

Report to CABINET

Project Skyline Partnership Agreement

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr. Shaid Mushtaq, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

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Reason for Decision

Provide an update on Project Skyline (GM proposal to create supply of children's homes to increase availability of Children Looked After placements in the GM region for some of the most vulnerable young people) and approve entering into a Partnership Agreement with the remaining Local Authorities in GM, GMCA and NHS GM for delivery of the project.

Recommendations

- Approval for the council to negotiate and enter into a Partnership Agreement for Project Skyline, as detailed in this report.
- Delegate to the Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services in consultation with the portfolio holder for Children and Young People, Treasurer and the Director of Legal Services to agree the terms of the Partnership Agreement.
- Delegate to the Director of Legal Services authority to execute and enter into the Partnership Agreement and any documentation required to give effect to the Partnership Agreement, detailed within this report.

Project Skyline Partnership Agreement

1 Background

- 1.1 A combination of market composition/pressures, increased case complexity from some Independent Providers is leading to unprecedented financial pressures, relating to placements for Looked After Children, on Children's Services Departments across GM and nationally. A more recent review of the costs of independent sector placements has confirmed that these pressures continue.
- 1.2 This financial analysis sits alongside evidence of an increased proportion of children being placed outside of their home Local Authority/ the Greater Manchester area, making it harder than ever for children in care to experience the stable conditions needed to achieve positive outcomes.
- 1.3 Whilst many of these issues were recognised within the Independent Review of Children's Social Care commissioned by central government there emerged a strong sense that GM as a region needed to take more direct action to respond to these challenges. Within this context the idea for 'Project Skyline' was born – a proposal to create supply of children's homes to increase availability of LAC placements in the GM region for some of most vulnerable young people whilst tackling the significant costs associated with these types of placements.

2 Current Position

- 2.1 Building on one of the central aims of the GM LAC Sufficiency Strategy Project, Skyline has developed significantly over the last 12-18 months. Extensive modelling based on need has led to a proposal for ten new homes that can accommodate 24 children with complex mental health issues or Emotional Behavioural Difficulties.
- 2.2 This modelling has been refined over time through discussions with Local Authorities and market engagement with providers to get to a position where there is a clear specification that has been launched as part of a procurement exercise which is scheduled to commence in May 2024 and complete by the end of November 2024. GMCA is leading the procurement on behalf of the ten GM local authorities.
- 2.2 The services will be divided into three lots, one for each of the cohorts of children and young people to be supported by the project.
- 2.3 The procurement exercise will follow the competitive dialogue procedure prescribed in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. Local Authority, GMCA and Health stakeholders are to be involved in the tender evaluations, with the awarded contracts due to commence in November 2024.
- 2.4 Local Authorities, the GMCA and GM NHS signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Project Skyline in January 2024. The MoU recognises the commitment of the ten local authorities, GMCA and GM NHS to the ambitions of the project.

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- 2.5 At a GMCA meeting in March 2024 it was formally agreed that GMCA would allocate funding to acquire properties to be used for Project Skyline with the selection of properties determined by the Skyline Strategy Group (which is a cross organisational internal governance board) and then recommended to the GMCA for acquisition.
- 2.6 The criteria for the homes includes:
- 1) Sufficient distance from other residential properties identified for Project Skyline;
 - 2) Distance from other registered children's homes;
 - 3) Space configuration suitable to provide break away spaces;
 - 4) Space for staff;
 - 5) Any refurbishment works required.
- 2.7 It was agreed that GMCA would take the lead role in procuring the required services on behalf of the ten districts with a recommendation that one of the ten Local Authorities will be allocated with resources to be the contracting authority and manage the contract on an ongoing basis on behalf of the other Local Authorities and partners.
- 2.8 Recognising the importance of having a clear health offer within the children's homes, discussions have been taking place with NHS GM colleagues to ensure that the health offer within Skyline is aligned to the strategic objectives of the project. NHS GM will be a signatory to the Skyline Partnership Agreement alongside the local authorities.

Skyline 'Partnership Agreement'

2.9 The Partnership Agreement builds on the Memorandum of Understanding. It will be entered into between the ten local authorities, GMCA and NHS GM, and will govern the relationship of the parties, roles and responsibilities, and the sharing of liabilities. In particular the Agreement:

- includes the collaboration principles the parties are committed to (taken from the MoU that has already been signed);
- sets out governance arrangements for the project, including terms of reference for the Skyline Strategy Group;
- details arrangements regarding the Skyline Homes;
- states GMCA's commitment to pay Mobilisation Costs to the procured Care Providers, as required;
- sets out the role of GMCA and other parties in managing the procurement process for the identification of the most economically advantageous Care Providers;
- establishes principles regarding the management of each procured Care Provider's Agreement, including key decisions (e.g. termination) that the contracting party will need to bring to the partner authorities for approval;
- reflects the principle that the local authorities will share costs and underwrite any losses incurred by GMCA as a result of its investment in the Skyline homes.

Project Skyline Indicative Timeline

2.10 Phase 1 of Project Skyline will be monitored through the Skyline Programme Board with any changes reported to GM Directors of Children's Services and LA Skyline Champions.

3 Options/Alternatives

3.1 Option One

- Approval for the council to negotiate and enter into a Partnership Agreement for Project Skyline, as detailed in this report.
- Delegate to the Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services in consultation with the portfolio holder for Children and Young People, Treasurer and Director of Legal Services to agree the terms of the Partnership Agreement.
- Delegate to the Director of Legal Services to execute and enter into the Partnership Agreement and any documentation required to effect the Partnership Agreement, as detailed within this report.

3.2 Option 2

Do not enter the Partnership Agreement for Project Skyline, as detailed in this report. This option is not recommended as there is already significant pressure on the children's placement budget and placement sufficiency is a concern.

4 Preferred Option – Option 1

- Approval for the council to negotiate and enter into a Partnership Agreement for Project Skyline, as detailed in this report.
- Delegate to the Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services in consultation with the portfolio holder for Children and Young People, Treasurer and Director of Legal Services to agree the terms of the Partnership Agreement.
- Delegate to the Director of Legal Services authority to enter into the Partnership Agreement and any documentation required to effect the Partnership Agreement, as detailed within this report.

5 Consultation

5.1 Consultation is led by GMCA and includes a young person's group.

6 Financial Implications

6.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

7 Legal Implications

7.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

8 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

17.1 Comments are contained in the report in the restricted part of the agenda.

18 Key Decision

18.1 Yes

19 **Key Decision Reference**

19.1 EDS – 05 -24

20 **Background Papers**

None

21 **Appendices**

None