**Soft Market Testing**

**Provision of Information, Advice & Support Services (IASS) for Children and Young People (CYP) with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**

1. **Introduction:**

Shropshire Council would like to take the opportunity to undertake Soft Market Testing in relation to innovative, efficient and cost-effective approaches to the provision of ***Information Advice and Support Services (IASS) for Children and Young People (CYP) with Special Educational Needs or Disability (SEND)***

Please note that the purpose of this process is for the council to discuss with the market and affirm their current understanding of what the market has to offer to assist the Council to deliver the service from 1st September 2023.

***This process is intended as soft market testing only*** and is an exercise designed to test commercial market capabilities of meeting a set of requirements which would include enough interested suppliers to maintain competitive pressures.

1. **Background:**

The Children and Families Act 2014 states that local authorities must arrange for children with SEN or disabilities for whom they are responsible, and their parents and young people with SEN or disabilities for whom they are responsible to be provided with information and advice about matters relating to their SEN or disabilities, including matters relating to health and social care.

Therefore, this service must include:

* Information, advice and support on the take-up and management of Personal Budgets.
* Information and support necessary for children and their parents and young people to participate in decisions
* Ensuring these services are known to children, their parents and young people in their area, head teachers, proprietors and principals of schools and post-16 institutions and others in their area where appropriate
* Information and advice regarding the Shropshire Local Offer including details of how information, advice and support related to SEN and disabilities can be accessed and how it is resourced

Many CYP will access information, advice and support via their parents. However, some children, especially older children and those in custody, may want to access information, advice and support separately from their parents, and the provider must ensure this is possible.

**Staff working in IASS should be trained to support, and work in partnership with parents**.

As a child reaches the end of the academic year in which they turn 16, some rights to participate

in decision-making about their Education Health and Care (EHC) plans transfer from the parent to the young person, subject to their capacity to do so, as set out in the Mental Capacity Act 2005. Staff should be clear about the transfer of some rights and responsibilities to young people and work sensitively with parents to help them understand their role.

Parents of young people can still access information, advice and support on behalf of, or with, the young person and should still be included in discussions about a young person’s future in the majority of cases.

There may be cases where the young person and the parents do not agree on an issue. Legally, it is the young person’s decision which prevails, subject to their capacity. Where there are disagreements, staff providing information, advice and support should work impartially and separately with both the parents and the young person

This service will ensure that CYP with SEND and their parent/carers are better informed about the options available to them and will be more able to make positive decisions about how they live their lives.

Information, Advice and Support for CYP with SEND and their parent/carers must be easily accessible through a dedicated and easily identifiable service. Information, Advice and Support must be comprehensive, accurate and impartial, and delivered through a single point of entry, with a focus on empowerment and early intervention.

This service contributes to delivering the councils’ strategic objectives detailed in [The Shropshire Plan 2022 – 2025](https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/23162/shropshire-plan-strategic-plan.pdf):

* **Healthy People** - work with partners to develop, commission and deliver the right services and support that meet the needs of children, young people, adults and families in the right place, at the right time.
* **Healthy Economy -** There will be a strengthened role locally in protecting the health of our population.
* **Healthy Environment** – Safe communities: enable safer, sustainable, diverse and inclusive communities that pull together by reducing anti-social behaviour and risk of harm; addressing the issues they face.
* **Healthy Organisation -** Quicker access to information, advice, and answers to your questions using suitable mechanisms such as digital technology, which will include informing healthy behaviours, supporting good mental health and wellbeing.

1. **Service Overview**

***3.1 Service Users***

1. Children with SEND
2. Young People with SEND
3. Parents / carers of Children and Young People with SEND
   1. ***The Service***

The Service Provider will ensure the IASS will implement the following principles as listed in the ***SEND Code of Practice 2015***

* The information, advice and support will be impartial and provided at arm’s length from the local authority and Integrated Commissioning Board (ICB)
* The information, advice and support offered will be free, accurate, confidential and in formats which are accessible and responsive to the needs of users
* Staff providing information, advice and support will work in partnership with children, young people, parents, local authorities, Integrated Care Board and other relevant partners
* The provision of information, advice and support should help to promote independence and self-advocacy for children, young people and parents

The IASS will also implement the following principles which are important to the Council, ICB, parents and young people:

* **Prevention** – the IASS is an aspect of Shropshire’s Early Help Offer, aiming to provide early support and therefore preventing an escalation of problems.
* **Integration and collaboration** – the IASS will provide a high quality, integrated information, advice and support service for the people of Shropshire, ensuring that people receive a seamless service.
* **Targeted** – the IASS targets the service users detailed at 3.1

The Service should direct young people to specialist support to help them prepare for employment, independent living (including housing) and participation in society and should provide access to careers advice where needed.

This should be provided in coordination with schools and colleges, who also have a duty to give impartial careers advice.

Regarding children and young people in custody - if IAS support for the young person or their parents is deemed to be necessary by the local authority, then the IASS must also be provided.

* 1. ***Definitions***

What we mean by “Impartial Information, Advice and Support”

**Impartial**

Shropshire parents have told us that an impartial service is one that is based on individual needs and delivered in an unbiased way. The top three criteria for deciding whether a service is impartial are

* Not driven by finance / no vested interest in the final decision made
* All information is given, not just selected information
* Providing information in the best interest of the child and family

Young people have told us that an impartial service is delivered in a fair and unbiased way.

**Information**

By information we mean the facts, i.e. locations, contact details, what the options are, legal frameworks, processes. Information needs to be accurate, up-to-date and available in a range of formats to suit service users.

**Advice**

By advice we mean activities which help parents and young people gather, understand and interpret information and apply it to their own situation.

Parents define such activities as discussions about options, help to decide what would be appropriate or helpful, working out other arrangements that would be needed.

Young People define such activities as discussions with individuals or group activities. The aim of such activities is to understand information and how it applies to the young person, to understand useful actions that help them move forward.

**Support**

In addition to information and advice, parents, CYP may need additional support to participate successfully in decision making. This will usually involve casework and may include advocacy, key working or the provision of an Independent Supporter or volunteer.

* Parents define such support as building confidence and skills, practical support to implement decision, emotional understanding.
* Young People define such support as exploring options, enabling making own decisions, overcoming barriers and making progress.

1. **Scope**

Please note that this is not the commencement of any formal procurement process, and the Council is not committed to carrying out such a process.

For the avoidance of doubt no information provided in response to this process will be used by the Council in assessing providers during any subsequent procurement process.

This soft market testing exercise is intended to allow potential providers to outline their views and to provide information to the Council’s decision-making process.

The Council will consider the information received as a result of this exercise to help inform its options appraisal and subsequent Council decision making processes.

1. **Timescales**

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| **PROJECT STAGE** | **PURPOSE** | **SCHEDULED START** |
| Soft Market Testing | ***This is NOT a call for competition***.  This is intended to allow interested parties with relevant experience to outline their views and provide information with no commitment to themselves or the Council | 24/3/2023 |
| Closing Date for responses | The closing date and time for responses is 5.00pm on Tuesday 11th April 2023 | 11/4/2023 |
| Response Analysis | Analysis of all responses | 12/4//2023 |
| SMT meeting – commissioner and supplier | Go through returned questionnaire with interested suppliers | 13th & 14th April 2023 |
| Result | Outcome of Soft Market Testing Exercise | 31st April 2023 |
| Tender Issue Date |  | June 2023 |
| Contract Start |  | 1/9/2023 |

1. **General Information**

Completed questionnaires (see Appendix 1) should be returned to Yvonne Oliver – Children & Young People Commissioning Lead: [Yvonne.m.oliver@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:Yvonne.m.oliver@shropshire.gov.uk) by 5.00pm on Tuesday 11th April 2023.

**If Suppliers have any questions about this soft market test, such questions should be submitted to the Council through an email to The Children & Young People Commissioning Lead at** [**Yvonne.m.oliver@shropshire.gov.uk**](mailto:Yvonne.m.oliver@shropshire.gov.uk)

A copy of the questions about this exercise and a copy of the written replies may be circulated to all Suppliers, with anonymity of the Supplier preserved. Suppliers must not raise questions through any other route or individual as described above.

We intend to invite all providers who express an interest in getting involved in this soft market testing exercise to meet with us to discuss their response. This could either be in person or via Teams and it is anticipated to take about an hour.

***We encourage your participation in this soft market testing exercise, but must emphasise that your involvement in this exercise will not carry any commercial advantage in any ensuing procurement process***

***No information provided in response to this soft market testing exercise will be used in any evaluation of any subsequent response to a procurement exercise***

1. **Appendix 1 – Questionnaire**

***Please complete the following questionnaire (questions 1 – 5) fully, highlighting any information that you consider to be commercially sensitive***\*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Name of your organisation** |  |
| **Contact name, email and telephone number** |  |
| **Do you currently (or have you previously) delivered an IASS service Y/N?** |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question 1** | **Would you be interested in bidding for this service?**   * 1. **If Yes, why?**   2. **If No, why not?** |
| ***Response to Question 1*** | |
| **Question 2** | **EITHER:**  **If you ARE currently delivering an Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS) for CYP with SEND, please tell us briefly about:**   * **what worked well** * **what did you learn from the experience?** * **where did you deliver the service?**   **OR:**  **If you are not currently delivering an Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS) for CYP with SEND, please tell us briefly about:**   * **any relevant experience your organisation has** * **what worked well** * **what did you learn from the experience?** * **where did you deliver the service** |
| ***Response to Question 2*** | |
| **Question 3** | **When/if the Council go to tender following the soft market test, is there anything in addition to the information contained within this brief that you feel suppliers would need to be advised of in order to aid in their response.** |
| ***Response to Question 3*** | |
| **Question 4** | **What Social Value opportunities do you feel may be available through this contract? (see link –** [**Shropshire Council Social Value**](https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/social-value/commissioning-social-value-faqs/) |
| ***Response to Question 4*** | |
| **Question 5** | **Please describe how (and when) your organisation has worked with Public Sector Commissioners to reconfigure/shape a service and or the market. –**   1. **What did you do?**   **and**   1. **what did you learn?** |
| ***Response to Question 5*** | |
| **Question 6** | **Is there anything you would like to add that you would like the council to take in consideration?** |
| ***Response to Question 6*** | |