

**From:** Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health

**To:** Diane Morton, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

**Subject:** **Kent Carers' Support Service**

**Key Decision :** It affects more than 2 Electoral Divisions and it involves expenditure over £1m

**Decision no:** **25/00116**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of report:** Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee – 21 January 2026

**Future Pathway of report:** Cabinet Member decision

**Electoral Division:** All

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**Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes**

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**Summary:** Kent County Council has statutory responsibilities under The Care Act 2014 which include assessing the needs of any adult (cared for or carer) with an appearance of need for care and support, and arranging services where appropriate to meet the unmet eligible needs of adults living in Kent. The 'Community Navigation Services (Part B)' and 'Carers' Short Breaks' Contracts support the council to meet this duty.

The new Kent Carers' Support Service Contract is split into two Lots, Lot 1 for East Kent and Lot 2 for West Kent.

Procurement for the Carers' Support Service was undertaken following formal evaluation of the bids procurement for Lot 2 (West Kent) was successful and procurement for Lot 1 (East Kent) was deemed not successful.

This decision seeks to award contracts to successful providers for Lot 2 and extend the current contractual arrangements for Community Navigation Services (Part B) and Carers' Short Breaks for up to four months (from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026) to allow a further procurement exercise to be undertaken for Lot 1 (East Kent) and award contracts to the successful providers for Lot 1, following completion of the procurement exercise.

**Recommendation(s):** The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health is asked to:

**a) APPROVE** the contract award for the Kent Carers' Support Service;

**b) APPROVE** a direct award of the Carers' Short Breaks contract, for a period of up to four months, from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026, in accordance with the relevant justifications set out in Regulation 32(2)(c) of the Public Contract Regulations 2015;

**c) APPROVE** a modification in the form of an extension of the contract for a period of up to four months for Community Navigation Services (Part B), from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026, in accordance with the relevant justifications set out in Regulation 72 of the Public Contract Regulations 2015;

**d) DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health to take other relevant actions including, but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision; and

**e) DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health and the Corporate Director, Finance, to agree the relevant contract extensions for the Kent Carers' Support Service Contract as required.

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Kent County Council (KCC) has statutory responsibilities under The Care Act 2014 which include assessing the needs of any adult (cared for or carer) with an appearance of need for care and support and arranging services where appropriate to meet the unmet eligible needs of adults living in Kent.
- 1.2 Following the decision to procure a new Carers' Support Service (decision 24/00113), extensive engagement and co-design work has been undertaken with carers and carers organisations. This work had informed a revised model for a Carers' Support Service which promotes choice and ensures equity of provision
- 1.3 This paper considers the outcome of the procurement activity for the new Kent Carers' Support Service Contract.

## **2. Key Considerations**

- 2.1 In Kent, there are an estimated 148,341 adults providing unpaid care each week. KCC aim to support carers to maintain their own identity and live a full life. The support provided by carers can prevent, reduce and delay the need for care and support from both health and social care.
- 2.2 KCC has statutory responsibilities under the Care Act 2014, which includes assessing the needs of any adult with a need for care and support and arranging services where appropriate to meet the needs of eligible adults living in Kent. The Community Navigation Services (Part B) and Carers' Short Breaks Contracts support the council to meet this duty. In fulfilling these responsibilities, the council recognises the vital role of unpaid carers. Without the unpaid carer, the council would be required to arrange and deliver support for the person requiring care.
- 2.3 The new Kent Carers' Support Service directly supports the Care Act's core principles, including the promotion of individual wellbeing, the prevention of escalating care needs, and the provision of timely assessments and support for carers. The Kent Carers' Support Service will offer a range of support such as a carers' assessment, information and advice, support with accessing activities,

peer support, training, and both planned and unplanned breaks to help carers in their caring role.

- 2.4 This aligns with Priority 5 of Reforming Kent – the Council's Strategic Statement by recognising and supporting the needs of carers and engaging with carers' support groups around the support and recognition carers can be provided

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 In January 2025 approval was sought for a 12 month extension period for the Community Navigation Service (Part B) Contract and a direct award for the Carers' Short Breaks Contract from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. This was to allow for the new service to be co-produced with stakeholders and people with lived experience, with a procurement exercise to follow.
- 3.2 At present the Community Navigation (Part B) contract is delivered geographically amongst three providers. Community Navigators work with the adult carers to identify needs and to offer support to ensure that carers have a balance between their caring responsibilities and a life outside of caring. The Carers' Short Breaks Contract is delivered by a sole provider across Kent.
- 3.3 The specification for the new Carers' Support Service was co-designed using carer feedback and based on the principles of the Kent Adult Carers' Strategy. Carers told us that they wanted a single point of access for carers' support services which is well promoted and marketed and has a wide reach into all parts of the community across Kent. This will ensure a greater focus on the benefits of completing a carers' assessment so the service can better understand the needs of carers.
- 3.4 A procurement process was designed which was proportionate to the requirement, clear and adhered to the updated 2023 Procurement Act regulations. The procurement plan and approach to the market was agreed by the Commercial and Procurement Oversight Board. Carers were involved in developing the award criteria; by creating a question which would encapsulate what they wanted from the service and allowing carer representatives to see how providers responded to their question by being part of the evaluation panel. The Carers' Support Service was procured through a competitive tendering process.
- 3.5 The table below sets out the procurement timetable-

| Procurement Timetable  |                            |
|--|----------------------------|
| Publication of advert and Invitation to Tender documentation on the Kent Business Portal | 30 June 2025               |
| Deadline for Tender responses  | 1 August 2025              |
| Tender evaluation and governance procedures  | 4 August- 12 November 2025 |
| Contract award notice  | 25 November 2025           |
| Contracts issued   | 8 December 2025            |
| Contract commencement  | 1 August 2026              |

- 3.6 The evaluation of tenders was completed by a team consisting of officers and managers from the Adults and Integrated Commissioning Team, Adult Social Care Assistant Directors, Finance Officers, Social Value Officers and Carer representatives.
- 3.7 Under the new contract there are two Lots with one Lot for each geographical area (East Kent and West Kent) and the same service provider cannot deliver both Lots. The Lots are aligned with the Health and Care Partnership boundaries, as set out below:
- Lot 1 – East Kent (Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Thanet, Folkestone and Hythe).
  - Lot 2 – West Kent (Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks, Maidstone, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells and Swale).
- 3.8 The evaluation method used was lowest cost above a minimum quality threshold.
- 3.9 Two bids were evaluated for Lot 1 but neither tenderer met the individual minimum thresholds required for specific quality-related questions. These thresholds were established to ensure higher standards. As a result, Lot 1 will not be awarded to any of the tenderers.
- 3.10 Imago Community were the winning bidder for Lot 2, having passed all the minimum quality thresholds and having submitted the lowest net price
- 3.11 An short term extension to the current contracts, of up to four months, is required to allow sufficient time to resolve the unsuccessful procurement for Lot 1.
- 3.12 The short term extension will mitigate any loss in the provision of service while the re-procurement is underway and will also enable ample mobilisation time for the winning bidder.

#### **4. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk**

- 4.1 Following the unsuccessful procurement for Lot 1 the following options were considered

4.1.1 Do nothing

The option of 'doing nothing' was considered, however it was quickly dismissed. Without a new contract in place to support carers across the county it will have a negative impact on carers and put the council at risk on both a financial basis and with regard to meeting its statutory duties.

4.1.2 Undertake a negotiation and direct award for Lot 1 with one of the bidders for Lot 2 who met the minimum quality threshold

This would take less time to complete than undertaking a procurement exercise but may not achieve best value and would restrict competition. Advice from the council's Commercial and Procurement division is that a further procurement exercise will need to be undertaken for Lot 1.

4.1.3 Undertake a competitive process, in the form of a procurement exercise, for Lot 1.

Cabinet Office guidance states that contracting authorities may re-run a competition where no acceptable tender is received, provided the process is transparent and the relevant notices are published. Completing a procurement exercise will ensure the council is achieving best value and the required level of quality for this contract.

- 4.2 To enable a further procurement exercise to be undertaken the current contracts will need to be extended up to four months from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026, on the same terms and conditions at the same contract price. This will allow sufficient time to complete the procurement exercise and mobilise the new service.
- 4.3 Currently the Community Navigation (Part B) contract is delivered geographically amongst three providers and The Carers' Short Breaks Contract is delivered by a sole provider across Kent. The new Kent Carers' Support Service will consist of two contracts covering east and west Kent which will combine community navigation and breaks for carers. For this reason it is not possible to mobilise the service, for the successful Lot 2, until the procurement for both contracts has concluded.

## **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The four month extension (1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026) to the existing contracts would be on the same terms and conditions at the same price. Therefore, no increase in cost for the extension period.
- 5.2 The Kent Carers' Support Service Contract will run for an initial period of three years (1 August 2026 to 31 July 2029) with options for two-two year extensions (1 August 2030 – 31 July 2034).
- 5.3 The annual price for Lot 2 is £2,647,176 which is below the maximum value set for this Lot £3,385,400. The total value for this Lot will be up to £18,530,235 over the lifetime of the contract (initial three years including the two-two year extension options).
- 5.4 The annual price for Lot 1 will not exceed the maximum value of £3,360,400 and will be up to £23,522,800 over the lifetime of the contract. The combined lifetime contract value will not exceed £42,053,035. Through the procurement exercise for Lot 1 the new contract value may be lower.
- 5.5 The Integrated Care Board (ICB) contributes £1,252,704 to the Community Navigation (Part B) contracts and £779,681 to the Carers' Short Break Service. ICB have committed to continue funding the service. Contribution to be agreed when the final contract prices are known.
- 5.6 This is a fixed price contract to ensure budget predictability and prevents overspend. KCC will pay 1/12 of the budget each month to avoid large upfront payments, which is also in line with other prevention contracts. Providers are encouraged to use resources efficiently to meet the high demand for services, ensuring value for money.

5.7 The use of the Supplier Incentive Programme has been utilised in this procurement.

## **6. Legal implications**

### **6.1 Care Act Implications**

6.1.1 KCC has statutory responsibilities under The Care Act 2014 include assessing the needs of any adult (cared for or carer) with an appearance for care and support and arranging services and where appropriate meeting the unmet eligible needs of adults living in Kent. Where it appears to the local authority that a carer may have needs for support (whether currently or in the future), a carer's assessment must always be offered.

6.1.2 In summary, the services are necessary and will allow KCC to meet these duties through a new carers offer which better meets the needs of carers.

### **6.2 Procurement Regulations Implications**

6.2.1 A short term contract extension will be awarded to the incumbent providers of the Carers' Short Breaks Contract, and Community Navigation (Part B) Contract for a period of up to four months. The short term extensions will enable KCC to complete the re-procurement of a joint service. By awarding the short term extension, it mitigates any loss in the provision of service while the re-procurement is underway. In addition, it will also enable ample mobilisation time for the winning bidder.

6.2.2 A contract extension of the Carers' Short Break contract for a period of up to four months from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026 is in accordance with the relevant justifications set out in Regulation 72(1)(b)(c) of the Public Contract Regulations 2015.

6.2.3 A contract extension of the Community Navigation (Part B) contract for a period of up to four months from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026 is in accordance with the relevant justifications set out in Regulation 72(1)(b)(c) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015

6.2.4 Regulation 72 (3) of PCR2015, requires Contracting authorities which have modified a contract in either of the cases described under Regulation (1)(b) and (c), as is recommended in this paper, should send a notice to that effect for publication, in accordance with Regulation 51. The risk to the council is that an alternate service provider may bring a legal challenge, arguing that the modification of the services does not satisfy Regulation 72. Officers will mitigate the risk of such a challenge by publishing a VEAT Notice on the central government "Find a Tender Service". This will notify the market of the council's intention to extend these contracts under Regulation 72 while a re-procurement for the failed lot is carried out. A 10 day standstill period will then commence before formally awarding the contract extensions.

6.2.5 Officers will follow the procurement regulations and Spending the Council's Money in relation to any procurement that is undertaken.

## **7. Equalities implications**

- 7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA), attached as Appendix 1, has been completed for the activity of recommissioning the service. The aim of the new service offer will be to deliver a service which is more identifiable to carers, able to reach a greater number of carers from different communities and with different protected characteristics. The EQIA for the new service will look at all areas and in particular the issue of 'intersection' of different characteristics on people who may be impacted by more than two protected characteristics at the same time.

## **8. Data Protection Implications**

- 8.1 A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) initial screening has been completed. No personal identifiable information will be collected for the extension. A full DPIA will be completed for the new service.

## **9. Governance**

- 9.1 The Corporate Director, Adult Social and Health will inherit delegated authority to take relevant actions to finalise the required contractual and legal agreements necessary to implement the decision.

## **10. Conclusions**

- 10.1 Kent County Council has a statutory duty to under The Care Act 2014 which include assessing the needs of any adult (cared for or carer) with an appearance of need for care and support, and arranging services and where appropriate meeting the unmet eligible needs of adults living in Kent.
- 10.2 Putting in place contractual arrangements for Carers' Support Services will meet those statutory duties.
- 10.3 Following the completion of a comprehensive and transparent procurement process, it is recommended to award the contract for the Kent Carers' Support Service to the successful provider identified as part of the procurement process and extend the existing contracts to allow for a procurement exercise to be undertaken for the unsuccessful Lot.

**11. Recommendations:** The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health is asked to:

- a) **APPROVE** the contract award for the Kent Carers' Support Service;
- b) **APPROVE** a direct award of the Carers' Short Breaks contract, for a period of up to four months, from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026, in accordance with the relevant justifications set out in Regulation 32(2)(c) of the Public Contract Regulations 2015;
- c) **APPROVE** a modification in the form of an extension of the contract for a period of up to four months for Community Navigation Services (Part B), from 1 April 2026 to 31 July 2026, in accordance with the relevant justifications set out in Regulation 72 of the Public Contract Regulations 2015;
- d) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health to take other relevant actions including, but not limited to finalising the terms of and entering into required contracts or other legal agreements, as necessary to implement the decision; and
- e) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health and the Corporate Director, Finance, to agree the relevant contract extensions for the Kent Carers' Support Service Contract as required.

## **12. Background Documents**

None

## **13. Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

## **14. Contact details**

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