

Subject:	Permission to use Crown Commercial Services RM6255 Framework		
Date of Meeting:	10 January 2022		
Report of:	Executive Director Families, Children & Learning		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Richard Barker, Head of School Organisation	Tel: 01273 290732
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT**

- 1.1 Authority is being requested to use the RB6255 Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement to procure an end-to-end retail voucher platform contract(s) for the distribution of government grants to residents (food, clothing, white goods, fuel) including food vouchers to families with children eligible for free school meals, who qualify for free childcare places, are eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium, use the children's centre food bank or are in similar circumstances.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee grant authority to the Executive Director Families, Children and Learning to use the RM6255 Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement to procure and award an end-to-end retail voucher platform contract(s) to facilitate the distribution of government grants to eligible families and children as detailed within the grant conditions.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 In December 2020 Covid Winter Grant funding was provided, at short notice, by the Department for Work & Pensions to the Council for distribution to families with children for food and fuel payments to those who were experiencing difficulties during the Covid period. The Policy and Resources Committee subsequently authorised the Covid Winter Grant being allocated to provide food vouchers to families whose children were eligible for free school meals, eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium, qualify for free childcare places for two-year-olds and families who use the children centres' food bank.
- 3.2 The Department for Work and Pensions subsequently made further grant allocations to the Covid Winter Grant, the Covid Local Support Grant and the Household Support Grant throughout 2021 and it is now expected that support will need to continue until at least 31 March 2022. It is anticipated that spend under the Framework Agreement would be approximately £0.455m until the 31

March 2022 but this figure will increase if more grant funding comes in and the Council is required to further extend its support. Officers are seeking authority to spend up to £1.0m of government grant funding under the Framework Agreement to provide food, clothing and white goods, fuel vouchers to eligible children and families should further government funding come in 2022.

- 3.3 The Council has been using a voucher platform provided by Hugg Limited to help issue supermarket vouchers to eligible children and families. With the continuation of central government grants confirmed, the Children, Young People & Skills Committee is being asked for authority to use the RM6255 Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement to procure these services and such vouchers going forward.
- 3.4 The Framework Agreement provides an end-to-end retail voucher scheme with providers who can provide multiple merchant closed-loop vouchers and is available to all central government and public sector bodies.
- 3.5 The Framework Agreement offers a wide choice of providers with the ability to direct award or enter into further competition depending on the Council's requirements. Appointed providers have procedures in place to provide replacement vouchers and refunds for unused vouchers and a wide range of grocery and non-grocery merchants vouchers are available to comply with grant conditions and meet our families' needs.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The RB6255 Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement allows the Council to identify providers that meet the requirements set out by the Crown Commercial Services, a public procurement organisation accessible by public and third sector buyers in the UK. The Framework Agreement has been developed to support Councils to procuring robust systems to enable them to distribute grant funding efficiently. The Council could consider alternative methods of securing a voucher scheme, but this would require significant resource to design then run a robust procurement process to identify a suitable provider which would most likely be on the Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement. This approach does not appear to add any value when there is the availability to procure via a Framework Agreement.
- 4.2 Alternatively, the Council could look to arrange for the distribution of vouchers using existing resources. Whilst the grant funding does allow the Council to allocate funding for administration it is likely to require a significant proportion of the funding to facilitate a scheme of purchasing and distributing in the region of 9000 supermarket food vouchers during school holiday periods and be as assured of the financial probity required. The use of a voucher platform enables more of the grant to be spent on families and children rather than administration and offers the greatest choice of where to spend their voucher.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 There has been no community engagement and consultation on the proposed use of a framework agreement. However, feedback from the use of the current scheme of issuing supermarket food vouchers via a platform has been very

positive. Crown Commercial Services have ensured that there is a wide choice of providers with the ability for the Council to directly award a contract or enter into a further competition depending on the Council's requirements. Voucher distribution using providers on the Framework Agreement is fast, secure and tailored to meet the needs of the general public. A wide range of grocery and non-grocery merchants' vouchers are available. No minimum or maximum scheme value is needed to use the Framework Agreement.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The RM6255 Crown Commercial Services Framework will allow the Executive Director Families, Children and Learning procure and award an end-to-end retail voucher platform contract(s) for the distribution of government grants to residents (food, clothing, white goods and fuel).

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The information included within the report indicates that there are no direct financial implications arising as a result of this proposal.

Finance Officer Consulted: Steve Williams

Date: 21/12/21

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The Council must comply with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 in relation to the procurement and award of contracts above the relevant financial threshold. The services outlined exceed the relevant financial threshold (£213,477). The RM6255 Crown Commercial Services Framework Agreement can be used to compliantly procure and award contracts.

Lawyer Consulted: Sara Zadeh

Date: 20/12/21

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 An Equality Impact Assessment has not been carried out. The report details a request for authority to use the Crown Commercial Services RM6255 Framework Agreement to procure an end-to-end retail voucher platform for the distribution of government grants. The report details the satisfactory use of the existing platform to distribute funds to those who require them since December 2020.
- 7.4 Where families have encountered difficulties in accessing the scheme education settings have supported them to receive the funding that is available to them. As a result, the Council has not identified any potential or actual negative impact on all people in relation to their 'protected characteristics' (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership).

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.5 There are no sustainability impacts in relation to the content of this report. The voucher platform scheme allows families to choose vouchers for a wide range of local shops to their community within the city.

Brexit Implications:

- 7.6 There are no Brexit implications in relation to the details in this report.

Any Other Significant Implications:

None