board learning from other partners to deliver against our Community Vision for Surrey 2030.
64. We work with partners – in line with procurement regulations – to develop service specifications which will enable the best outcomes to be achieved for our residents and we hold services to account through contract monitoring to ensure they are being delivered.

PART B: Family Centre and Family Resilience Recommission

Introduction:

65. Early Help and Family Resilience services are vital to identifying and preventing children, young people and families' needs from escalating and requiring higher cost services. This provision supports residents to build resilience and confidence, enabling them to connect to their local community.

66. This part of the report will focus on the recommissioning of Family Centres and Early Help/Family Resilience services. Information is captured on the Family Centre and Family Resilience Recommissioning journey to date. It includes examples of how officers have carried out research, engagement and co-design activities and used this learning to shape the recommissioning model.
67. A high-level overview of the key aspects stated in the service specification, reporting requirements as well as outcomes has been provided for these commissioned services. Furthermore, information on the procurement process and possible future challenges and mitigations has been noted.
68. It is important to note that the wider work on Surrey's Early Help model is outside of the recommissioning of the Family Centres and Family Resilience contracts and therefore is not included in this report.
69. The Early Help Partnership Team, which supports the operational delivery for family centres and the wider partnership who deliver early help services, work closely and collaboratively with Family Resilience to develop the specification for the recommissioning, which is an enabler of services rather than a driver.

Context

70. The basis for Early Help services is noted in Section 17 of the Children's Act 1989 which places a general duty on Local Authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Surrey County Council's (The Council) [Helping Families Early Strategy \(2020 to 2023\)](#) explains that the Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 (statutory guidance) highlights that "Local authorities, under section 10 of the Children Act, have a responsibility to promote inter-agency co-operation to improve the welfare of all children. Identifying children and families who would benefit from Early Help." However if a Local Authority decides not to deliver Early Help Services, they cannot be held to account because it is not a statutory requirement which is why there are different levels of investment in early help across the country.

Partnership Vision for Early Help

71. Local Authorities Early Help offer is subject to Ofsted inspections and is a key element of the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework. Ofsted have recently introduced Early Help Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAs) which focus on local areas' multi-agency arrangements for helping children and families early. The partner inspectorates for the JTA inspection are The Care Quality Commission (CQC) and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, therefore health and police partners are key partner organisations for this inspection.

72. In February 2023 the Department for Education noted in the “Children's social care: stable homes built on love” consultation the risk of not having an effective Early Help System would place demand on higher cost services. It is important to note that building a relationship with one trusted professional for children and families is most important to them when we move them through different services this fractures relationships. Our ambition in Surrey’s broader early help continuous improvement work is to join up prevention, place, and early intervention including health, education, social care, and community services into a systemic model of delivery in a district and borough boundary. This should be visible, accessible to families at the earliest opportunity and based in their communities to ensure that no one is left behind.

73.



Figure 2 Surrey's Partnership Vision for Early Help

74. Therefore, the Early Help offer in Surrey is dependent on the contributions of all agencies, partners, and communities. When this is working well families can access a localised Early Help offer whether they are signposted and self-serve or are supported by practitioners for example, schools and early years settings, Police, GPs, and other health services to get the help they need. The Council’s Early Help offer is a mixed economy of in-house and commissioned provision. The Family Centres offer is currently delivered by schools and voluntary community and faith sectors (VCFS). Mentoring services are also delivered by VCFS partners. Further details on Surrey’s current commissioned Early Help offer can be found in annex 1.

75. The Council are recommissioning Family Centres and Family Resilience services. The term Family Resilience in the context of the recommission means a wide range of services that are evidence based to support Family's Resilience e.g., parenting support, group work, mentoring which are currently delivered by YMCA, Home Start & Surrey Care Trust. The level of need and demand for these services is monitored through referrals in Children's Single point of access weekly and through contract monitoring arrangements with providers.
76. The recommission will also help tackle health inequalities and support the empowerment of communities by making families and communities more resilient. For example, this could be through residents being able to identify and access support for themselves. It is likely that the recommissioned services will employ Surrey residents and possibly Surrey based providers therefore supporting the Council's ambition to grow a sustainable economy.
77. The Family Centre and Early Help mentoring services contractual arrangements are coming to an end on 31 March 2024. The Council will need to ensure new services are in place from 01 April 2024 so that Surrey can continue supporting children, young people and families with this important provision.

What the recommission is trying to achieve

78. The overarching aim for this recommission is for providers to work with children, young people, and families as well as partners to meet families' additional needs. Providers will need to offer the right help at the right time to prevent needs escalating and reducing the requirement for specialist services. Family Centres and Family Resilience services will act as soon as problems emerge, share information and provide effective, timely support. This will enable children and families to overcome difficulties and become more resilient so that they can manage future life challenges independently. However, the biggest challenge for recommissioning is a 10% reduction in the financial envelope and no inflationary uplift over the lifetime of the contracts.

How the recommissioning model was developed

79. [The Early Help and Family Resilience Needs Assessment](#) is completed prior to recommissioning to inform the delivery by exploring the needs of children, young people, and families in Surrey. This document presents a snapshot in time, providing information on the level of needs across Surrey, an overview of the current Early Help offer, families and partners experiences of using the provision, and the impact of the pandemic. This assessment also provides a series of recommendations that have been used to inform the recommissioning of Family Centres and Family Resilience provision. There is also a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment held which is being developed by the Health and Wellbeing team to collect data on families who experience multiple

disadvantages facing 2 or more challenges for example homelessness, substance misuse, mental health.

80. The challenge is that the level of need cannot be delivered by one service or commissioning activity, and we currently offer services when a problem has occurred or escalated. It is therefore extremely important that we have a systemic localised model of delivery which is based in communities to ensure children families receive timely support by the right service at the right time In Surrey this will be achieved through the development of a recognised Early Help branding/quality standard that partners can sign up to. This will highlight to families that this is a safe space to access information, advice, and services.
81. A benchmarking exercise also took place where officers reviewed a number of other local authorities' Early Help commissioning models. Early Help is provided in a range of different ways, this could be through Local Authorities delivering services inhouse, commissioning services or a mixed economy similar to how Surrey delivers provision. Surrey has taken inspiration from Essex, Hampshire and Hertfordshire which have all received from Ofsted an overall effectiveness of "Outstanding" (Essex in 2023, Hampshire in 2019 and Hertfordshire 2023). Essex and Hampshire have developed Early Help Hubs or Family Hubs in local communities which is a similar approach the Council is implementing.
82. Between June - October 2022, the Council commissioned research partners, Ideas Alliance who engaged with children, young people, families, partners, school-based Family Centres, D&Bs through the Family Support Programme, and practitioners. This resulted in the project team having a conversation with 105 practitioners, 5 children aged 1-10yrs, 34 young people aged 11-18yrs, 23 parents and 3 mentors. In addition, a team of Community Researchers conducted 59 interviews and 62 people were consulted.
83. The entire sample included the following family situations: single parents, parents for whom English is not their first language, travellers, young parents, those with young children, those with teenagers, parents of children with additional needs, young people with additional needs, and parents with adopted children. Please see annex 2 for the outputs of this work including the 10 key cross cutting themes that emerged from engagement activities that underpinned the design of services.
84. The Council made a commitment to co-producing and co-designing Family Centre services in partnership with children, young people, families and partners. In February 2023, the Council commissioned New Possibilities who are graphic facilitators to hold the following co-design activities:
 - Two sessions just for children, young people and families (one session in the East of the county and one session in the West) which was attended by 21 children, young people and families. These sessions were called Focusing on the Future.

- Four co-design events for children, young people, families, partners and practitioners. One session was held in each of Surrey's geographical quadrants and a total of 9 families and 17 partners contributed to these sessions.
 - One virtual Partner Forum that focused on how the Early Help commissioned partners can ensure families are at the centre of everything the partnership do, 44 partners attended.
85. Building on the learning from the 10 themes from the engagement work carried out by Ideas Alliance and the Focusing on the Future sessions, officers and New Possibilities worked with children, young people, families and partners to generate ideas on how they would like services to look in the future. There was also consideration for what the challenges could be and participants put forward their recommendations. Please see annex 3 to see the outputs of the co-design work including a short video showing the activities carried out with children, young people, families and partners.
86. In March 2023, the Council ran two virtual Market Engagement events for incumbent providers: charities, Voluntary & Community Sector provider, Schools and Nurseries and some District & Boroughs. During these sessions learning from the engagement and co-design events was shared as well as the proposed recommissioning model. Providers also had the opportunity to share their feedback. A total of 70 people attended these events. A following Market Engagement Event took place on the 30 June 2023 to inform the market on the commissioning model and the bidding process, this was attended by 62 people.
87. The following stakeholders and partners have been informed about the recommissioning model during the following meetings:
- Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Leadership Team Meeting
 - Corporate Leadership Team Meeting
 - Informal Select Committee
 - Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership Executive Group
 - Informal Cabinet
 - Market engagement events with potential providers

Demand

88. Early Help demand for Family Centres, Family Support and Targeted Youth Support and Family resilience services is captured through the number of referrals to the services and reviewed on a weekly basis. A capacity report is developed to help inform the Council's Childrens Single Point of Access and other services on what provisions are available. Demand is also discussed during quarterly and annual performance conversations with commissioned partners.

89. The current Early Help mentoring providers have consistently supported more than the minimum numbers of families as set out in their contracts. Between 01 April 2022- 31 March 2023 mentoring services worked with 2,724 families. Case studies and service user feedback demonstrate the positive impact mentoring provision is having on Surrey's families. Between 01 April 2022- 31 March 2023, on average 52% of families reported that 'Family resilience (was) established' (based on a sample of 788 families).
90. Between 01 April 2022- 31 March 2023, Family Centres supported 2,629 children and young people and on average 65% reported that their 'family needs (were) met' (based on a sample of 2,488 families). This is an increase from the previous financial year when Family Centres worked with 1,874 children and young people and on average 55% reported that their 'family needs (were) met' (based on a sample of 719 families). There is no comparative data prior to 1st of April 2021 as the Council use to record the number of families support and this changed to measuring the number of children and young people supported.
91. There are several D&B areas in Surrey that experience higher demand compared to the rest of the county for Early Help and Family Centre support. The D&Bs with the highest number of allocations is Reigate and Banstead, followed by Woking, Spelthorne, and Guildford. The new service specification is designed to be flexible to meet demand and changing demographics which is difficult to predict.

Recommissioning model

92. Family Centres will provide predominantly whole family one-to-one work or group work depending on the family's needs. These services are for families with children and young people aged 0-18yrs (up to 25yrs for those with additional needs). Evidence based parenting support (one-to-one or group work) and utilising evidence-based tools such as reducing parental conflict (RPC) to support parents will also form part of the offer. Service delivery will take place via an outreach model however services will also be provided from Family Centres. All services will be delivered within the county of Surrey.
93. The Council is streamlining the number of contracts that are commissioned. Currently the Council manage 11 Early Help contracts for mentoring services and 15 Family Centre contracts. The Council is commissioning services through a Lead Provider model which means there will be one lead provider for each of Surrey's 11 D&Bs. This approach will reduce the number of contracts the Council will be managing as the Lead Provider will be accountable for sub-contractors' activities. Whilst the Council's contractual arrangements will be with the Lead Provider the Council will still have strong partnership relationships with sub-contractors. The Lead Provider will be responsible for co-ordinating Early

Help provision within the D&B geographical area to meet local need, collate performance reporting and work within the wider community. Providers will be able to bid for as many contracts as they wish during the recommissioning process.

94. The contracts will start from 01 April 2024, the initial term will be for 5 years with the option to extend for 3 years and then another 2 years. A longer contract term will help give providers stability both for staff and families and will help improve staff recruitment and retention.
95. The Council is taking a localised approach to recommissioning that helps to join up local services and assets in a partnership model co-ordinated within a D&B area. Providers will be expected to work in partnership to collectively identify buildings in each of the D&Bs that could be used for multiple purposes. There will also be a drive to support partners to co-locate services wherever possible through utilising local assets such as buildings, voluntary and community groups and outdoor spaces. This would help provide families with a joined up holistic approach between different types of provision. It would also support closer working between partners and provide the opportunity to share learning and expertise. Wider integration with existing provision will also take place to ensure families receive a more holistic offer.
96. Utilisation of buildings to support families in their local areas is important and the Council has stipulated in the service specification that providers must retain the outreach offer so that families can be supported within the home. Providers will need to use buildings such as libraries and community centres to ensure delivery is taking place in communities where families live. Providers will also need to reach out to remote communities or groups e.g., Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities.
97. The service specification also notes the importance of having an improved digital offer and to develop a greater social media presence. Providers will need to ensure their offer is clearly noted online so that young people and families can understand the services that are being delivered in their local area. Delivering provision online as well as face to face will also be expected. Providers will be promoting the use of the Family Information Service to families and partner agencies.
98. Based on feedback from families the Council, in partnership with the wider Early Help System, will develop a recognised Early Help branding/quality standard which when ready will be available to partners. The quality standard will give confidence to families that services offered under this brand provide a safe space to access information, advice, services and the brand will provide assurance about a standardised and consistent offer. The Council has learnt (through engagement work) that Early Help services need to be more visible

therefore developing the branding approach would provide children, young people, and families the opportunity to access information and support from a number of different settings such as schools and libraries. The branding will make sure that families can easily recognise that these are safe spaces which are available for them to get the support they require. Providers will be expected to support with the development and implementation of this initiative.

Service specification, outcomes, and performance reporting

99. In July 2021 the Council introduced a central case management system, the Early Help Module (EHM) which incumbent Family Centres are currently using. This case management system allows the Council and Family Centres to share and access relevant children's information to ensure children and families do not have to repeat their story. EHM is used to record work with families receiving targeted support who require an Early Help Assessment and a Team around the Family approach. Before the introduction of EHM, information was held locally by Family Centre partners, providing a challenge in getting accurate data about the support given to families. With the introduction of EHM data is now collected on individual children instead of families. It has been stipulated in the service specification that providers must use EHM as their case management system. This will mean that the Council can use comparable data from July 2021 to the present day.
100. The service specification has been developed based on the findings from the Early Help and Family Resilience Needs Assessment, engagement and co-production with children, families, partners and practitioners. The new commission will have a strong focus on working with the whole family, supporting and measuring outcomes for both children, young people and families. The service outcomes are aligned to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) [The National Supporting Families Outcome Framework](#) and the 10 Supporting Families Outcomes (which will be transferred to and closely monitored by the Department for Education in April 2024):
 - Getting a good education
 - Good early years development
 - Improved mental and physical health
 - Promoting recovery and reducing harm from substance use
 - Improved family relationships
 - Children safe from abuse and exploitation
 - Crime prevention and tackling crime
 - Safe from domestic abuse
 - Secure housing

- Financial stability

101. There will be a focus across the Early Help System including this commissioned provision to align services to meet each of the 10 Supporting Families Outcomes. For example, one of the outcomes is “Getting a good education”, the Council will work with partners and colleagues across the county to support children and young people stay in educational settings so that they achieve a good education. For Family Centres it can be any of the outcomes depending on the family's circumstances - to be included in the national supporting families programme there need to be 3 outcomes which are interconnected affecting more than one family member. For example, if there is domestic abuse, there could be parental or child mental health or both and financial instability due to this. Successful outcomes which are achieved with families and are sustained which means families no longer require services are monitored through the database we record work with families.
102. Clear reporting requirements including quantitative and qualitative data will be developed so that a consistent reporting approach is taken across the county. There will be an expectation that providers regularly collect feedback including the voice of the child and families and demonstrate how learning is shaping the continuous improvement of services. This requirement will be part of ongoing contract management arrangements.
103. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion principles will be a key ongoing feature throughout contract management. The Early Help and Family Resilience Needs Assessment noted a gap in data recording on sexuality, gender identity, and ethnicity. Furthermore, there is a need to have a greater awareness of how families experience these services and how their outcomes may differ based on their protected characteristics and Lead Providers will be expected to support the Council with capturing the relevant data to help develop the partnerships understanding and implement beneficial change.

Procurement and next steps

104. The financial envelope for the recommission is set in the annual budget setting and was signed off by Cabinet in February 2023. The total funding envelope is approx. £6.5m per annum. There is an additional request for investment of £2.5 million to establish an inhouse Intensive Family Support Service which will go for approval to Cabinet in October. Most good and outstanding authorities have this service, and it works with the most complex families who face multiple disadvantage and interconnected challenges which affect more than one family member.

105. As part of the tender process the Council has asked bidders to note what services they will be able to deliver within the financial envelope for each contract that is linked to a District and Borough geographical area. The Council has stipulated in the service specification that providers should prioritise funding for Family Centres and the remaining budget should be for evidence-based Family Resilience services. At this stage providers have only registered interest and will be submitting their bids at the end of September.
106. Each of the 11 contracts has a financial envelope based on a funding formula that has considered the geographical spread of children across Surrey, children who are considered disadvantaged based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) and the number of referrals received in the Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA) for Targeted interventions. The Council has stipulated that providers must submit bids that are within the financial envelope or their bid will be disqualified.
107. Throughout the recommissioning process the Council has been following Procurement Contract Regulations 2015 that determines that procurement needs to be conducted in accordance with the principles of equality, non-discrimination, transparency, proportionality and competition. The bidding opportunity will close at the end of September and the evaluation panel must treat each bidder equally and approach the scoring in a consistent, non-discriminatory and fair manner. This means that the panel must only score the bidder submissions on the information contained in them and any clarifications received. The panel cannot take into account any other information they may have already received by any means, including personal experience. The scoring criteria does not provide an advantage to larger providers compared to small organisations. It is an open and transparent process and even smaller organisations are experienced in bid writing.
108. The recommissioned services are due to go live 01 April 2024. There will be quarterly and annual monitoring meetings between the Lead Provider, the Council Contract Manager from the Early Help Commissioning team and a representative from the Early Help Partnership operational team. These meetings will include reviewing performance, reviewing needs and demands and identifying any areas for improvements. Providers will be expected to submit a completed Performance Monitoring Form (PMF) and demonstrate in the PMF how their delivery has contributed to the outcomes set out in the service specification.
109. The Council has developed flexible contracts that can adequately respond to the changing needs and demands of the population. The contracts that will be awarded allow for contract variations and have break clauses. Contracts have also accounted for cost-of-living/inflationary requests, for example, providers will be able to submit a request in writing for the Council to consider.

Possible future challenges

110. The possible high-level future challenges have been identified in the table below.

	High-level future challenges	Mitigating actions
1	Finance – inflation grows at a higher rate than expected which then puts greater pressure on the budget.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providers will work more closely together through a lead provider model with D&Bs to help reduce the number of management overhead costs. • Providers are being encouraged to work in innovative ways to deliver services that uses the funding available in a cost-efficient way and to maximise social value. • The Council has included in the contract an opportunity for providers to submit a business case on a yearly basis to review any inflationary requests.
2	Children, young people and family's needs and demands could change over the life of the contract. It is forecasted by 2030 that these services will be supporting more adolescents rather than young children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be responsive to local needs and demands officers will be regularly reviewing quantitative and qualitative data to establish if children, young people and family's needs are being met. • Contracts are flexible to respond to local needs.
3	The government could introduce new policies or initiatives that the Council would need to respond to with partners.	Contracts will be flexible to respond to new initiatives.
4	Recruitment and retention of staff and volunteers.	The Council will be awarding contracts with a longer term to give providers more stability for staff, and volunteers which will help improve recruitment and retention.

Conclusions:

111. Through research, engagement and co-design activities the recommissioning model was developed. The key principles that came out of this work also shaped commissioning documentation such as the service specification and reporting requirements. The draft model was shared for feedback with several different stakeholders and meetings before it was finalised and shared with prospective bidders at the end of June 2023.
112. The tender is currently live and will close at the end of September 2023. The Council officers will be following procurement regulations to ensure the principles of equality, non-discrimination, transparency, proportionality and competition are adhered to.

Recommendations:

113. For the committee to review and note the updates outlined in the report and the progress made to recommission and deliver new services by 01 April 2024.
114. For the Committee to agree to receive further updates on the recommission after 01 April 2024.
115. Set up a separate informal workshop to provide members of the Select Committee with an opportunity to learn more about key areas of CFLL's commissioning approach.

Next steps:

116. The high-level next steps for the family centres recommission are as follows:
- Bid deadline - End of Sept 2023
 - Evaluation, moderation, decision to award contracts - Oct to Nov 2023
 - Contracts Awarded - Dec 2023
 - Mobilisation - Dec 2023 to March 2024
 - Launch of services - 01 April 2024

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Sources/background papers

[\(Joint Commissioning Strategy for Children, Young People and their Families in Surrey 2022 \(surreycc.gov.uk\)\)](#)

[THE COUNCIL’s Commissioning Framework](#)

<https://www.surreyi.gov.uk/jsna/>

[Institute of Public Care Commissioning approach](#)

The Department for Education (Feb 2023) “[Children's social care: stable homes built on love](#)” consultation

The Department for Education (Oct 2022) [The National Supporting Families Outcome Framework](#) and the 10 Supporting Families Outcomes

Surrey County Council (Jan 2023) [Early Help and Family Resilience Needs Assessment](#)

Surrey County Council (June 2020) [Helping Families Early Strategy 2020 to 2023 \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk)

Annexes

Annex 1 - Current Commissioned Early Help Provision



Commissioned Early
Help Provision in Surr

Annex 2 – Ideas Alliance (Oct 2023) Understanding Early Help in Surrey, Stories from children, young people, families and practitioners.



Understanding Early
Help in Surrey.pdf

Annex 3 - New Possibilities (March 2023) Output from co-design activities



New Possibilities
Output from co-desig

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