

Keyfacts

Directorate: Children's Wellbeing

Name of Service: Commissioning

Overview of service



The commissioning service undertakes key functions to plan, develop and monitor services delivered in-house or externally for the directorate. Following the 'commissioning cycle', our key functions include:

- strategic analysis of the needs of different populations of children and families, including hearing their voices
- identifying gaps in services and evidence based solutions
- informing service redesign, procurement and market development
- managing the performance of contracted services
- informing de-commissioning and re-commissioning decisions

Roles and Responsibilities within the service: There are four key functions:

Strategic Commissioning: Commissioning officers and leads work to understand the needs of different populations of children and families. We use our understanding to forecast future need and demand, develop strategic priorities, identify gaps in services and find evidence based models to fill any gaps. We inform the decision to either deliver services in-house or procure them from external providers, which can lead to significant service redesign projects. We often act as contract managers for specific services and use evidence of service performance to inform the 'de-commission or re-commission' decision as part of the commissioning cycle.

Social care agency accommodation placements: One focus is to support social care by managing the contracts for in & out of county residential, fostering and supported accommodation placements provided by the independent & private sector. Residential & fostering providers are regulated services, inspected by Ofsted or CSSIW, supported accommodation is an unregulated sector. The team also searches for placements for individual children when they cannot be placed with in-house services. We undertake a range of pre-placement checks and conduct contract compliance visits to providers.

Contract Management: Each contract has a nominated contract manager, who is supported by the contracts officer and a relevant technical expert from within the directorate. Contracts are for fixed periods, some with the option to extend for additional periods. Contract quality and performance is regularly monitored, and service delivery is also evaluated through contract compliance visits. Performance and quality issues are escalated to the Education & Commissioning Senior Management Team to ensure proper oversight and action is taken. Contract performance information is also used to inform the next round of the commissioning cycle.

Children's Wellbeing Network: As a key stage of the commissioning cycle, the team supports the development of local providers markets. Increasingly, this involves ensuring providers are aware of key priorities, changing policy or legislation, service gaps and business opportunities, so that they can respond to Herefordshire's needs without the need for Council funding. To help children and families access the right support, and to inform strategic commissioning work, the team is also leading work to map service availability across Herefordshire and develop the [family services directory](#).

Key Facts about the service

Strategic Commissioning - the service has led on the work to develop the following strategies:

- [Looked After Children and Complex Needs Placements Sufficiency Strategy](#) 2014-19. The strategy addresses 4 key priorities:
 - Reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements

- Prevent use of residential placements through intensive wrap-around support to children with challenging needs and their carers, reducing the reliance on residential placements by 50%
- Enable more children with complex needs to remain with their families or, if necessary, be accommodated closer to home
- Improve the quality and availability of local supported living arrangements for Looked After Children aged 16+
- **[Children & Young People with Disabilities and Special Educational Needs Services Transformation Programme](#)** 2015-18, which has seven main areas of work, each with their own project which are supported by the Commissioning service:
 - Integrated Pathway
 - [The Local Offer](#)
 - [Education, Health and Care Plans](#)
 - [Specialist Childcare](#)
 - Personalisation
 - [Short Breaks](#)
 - Strategic Needs Analysis

Social care agency accommodation placements:

In 2013/14, Herefordshire spent £6.9million on agency placements. There are usually around 80 active placements with external providers at any one time, in addition to those children placed with the in-house fostering service. The team conducts around 300 placement searches per year. 70% of the Council's placements with external agencies are made on an emergency or urgent basis. Only 30% are planned.

Contract Management

The commissioning service manages a range of contract types, including 'spot-purchase', 'block', and 'framework agreements'. Some of the services purchased under contract include:

- Children's Centres & nurseries
- [Community equipment](#)
- Counselling
- Domestic Violence Safeguarding Officer
- Fostering, residential and supported living placements. A framework agreement contract for agency fostering has helped to avoid costs of over £500,000
- [Herefordshire Intensive Placement Support](#) which is reducing reliance on residential provision
- [Independent advocacy](#)
- [Independent visitors](#)
- [Leisure vouchers for Looked After Children](#)
- [Short breaks for children with disabilities](#)
- [Social Care Emergency Duty Team](#) dealing with an average of 125 contacts per month

Children's Wellbeing Network

The Council hosts three network events each year that are [publicised online](#). Stakeholders can also join the [network Facebook page](#) to keep in touch with the latest developments between events. Each has a different focus. Topics have included:

- Digital by Default
- SENDirect
- Herefordshire's Children's Integrated Needs Assessment (CHiNA)
- Herefordshire's Approach to Early Intervention
- Working in Partnership
- Children and Young People's Partnership priorities
- Children with Disabilities strategy & gaps
- Shaping the Health & Wellbeing Strategy
- Herefordshire's Integrated Early Years Offer



Key Contacts for service

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