

20th July 2020

Agenda Item: 9

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES

PROPOSALS FOR THE NOTTINGHAMSHIRE FAMILIES INFORMATION SERVICE AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY LOCAL OFFER

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval to bring the Families Information Service and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Local Offer functions currently delivered by Inspire back under the management of the Council from 1st April 2021.

Information

Families Information Service (FIS) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Local Offer in Nottinghamshire

2. Nottinghamshire County Council currently commissions Inspire to deliver the Families Information Service (FIS) to fulfil the statutory duty laid out in Section 12 of the Childcare Act 2006 to offer a service providing information, advice and assistance about childcare and other activities to benefit parents, children and young people up to the age of 20 yrs and up to 25 yrs for those with SEND. Prior to the creation of Inspire, this function was managed by internal colleagues within the Library Service, and prior to that the function sat within the Council's Early Years Service.
3. Since 2015, FIS has also worked with the Commissioning and Placements Group and the Integrated Children's Disability Service team to fulfil statutory responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014, which places a statutory duty on local authorities to provide information, advice and support directly to children, young people and parents on matters relating to special educational needs and disability.
4. A Service Level Agreement is in place which details the requirements placed on Inspire to deliver both of these statutory duties on behalf of the Council. The purpose of the Agreement is to ensure that the correct elements and commitments are in place in order to meet the statutory requirements laid out in the Childcare Act 2006, the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice, relating to the provision of information, advice and assistance to parents of children and young people, aged up to 25 yrs. The Service Level Agreement began on 1st April 2016 and is due to expire on 31st March 2021. This is

referenced in the County Council's contract for Inspire and is performance managed by Early Childhood Services with support from the Commissioning and Placements Group.

5. The FIS fulfils the following functions:
 - a) to maintain and update the Notts Help Yourself website, to include current information on services for families in Nottinghamshire
 - b) to manage and update the Family Services Directory database of all local childcare providers and ensure Ofsted judgements are updated and included
 - c) management of the FIS Facebook page for local parents
 - d) training the Council's Customer Services Centre to address and appropriately direct parents' queries regarding support and services for children under the age of 5 yrs, childcare and the SEND Local Offer
 - e) supporting the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment through consultation with local parents and carers
 - f) facilitation of national and local surveys to better understand childcare costs
 - g) active promotion of childcare entitlements including funding for eligible 2, 3- and 4-year olds and additional funding streams for low income families and children with SEND
 - h) support the delivery of innovative methods to promote the SEND Local Offer in a variety of settings and with a range of audiences
 - i) support new organisations/providers who need assistance with registering with the SEND Local Offer
 - j) provision of information and guidance for existing early years and childcare providers located across the County, and for those wishing to become a new provider. This is achieved through the development and maintenance of data and web pages held on the Notts Help Yourself website
 - k) promotion of campaigns and information for parents including 'flu immunisations, and activities to support home learning etc.
6. Inspire currently receives £105,985 from the Council per annum for FIS. This historically paid for 2 fte posts within Inspire, however there are now two part-time posts which include a 0.8 fte FIS Database Manager (Band A) and a 0.5 fte Local Offer Information Officer (Grade 3). Additional work to address queries from members of the public is addressed by the 'Ask Inspire' team who deal with a range of issues.

Proposal

7. It is proposed to bring the FIS back under the management of the Council to be provided through Early Childhood Services within the Commissioning and Resources Division of Children and Families Services from 1st April 2021.
8. This proposal will help to better integrate information for parents and families with children under the age of 5 yrs and information for children, young people and parents on matters relating to special educational needs and disability. The imminent transfer of the Children's Centre Service to the Council on 1st June 2020 provides an opportunity to have one overall strategic lead for all social media work and website information with consistent and appropriate messaging. The Children's Centre Service currently manages 18 Facebook pages for example, and it is intended to reduce these and align information campaigns such

as promoting childcare entitlements or SEND advice, whilst still providing local information, local services, partner events and activities.

9. Inspire already provides a range of universal activities for families with pre-school children e.g. 'Rattle, Rhyme and Roll' library sessions and the BookStart programme. These activities are funded separately and will continue after the FIS has transferred to the Council. Links between the Council and Inspire will remain in place so that activities and resources such as library sessions are actively promoted to local families.
10. The proposal will also ensure that information for parents on a range of issues such as sleep routines, managing challenging behaviour, promoting home learning environments and improving school readiness will continue to be provided through Notts Help Yourself and social media opportunities. FIS will continue to maintain the Notts Help Yourself website on behalf of Children and Families Services.

Other Options Considered

11. The option to continue the Service Level Agreement with Inspire until 31st March 2023 has been explored, however Inspire currently lead on two statutory duties placed on the Council and it is felt that these are better placed with the Council who will ensure duties are fulfilled whilst evidencing value for money.
12. The option to procure a standalone FIS service (which includes the SEND Local Offer) has been explored, however the benefits of integrating service provision with Early Childhood Services, the Children's Centre Service and SEND services within the Council are substantial. FIS will also benefit from closer working with the Council's Communications and Marketing team and the Customer Service Centre.

Reason for Recommendation

13. The benefits of the proposal to bring the service in-house include:
 - a) there will be increased assurance that Council statutory duties are delivered effectively and efficiently.
 - b) closer working between FIS and Early Childhood Services to fulfil statutory duties for childcare sufficiency and increased ownership of targets to increase take-up rates of childcare entitlements.
 - c) closer working with FIS, the Commissioning and Placements Group and SEND services will support the statutory duty to develop and promote the SEND Local Offer.
 - d) there will be closer alignment with Children's Centre Service which will be brought under the management of the Council from 1st June 2020, ensuring direct communication and consultation with families to improve outcomes.
 - e) potential to further develop the FIS function to provide enhanced analysis of data and improve overall communications activity, for example the promotion of funded childcare places and public health promotion campaigns, support for parents, and increased opportunity for alignment of FIS and Local Offer communications activity.

- f) increasing the take up of funded childcare entitlements for 2 year olds from low income households remains a local priority. It is envisaged that the FIS function once in-house will be able to work with Early Childhood Services to proactively contact eligible parents by phone, email and post to increase take-up rates.
- g) FIS skills and knowledge could be shared with Children and Families Services colleagues and there would be closer working in shared priorities, for example the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, Early Years Provider briefings, the Care Leavers Local Offer, and support for families to gain employment.
- h) increased opportunity for sharing of knowledge between the services and identifying gaps in provision on the Local Offer and Notts Help Yourself, for example SEND specific services around early years and childcare.
- i) improved monitoring in terms of responses to providers' requests for assistance with registering on the Local Offer.
- j) the ongoing work of tagging records on the Local Offer and approval of records for the Local Offer site to ensure their relevance can be more closely monitored.

Statutory and Policy Implications

- 14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Data Protection and Information Governance

- 15. If the proposal to bring the FIS function under the management of the Council is approved, data sharing will be improved and will be permitted under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) processes.
- 16. Each term, the Department of Work and Pensions sends local authorities a list of all 2 year olds from low income households that are eligible for 15 hours of funded early education per week; councils are permitted to retain this data for three weeks before it is destroyed. As take-up rates in Nottinghamshire are at 80%, further work is required to make contact with these families within this three week window. The FIS post holders will have access to this data and will be tasked to work alongside the Children's Centre Service to contact all parents to promote entitlements and signpost to high quality childcare providers whilst continuing to ensure GDPR compliance by making contact within the three week time limit set by the Department of Work and Pensions.

Financial Implications

- 17. Early Childhood Services provide £93,985 per annum using funds from the Early Years block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) to pay for 0.8 fte FIS Database Manager who is supported by the wider 'Ask Inspire' team.

18. This early years budget also includes an allocation of £3,100 per annum which funds the delivery costs for the BookStart programme led by Inspire. Funding will continue to be provided to Inspire to continue this successful evidence-based scheme which is funded by Arts Council England. The Council is exploring expanding this financial contribution to enable BookStart packs to be delivered to Children's Centres as well as Health Centres, Libraries and Early Years settings. It is anticipated that additional funding from the Early Years block of the Dedicated Schools Grant will be sought to fund these delivery charges. It is anticipated that approximately £5,000 of the grant will be available for Bookstart in addition to the £93,985 which will be retained to fund FIS in 2021/22 subject to the agreement of the Schools Forum.
19. The Commissioning and Placements Group provides £12,000 per annum for the delivery of the SEND Local Offer, which funds a part-time (0.5 FTE) Information Assistant to ensure the SEND element of the information is accurate and current, in line with Local Offer requirements.
20. The report highlights a number of potential benefits of bringing the service under the management of the Council. It is proposed that the £105,985 allocated to the service will enable the creation of an additional post increasing capacity to fulfil both statutory duties and additional tasks including supporting communications activities with families for the wider Children and Families Services.

Human Resources Implications

21. Bringing the Families Information Service back under the management of the Council will potentially result in the TUPE of two posts into the Council from Inspire. These posts include the 0.8 fte Database Manager (Band A) and 0.5 fte Local Offer Information Assistant (Grade 3). TUPE consultation with both postholders will take place by December 2020.
22. The Ask Inspire team within Inspire also support these functions, however this is less than 50% of their role so agreement has been reached with Inspire that these posts will not transfer.

Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk Implications

23. If the service is brought back in-house, there is an expectation that children and families will experience an improved package of services from the Council by FIS working collaboratively with other Council services.

Implications for Service Users

24. FIS will continue to provide information on childcare, education, employment, health, leisure and parenting to benefit parents, children and young people up to the age of 25 yrs. FIS will continue to undertake user satisfaction activity to identify and implement further improvements to the service, as highlighted by service users.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the proposal to bring the Families Information Service and Special Educational Needs and Disability Local Offer functions back under the management of the Council from 1st April 2021 be approved.

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Constitutional Comments (AK 30/06/20)

25. The report falls within the remit of Children and Young People's Committee under its terms of reference. Legal advice should be sought on the contractual arrangements set out in this report.

Financial Comments (SAS 08/07/20)

26. The budget for the Family Information Service is £105,985 and of that £93,985 is funded from the centrally retained element of the DSG Early Years Block which is £1,461,431 and £12,000 from the short breaks budget of £1,134,289. If any changes are proposed to the service following the transfer to the management of the Council the financial implications will need to be assessed together with the available funding.

HR Comments (BC 06/07/20)

27. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. Appropriate consultation will occur with both postholders in line with TUPE requirements.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Families Information Service & Notts Help Yourself Mystery Shopper Summary Report 2019

Service Level Agreement between Nottinghamshire County Council and Culture Learning and Libraries (Midlands) trading as Inspire. April 2016 (revised April 2018)

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.

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