

## **Delegated Officer Report**

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	<b>Rebekah Sutcliffe – Strategic Director of Reform</b>
<b>Date of Decision:</b>	<b>March 2019</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>On-line Counselling support services for Oldham’s young people – contractual arrangements 2019/20</b>
<b>Report Author:</b>	<b>Neil Consterdine Head of Service Public Health, Youth and Leisure</b>
<b>Ward (s):</b>	All – no consultation required

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**Reason for the decision:** The current contract with Xenzone, for delivery of on-line counselling support services for Oldham’s young people, expires on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019. This report seeks approval to fund the service going forward for one more year in accordance with the provisions in the original contract which commenced in 2015 and then to re-procure the activity via a full procurement exercise.

**Summary:** The Council commissions a specialist provider to deliver an on-line counselling service for Oldham’s young people, to support delivery of its children and young people’s emotional wellbeing and mental health agenda.

In October 2015, the Council re-procured delivery of an on-line counselling service for children and young people with Xenzone Limited. The service is known locally as KOOTH.com. The contract was procured 2015 for a period of three years with the option to extend for two further years. The contract was extended on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 for 12 months until March 31<sup>st</sup> 2019. This report makes recommendations in respect of 2019/20.

It is envisaged that during 19/20 a process is undertaken which will identify service need and models of delivery beyond April 2020. Whilst this process is underway there needs to be an arrangement which secures ongoing delivery of a much valued resource to Oldham’s young people.

Xenzone has successfully delivered on-line counselling services within Oldham for 8 years and have worked positively with the Local Authority and the Youth Council throughout this time to develop the service. Oldham Youth Council has jointly commissioned the service with colleagues from the commissioning team for the past 6 years. This innovative approach involves young people in every step of the process including contract monitoring.

Locally, the Council and its partners continue to recognise that the emotional wellbeing and mental health of young people is a key priority across the Borough and that it is everybody's business. There continues to be a high usage of the online service by children and young people and the anonymity of the service is advantageous to those using it.

Healthy Young Minds Oldham, who deliver higher level mental health support, are supportive of the service and signpost children and young people accordingly and where appropriate for lower level intervention. The LAC Psychologist post commissioned by the LA which sits with Pennine Care reports significant capacity issues and increased demand on their services. It is therefore felt that to discontinue funding the on-line counselling support services would be a key risk for Oldham's vulnerable children and young people at this stage, as it offers a lower level intervention which ultimately reduces demand on Tier 3 and 4 services.

The service delivers 100 hours on-line support delivery every month at an annual cost of £58,800.

Recent evidence received from Xenzone through the quarterly monitoring process continues to tell us that young people report anxiety/stress, friendships, family relationships, self-worth, depression, confidence, sense of belonging, loneliness, self-harm and bullying as the top presenting issues through current on-line support.

The number of new young people registered with the service during 2017/18 was 552. During this time, 887 individual young people logged in and accessed the service a total of 5,881 times. The information received from the provider continues to evidence the need for an on-line service and the demand.

The service is funded through the Youth Council's Kerrching grant which is in turn funded through Public Health monies. Whilst there is funding allocated to Kerrching for 2019/20, this is at a reduced amount and is not secure for longer term planning.

***What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the***

**Option 1 – cease commissioning of on-line mental health support services for children and young**

***reason(s) for recommendation(s):***

**people following contract expiry on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019.**

Monitoring received from the current provider evidences that there is a continued need for this type of lower level support for Oldham's young people. The fact that young people are actively involved in contract management ensures that the provider is responsive to local need. Rising demand for higher level support highlights the importance of preventative approaches. This option is therefore not thought to be viable at this time..

**Option 2 – authorise an extension to the current contract covering the financial year 2019/20**

Oldham's objective to see the Borough as a 'place where children and young people thrive' is supported by having a range of support for young people around their emotional wellbeing and mental health. There is a continued need for this type of lower level support.

***Consultation :***

As the service is anonymous and confidential, it is not possible to consult with individual service users to ascertain their views on the service continuing. The most recent monitoring from the current provider reports that 93% of young people would recommend the service to a friend.

We also know and acknowledge that young people choose to use the on-line service because it is anonymous and provides them an opportunity to speak to counsellors and seek support without having to do so face to face.

The Youth Council see the emotional and mental health needs of young people as a key priority.

***Recommendation(s):***

The preferred option is option 2 – Oldham continues to see a rise in the problems facing children and young people with their emotional wellbeing there is a continued need for this type of lower level intervention for Oldham's vulnerable children and young people.

Any process to determine the longer term arrangements beyond March 2020 needs to address the issue of sustainable funding.

***Implications:***

***What are the financial implications?***

It is proposed that the existing contract with Xenzone be renewed for a further twelve month period, from April 2019 to March 2020.

Budgetary provision exists within the Youth Service base budget to cover the cost of the proposed contract extension, via the Public Health Transformation Funding.

There are no adverse financial implications as a result of renewing the contract.

(Jenny Howarth Senior Accountant/Nicola Harrop Finance Manager)

What are the **procurement** implications?

Contract Procedure Rules and EU procurement regulations should be followed when awarding contracts. However, Strategic Sourcing acknowledges nature of this requirement and the belief that continuity and consistency in the delivery of support to schools and Oldham's young people is a currently a special service, which delivered by the Xenzone. On this basis, and in accordance with legal advice an exemption can be made due to number of suppliers in the Market. The procurement team also recommends the following

- a. A clear KPI's must be agreed with the provider and the commissioning team manages and monitors KPI's.
- b. A contract variation document must be agreed and includes full financial information such as rates we pay i.e. per hourly or daily; not just the financial envelope.
- c. Further advice **MUST** be sought about TUPE implications at the time of direct award i.e. to address TUPE implications at the tendering stage.
- d. Set up a working group involving Procurement team at early stage ensuring no further requests will be made to extend these contracts in the future.
- e. Ensure appropriate consultation is undertaken at pre-procurement stage with the provider market, (Mohammad Sharif) 28/02/2018 Interim sourcing.

What are the **legal** implications?

There is provision within Rule 17(1) (a) of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to extend an existing contract where the original tendered contract contains clauses allowing for such modifications and lists the scope and nature of the possible modifications and the conditions under which they may be used none of which would alter the overall of the contract. The provisions in the existing contract with Xenzone Ltd provide the Council with an option to extend the original contract for further periods of up to two years. The option to extend for one year was exercised last year leaving the option to extend for one more year available to the Council to use whilst it undertakes a re-procurement exercise. (Elizabeth Cunningham Doyle)

What are the **Human Resources** implications?

N/A

**Equality and Diversity Impact**

Not required as the proposed option maintains

**Assessment** attached or not required because (please give reason)

continuity of service.

What are the **property** implications

There are no property implications as the service is delivered entirely on-line.

**Risks:**

If the preferred option is approved then there are no risks at this stage, however there is a requirement to locate a more secure funding model moving forward as a funding change may result in vulnerable young people losing a valuable support service which is then likely to mean an increased demand on higher level and higher costing services.

The current funding arrangement was only ever intended as a short term measure over 7 years ago, However, as Oldham continues to see a rise in the problems facing children and young people with their emotional wellbeing, the Youth Council have continued to fund delivery of this on-line counselling service as part of their I Love Me programme. For the longer term security of the service, it is suggested that mainstream funding is secured to be able to re-procure a service for 3 years, which in turn will allow the Youth Council to continue with its full grant allocation via Kerrching.

**Co-operative agenda**

The recommended option aligns with the Council's Co-operative agenda. The preferred provider has been delivering services in Oldham and engaging local people for several years and has a proven track record of supporting Oldham's most vulnerable young people through their on-line services. The organisation also has established experience of working with Oldham's Youth Council who co-commission this function.

The delivery of on-line counselling services will ensure continued support for Oldham's vulnerable young people and will provide some of the required low level, earlier intervention within this area. Ultimately, it will help support young people to be able to achieve and succeed, becoming productive Oldham citizens. By encouraging young people to do more for themselves, improving self-worth and resilience and promoting independence for young people, they can begin to take responsibility for their own future and 'do their' bit for themselves and for Oldham as a Borough.

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Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution?

Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the

Yes

Council's budget?

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

**List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:**

Title	Available from

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Report Author Sign-off:	
N Consterdine	
Date: 02.02.18	

Please list and attach any appendices:-

Appendix number or letter	Description

In consultation with Director / Executive Director

Signed : 

Date: 21/03/19