

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Georgia Foster, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

DECISION NUMBER:

26/00056

Executive Decision – Key

26/00056 - Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs

Decision: As Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, I propose to:

- a) **APPROVE** the commissioning of a new Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs;
- b) **APPROVE** a three-month extension on the current Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs contract, to enable effective mobilisation and transition to the new service;
- c) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health to take relevant actions to secure and manage the three-month extension; negotiate, finalise the terms of, and (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care) award the contract for the Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs;
- d) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and S151 Officer) to exercise any approved contract extensions;
- e) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health (in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and S151 Officer), to accept and deploy any additional external funding secured during the lifetime of the contract to enhance the approved service, provided this does not create any unfunded financial commitment for the Council: and
- f) **DELEGATE** authority to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health to enter relevant contracts or other legal agreements as required to implement the decision.

Reasons for decision:

Wellbeing Services are commissioned services which aim to help people take a proactive approach to their health and wellbeing, increase independence, and prevent, reduce or delay the need for additional care and support services. These services form part of Kent County Council's (KCC) broader approach to prevention.

The Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs supports people who are aged 18 and over with a sensory impairment, including people who are blind and/or deaf, including people that use British Sign Language (BSL). The services provide information and advice, equipment and training and rehabilitation.

The proposal to recommission the Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs separately from the other Community Wellbeing Service contracts allows for a standalone arrangement providing greater assurance that these specialist requirements remain visible, prioritised and appropriately resourced with the specialist expertise in visual impairment rehabilitation, Deaf BSL support, hearing loss support and Deafblind services.

The current Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs contract expires on 31 March 2027, with no further extension options available. The proposal for a three-month extension (1 April 2027 to 30 June 2027) with the new service delivery commencing from July 2027. The extension will allow for procurement and mobilisation of the new service whilst maintaining service continuity.

How the proposed decision supports the Council's Strategic Statement:

This proposal supports the priorities set out in Reforming Kent 2025-28 by strengthening the Council's preventative approach, helping adults with sensory impairments maintain independence, reduce social isolation, build community resilience and delay or avoid the need for more intensive health and social care support.

The proposed model aligns with the Council's strategic shift towards prevention and early intervention, supporting better outcomes, greater independence, stronger community resilience, and reduced reliance on higher-cost statutory services. Delivery will be based on partnership working with local communities, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, health partners, and other organisations to provide integrated, person-centred support.

Overall, investment in sustainable community wellbeing services will help residents remain independent and socially connected for longer, while delivering value for money through reducing reliance on more intensive support services. The proposal also supports the Council's commitment to improving outcomes for vulnerable residents by ensuring continued access to specialist support for people who are blind, partially sighted, Deaf, Deafblind or living with hearing loss. Through a preventative approach, the service will reduce social isolation, support participation in community life, improve wellbeing and help residents maintain **independence**.

Financial implications:

The proposed cost of recommissioning the Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs is £1.03m per annum.

The new service length will be two years starting 1 July 2027 with two optional extension periods of one year. The estimated maximum value over the full four-year term is approximately £4.12 million. This is within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The three-month extension of the current contract will be £257,500 which is within the allocated budget. This is within the Medium Term Financial Plan.

Legal implications:

KCC has statutory duties under the Care Act 2014 to promote individual wellbeing and to take steps to prevent, reduce or delay the development of needs for care and

support. KCC also has a statutory duty to improve the health of the population and reduce health inequalities (Health and Social Care Act 2012). The proposed Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs contributes to the discharge of these duties by providing preventative support that helps people maintain independence and wellbeing.

KCC also has a duty to consider the sustainability of the care and support market when exercising its functions under the Care Act 2014. The proposed commissioning approach seeks to support a sustainable VCSE market whilst securing value for money and continuity of preventative services for Kent residents.

KCC has a specific duty under Section 77 of the Care Act 2014 to establish and maintain a register of adults who are sight impaired or severely sight impaired. The commissioned service will maintain the Vision Impairment Register on behalf of KCC, supporting compliance with this statutory requirement.

The proposed contract modification is permitted under Regulation 72(1)(b) of the Public Contracts Regulations (PCR) 2015. The modification is also permissible under Regulation 72(1)(e), as it is not considered substantial under Regulation 72(8). The nature and scope of the contract remain unchanged, there is no alteration to the economic balance in favour of the contractor, no change of provider, and no amendments that would have affected competition or bidder participation in the original procurement. The contract therefore remains materially the same.

Equality Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed. The assessment considered the potential impact of the proposed commissioning approach on people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. The assessment confirmed that the proposed service promotes equitable access to care and support, supports fair and consistent decision-making, and mitigates the risk of disparities in service delivery across different localities in Kent.

No adverse impacts have been identified that cannot be mitigated through service design, procurement and contract management arrangements.

Data Protection implications:

A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) has been started and will be updated with any information required as the recommissioning process progresses.

The provider will also be required to undertake a Data Protection Impact Assessment during mobilisation and support the completion of KCC's Data Protection Impact Assessment.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation: The proposed decision will be considered by the Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee on 24 September 2026 and the outcome included in the paperwork which the Cabinet Member will be asked to sign.

This version of the PROD is included in the agenda pack for committee members to review ahead of the meeting.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Option 1: Do nothing / allow contract to expire

Maintain the existing Community Wellbeing contracts until they expire on 31 March 2027.

- Although this option avoids a further procurement commitment, it creates significant service continuity risk and would require alternative arrangements to ensure eligible needs continue to be met. Risks disruption for people using specialist services and destabilisation of existing provision.

Option 2: Bring service in-house

KCC providing the service in house and remove the need for externally commissioned providers.

- Although this option could provide greater direct control and integration. However, this option would require workforce recruitment, specialist capability, infrastructure and ongoing management capacity. This is unlikely to provide sufficient flexibility or value for money at the scale required.

Option 3: Re-procure and bring together all of the current wellbeing services into one contract

Bring the sensory wellbeing service into a single contract with other wellbeing services (55+, dementia and physical disability).

- This option could reduce duplication and provide a more consistent contractual approach. However, there is a material risk that specialist Deaf, Deafblind, British Sign Language and visual impairment expertise becomes diluted within a broader service model.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

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Signed

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Date