

Schedule 2 (Specification)

The Specification

Introduction

- 1.1 This tender seeks bids to take on and improve an existing national advocacy information and advice helpline and 'safety net' service for looked after children and care leavers across England. The services are intended to provide information, advice and signposting for looked after children and care leavers to local advocacy support or help those who have been denied local advocacy to make representations and pursue complaints. The service will be active in referring cases back to local authorities and progressing these until satisfaction.
- 1.2 The current provider (Coram Voice) supports children and young people to: access online information about their rights and see who their local advocacy provider is; contact the service directly for advice and signposting; and receive 'safety net' advocacy provision where local advocacy is denied. Coram Voice has been providing the service since 2017 and the current contract expires at the end of September 2023. We wish to procure a delivery partner to manage the advocacy and safety net service for two years (from 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2025), with the option to extend for a further year (subject to review prior to the end of September 2024 and September 2025).
- 1.3 The service will continue to encourage local authorities to provide advocacy services in line with their statutory responsibilities, only stepping in where this proves unsuccessful. It is expected the improved national advocacy 'safety net' will also improve insight and analysis about callers to the service and the issues they raise and will gather evidence about the quality and coverage of local advocacy services. The service will use clear approaches for prioritising limited resources and engage looked after children who might otherwise be difficult to reach.
- 1.4 The national advocacy 'safety net' is not a substitute for the services that local authorities should provide. Its role is to signpost children to locally provided services and to monitor availability. The service will maintain a dynamic picture of local provision, updated via calls to the helpline and based on work with local areas and through its networks. The service will only step in where local advocacy support continues to be denied.
- 1.5 Looked after children and care leavers have a legal right to advocacy. Local authorities are responsible for the following:

- Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 provides that before making any decision with respect to a child who a local authority is looking after or proposing to look after, the authority should ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child and give due consideration to those. This could entail the provision of advocacy should a child request it.
- The Adoption and Children Act 2002 amends the Children Act 1989, and requires local authorities to make arrangements for all looked after children and care leavers to have access to advocacy services, to help make representations about the services they receive, including pursuing complaints
- Section 26A of the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 set out the process for representations and require that children making complaints must be offered advocacy.
- Quality Standard 7 for care homes requires that children in care are provided with information about their right to an advocate.
- The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010, and related statutory guidance, consolidate a wide range of previous regulations into one place, including ones on advocacy within care planning.
- The provision of local authority advocacy should be consistent with the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy (2002).

3 Policy Background

2.1 Children in care and looked after children have a right to express their wishes and feelings when decisions are made about their lives and their care. This right is enshrined in the Children Act 1989, with a view to meeting the obligations of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the right to be heard.

2.2 Looked after children may lack the confidence, trust, or communication skills to voice their views, wishes and opinions. In these circumstances, it is important that each cared for child is supported to 'have a say' and that they are listened to, improving a number of outcomes including the development of a sense of self, agency, and control. Children should be meaningfully involved by decision-makers as they plan and manage care, acting as good 'corporate parents'. Those with complex needs (including linked to communication) and those that live in out of area placements may in particular benefit from advocacy support.

- 2.3 Every child in the care system has the legal right to be supported by an advocate if they wish, though not every child will want or need an advocate. Local authorities are under a duty to explain to children of their right to an advocate and to provide an independent advocate for when a child requests one. Advocates may be provided through a number of different routes, including in-house or externally commissioned, but their independence remains key.
- 2.4 Along with helping a child express their views and wishes, advocates may also provide support to assist with making a representation or a complaint about a service. Local authorities must have a system in place to provide written, age-appropriate information to each looked after child about the function and availability of an advocate and how to request one.
- 2.5 Statutory guidance emphasises the importance of advocacy. Independent Reviewing Officers must help looked after children understand how an advocate could be of benefit to them. The guidance can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-act-1989-care-planning-placement-and-case-review>
- 2.6 Local authorities are required to ensure they have arrangements in place to respond to complaints through local resolution, further investigation, and review panel stages. Advocacy is an important entitlement for children as they progress to formal stages of complaints. The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 sets this out in detail.

3 Current Service Performance

- 3.1 Selected provider data for performance during the 2021-22 financial year demonstrates the following:

Measure	Data (2022/23)
Direct helpline contacts	2,533
Website advice/information contacts	13,379
Percentage (of overall service users) of children from 'harder to reach' cohorts ¹ accessing and supported by service	45% (1,140)
Number of children supported to make 'safety net' representations/complaints	628
Percentage of children (accessing "Safety Net" advocacy) from harder to reach groups	75% (470)

¹ The 'harder to reach' cohort includes children under 10, those experiencing homelessness, mental health difficulties, or having a disability

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Number of helpline telephone calls received	6,660
Number of helpline SMS received	854
Number of helpline email received	15,928
Number of helpline WhatsApp conversations undertaken	939*
% of children 17 and under	40
% of young people 18 - 25 years old	60
% of young people were under 10	3
% of young people had a disability	30
% of young people identified a mental health problem	15
% of young people were homeless	15

** number refers to conversations/threads not individual messages sent or received*

- 3.2 The current service responds to around 6,600 telephone calls per year (excluding contacts via text, WhatsApp, and email). Some of these calls relate to support for the same individual. Helpline calls are aimed to be answered within a minute and vary in duration with initial referral conversations taking around 25 minutes.
- 3.3 The existing provider makes use of a VITE customer relationship management (CRM) system based on MOSAIC. System data is extracted through script SQL to produce reports and review service performance. The existing CRM system will not transfer over. Live case data will be transferred to providers securely and with the consent of the subjects.
- 3.4 Current providers will continue to retain their respective freephone helpline numbers and hardware.
- 3.5 The current service is run by eight employed staff members. Up to eighteen volunteer posts also support the service and contribute 3.5 FTE. More information around staffing and TUPE is found in point 9.
- 3.6 Where local advocacy is denied, the service has Safety Net advocates (2 FTE) based across the country providing phone, messaging and video support to young people when they need it. The service model provides virtual support first but has the capacity to travel and provide face-to-face support where this is needed by the young person.

4 Scope of the Service

- 4.1 The national advocacy helpline and 'safety net' service will address the following objectives:

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- 4.2 To provide a national (England) advocacy advice helpline and website to signpost children to local advocacy.
- 4.3 To provide direct advocacy support where advocacy is denied locally to looked after children or care leavers as well as supporting a looked after child or care leaver to pursue a complaint, likely in partnership with an Independent Reviewing Officer (unless concerns centre on the IRO service itself).
- 4.4 To collect and maintain information about the range and availability of advocacy support provided to local children and young people based on calls to the service, contact with Local Authorities and through networks. Through this knowledge, the service will be able to support swiftly and effectively looked after children to obtain advocacy.
- 4.5 To raise concerns, immediately, where there is a risk to a child's safety or welfare by referring to a local authority's child protection and safeguarding teams (and the police as appropriate).
- 4.6 Where there are persistent concerns about the availability or quality of local advocacy services in a particular area, Ofsted should be informed, and reports made to the Department for Education as part of regular progress and monitoring arrangements. Quarterly information around safeguarding referrals is also to be shared with Ofsted. Where a serious safeguarding incident occurs, Ofsted would need to be informed immediately.
- 4.7 The service may be contacted by children and young people directly, or by others such as carers or professionals making referrals on their behalf. It is anticipated that the majority of calls about older children should be made directly by the children themselves. Even where professionals make contact, the young person is spoken to before an advocacy support case is opened.
- 4.8 The service is not a substitute for services that local authorities are responsible for providing. Social workers should demonstrate that they have exhausted other local advocacy routes before referring a child or young person to the service.
- 4.9 This service should prioritise those calls from looked after children. The service provider must have mechanisms in place to monitor and measure demand and understand what may be driving changes (based on the reasons behind calls and wider understanding of children's services)

5 Deliverables

- 5.1 The supplier is required to deliver the following service aspects:

D1	An advice helpline run by appropriately trained staff members who are able to respond to calls from looked after children and able to respond accordingly, identifying the best route to address concerns. The helpline should offer telephone, email, text, and WhatsApp communication options. This should also support children where English is not their first language.
D2	Additional advocacy support through web-based information including 'self-advocacy tools and technology. A website should allow looked after children and care leavers to be made aware of their local advocacy provider and the relevant contact information. This should also support children where English is not their first language.
D3	A database capturing the availability of local advocacy, which is accurate and kept up to date so to refer children and young people to local support. The database is held by the current provider and regular contact with all local authorities are needed to ensure information is kept up to date.

a. The supplier will ensure the service:

D4	Operates a 'no child turned away policy, in partnership with local authorities who are supported to respond appropriately to cases. Where local authorities are unable or unwilling to provide advocacy support, the supplier will then operate the 'safety net and help the looked after child to pursue their complaint in being denied support.
D5	Has an effective approach to identifying and engaging harder-to-reach groups, with a clear and consistent approach to prioritising support during periods when calls and other activity are higher than expected and that this is communicated to children sensitively with alternative support found for them in the interim.
D6	Provides support across England so that children and young people across the country can benefit, e.g. by holding up to date and accurate information about each local authority's advocacy provision; by recruiting local volunteers to add capacity to the service (including as advocates)
D7	<p>10 Promotes awareness of the legal requirements and the value of independent advocacy with relevant children, young people and local authorities</p> <p>11 Increases awareness of the advocacy helpline with children and young people, carers and relevant professionals.</p>
D8	The new service is required to be operational from 1 October 2023 following an implementation period.

6 Detailed Service Requirements

National Advocacy Helpline

- 6.1 The continuing service must operate a helpline staffed by skilled advisers and a range of available support routes including by video-chat (FaceTime, Zoom, WhatsApp etc.), phone, email and text, and direct.
- 6.2 The current service model provides virtual support initially with the option of face-to-face support available where this is needed. Between 70-100 face-to-face visits are anticipated per year.
- 6.3 All callers to the helpline should receive basic information about their rights and advisers should be able to provide emotional support to the caller and make a decision about how best to provide further support.
- 6.4 There is an expectation that helpline staff will be given sufficient training and skills to be equipped to sensitively handle calls, providing complex information in relation to care, and leaving care entitlements or as well as emotional support to children who are homeless, in crisis, experiencing mental health crisis or suicidal thoughts.
- 6.5 The helpline will operate from a freephone number. The actual call costs and telephone number purchase will need to be factored into any budget planning based on the total contract value.
- 6.6 The minimum opening hours for the helpline will be:
- 10am - 6pm, Monday – Friday
- 10am - 4pm, Saturday
- 6.7 Where calls are higher than projected during any particular period, there will be a clear and consistent approach to prioritising support. The service should maintain or exceed the current standards for allocating and responding to calls, with caller satisfaction recorded and reviewed.
- 6.8 The service will be able to support harder-to-reach groups who might be less likely or less aware of their entitlement to local advocacy. The service will identify these groups and have plans in place to address and overcome barriers and issues.
- 6.9 The service will maintain a CRM system to monitor case progression and report on service outputs.

6.10 The service will be able to analyse the range of calls and issues presented, drawing out themes, trends, and patterns, quantitatively and qualitatively, linking insight to regional and local authority levels, along with evaluating the impact of direct advocacy when this is provided.

6.11 The service will be able to raise awareness of the service as well as develop and harness local volunteers to add to operational capacity.

Website

6.12 A website will provide up to date information about advocacy, children's rights, and how to request advocacy.

6.13 The website should have a search function enabling children and young people to find their local advocacy provider with up-to-date contact information provided.

6.14 The website should also contain relevant information for professionals about advocacy provision.

6.15 We do not require a new website to be set up for this service if you have an existing website platform in place. If you do have an existing platform in place, the new information for this service set out in the specification would be hosted on your current platform.

6.16 If you do not have current website platform that can host the information of this service as set out in the specification the requirement would be you set up

6.17 Both new website set up and existing website platforms will have to be subjected to DfE internal reviews to ensure up the most cyber security both parties

Safety Net Service

6.18 Where signposting to local advocacy services has not been successful and local authorities are unable to provide advocacy, including in support of making a complaint itself, the service will then provide advocacy support to continue to pursue service complaints including the denial of local advocacy.

6.19 Where a local authority is unable to provide support and there remain 'critical issues' (e.g. likelihood of homelessness likelihood of or actual abuse or harm; other serious detrimental impact on outcomes) then direct advocacy should be provided along with notification to Ofsted about the case.

6.20 If a child's case progresses to formal stages in a local authority's complaints procedure, in some instances it may be helpful to engage the Office of the Children's Commissioner. This is likely to be at the point where a child and their advocate consider they are approaching an unsatisfactory conclusion to the 'local resolution' stage of a complaint.

Monitoring national advocacy provision

6.21 Creation of database capturing the availability of local advocacy, which is accurate and kept up to date. The database can help refer children and young people to local support as well as monitor compliance of the providers against the national standards. The database is held by the current provider and regular contact with all local authorities are needed to ensure information is kept up to date.

6.22 The service will be able to engage local authorities (England) and remind them of their responsibilities to promote and provide advocacy support for looked after children, including through specific officers such as the Independent Reviewing Officer. The provider will work with all relevant local authorities to channel calls for advocacy support to ensure that local authorities meet their statutory duties. The provider will be able to hold information about the range and quality of local services.

6.23 The service should engage with Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner to highlight where local advocacy is denied or is unable to be provided.

7 Service levels and Performance Indicators

7.1 The current service was asked to deliver a number of KPIs, with targets based on helpline performance from 2015 – 2017 but were updated through a contract variation to reflect performance from 2017 – 2020.

7.2 New suggested KPIs for the contract from October 2023 are listed below with performance to be reported quarterly. The 'per annum' timescale will relate to each year of the contract and will run from October to September:

Area/Theme	Measure	Monitoring Method/ Target	Timescale
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Public awareness of the service	Number of digital interactions	10,000	p.a.										
	Number of direct interactions	2,000	p.a.										
Performance of web-based advice and self-advocacy tools	Average user satisfaction score for web-based information and self-advocacy tools is 'Good'	<table><tr><th>Rating</th><th>Threshold (out of 10)</th></tr><tr><td>Good</td><td>8 or above</td></tr><tr><td>Approaching Target</td><td>6 to 7</td></tr><tr><td>Requires Improvement</td><td>4 to 5</td></tr><tr><td>Inadequate</td><td>3 or below</td></tr></table>	Rating	Threshold (out of 10)	Good	8 or above	Approaching Target	6 to 7	Requires Improvement	4 to 5	Inadequate	3 or below	p.a.
	Rating	Threshold (out of 10)											
Good	8 or above												
Approaching Target	6 to 7												
Requires Improvement	4 to 5												
Inadequate	3 or below												
	Sample expectation of feedback received for website	50% of the total number of web-based advice users helped	p.a.										
Performance of helpline service	Percentage of telephone calls to be answered via a call handler within under 2 minutes	90% (remaining 10% to be answered within 5 minutes)	p.a.										
	Percentage of text, WhatsApp, emails received are to be responded within 24 hours of first contact to the service	90% of contacts (remaining 10% to be responded to within 48 hours)	p.a.										
	Percentage (of overall service users) of children from 'harder to reach' ² cohorts accessing signposting and advice service.	30%	p.a.										
	Average user satisfaction score for advice/signposting helpline is 'good'.	<table><tr><th>Rating</th><th>Threshold (out of 10)</th></tr><tr><td>Good</td><td>8 or above</td></tr><tr><td>Approaching Target</td><td>6 to 7</td></tr><tr><td>Requires Improvement</td><td>4 to 5</td></tr><tr><td>Inadequate</td><td>3 or below</td></tr></table>	Rating	Threshold (out of 10)	Good	8 or above	Approaching Target	6 to 7	Requires Improvement	4 to 5	Inadequate	3 or below	p.a.
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² The 'harder to reach' cohort includes children under 10, those experiencing homelessness, mental health difficulties, or having a disability

	Sample expectation of feedback received for helpline.	30% of the total number of helpline-based users	p.a.										
Performance of Safety Net Service	Percentage of children requiring 'safety net' advocacy provided with an advocate within 24 hours of first contact to the service.	95% (Remaining 5% to be provided a safety net advocate within 48 hours of first contact to the service)	p.a.										
	Percentage of children from 'harder to reach' cohorts accessing 'safety net' support.	30%	p.a.										
	Average user satisfaction score for 'safety net' advocacy service is 'good'.	<table><tr><th>Rating</th><th>Threshold (out of 10)</th></tr><tr><td>Good</td><td>8 or above</td></tr><tr><td>Approaching Target</td><td>6 to 7</td></tr><tr><td>Requires Improvement</td><td>4 to 5</td></tr><tr><td>Inadequate</td><td>3 or below</td></tr></table>	Rating	Threshold (out of 10)	Good	8 or above	Approaching Target	6 to 7	Requires Improvement	4 to 5	Inadequate	3 or below	
	Rating	Threshold (out of 10)											
	Good	8 or above											
Approaching Target	6 to 7												
Requires Improvement	4 to 5												
Inadequate	3 or below												
Sample expectation of feedback received	80% of the total number of 'safety net' users	p.a.											
Local authority/Service Monitoring	Percentage of local authority/ services contacted quarterly to update information held by the national database	100%	Per quarter										
	Percentage of safeguarding alerts made within 24 hours in response to disclosures of risk to safety or welfare of child.	100%	p.a.										
	Percentage of serious practice failures	100%	p.a.										

	identified reported to Ofsted within 24 hours.		
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7.3 The current service also provides a 'distance travelled' measure which is not a KPI but features in quarterly performance monitoring reports. Performance reports will be codesigned with the department but there is an expectation that outcomes and distance travelled will be monitored.

8. Management Information

8.1 The successful tenderer will be asked to provide management information during set quarterly meetings to aid departmental delivery scrutiny and to inform wider work. Information will be drawn from: call volumes/duration timing etc., profiles of children calling, reasons for calls, call prioritisation (if needed), LA area origin of calls, call outcomes; administrative and financial service operation information, awareness-raising activity, and from work with local authorities to channel requests for advocacy. Reporting indicators will be further developed during the service transition period and agreed upon award of the contract.

8.2 The provider will be asked to project activity volumes (for call handling, for work with LAs, for provision of advocacy) for each period. Projected volumes and 'actuals' will inform regular performance review meetings with the department. The provider is also asked to analyse calls made and the issues raised, to draw out themes, trends, and patterns, quantitatively and qualitatively, linking insight to regional and local authority levels. The provider is also asked to set out the impact and outcome of any direct advocacy that might be provided.

8.3 During the life of the contract the department may commission an external independent evaluation on the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. This will be in addition to the service provider's own internal monitoring and quality control. Feedback from any exercise of this nature will be used both to assess the performance of the service provider and to develop and improve the quality and cost effectiveness of the service.

8.4 The provider is asked to submit a template and mock-up of a performance monitoring report as part of their bid, setting out the information covered within this section and drawing from information that will be collected via the central case-management system.

8.5 The final version of the template and mock-up of the performance monitoring report will be finalised and agreed between both parties during the successful bidder's implementation period.

9 Staffing

- 9.1 The staff who deliver the service are key to its effectiveness. The service provider will need to consider the types of advisors and other staff who would be most appropriate for this contract and must ensure that there are appropriate administrative and supervisor staffing levels in place to meet the contract requirements and deliver an efficient and flexible resource.
- 9.2 The attention of bidders is drawn to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE). Whilst it is the responsibility of the bidder to consider whether TUPE applies in the circumstances of this contract, and to tender accordingly, it is the view of the Department that TUPE may apply as a consequence of any change in the provider of the services under this contract. However, the Department is not liable for this view and bidders should form their own view, taking specialist advice if necessary.
- 9.3 Based on information provided by the incumbent provider of services, the Department understands that there are currently 8 employees who may be within the scope of TUPE, although the Department makes no representations or warranties as to the accuracy of this information. Anonymised information on these employees will be made available as part of the ITT process subject to the completion of a Non-Disclosure Agreement.

10 Data Security and Transfer Protocols

- 10.1 Where appropriate, the successful tenderer will be asked to submit a security plan that explains how they will ensure that departmental and children's personal data will be protected.
- 10.2 The service provider must be fully compliant with the Departmental Security Standards. This includes, but is not limited to the following:
- a) The system must be capable of processing information with a security classification of OFFICIAL (including OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE) of the Government Security Classifications Scheme, and must provide security controls capable of mitigating risks associated with this level.
 - b) The service provider must demonstrate compliance with all applicable regulatory requirements, including but not limited to the Data Protection Act 1998 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
 - c) Suppliers' collection, use, storage, management and sharing of personal data, including details of systems in which such data is stored, will be governed through DfE's DDaT processes. Security governance is based on risk and the DfE team can bring in contractual

support to support, manage and mitigate identified risks. This may also impact the supplier's costs.

10.3 For the purposes of this contract, the department will be the data controller and will enter into an agreement with the contractor for it to process the information.

11 Customer Relationship Management System

11.1 The service provider must provide a central CRM system which can perform the following functions:

- 1 Create and maintain a single customer record for each client. Each client should have a unique identifier.
- 2 Provide a scalable and flexible solution to allow for changes to the CRM system, in terms of data capture and functionality.
- 3 Comply with all relevant data protection and Government information security requirements.
- 4 Allow system changes at minimal cost.
- 5 Be capable of providing regular specified and ad-hoc management reports.
- 6 Ensure reporting is compatible with standard computer systems (such as standard MS packages, Word, Excel, etc.).
- 7 Support export of data in standard formats (e.g. CSV, XLS).
- 8 Provide a database of contacts.
- 9 Have the capability to record and store all contacts for a predetermined period of time in compliance with its legal obligations.
- 10 Integrate with the 'knowledge bank' database of up-to-date provision for all local authorities. to enable advisors to access information quickly in order to provide effective advice and support to clients.

11.2 The service provider will need to work with DFE to define the exact data capture field requirements during set-up.

11.3 People can re-contact the service a number of times if they have ongoing problems, through multiple channels. The CRM system must be able to record information that has been given to

advisors by clients during each contact. That information must be capable of being re-called by advisors if the client contacts the service again. Information must be capable of being extracted and presented to the clients or advocates as part of ongoing casework.

- 11.4 Final outcomes/results of interactions and advice/support given needs to be recorded against each client's records.

12 Child Sex Abuse

- 12.1 The Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) was established in 1996 by the UK internet industry to provide the UK Internet Hotline for public and IT professionals to report potentially illegal online content and to be the 'notice and take-down' body for this content. IWF works in partnership with the online industry, law enforcement, Government, the education sector, charities, international partners and the public to minimise the availability of this content, specifically, child sexual abuse content hosted anywhere in the world.

- 12.2 Access to the IWF URL list is available to ISPs, mobile operators, search providers and filtering companies only. All organisations that require access must sign a licence which sets out how the data can be used.

- 12.3 It is a contract condition that the successful supplier must block access to those Uniform Resource Locators (URLS) specified on the IWF's list.

13 Costs

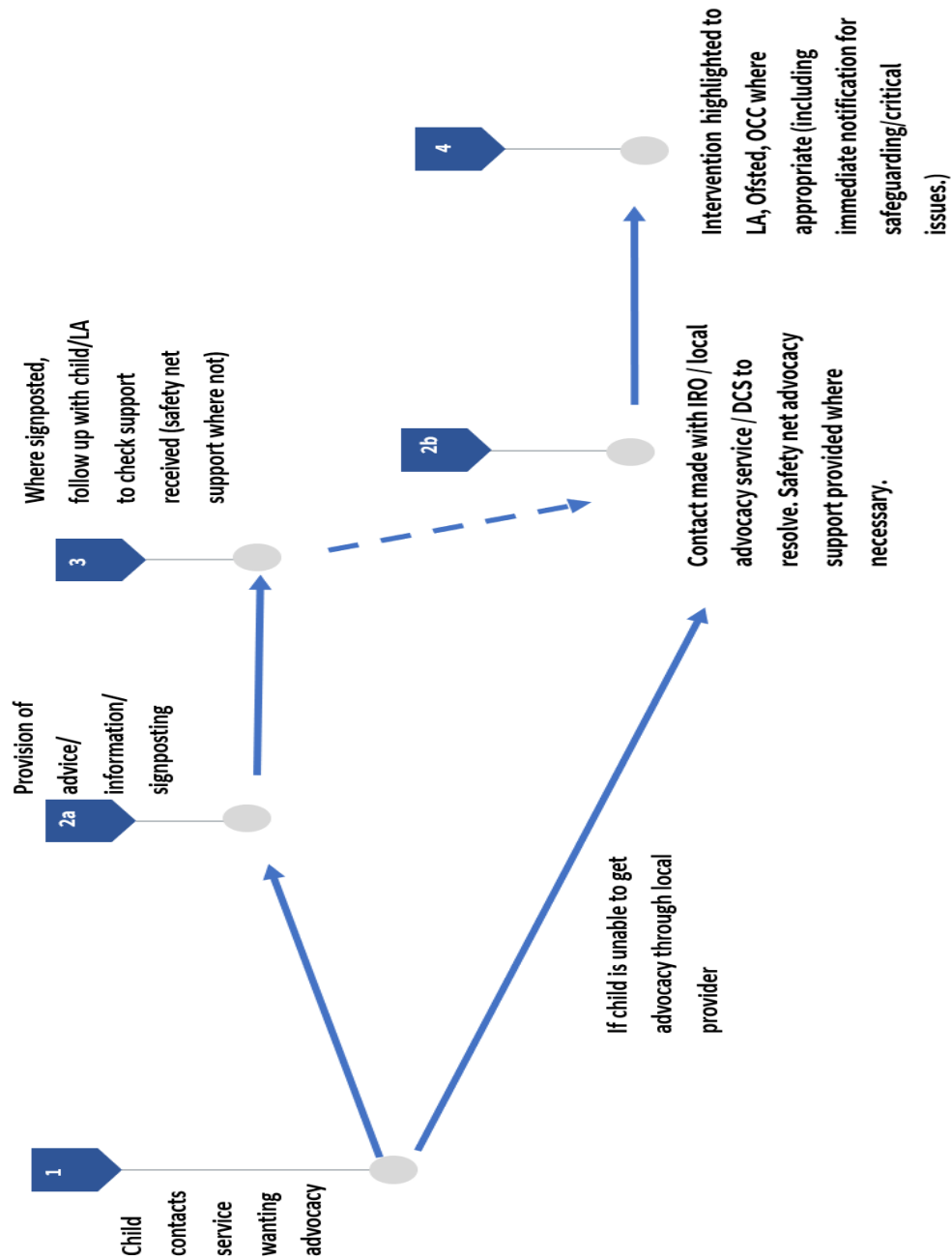
- 13.1 The supplier is required to provide a detailed breakdown of costs (excluding VAT).
- 13.2 Payments will be made to the supplier by BACS transfer following receipt of a valid invoice.
- 13.3 The supplier should provide details of discounts for prompt payment.

14 VAT

- 14.1 The supplier should state clearly when submitting prices whether *or not* VAT will be charged.
- 14.2 Where the contract price agreed between the department and contractor is inclusive of any VAT, further amounts will not be paid by the department should a vatable supply claim be made at any later stage.

- 14.3 Where the overall contract price is exclusive of VAT, the department will pay any VAT incurred at the prevailing rate (currently 20%). If the VAT rate changes the department will pay any VAT incurred at the new rate.

Annex A – User Journey



[Subject to Contract]
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