

TO: DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE HEALTH & HOUSING
12TH APRIL 2017

**ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING SERVICE
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
Consultant in Public Health**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To outline the tendering intention for an online mental health support and counselling service for young people aged 11 – 19 years.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **To advertise for a minimum of three quotations from professional online mental health counselling service providers in the amount of £30,000, for a period of one year (1 October 2017 – 30 September 2018) plus an optional, one year extension (1 October 2018 – 30 September 2019), with a maximum contract value £60,000.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The current contract with Xenzone Ltd for the KOOTH.com service ends on 30 September 2017. The provision of online counselling has been well received by many stakeholders, particularly schools and young people themselves, as a means of improving young people's access to preventative and early mental health support and advice. The continued growth in the number of young people accessing mental health advice and support, including counselling, provides confidence that provision of an online service should continue.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 Not to commission a service. This is likely to have an adverse effect on mental health outcomes for young people as well as place an extra burden on other mental health services within the NHS and on support capacity within schools.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The Bracknell Forest Health and Wellbeing Board has provided a clear steer that children and young people need to be able to access emotional and mental health services that they require in a timely manner, and where possible at the lowest level possible to prevent escalation to higher tiers of support.
- 5.2 This approach aligns with the focus on prevention identified in the ["Future in Mind"](#) report (Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Taskforce, 2015) and the [East Berkshire Mental Health Services for Children and Young People Transformation Plan](#) (December 2015), which emphasises the importance of ensuring young people receive the help and support they need, when they need it, delivered in a way that suits them.

Unrestricted

- 5.2 Our experience of commissioning online mental health support and counselling over the past year and ten months has clearly demonstrated that it dramatically improves the length of time young people have to wait to access professional counselling and specialist mental health advice, compared to other, more traditional methods. Around 70% of log-ins have been made out-of-hours, when many services are closed.
- 5.3 The average waiting time for a young person to access professional mental health counselling via KOOTH.com is 10 minutes, compared to days or weeks for Youthline face-to-face counselling and up to two years for some specialist CAMHS services.
- 5.4 There is now good evidence that online mental health support and counselling is meeting young people's needs for information, advice and support to improve their emotional wellbeing and is likely to prevent their concerns from escalating:
- Levels of satisfaction are consistently high (typically over 80% who use the online service report finding either they "definitely" or "mostly" got what they wanted from their visit to the site).
 - 1400 young people have registered with the service since May 2015.
 - In the first nine months of 2016/17;
 - an average of 177 online chat messages were sent each month between young people and mental health professionals;
 - an average of 28 young people accessed self-help documents each month.
 - an average of 28 young people each month took part in counselling via online chat and 47 via online messaging.
 - In Q3 2016/17 alone, 97 unique young people took part in moderated, themed discussion forums.
 - Case studies of Bracknell Forest young people provide additional richer data to support the conclusion that the service is professional and non-judgemental in its approaches, is sensitive to the needs of young people in distress and enables them to express their feelings.
 - More robust data recording of young people's progress against counselling goals they set, has enabled us to see how the service is improving young people's mental wellbeing.
 - A before-after analysis that explored to the effect of the online service on CAMHS referrals was carried out by Public Health last year. We found that its introduction was linked to a significant reduction in referrals to CAMHS. Whilst it's difficult to draw firm conclusions on the efficacy of preventative services outside of a controlled research trial, the data does suggest the online model is having a positive impact. (data available on request).
- 5.5 The current contract with Xenzone Ltd is jointly funded with Bracknell & Ascot CCG/East Berkshire CCGs on a 50/50 basis. The Council will go out to tender as sole commissioner, to ensure continuity of service from 1 October 2017. We anticipate that the CCG will be commissioning extra hours for the service in a separate process and have requested confirmation of their intentions in writing.
- 5.6 The value of the contract has been reduced from £50,000 to £30,000 per annum to reflect the level of demand. Following advice from procurement the contract will be awarded on a 1+1 basis to provide the Council with greater flexibility and be more likely to secure continuity of service and value for money. In addition, the contract

will allow for a further reduction in the value of year 2, equivalent to the percentage decrease required by any further cost savings that may become necessary.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

6.1 No significant issues arise

Borough Treasurer

6.2 The relevant financial provisions are contained within the report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 See initial equalities impact assessment attached

Privacy Impact Assessment

6.4 See privacy impact assessment attached

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.5 None identified

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 Young People who have used the current service (reported by the Provider each quarter)

7.2 East Berkshire CCGs

Method of Consultation

7.2 See above

Representations Received

7.3 None

Background Papers

Equalities Impact Assessment

Privacy Impact Assessment

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