

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker and Portfolio area:	Richard Lynch – Director Education, Early Years and Skills, Oldham Council
Date of Decision:	July 2022
Subject:	Commissioning of contractor to produce Opportunity Area early years and mental health thematic evaluation report.
Report Author:	Sally Robson Opportunity Area team
Ward(s) Affected:	All

Reason for the decision:

A decision is sought to request approval for a contract to be directly award to:

1. Better Communication CIC to carry out research and evaluation to produce thematic Early Years report.
2. Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER) to carry out research and evaluation to produce thematic Mental Health report.

This project has been signed off for exemption from competitive tender by Emma Barton, Executive Director of Place & Economic Growth under Rule 21.3(i) of the Contract Procedure Rules.

In Oldham there has been a successful partnership with The University of Manchester over the last four years, which has provided us with a 'researcher in residence'. It was the intention of both parties that the scope of services provided by this person would be extended to provide evaluation across the thematic areas of early years and mental health but the researcher has a new role within her department so cannot provide these additional services to the OA.

In March 2022 an expression of interest process was run with the University of Manchester which failed in securing capacity for the early years and mental health evaluations. Capacity for a NEET evaluation was however secured.

Therefore, there is a need to commission early years and mental health evaluations. Specifications are detailed in Appendices 1 and 3. A paper outlining this revised approach was approved by the Opportunity Partnership Board in April 2022.

Capacity to conduct external evaluations is currently scarce and the two identified providers are unable to deliver until Autumn 2022. They have been identified due to ongoing work in these thematic areas and their current involvement, with GM strategy around Speech Language and Communication, and the balanced systems approach in the case of Better Communication CIC and the wider Opportunity Area Programme, health related projects in Bradford OA in the case of the Centre for Applied Education Research.

This makes the identified suppliers from specific organisations uniquely placed to help Oldham produce the evaluation as efficiently and effectively as possible so that the report is finalised and published by the end of 2022, in time to inform future policy.

Summary:

There is a need to tell the story of Oldham OA to illustrate impact and learning in line with the programme's approach to evidence-based project design and evaluation to inform future policy and delivery. This approach also underpins the systemic change the OA has also supported and the proposed evaluations will inform future policy and commissioning in Oldham Council along with incoming programmes such as DfE's Priority Area Programme which supports the aims laid out in the Schools White Paper.

The thematic evaluation will allow insight into how groups of interventions support schools and settings to improve children's and young people's outcomes in Oldham, creating greater value than an individual review of component parts. This new approach will complement the enhanced data collection that projects now have

The contract for the early years thematic evaluation is worth £23,125 ex VAT. The contract for the mental health thematic evaluation's estimated value is £25,000, the final proposal is due in the next week but due to the end of the OA on the 31st August we are seeking approval on the providers' commitment to provide the proposal. This work was included in the research in residence line totalling £50,000 on the OA year 5 Cabinet paper and in the OA's commissioning report dated July 2021. Recognising the benefit of these evaluations to GM and alignment with their strategies

across early years and mental health, there is also money available from the twinning budget for this work.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Option 1: Approve an exemption under rule 21.3 (i) of the Contract Procedure Rules and directly award a contract to:

1. Better Communication CIC to carry out research and evaluation to produce thematic Early Years report.
2. Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER) to carry out research and evaluation to produce thematic Mental Health report.

This is the recommended option as it will enable us to deliver the product in line with OA best practice and in line with the partnership board's approval.

Option 2: Put out a tender for the evaluation commission. The duration of this process would result in Oldham OA missing the publication deadline for the evaluation report, likely by a number of months.

Recommendation(s):

That permission is given under exemption of the Contract Procedure Rules and directly award a contract to:

1. Better Communication CIC to carry out research and evaluation to produce thematic Early Years report.
2. Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER) to carry out research and evaluation to produce thematic Mental Health report.

Implications:

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

This report seeks approval to directly award the following contracts under exemption of the Contract Procedure Rules to:

1. Better Communication CIC at a cost of **£23,125**.
2. Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER) at an estimated cost of **£25,000**.

The total cost of these contracts will be in the region of **£48,125**, this will be wholly funded from the drawdown of Opportunity Area Year 5 funding in accordance with the Council's reserves policy.

Vicki Hayes - Senior Accountant

*What are the **procurement** implications?*

There is provision in the Council's Contract Procedure Rules to grant an exemption from the Rules Where an

(Rule 21.31) will apply this will ensure that Better Communication CIC will carry out a research and evaluation programme for Oldham Opportunity Area (OA). On this basis, Commercial Procurement Unit acknowledges the requirement. As the provision of a service is urgently required. Mohammad Sharif
04/08/2022

*What are the **legal** implications?*

An exemption to the Contract Procedure Rules has been approved to allow for the proposed direct contract awards. Therefore, provided suitable contracts are put in place with the preferred contractors, there are no known legal implications at this time.
Sarah Orrell, Commercial & Procurement Solicitor

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?*

None

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason)

Not required

*What are the **property** implications?*

None

Risks:

The report sets out a way the risk of not missing a key deadline to submit data (Mark Stenson)

Co-operative agenda

The proposal to directly award contracts to Better Communication CIC and the Centre for Applied Education Research (CAER) to carry out critical research and evaluations into the provision of Early Years and mental health services for children and young people, without going through the tendering process, will be beneficial for children, young people and families as the evaluation will produce timely research and help inform future policies. This will be important because we know the pandemic and the contemporary cost of living crisis has had huge impacts on the early years sector the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. Providing high quality services for children and families is a key co-operative priority for the Council.

However, direct awards mean that the Council miss the opportunity to co-operatively work with other service providers for best value. It is important for services to review contract needs and requirements ahead, to ensure that all service providers have the opportunity to collaborate with the Council through fair and co-operative evaluation and tendering processes (Mahmuda Khanom, Policy Support Officer).

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 Council's budget? Yes

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
OA Year 5 Cabinet Paper	Sally Robson

Report Author Sign-off:	
Sally Robson	
Date: August 2022	

Please list any appendices:-

Appendix number or letter	Description
Appendices 1	EY Specification
Appendices 2	EY Proposal
Appendices 3	Mental Health Specification

In consultation with Richard Lynch, Director Education Skills and Early Years



Signed : Date: 30/08/2022