

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S CABINET MEMBER MEETING

Agenda Item 41

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Provision of Family Group Conferences		
Date of Meeting:	5th March 2012		
Report of:	Strategic Director, People		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Ellen Jones	Tel: 29-3441
	Email:	Ellen.jones@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Key Decision:	Yes	Forward Plan No: CYP 27897	
Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Family Group Conferences are an internationally recognised and evidence based mechanism of family based decision making for children and young people in crisis where a plan needs to be made for their welfare. They are now required under the Public law Outline. Brighton & Hove have had Family Group Conferences provided by a specialist independent provider since October 2002. Family Group Conferences aim to divert children and young people from public care and maintain them within their families and communities. This is a key objective of the Value for Money programme in Children's Services.
- 1.2 Following the review of the Early Intervention Grant in 2011 a recommendation was made that there should be a new tender process for provision of Family Group Conferences in Brighton & Hove to ensure value for money. Approval is sought to undertake a tender process to procure provision of Family Group Conferences in Brighton & Hove from September 2012 to the end of March 2015. A contract over this longer period will enable stability of provision, a quality service and efficiencies to be made ensuring value for money for the city.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That CMM agree to a tender process to procure provision of Family Group conferences for the city.
- 2.2 That CMM agree the contract for provision of Family Group Conferences from September 2012 to end of March 2015 with a break clause in March 2014.
- 2.3 That CMM authorises the Strategic Director, People to approve the award of a contract to the selected provider following completion of the procurement process.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 **Family Group Conferences (FGCs)** originated in New Zealand where they have been used since the 1970's and are now required as part of the legal process in child welfare. The Family Group Conference (or FGC) is a formal meeting in which the family (including extended family and wider network) of the child and professional practitioners work together to make a decision that best meets the needs of the child. The process has four main stages, which includes a meeting where professionals inform the family of the concerns they have, followed by private family time, where the family alone develop a plan that addresses the concerns that have been raised. The plan is then presented to the professionals who should support it if the concerns have been addressed and it does not put the child at risk. The meetings are facilitated and coordinated by people independent of casework decisions in the agency working with the family.

3.2 **Objectives of a family group conference**

The objectives of the family group conference are:

- to keep children safe by preventing the occurrence and re-occurrence of child abuse and neglect;
- to include family members in the creation of their own plan, increasing their motivation and facilitating implementation of actual services provided for children and their families;
- to strengthen and extend the support networks within and around the family;
- to increase the number of children and youth living safely with immediate or extended family or friends;
- to develop plans for children in care which are supported by extended family and significant people in the child or youth's life; and,
- to divert cases from court thereby reducing delays in decision making and planning.

3.3 In 2002, following research into Family Group Conference models, Brighton & Hove went to tender for the provision of a Family Group Conference Project for the city. Initially referrals were to come only for children in the 5-13 age range. A specialist voluntary agency called Daybreak was awarded the contract and has been providing the service since 2002. Provision of FGC's is overseen by a multi agency steering group. Daybreak provide FGC's for a number of other local authorities including Hampshire and Bournemouth and Poole.

- 3.4 During the ten years in which the project has been operating a number of changes have been made including widening out the age range to include all children and young people from 0-18 including unborn babies. The project now takes 93 referrals a year, in 2010-11 this related to 177 children, 54% of whom were under 5 years. The children supported by FGC's in Brighton & Hove have significant difficulties; for example, in 2010-11 a third of the children were living in families where there was domestic abuse. The focus of Family Group Conferences is to make robust plans for children and young people who are at risk of coming into the care system. This group of children and young people are a key focus of the Value for Money programme in Children's Services because of both their poor outcomes and because of the high cost of placing children away from their families.
- 3.5 Outcomes from Family Group Conferences are positive. For example in 2010-11, of the 44 children referred because of a request for Local Authority accommodation, 43 children (97%) remained living or were placed with either their immediate or extended family. In addition, 97% of children who were in Local authority care when referred had plans agreed for them to return to live within their families.
- 3.6 In August 2011, a review of services funded through the Early Intervention Grant took place which included the Daybreak Family Group Conference Project. The review recommended that after 10 years of operation it was appropriate to retender for provision of this service in order to ensure best value and that provision in the next few years was fit for purpose.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Appropriate consultation with stakeholders will be planned as part of the procurement process.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The current budget for the service is £182,500 per annum. Efficiencies and economies of scale would be sought over a longer contract period of 30 months to both increase the number of referrals taken thus reducing the unit cost and to reduce the overall contract sum. Provision of capital and set up costs would need to be taken into account for any new provider.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name David Ellis Date: 080212

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 Family Group Conferences are required under the Public Law Outline. Any provision in Brighton & Hove would need to comply with this requirement.

Lawyer Consulted: Name Natasha Watson Date: 080212

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 An equality impact assessment will be fully considered

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Family Group Conferences improve a sense of community and support the capacity of the community to support themselves through an empowering family centred decision making process.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Family Group Conferences can be used in situations where young people are offending or are at risk of offending and therefore are a positive tool in preventing or reducing crime and disorder.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 Risks relevant to the procurement process and continuity of provision will be addressed and appropriate advice and guidance will be sought.

Public Health Implications:

- 5.7 Family Group Conferences support wider health and wellbeing through engaging and involving vulnerable children and families in making crucial decisions about their lives, promoting self efficacy.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.8 These proposals support the corporate objectives of tackling inequality and engaging people who live in the city. Family Group Conferences are an empowering process whereby families are fully involved in making decisions for their children and the resources of the extended family and community are engaged in supporting some of the most vulnerable children in the city. Family Group Conferences have proven that they can prevent children coming into the care system and help maintain them in their families and communities. The process also addresses the corporate Value for Money objectives.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 The option of providing Family Group Conferences in house through the local authority will be fully considered before making final decisions.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 To maintain children and young people at home in their families and communities wherever this is safe and in the best interests of the child or young person, utilising the resources and support of local families and communities through ensuring best value provision of Family Group Conferences in the city over the next two and a half years.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. None

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. None

Background Documents

1. None

