BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL **DECISION NO. 1893 _____**

RECORD OF EXECUTIVE DECISION TAKEN BY AN EXECUTIVE MEMBER

This form **MUST** be used to record any decision taken by the Elected Mayor or an individual Executive Member (Portfolio Holder).

The form must be completed and passed to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services no later than NOON on the second working day after the day on which the decision is taken. No action may be taken to implement the decision(s) recorded on this form until 7 working days have passed and the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services has confirmed the decision has not been called in.

1. Description of decision

(1) That the award of the Children's Services Transformation Delivery Partner (Implementation Phase) contract to the proposed winning bidder, identified in Confidential Appendix A that has been prepared to accompany this decision, be approved.

(2) That the transformation benefits and associated risks, outlined in the attached report that has been prepared to accompany this decision, and the compliant procurement process that has been followed, be acknowledged.

2. Date of decision

28 October 2026

3. Reasons for decision

- To support improved outcomes for children and families and realise the identified financial savings, it is vital that the Council proceeds with the contract without delay.
- Through the appointment of the proposed bidder as the transformation delivery partner, the programme will secure the capacity and capability needed to deliver the required level of systemic change and realise the identified financial savings.

4. Alternatives considered and rejected

The Council considered whether it could deliver the programme in-house, however, it was recognised that this programme requires significant specialist resources to deliver and sustain the level of change required. The Council does not have sufficient capacity or capability to deliver this level of systemic change at a time when the Directorate is already engaged on the Ofsted Improvement Plan, SEND Reform and Families First programme. The Council, therefore, concluded that there was a need to procure specialist support to deliver this transformation programme.

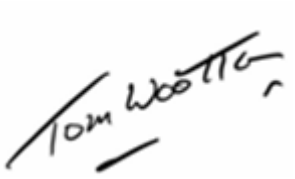
5. How decision is to be funded

The programme costs are included within the Council's approved capital programme, allocated from the Transformation – Utilisation of Flexible Capital Receipts scheme over 2026/2027 and 2027/2028.

6. Conflicts of interest

Name of all Executive members who were consulted AND declared a conflict of interest.	Nature of interest	Did Standards Committee give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and date of dispensation)	Did the Chief Executive give a dispensation for that conflict of interest? (If yes, give details and the date of the dispensation).
All evaluators and project team members have signed and returned COI's and no conflicts of interest have been stated.			

The Mayor has been consulted on this decision | Not Applicable

Signed:  Date: **28 October 2026** Name of Decision Taker: **Mayor Tom Wootton**

This is a public document. A copy of it must be given to the Chief Officer responsible for Legal and Democratic Services as soon as it is completed.

Date decision published: 28 October 2026

Date decision can be implemented if not called in: 6 November 2026

(Decision to be made exempt from call in……NO…….)

For publication

Bedford Borough Council

Report to the Mayor of Bedford Borough

Date of Report: 28 October 2026

Report by: Executive Director of Children's Services and Portfolio Holder for Valuing Families: Children's Services

Subject: CHILDREN'S SERVICES TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME – CONTRACT WITH PROPOSED DELIVERY PARTNER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report seeks approval to enter into a contract with the proposed delivery partner for the delivery of specialist consultancy services to support large-scale transformation in Children's Services.

1.2 A comprehensive review highlighted opportunities to address major pressures in children's social care, including rising demand and more complex needs, workforce pressures, placement sufficiency and increasing placement costs.

1.3 As a result of this review, the programme has been incorporated into the Council's approved savings initiatives.

1.4 This programme aims to improve outcomes for children and families, whilst delivering estimated savings of £5.1 to £6.3 million per annum by two years after the contract commences.

1.5 The proposed delivery partner has a proven track record of delivering large-scale transformation and has demonstrated the capacity and expertise to deliver the scale of savings required, which the Council would not be able to achieve alone. They bring in extra capacity for planning, delivery and upskilling the Council's staff for long term sustainable improvement.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Mayor is invited to consider the report in respect of the proposed contract for transformation services and to:

(a) Approve the award of the Children's Transformation Delivery Partner (Implementation Phase) contract to the proposed winning bidder identified in Confidential Appendix A.

(b) In doing so, acknowledge the transformation benefits and associated risks, outlined in the report, and the compliant procurement process that has been followed.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 To support improved outcomes for children and families and realise the identified financial savings, it is vital that the Council proceeds with the contract without delay.

3.2 Through the appointment of the proposed bidder as the transformation delivery partner, the programme will secure the capacity and capability needed to deliver the required level of systemic change and realise the identified financial savings.

4. THE CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The Children's Services Transformation Programme addresses major pressures in children's social care, including rising demand and more complex needs, workforce pressures, placement sufficiency and increasing placement costs, resulting in Bedford facing significant budget pressures.

4.2 The Council's Capital programme includes the contract costs for the proposed delivery partner.

5. DETAILS

5.1 A diagnostic exercise that took place in late 2025/early 2026 identified opportunities to improve outcomes for children and families in the following areas: fostering, care starts and family help, residential care, permanence and commissioning and brokerage.

5.2 This Transformation Programme will implement the recommendations from the diagnostic exercise to support sustainable change across Children's Services, along with associated savings of £5.1 to £6.3 million per annum by two years after the contract commences.

5.3 Council resources to support the programme include a Senior Responsible Officer (Transformation Director for Children's Services), a Programme manager, and a Children's integrated system improvement lead. Corporate services, including Finance and Analytics, Insight & Performance will also provide support. The successful implementation of the contract, sustainable change, and the realisation of savings are contingent upon the Council allocating the appropriate resources.

5.4 The proposed delivery partner will ensure all Council resources receive appropriate upskilling under this contract to facilitate sustainable change throughout the lifetime of this programme and beyond.

5.5 To support the delivery of the required transformation and savings the Council is planning on entering into a contract with the proposed delivery partner to deliver the Children's Services Transformation Programme.

5.6 The selected Procurement route to market was approved through a Gateway 1 (GW1) Procurement Strategy paper by the Strategic Procurement Board (SPB) and a Gateway 2 Contract Award paper has also been approved through the SPB process in accordance with the current Contract Procedure Rules.

5.7 As set out in the approved Gateway 1 strategy, procurement was undertaken through a further competition under the Crown Commercial Service RM6309 Management Consultancy Framework Four (MCF4), Lot 3: Complex and Transformation, let under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.

5.8 The evaluation comprised Qualification, Technical and Commercial Envelopes. The proposed winning bidder passed the Qualification stage; three senior officers from Children' Services assessed the technical submission and the Children's Services Finance Business Partner evaluated the Commercial submission.

5.9 The proposed delivery partner's bid is fully compliant with the scope of requirements, evaluation methodology, key performance indicators, and contract management and monitoring arrangements. The submitted price is within the Council's anticipated budget. The Finance Business Partner completed a financial review, and the bidder also passed an independent credit check.

5.10 The contract will use the framework terms and conditions, associated call-off contract and schedules, and will deliver a saving against the stated budget.

5.11 This specialist implementation support from the proposed delivery partner would be provided for up to 24 months from contract commencement (estimated November 2026).

5.12 Fees are fixed and contingent on the achievement of financial benefits, ensuring accountability and value for money. The savings value is contractually guaranteed by the proposed delivery partner, subject to the Council delivering on the contract terms, essentially staffing resources being available for the essential activities for the transformation to take place and continue. The programme will need to be a key Council priority to guarantee delivery of the required cultural change, improved outcomes and financial sustainability required of Children's Services as part of the Council's Improvement journey.

5.13 The Programme will have robust governance arrangements with an Operational Board, Workstream Delivery Steering Group and Finance Steering Group to provide oversight and monitoring. This governance process will be the approval mechanism for agreeing and monitoring the delivery of savings which will report into the Improvement Plan.

5.14 The joint delivery model ensures close collaboration between the Council and the proposed delivery partner's teams throughout the programme. The transfer of skills from the proposed delivery partner to Council teams is essential to the overall programme, ensuring that sustainable improvements are maintained long after the contract period has ended.

6. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

6.1 The Council considered whether it could deliver the programme in-house, however, it was recognised that this programme requires significant specialist resources to deliver and sustain the level of change required. The Council does not have sufficient capacity or capability to deliver this level of systemic change at a time when the Directorate is already engaged on the Ofsted Improvement Plan, SEND Reform and Families First programme. The Council, therefore, concluded that there was a need to procure specialist support to deliver this transformation programme.

7. KEY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Legal Issues

A compliant procurement process has been followed (see 5.7).

7.2 Policy Issues

Children's Services works within The Children's Act 1989 and Working Together 2026. The transformation programme does not contradict or undermine any of the duties of Children's Services in relation to any legislation.

The identified workstreams of the programme will not affect the current operational policies used in Children's Services to ensure that the standard of practice is of sufficient quality.

7.3 Resource Issues

The programme projects £5.1 to £6.3 million per annum efficiencies by two years after the contract commences.

The 2026/2027 savings are included within the approved 2026/2027 Revenue Budget, with the future years savings included within the medium-term forecast as shown in the Revenue Budget Report considered by Full Council on 18 February 2026.

The proposed delivery partner's expertise and assurance will strengthen the Children's Services leadership team, supporting successful operation of Children's Services.

7.4 Risks

The achievement of the savings are dependent on the contract term and are, therefore, at risk should the contract not go ahead or should there be delays to the commencement or throughout the delivery of the contract.

Several key risks have been identified in relation to this contract:

- **Insufficient or inexperienced Council resources available to meet requirements.** The successful implementation of the contract, sustainable change, and the realisation of savings are contingent upon the Council allocating the appropriate resources.

  Mitigation:
  Council resources to support this programme have been reviewed and are in place, including a Senior Responsible Officer (Transformation Director for Children's Services) to support the existing staff. Corporate services, including Finance, Analytics, Insight & Performance, and Programme Management, will also be assigned to provide support.

  Skills transfer is a central part of the proposed programme, through 'on the job' opportunities for those working within the Programme and through formal training.

- **The Council's potential inability to fulfil the dependency requirements specified within the contract:** The contract relies on timely provision of information, participation in shaping and developing services and processes, and execution of actions.

  Mitigation:
  A robust governance framework will be established to ensure dependency risks are identified and appropriately addressed in a timely way. Resource requirements will be developed in collaboration with the proposed delivery partner on skills & expertise and time allocation. Communication plans will be developed for both internal staff and external stakeholders.

- **Possible inaccuracies in data supplied to the proposed delivery partner, which could adversely affect the achievement of targeted savings:** Accurate and complete data is crucial for identifying and implementing savings.

  Mitigation:
  The Workstream Delivery Steering Group is responsible for driving progress of the Programme, and The Finance Steering Group is responsible for validating data and driving progress in relation to the achievement of savings associated with the Programme.

- **Difficulties encountered by the Council team in implementing and maintaining processes essential for medium- to long-term annualised savings, arising from either internal or external factors:** Achieving sustained savings means embedding new processes and maintaining commitment over time. Internal challenges, like staff turnover or resistance to change, and external factors, such as evolving regulations or market shifts, could impede progress.

  Mitigation:
  Change management strategies, including ongoing staff engagement, training and clear communication of benefits, will be central to overcoming barriers to these changes. Regular monitoring and feedback loops will provide early warning, enabling prompt remedial action.

  These risks will be managed and monitored through the established governance processes. Regular risk assessments and the implementation of mitigation strategies will ensure suitable responses to emerging challenges.

  In addition, this programme will report through the Independent Improvement and Assurance Panel.

7.5 Environmental Implications

Bedford Borough Council's Environmental Policy, Carbon Reduction Delivery Strategy 2020-2030 and Sustainable Development and Environmental Efficiency Strategy form part of this Call-Off Contract. The proposed delivery partner is expected to align their delivery of the Services with these documents wherever reasonably practicable.

7.6 Equalities Impact

In preparing this report, due consideration has been given to the Council's statutory Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, as set out in Section 149(1) of the Equality Act 2010. An initial Equality Assessment has been completed and is attached at **Appendix B**.

The Equality Assessment will be updated as the programme progresses through each phase.

7.7 Impact on Families

The transformation programme is pivotal in facilitating more children to remain safely within their family networks wherever possible, through earlier support, improved family resilience, stronger permanence planning, and reduced escalation of need into statutory services. For those requiring care there will be a focus on placement stability, strengthening reunification and permanence arrangements where appropriate, and ensuring that services remain responsive to the needs of children, young people, parents and carers. Throughout implementation, the Council will seek to ensure that transformation activity does not create barriers to accessing support and continues to promote positive, sustainable outcomes for families across the Borough.

7.8 Community Safety and Resilience

Care, support and advice is provided to some of the most vulnerable people in our society via this Transformation Programme; it is important, therefore, that it does not create a barrier to accessing those services, which are a major factor in maintaining personal dignity and safety.

7.9 Impact on Health and Wellbeing

The Transformation Programme will ensure that services are aimed at improving outcomes for families.

8. SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND OUTCOME

8.1 The following Councillors, Council units, Officers and/or other organisations have been consulted in preparing this report:

Portfolio Holder for Valuing Families: Children's Services
Portfolio Holder for Finance
Chief Executive
Executive Director of Resources
Service Director for Governance (Monitoring Officer)
Manager for Insurance & Risk
Procurement Lead
Finance Business Partner (Children's Services)

9. WARD COUNCILLOR VIEWS

9.1 Not applicable to this report

10. CONTACTS AND REFERENCES

Report Contact Officer:	*Jonathan Churchill, Service Director for Children's Social Care, Jonathan.churchill@bedford.gov.uk* *Beth Bowmer, Programme Lead, beth.bowmer@bedford.gov.uk*
Declarations of Interest by the Report Author:	*None*
File Reference:	*N/A*
Previous Relevant Minutes:	*Minute 117, Full Council: 18 February 2026 – General Fund Revenue Budget 2026/2027* *Minute 117, Full Council: 18 February 2026 Capital Programme Update*
Background Papers:	*None*
Appendices:	*Appendix A – Confidential* *Appendix B – Equality Assessment*

BEDFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

Equality Analysis (EA) Reporting

Appendix B

Part 1

Information about your Activity

(a) Title of activity / budget proposal title: *Activity' refers to a project, policy, strategy, service, procedure, or decision, this includes decommissioning.* **Children's Services Transformation Programme**	**(b) Committee meeting (Decision Maker) and date:** *Committee meeting or relevant decision maker e.g. Mayor, Portfolio Holder, or Council Officer* **Executive Director for Children's Services**
(c) Service area: *Service area responsible for the activity.* Children's Services	**(d) Is this activity:** **X New** ☐ **Change** ☐ **Review** *Refer to Section 2 of the EAG to determine the appropriate option.*
(e) Lead Officer Name and Title: *Officer with responsibility for ensuring the results of the equality analysis are implemented.* **Jonathan Churchill, Senior Responsible Officer for the Transformation Programme**	(f) **Other Officer name(s) and title(s) supporting in carrying out the Equality Analysis, undertaking any reviews or actions: (***If applicable)*
(g) Is this activity delivered as part of any Council Plans or Strategies, if 'Yes' please list below: ☐No ☒Yes: please specify the relevant plan(s) or strategy(ies): **Improvement Plan**	**(h) Approved by Director or Head of Service:** **Name: Harmesh Bhogal** **Date: 30/07/2026** **Review Date:**

(i) Description of the Activity or Budget Proposal (e.g. Policy, Strategy, Plan, Service).
Briefly outline the key objectives and intended outcomes listed in Part 1(a) (maximum 250 words). Please refer to the Section 2, page 3 of the EAG for further information.

Children's Services Transformation Programme

In late 2025 and early 2026, Newton Consulting Ltd (Newtons) undertook a diagnostic review of the Council's Children's Services and identified strategic opportunities for a multi-year transformation.

The diagnostic review concluded that delivering changes of this scale and sustaining them over the long term would require a comprehensive Transformation Programme that would improve outcomes for families whilst delivering substantial financial efficiencies, estimated at £5.1 to £6.3 million over the medium term.

A procurement exercise to appoint a delivery partner for the Transformation Programme will take place during summer and autumn 2026.

(j): Who are the beneficiaries*? Which group(s) of people or individuals will be impacted by your activity or proposal?*

☒ **Service Users**
☒ **Staff**
☐ **Stakeholders**
☐ **Other, please state…….**
☐ **No direct beneficiaries** *(e.g. implementing administrative changes or updates, implementing agreed budget decision).*

This programme will deliver the teams, data, systems, and internal structures for a successful programme of service efficiencies. Enacting the changes will be the responsibility of subsequent phases.

Part 2

Screening Test

This section will help you decide if you need to complete Part 3 and 4 of this form. If in doubt, think: will this affect people? If it does, then it is likely you will need to complete the rest of this form. Please refer to Section 1 of the EAG to understand our PSED and for the list of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, as well as other relevant groups. The following questions relate to the protected characteristics and other relevant groups.

a)	The activity will treat everyone fairly, create equal opportunity with equal outcome, and/or promote cohesion.	Yes	X☐	No	
b)	The activity relates to an area where there are known inequalities. *(look for research done academically or any reports that has identified any inequalities for the protected characteristics and other relevant groups)*	Yes	☐	No	**x**
c)	It is foreseeable that the activity could / will affect protected characteristics or other relevant groups differently.	Yes	☐	No	**x**
d)	It is foreseeable that the activity could / will impact positively or negatively on one or more of the protected characteristics or other relevant groups.	Yes	☐	No	**X**
e)	Is it foreseeable that the activity can affect relationships between certain protected characteristics or other relevant groups?	Yes	☐	No	**X**
f)	Are you decommissioning or commissioning a service? *Please see Section 8 of the EA guidance.*	Yes	☐	No	**X**
	If you have ticked YES to one or more of the above questions, continue to complete Part 3 of the form.				

g)	If you ticked NO to ALL the above questions in this section and Part 1 (j) identifies that there are no beneficiaries, then a full EA is not required, you do not need to complete Part 3 or 4 of this reporting form. Briefly explain how the activity has no relevance to the Council's equality duties in Part 4 (b) of this form. (maximum 150 words) *Please refer to Section 6 of the EAG for guidance*.

n/a

Part 3

Impact on Protected Characteristics and Other Relevant Groups

(a) Data, consultation, survey & research

*Decisions cannot be based on assumptions; they must be evidenced, and the source must be referenced. In this section **only list your source(s)** and where possible include a reference link to the source, such as the name of a dataset, reports, internal documents, website, or academic research. This will be your evidence to show how different individuals and groups with protected characteristics and other groups may be affected.*

*Some individuals and groups may belong to more than one of these groups at the same time. This is called **intersectionality**, and it helps us understand overlapping or compounding disadvantages. Some findings may not relate directly to equality but can be used as they will provide important context to help us understand broader impacts. Professional judgement and conclusions made on the likely equality impacts on the protected and other relevant groups must be based on information and evidence such as the examples listed in Section 5 of the EAG. The list is not exhaustive, and you may use other reliable sources.*

If the activity has a positive impact on one group but has an unavoidable negative impact on another group, this must be clearly explained and justified in Part 4 (b).

List evidence, data, information, and/or consultation used to understand the impact of your activity on the protected characteristics and other group.	The Transformation Programme will affect children, young people and families who use Children's Services, including early help, social care and services provided by voluntary and community organisations. The programme aims to improve outcomes for families, structured around the key improvement themes and workstreams identified through the diagnostic review, alongside a number of cross-cutting enabling activities required to support sustainable transformation and continuous improvement across Children's Services. The key improvement themes are Fostering and Family Help, Residential Care, Permanence, and Commissioning and Brokerage. The evidence will draw on the

	expertise of the appointed delivery partner and the Council's experience of delivering Children's Services to people across all protected characteristic groups.

(b) Assessing Impact

*For the EA, '**Impact'** means lasting change that a decision and action can or may have on people's lives, whether this is for an individual or group/community. Impact for the EA is described in three ways:*

- ***Positive Impact:** Helps reduce barriers, improves access, promotes fair treatment, and/or improves relationships between groups.*
- ***Negative Impact:** Causes harm, exclusion, or unfair treatment. If this happens, it must be explained, and steps must be taken to remove or reduce the impact through actions set in Part 3 (c).*
- ***No or Neutral Impact:** The action does not noticeably affect individuals or groups.*

Protected Characteristics	**Positive Impact**	**Negative Impact**	**No or neutral Impact**	**Key findings of data, consultation, survey etc**. *If there are gaps in the evidence, list this in the actions section below.*
Age	x☐	☐	☐	Children and young people and their families are the key audience for Children's Services. The Transformation Programme aims to improve outcomes for families.
Disability	x☐	☐	☐	Children and young people with a disability, whether physical disability, learning disability or mental health need are more likely to use Children's Services than other people in the community.
Gender Reassignment	x☐	☐	☐	Gender reassignment is not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Pregnancy and maternity	x☐	☐	☐	Pregnancy and maternity is not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Race	x☐	☐	☐	Race is not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Religion or belief	x☐	☐	☐	Religion or belief is not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.

Sex	x☐	☐	☐	Sex is not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Sexual Orientation	x☐	☐	☐	Sexual orientation is not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	x☐	☐	☐	Marriage and Civil Partnership is not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.

Other groups	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No or neutral Impact	**Key findings of data, consultation, survey etc**. *If there are gaps in the evidence, list this in the actions section below.*
Care Leavers and Care Experienced People [1]	x☐	☐	☐	Care Leavers and Care Experienced People - not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Socio-economic[2]	x☐	☐	☐	Socio-economic - not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Carers	x☐	☐	☐	Carers - not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.
Rural Communities	x☐	☐	☐	Rural Communities - not a determining factor as to whether a person will be eligible for support from Children's Services.

(c) Actions

Complete this section to explain how you will mitigate any negative impacts identified above, if any further consultation is needed, or how you will address any gaps in data/ evidence. You may also use this section to include any relevant information that supports your analysis but could not be captured in any of the tables above.

[1] Bedford Borough Council passed a motion for this group to be recognised as a protected characteristic.

[2] Not a protected characteristic, but important to consider this when undertaking the EA.

Actions	What will be done	By whom?	By When?	Date Completed and outcome
Are there any gaps in the evidence? if so, what will need to be done to address this? *e.g. further consultation, obtain additional data.*	n/a			
What are the negative impacts identified. How will you lessen the impact?	None			
Are there other relevant actions and if so, what are these?	None			
Is there any other relevant information to support your analysis?	No			

Part 4

Conclusion

(a) Recommendation

You will need to justify your conclusion in Part 4 (b)

No major change required *The evidence shows no negative impact or potential risk for discrimination.*	x☐
Adjustments required *The evidence shows that your activity requires changes or adjustments to ensure it does not negatively impact any protected characteristics and other relevant group or miss opportunities to have a positive impact.*	☐

Justification to continue the activity *A negative impact on equality has been identified. However, the activity can continue because the activity does not unlawfully discriminate as there are reasonable and/or legal factors that make it objectively justified, 'a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim'.* *Please refer to the EAG, Section 7 'Objectively Justified'.*	☐
Stop the activity *The equality analysis identified that the activity unlawfully discriminates, cannot be mitigated or objectively justified. The activity must therefore be stopped.*	☐

(b) Summary of analysis

Insert a summary of your equality analysis and explain your recommendation *(maximum 125 words)*. Please refer to Section 9 of the EAG for more information.
This summary should also be used to complete the Equality Impact section of any related Corporate Leadership Team or Committee reports, as part of the 'Key Implications' section in the report template.

The Children's Services Transformation Programme will support a more consistent, child-centred and family-focused approach. It aims to improve outcomes by providing timely, joined-up support that reflects each child's and family's individual needs, strengths and circumstances, including any protected characteristics.