
SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT REPORT

**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) – Councillor Eleanor Lister, Adult Services Portfolio;
Councillor Chris McEwan, Children’s Services Portfolio**

Responsible Director(s) - Margaret Asquith, Director of Social Services

Purpose of Report

1. To provide details of existing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with Independent Sector Providers and to seek agreement for their renewal.
2. To seek agreement to the waiving of the Council’s Contracts Procedure Rules to enable current social care arrangements to be maintained.

Summary

3. The Council’s current scheme of delegation to officers state that the Director of Social Services has delegated powers to enter into contracts up to the value of £75,000. Contracts exceeding this amount would normally be subject to a tendering process. With regard to social care arrangements it will often be necessary to exceed this limit to ensure continuity and meet social care needs. In many instances, to meet these needs, arrangements need to be entered into with organisations which have particular expertise and knowledge. Therefore, this report seeks agreement to waive the Council’s Contracts Procedure Rules with respect to each of the SLAs detailed in the report and specifies the reason for this course of action. The Council’s Contracts Procedure Rules are found in Part 4 (Rules of Procedure) of the Council’s Constitution.

Information and Analysis

4. The Department as part of its Purchasing Framework enters into SLAs with a number of Independent Sector and Voluntary Providers of social care. These are often partnership arrangements to develop services to meet specific needs and rely upon the organisation’s specialist knowledge and expertise. The following SLAs are considered to meet these criteria and details on each are provided below.

Age Concern Bathing Service

5. Age Concern is a registered charity which has an established record of providing services to older people in Darlington. The service was initially established in 1996 to provide 50 baths per week with funding from Darlington Borough Council, and has steadily increased to the current provision of 140 baths per week. The increase in provision has been part supported

by the use of funding from the Access and Systems – Capacity Grant.

6. The service provides privacy and convenience by enabling a person to receive the service in their own home. The total annual value of the current agreement is £80,080 of which the Department funds £29,438.40. An additional £15,000 was funded from the Access and Systems – Capacity Grant, £19,625.60 was funded by the Primary Care Trust and the remainder came from Client Contributions. It is anticipated that funding for any new agreement would not exceed this amount. An inflationary increase will be negotiated yearly if needed. A three year Agreement is proposed.
7. On the basis of the proposed arrangements the total value of the agreement with Age Concern will exceed £ 75,000. However, for the reasons outlined in this paragraph, it is deemed appropriate to negotiate a new agreement. The reasons are:
 - (a) The service has been provided in partnership for a number of years and is a key support in enabling people to live independently in their own homes;
 - (b) It is a very popular service which provides privacy and convenience of bathing in peoples' own homes; and
 - (c) Age Concern has contributed to the development of the service and is working closely with the department to continually provide an improved service provision.

Durham Diocesan Family Welfare Adoption Service (DFW)

8. DFW is a registered charity, which has an established record of providing high quality services for children, where adoption is the plan, and for prospective adoptive carers. Darlington Borough Council's Social Services Department has had a Service Level Agreement with DFW since June 1998 for the provision of an adoption service on our behalf.
9. 1.5 whole time equivalent social workers are seconded to DFW to deliver the service with DFW making a significant contribution to the management of the service plus administration support to the Adoption Panel and to the Darlington staff. The service has been regularly reviewed and was last negotiated for two years in April 2003. The most recent review in November 2004 recommended that there continues to be a very positive view of how the scheme operates and that the scheme should continue.
10. The gross cost of the service for the financial year 2004 – 2005 was £ 70,507. If approved, negotiations would include the annual inflationary uplift of 2.5% resulting in the gross cost of the service, as presently provided, rising to £72,270. This and the seconded Social Workers mentioned above would represent Darlington Borough Council's total investment in the project. The Government continues to focus on improving adoption performance by Local Authorities. This includes the need to meet the criteria set down in new adoption standards and increasing the support provided both pre and post adoption to children and their birth and adoptive families. The total invested in the scheme with DFW may therefore be increased pending further negotiations around the increased finance for adoption being made available by the Department of Health.

11. The benefits to service users, and the improvement in our adoption performance are such that officers feel it is appropriate to negotiate, and renew the SLA with DFW for three years to provide Darlington Borough Council's adoption service. On the basis of proposed arrangements, the total value of the agreement with DFW will exceed £75,000. However, for the reasons outlined in this paragraph, it is deemed appropriate that the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules be waived. These reasons are:

- (a) The arrangement with DFW is making a significant contribution to the service; and
- (b) DFW has an established reputation and expertise as a service provider in this area of work so that our adoption performance has been maintained and is improving with Darlington Borough Council benefiting from DFW's wider recruitment of prospective adopters across the North East region.

DAD Direct Payments Support Service

12. Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) is a charity which has a well - established record of providing services to disabled people and carers in Darlington. One of the services they provide is the Direct Payments Support Service, which they have provided since August 2002. The total value of the current agreement is £73,904.00 which was for 8 months and the intention is to extend this for a further three year period.

13. DAD has developed considerable expertise in the delivery of support to direct payments service users and has been invited (with representatives of the Local Authority Social Services Department) to give a presentation at a national conference arranged by the National Council on Independent Living (NCIL) on behalf of the Department of Health. It has also been invited to attend the Scrutiny Committee of a neighbouring Local Authority seeking to improve the support offered to Direct Payments Service users. The service provided is of high quality and DAD (with the Support of the Social Services Department), has recently received 18 months additional funding from the Department of Health Direct Payments Development Fund to develop further the support provided to direct payments service users and to raise awareness of, and increase the take up of, direct payments in Darlington.

14. On the basis of the proposed arrangements, the total value of the agreement with the DAD Direct Payments Support Service will exceed £75,000. However, for the reasons outlined in this paragraph, it is deemed appropriate to negotiate a new agreement. The reasons are:

- (a) DAD has an established reputation and expertise as a service provider in this area of work; and
- (b) It has worked in partnership with the SSD over a number of years to provide and to develop the service and is key to the further development of direct payments in Darlington.

DAD Carers Support Service

15. Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) is a well established charity committed to the provision and development of services for people with disabilities within Darlington. DAD offers a broad range of services one of which is the Carers Support Service which has been

established since April 1994. The carers support service offers support to carers of all service user groups including young carers and parent carers. It aims to facilitate the caring role through direct support and advice to carers and involvement in service development, training and consultation.

16. The total value of the current agreement is £54,507.40 which is funded through the Mental Health Grant. A three year agreement is proposed, therefore on the basis of proposed arrangements the total value of the agreement with DAD will exceed £75,000. However it is deemed appropriate to negotiate a new agreement based on the following reasons:
- (a) The service is well established and plays a pivotal role in the support of carers in Darlington;
 - (b) The service is highly valued by both service users and professionals signposting people to the service; and
 - (c) DAD are committed to ongoing partnership working across agencies to ensure most effective use of resources and service development

DAD Dimensions

17. Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) is a well established charity committed to the provision and development of services for people with disabilities within Darlington. DAD offers a broad range of services one of which is the Dimensions Day Care Service. The service has been developed in close partnership between the local authority and DAD and the philosophy of the service based on the social model of disability and encouraging community integration limits the number of potential providers.
18. The SLA for Dimensions is a three year agreement with a total value of £ 367,082.48, £ 355,277.38 is funded from the department and the remainder is funded from client contributions. The SLA is not due to end until 31 March 2006 but we are seeking approval to extend this agreement for a further two years to bring it in line with the above agreements with DAD.

WRVS Community Support Service

19. The WRVS is a registered charity with a proven track record in delivering services to vulnerable people in the community. The WRVS Community Support service commenced in February 2004 to provide a 'Good Neighbour Scheme' to Darlington residents who have low level needs, are lonely or isolated and at risk of losing their independence. The purpose of the service is to promote independent living and improve the individual's quality of life using a preventative approach.
20. The total value of the current agreement is £52,174 which is funded through the Access and Systems - Capacity Grant. A three year agreement is proposed, therefore on the basis of proposed arrangements the total value of the agreement with the WRVS will exceed £75,000. However it is deemed appropriate to negotiate a new agreement based on the following reasons:
- (a) The service is becoming well established and would benefit from a period of stability to enable further development and growth;

- (b) It is a service which is very well received and welcomed by service users with positive outcomes;
- (c) The WRVS is proactive in working in partnership both with the Council and other agencies i.e. Age Concern to ensure efficient and effective use of resources; and
- (d) The WRVS is committed to the ongoing development of the service and a model of continuous improvement

Mental Health Matters - Mental Health Resource Centre

21. In September 1998 the local authority was successful in its bid for Mental Health Partnership funds to develop a Mental Health Resource Centre. Following a rigorous selection process Mental Health Matters was chosen from 3 potential service providers to undertake the development of this project in partnership with the local authority. Since then the service at the Resource Centre has developed steadily in accordance with the SLA providing a combination of day support and supported employment for an average of 60 service users. In addition, Mental Health Matters has extended the service to offer additional drop in sessions on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and has prepared guidelines for employers to support the Welfare To Work Joint Investment Plan (JIP).
22. The services provided by Mental Health Matters have been considered as part of the authorities Best Value review as reported to Cabinet on 30th January 2001. Market analysis, consideration of performance indicators, feedback from other stakeholders and the service user interviews all confirmed the value of the existing service. The outcome of that review was to conclude that the authority should support the continuation of the service. Funding for the service for the financial year 2004/2005 was £183,039.88. £21,964 was funded by the Primary Care Trust, £110,000 was funded from the Mental Health Grant and the remainder from the Social Services Department. It is anticipated that funding for any new agreement would not exceed this amount. An inflationary increase will be negotiated. A one year agreement is proposed as there will be a service review undertaken due to a reduction in the Support Grant and a change in local need.
23. On the basis of the proposed arrangements, the total value of the agreement with Mental Health Matters will exceed £75,000. However, for the reasons outlined in this paragraph, it is deemed appropriate that Para 3 of the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules be waived to allow officers to negotiate a new agreement. These reasons are:
- (a) Mental Health Matters has an established reputation within Darlington as a service provider in this area of work which has been confirmed in the Best Value Review; and
 - (b) Mental Health Matters have significantly contributed to the development of the service.

Outcome of Consultation

24. No consultation was required to complete this report.

Legal Implications

25. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

26. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

27. The issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

Conclusion

28. This report details a variety of service provision to best meet the needs of service users. It is considered that the use of SLAs should continue and that agreement be given to those outlined in this report and the waiving of the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules.

29. A number of reports have been presented to Cabinet requesting the waiving of the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules, to enable the Social Services Department to develop contractual relationships with partner agencies and organisations, which are beneficial to service users and offer stability to independent providers. It is recognised that, although it is important to develop appropriate partnerships and to offer stability to providers and security of service to service users, it is equally important to ensure that the Department works within a framework recognised and approved by Cabinet.

Recommendation

30. Council are requested to recommend that the Director of Social Services be given delegated power to negotiate suitable SLAs with existing suppliers of these services detailed in the report and that the Council's Contract Procedure Rules be waived accordingly.

Reasons

31. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:

- (a) All of the organisations are committed to the principles of partnership working and are developing services to ensure positive outcomes for service users;
- (b) There are significant benefits arising from relationships developed between provider organisations and service users as a result of the continuity of services;

- (c) Some of the organisations make significant financial contributions to the service; and
- (d) A number of these services have been part of the Best Value reviews and considered to be appropriate services.

Margaret Asquith
Director of Social Services

Background Papers

DFW Adoption Service Level Agreement Review undertaken on 24 November 2004

Mental Health (Children and Adults) Best Value Review undertaken between April and December 2000.

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MWA