

From: Helen Woodland, Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health

To: Georgia Foster, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care

Subject: **Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs**

Key Decision: Yes

Decision no: **26/00056**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: Adult Social Care and Public Health Cabinet Committee – 24 September 2026

Future Pathway of report: Cabinet Member decision

Electoral Division: All

Is the decision eligible for call-in? Yes

Summary: This report outlines the proposal to recommission the Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs and to extend the current contract by three months to enable procurement and mobilisation of the new service. The recommissioned service will continue to provide specialist preventative support for adults with sensory impairments, helping people maintain independence, reduce social isolation and remain connected to their communities. The proposal supports the Council's statutory duties, prevention priorities and commitment to improving outcomes for Kent residents with sensory needs.

Recommendations: The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care is asked 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.

1. Introduction

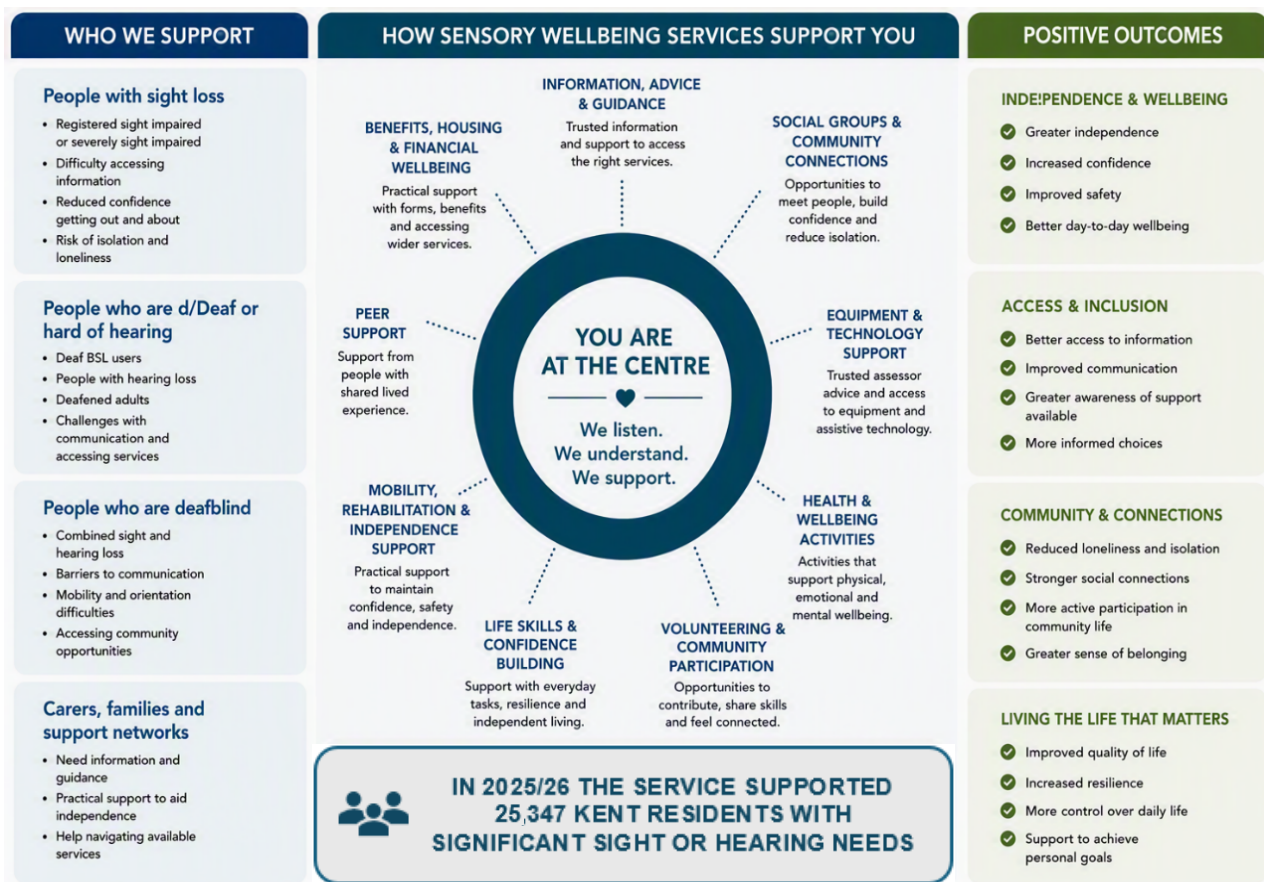
- 1.1 Wellbeing Services are commissioned services which aim to help people take a proactive approach to their health and wellbeing, increase independence, and prevent, reduce or delay the need for additional care and support services.
- 1.2 The Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs supports people who are aged 18 and over with a sensory impairment, including people who are blind, partially sighted, Deaf, Deafblind, living with hearing loss, and people who use British Sign Language (BSL).
- 1.3 Kent County Council (KCC) last commissioned Community Wellbeing Services for Adults with Sensory Needs in 2021/2022, and with no permitted extensions remaining, the contract will reach the end of its permitted term on 31 March 2027. It is therefore necessary to commission a new service. Engagement has been undertaken with providers, people with lived experience and staff to co-design the new Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs offer.
- 1.4 The proposal to seek a three-month extension to the current contract is required to facilitate the completion of the procurement process and provider mobilisation and does not represent a change to the service scope. The extension will allow sufficient time for completion of the procurement process, contract award, any applicable standstill period and a comprehensive mobilisation period to support safe transition of services. This approach will maintain compliance with procurement legislation and the Council's governance requirements while ensuring continuity of service for residents.
- 1.5 Procurement and mobilisation will take place from November 2026 to June 2027, with the new service delivery commencing from July 2027. It is proposed that the new contract will run for an initial period of two years, with two optional extension periods of one year. The proposed contract term balances provider stability and investment confidence with flexibility to respond to Local Government Reorganisation, Neighbourhood Health developments and future commissioning requirements.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs will support wellbeing and independence. This is achieved by, including but not limited to: peer groups, physical activities, providing information (e.g. about support in the local community and how to manage money and benefits), supporting people to

live safely in their own home, and supporting individuals to access and use relevant technology where appropriate. There is also recognition of the different levels of intensity, duration and specialist skill required for visual impairment rehabilitation, hearing loss support, Deaf BSL provision, Deafblind assessment and community-based support for people with combined or complex sensory needs.

- 2.2 The provider will maintain the Vision Impairment Register on behalf of KCC. The register records adults who are certified as sight impaired or severely sight impaired and choose to be registered. Under Section 77 of the Care Act 2014, local authorities are required to establish and maintain such a register. Maintaining the register supports KCC to meet its statutory duties, identify residents who may require support, and plan and commission appropriate services for people with visual impairments.
- 2.3 These services are part of KCC's broader approach to preventing, reducing and delaying the need for care and support.
- 2.4 The current service supported approximately 25,347 Kent residents during 2025/2026, demonstrating its significant role within KCC's wider prevention offer for adults with sensory impairments.
- 2.5 The infographic below shows how the service supports people.



- 2.6 The recommissioning does not propose any reduction in eligibility, access or availability of support for current or future people who access the services.

3. Market, Stakeholder and Public Engagement

- 3.1 Between November 2025 and March 2026, seventeen engagement sessions, with representation from a wide range of external and internal stakeholders, were delivered through a combination of in-person and virtual meetings and workshops. These sessions have informed the design of the future service
- 3.2 The key findings from the events, were that services should:
- Be person centred and fully accessible
 - Aim to reduce duplication and work in partnership with other services
 - Include peer support and volunteering opportunities
 - Include multiple support options
 - Recognise transport barriers
- 3.3 People with lived experience will continue to play a role in the procurement, mobilisation and contract management.
- 3.4 A further engagement session held in June 2026, gave providers the opportunity to help shape the proposed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and wider performance management approach for the new contract.

4. Options considered and dismissed, and associated risk

- 4.1 Before deciding on the preferred way forward, the following options were considered:

Option Overview	Reason for Discounting / Carried Forward
Option 1: Do nothing / allow contract to expire Maintain the existing Community Wellbeing contracts until they expire on 31 March 2027	Discounted because: • 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.	Discounted because: • 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	Discounted because: • This option could reduce duplication and provide a more consistent contractual approach. However, there is a material risk that specialist Deaf, Deafblind, BSL and visual impairment expertise becomes

into a single contract with other wellbeing services (55+, dementia and physical disability).	diluted within a broader service model.
Option 4: Re-procure the service and separate from other wellbeing service contracts A stand-alone contract for the specialist delivery of community wellbeing services for those with sensory needs.	Recommended option – Market engagement consistently demonstrated the importance of preserving specialist Deaf, Deafblind, BSL and visual impairment expertise within a dedicated service model. A standalone contract provides the greatest assurance that this expertise remains visible, prioritised and appropriately resourced.

- 4.2 The preferred option is to re-procure a stand-alone contract for the specialist delivery of community wellbeing services for those with sensory needs. Following discussion with the Commercial and Procurement Division (CPD), a time-limited three-month extension to the current contract is required to maintain service continuity, support mobilisation of the new service and ensure the Council continues to meet its statutory duties.

5. How the proposed decision supports the Council's Strategic Statement

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 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.

6. Service Specification

- 6.1 The Service Specification clearly outlines the vision of the service and the approach.

'People in Kent will have easier access to information and services in their communities, helping them to lead fulfilled, healthy and independent lives for longer.'

- 6.2 The Service Specification sets out a holistic, flexible and person-centred approach that supports people with sensory impairments to maintain independence, wellbeing and community connections. The service will provide information and advice; wellbeing and resilience support; peer support opportunities; social and community inclusion activities; support to access benefits and financial wellbeing advice; guidance on assistive technology and equipment; Deaf BSL support; Deafblind support; visual impairment rehabilitation; volunteering opportunities; and signposting to relevant health, care and community services. The specification also promotes asset-based community development by helping people access local resources, strengthen social networks and build confidence to remain independent.
- 6.3 To ensure clear accountability and avoid duplication, the Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs will provide preventative, community-based support and will operate alongside other commissioned and statutory services. The service will not undertake functions which sit within Adult Social Care, commissioned care and support services, or other separately commissioned specialist services. Where individuals are identified as requiring additional assessment, care or support, providers will make appropriate referrals and signpost people to relevant services in accordance with agreed pathways.
- 6.4 The service will identify and engage unpaid carers where appropriate, providing information, advice and signposting. Providers will work collaboratively with the commissioned Carers' Support Service to ensure carers are aware of, and can access, specialist support.
- 6.5 Key considerations which informed the future service design and delivery requirements are outlined below:
- 6.5.1 Based on Kent Analytics projections (Appendix 1) the number of people aged over 65 years old, in Kent, with moderate or severe visual impairment is projected to increase by 28% by 2040, and those over 65 with registrable eye conditions are expected to increase by 30%. The number of 18-64 year olds in Kent with severe hearing loss is projected to increase by 4% by 2040, while the number of people aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 38%.
- 6.5.2 Future provision will deliver a consistent, outcomes-focused prevention model that supports independence and wellbeing through early intervention and targeted support. Stronger partnership working across the VCSE sector, Neighbourhood Health and other system partners will reduce duplication and improve alignment of services. A strengthened performance framework will support evidence-based commissioning, demonstrate impact and value for money, and ensure resources are targeted where they can achieve the greatest benefit.

- 6.6 The Service Specification has been designed so the service is able to innovate and change. It will be a requirement that the provider collaborates with local communities and people accessing services to further enhance understanding on how people would like to be supported and how services should be delivered. This intelligence will be used to innovate and enhance the service offer.
- 6.7 The performance framework for the contract will ensure that success is measured through a combination of activity, outcome and impact measures, including improvements in wellbeing and independence, reductions in loneliness and social isolation, increased community participation and access to support, user satisfaction, and evidence that preventative interventions help people remain independent and reduce reliance on statutory services.
- 6.8 The examples below demonstrate how the service can support people.

- Supporting a person with sight loss to remain independent at home through rehabilitation and assistive technology.
- Helping a Deaf BSL user access information, services and community opportunities in a way that meets their communication needs.
- Enabling people experiencing sensory loss to build social connections, improve wellbeing and reduce isolation through peer support and community-based activities.
- Supporting Deafblind people to access specialist advice, advocacy and practical support to maintain independence and participation in community life.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The proposed cost of recommissioning the Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs is £1.03m per annum.
- 7.2 The new service length will be two years starting 1 July 2027 with two optional extension periods of one year.
- 7.3 The estimated maximum value over the full four-year term is approximately £4.12 million. This is within the Medium Term Financial Plan.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 Should any additional external funding become available within the lifetime of the contract, it is proposed that authority be delegated to the Corporate Director, Adult Social Care and Health, in consultation with Section 151 Officer and Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, to accept and deploy such funding to enhance the service.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.
- 8.3 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.
- 8.4 TUPE regulations may apply. During mobilisation, the Council needs to be conscious to mitigate the disruptive effect that this may have on current people accessing the service.

9. Commercial Implications

- 9.1 The current contract expires on 31 March 2027 and contains no further extension options.
- 9.2 The commissioning activity required to support the re-procurement has been completed, including service review, stakeholder engagement, co-design and market preparation. However, the procurement process will not commence until November 2026 due to competing demands on Commercial and Procurement resources arising from the concurrent re-procurement of several of the Council's largest Adult Social Care contracts, alongside implementation of the new procurement legislative framework. The proposed three-month extension to the current contract, will provide sufficient time to undertake a compliant, robust and appropriately resourced procurement process, securing best value outcomes for both the Council and its residents.
- 9.3 The proposed contract modification is permitted under Regulation 72(1)(b) of the Public Contracts Regulations (PCR) 2015. The extension relates to additional services not anticipated within the original procurement and is required to allow time to remodel and recommission the Community Based Wellbeing Service (SC19050). A change of provider for the proposed three-month period would create significant inconvenience and duplicate costs for the Council. The value of the extension is below 50% of the original contract value and therefore satisfies the requirements of Regulation 72(1)(b).
- 9.4 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.

- 9.5 In accordance with Regulation 72(3), a contract modification notice will be published. Following publication, any challenge must be brought within 30 days. If no challenge is received, the Council may proceed with the modification.
- 9.6 The Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs will subsequently be recommissioned in accordance with the Procurement Act 2023 and associated regulations, with appropriate procurement and legal support in place to ensure compliance and manage risk. No further contract extensions are proposed.
- 9.7 The inclusion of such provisions will ensure the contract is flexible, legally robust and able to adapt to future structural changes in local government while maintaining uninterrupted service delivery.
- 9.8 Spending will comply with 'Spending the Council's Money' and all relevant procurement legislation, including the Procurement Act 2023, which is expected to govern this procurement. A final confirmation of the applicable procurement regime will be made following assessment and advice from the Commercial and Procurement Division (CPD).

10. Equalities Implications

- 10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed (attached as Appendix 2). 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.
- 10.2 No adverse impacts have been identified that cannot be mitigated through service design, procurement and contract management arrangements.
- 10.3 The service directly supports people with disabilities, including visual impairment, hearing impairment and Deafblind people, and therefore contributes positively to advancing equality of opportunity for people with protected characteristics.
- 10.4 The provider is required to work with the Council to undertake an annual review of the EqIA for the Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs and demonstrate how they are delivering the recommendations identified by the EqIA to ensure the needs of populations with protected characteristics are met in the service the provider delivers. This will include making reasonable adjustments to make services accessible and tailored to meet different needs.

10.5 Equality data will also need to be captured by the provider as part of the performance management of the contract.

11. Data Protection Implications

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

11.2 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.

12. Conclusions

12.1 The Community Wellbeing Service for Adults with Sensory Needs is a key component of KCC's prevention offer, supporting adults with sensory impairments to maintain their independence, wellbeing and connection to their communities. The service contributes to the Council's statutory duties by helping to prevent, reduce or delay the development of care and support needs.

12.2 Engagement with people with lived experience, providers, stakeholders and staff has demonstrated the ongoing need for a dedicated sensory service that retains specialist expertise in supporting people who are blind, partially sighted, Deaf, Deafblind and living with hearing loss. The proposed recommissioning will ensure continued access to this specialist support while responding to current and future demand.

12.3 The proposed standalone contract provides the best balance of quality, value for money, market sustainability and flexibility. It will strengthen the Council's prevention approach through a greater focus on outcomes, partnership working and evidence-based commissioning, while enabling the service to evolve in response to future health and care system developments.

12.4 The recommissioning and associated three-month contract extension will ensure continuity of support for Kent residents, maintain compliance with the Council's statutory responsibilities and provide a stable platform for delivery of the new service model from July 2027. The proposal is deliverable within the approved budget and does not involve any reduction in service provision.

13. Recommendations

Recommendations: The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care is asked 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.

14. Background Documents

[Prevention Framework](#)

[Decision - 25/00014 - Wellbeing Services in the Community - Kent County Council - Council & Democracy](#)

15. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Kent Analytics Report

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment

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