

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 11th December 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Childrens Services Commissioned Contract Extensions

WARD(S) All Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 This report seeks to gain approval for a series of staged extensions via requests for various contractual waivers, in compliance with Procurement Standing Orders 1.14.4.3 and 1.14.4 iv, seeking to waive parts 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders. This covers several contracts identified in the report and an overarching rationale is provided, alongside individual contractual considerations.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- 1. The report be noted;**
- 2. Approval be given to the Emotional Health and Wellbeing contract with Barnardo's being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive parts 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**
- 3. Approval be given to the Advocacy and Independent Visitor (CRAIV) contract with NYAS being extended for 6 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive parts 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**
- 4. Approval be given to the Personal Assistant Services contract with Positive Futures Consultancy being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**
- 5. Approval be given to the Specialist Children's Domestic Abuse Service contract with The Children's Society being extended for 6 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**

- 6. Approval be given to the Friendships Groups contract with VIBE being extended for 6 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**
- 7. Approval be given to the Specialist Seating contract with Newlyn Healthcare being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.3 (non-emergency procedures – not exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**
- 8. Approval be given to the Supported Accommodation contract with P3 being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 (non-emergency procedures – exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**
- 9. Approval be given to the PAUSE and REACH Programmes contract with PAUSE Halton being extended for 12 months, in pursuance of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 (non-emergency procedures – exceeding a value threshold of £100,000), seeking to waive part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders;**
- 10. The re-commissioning of each service, via open competitive tender, or otherwise, at the extended contract end dates, be undertaken by the Children's Head of Commissioning and Quality Assurance in liaison with the Portfolio Holder for Children's.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1** The Childrens Commissioning function has undergone a restructure in terms of staffing, and alongside this has also reviewed its current practices and processes. Due to the previous structure of the team, there has not been the capacity to fully review and plan for the appropriate re-commissioning of the various contracts in place. This has resulted in the over use of rolling waivers, and direct awards, to maintain service delivery with its many providers. This has meant that there has been very few open competitive tendering processes, and it is not clear that the local authority are receiving the best service, at the most cost effective price.
- 3.2** In addition, the internal Audit Report into Childrens Commissioning (July 2024) highlighted that there was minimal to no assurance that processes were being followed and that there was insubstantial evidence that commissioning functions were cost-effective and followed due process. The commissioning team has worked diligently to support all of the recommendations following the restructure and, when the Audit was repeated as a follow up in July 2025, all areas were improved and exceeded. Childrens Commissioning now has substantial assurance across all areas of its functionality, and, part of the improvement plan was a staged and procedural

approach to contracting. These extensions will assist in staggering the workflow and limits the additional barriers outlined below.

- 3.3 There is also consideration around the interdependencies of other departments currently relying on Childrens Commissioning to facilitate their commissioning functions. There is no integrated commissioning approach in Halton, which means that only Childrens and Adults Services have dedicated commissioning support. Departments and directorates such as Community Safety do not, and therefore, this workload is being disseminated into Childrens. There are plans to formalise this with Community Safety, however, these are not yet clear.
- 3.4 The progression of some of this current work (Grangeway Court Homelessness/DA Services in particular) is causing delays and therefore having a direct impact on the progression of Childrens projects, namely, the progression of Maya Court for Supported Accommodation, leading to an extension request for the current contract.
- 3.5 In conjunction, and partly in relation to the above, this has meant that every year, each contract is due for renewal in March/April (Quarter 4), and has created a bottleneck effect, which is further compounding the effectiveness of fully scrutinising and exploring options for each individual contract.
- 3.6 This is further compounded by the parameters of the local authorities budget setting timeframes, and the receipt of the annual budget specifics in November, result in very little time to plan and execute effective commissioning processes prior to April. An effective, open, competitive tender should realistically take between 6 and 8 months to fully scrutinise the contract, plan and execute meaningful consultation with stakeholders, and map out the specification in line with coproduction principles.
- 3.7 Coupled with this, the commissioning team also manage and oversee the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Fund, the Youth Grants Fund and the Short Breaks Allocations. These are static in the calendar year and must be distributed between January and April. Inevitably, this further reduces the teams capacity in Quarter 4, and creates a subsequent tighter capacity issue during this period.
- 3.8 Currently, 18 of the contracts we hold are coming to an end in April 2026, and to fully review and effectively appraise the spend and outcomes of these will be difficult given the above pressures and also taking into account our procurement colleagues capacity across the directorates at this time. We are proposing a series of short extensions, to be granted to the current providers of the named contracts.

This will serve a number of purposes:

- The short 6/12 month extension waivers will allow us to spread our focused workplan more equitably across the financial year, resulting in contract end dates of April and October respectively across our portfolio. This will allow dedicated focus on each contract.
- Varied contract end dates will grant each of the allocated commissioning officers time and space to fully review the contract, allowing for more options to be considered, including the use of open and competitive tenders, or longer

term direct awards, based on quality audits of the outcomes achieved across the specification key performance indicators.

- Our procurement colleagues will also have the time to plan the preferred options into their annual work schedules, and be in a more comfortable place to assist in the completion of the required procurement functions.

The contracts which have been identified for a short term extension, are:

3.9 **Contract 1**

Incumbent Provider – Barnardo's

Contract Name – Emotional Health and Wellbeing (CIC/CL)

Proposed Contract Extension Length - 12 month 01/04/26 to 31/03/27

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £180,000

Statutory Function: Yes

Proposed Finance: Jointly funded via Childrens Social Care (£148,000 - 8242) and Supporting Families (£32,000 - 8269)

Individual Rationale: The current contract is performing well in relation to the core KPI's and meeting all required expectations. We require a review of this service in line with wider scoping alongside the ICB through the Joint Commissioning Stocktake and the Joint Commissioning Board. In the interim, should a contract not be in place, this could potentially impact on demand into CAMHS, as well as driving up costs for specialist interventions for CIC and CL through Continuing Care panels. There is also consideration around the provision for assessment and intervention services for young people who display sexually harmful behaviour (SHB), which are currently being spot purchased via the above. From September 2025 All staff have completing training in both AIM3 and the Good Lives model in order to be able to deliver the Barnardo's programme of specialist therapeutic provision for children who have experienced sexual abuse (CSA) or are showing harmful sexual behaviour (HSB) to other children.

There has also been an agreement to reduce management hours to bring in an additional part time therapist to support with demand at the same financial ceiling. The service has made excellent progress in reducing the previous waiting list to zero, and all current children who are referred are receiving the service they require as quickly as possible.

During this current contractual period, we have built a greater understanding of the mental health landscape, via joint mapping with the ICB, through the Joint Commissioning Stocktake, and the rejuvenation of the Children and Families Joint Commissioning Partnership. The Children and Families Joint Commissioning Strategy has been developed and is ready for publication and distribution, within which is a clear priority to focus on Emotional Health and Wellbeing as a primary workflow strand. We are currently in a position to strengthen a contract offer which best meets the needs of the children and young people of Halton.

The ICB have confirmed that they are not in a position to contribute their previously provided £40,000 to funding the extension waiver period, and we would look to

negotiate with the provider around the service delivery model, to remain in line with the reduced financial envelope.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: Complete the 12 month extension with a view to fully review the ongoing work with the ICB and additional system partners around the landscape of services for children's emotional health and wellbeing. This will further inform any potential for joint working or pooled budgets via the Joint Commissioning Board. We will complete some early soft market testing to understand the breadth of other providers who could deliver on the service. This will be in addition to reviewing the need for a bespoke service around SHB, following a review of need/demand from children's social care operational teams.

3.10 **Contract 2**

Incumbent Provider – National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)

Contract Name – Childrens Advocacy and Independent Visiting (CRAIV)

Proposed Contract Extension Length - 6 month extension 01/04/26 to 30/09/26

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £35,000

Statutory Function: Yes

Proposed Finance: Existing Social Care Budget (8236)

Individual Rationale: The current contract is performing well in relation to the core KPI's and meeting all required expectations. This is an incredibly proactive contract which delivers on statutory functions, combining advocacy with the independent visiting function, therefore, there can be no gap in service provision. NYAS are experts in children's advocacy, providing:

- Issue based Advocacy
- Care Leaver Advocacy
- Residential Visiting Advocacy
- Independent Mental Health Advocacy
- Non-Instructed Advocacy
- Parent Advocacy
- Peer Mentor Advocacy
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS)/Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS)

Independent Visitors are also commissioned within this contract, these are trained adult volunteers who provide children and young people in care with long lasting friendship and support. Access to independent visiting sessions is a statutory entitlement for children and young people who are living with a foster family or in residential care. They complement the vital role of social workers and carers in contributing to and promoting the young person's developmental, social, emotional and cultural needs. However, there are also wider considerations on how this service interacts with the changing landscape of emotional health and wellbeing in Halton, NYAS are an integral part of the emotional health and wellbeing panel, and have embedded processes extremely well in Halton. There are limited providers across the Northwest who offer this specialist service, and do it well.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: Complete the 12 month extension with a view to fully review the ongoing work with the ICB and additional system partners around the landscape of services for children's emotional health and wellbeing. This will further inform any potential for joint working or pooled budgets via the Joint Commissioning Board. We will complete some early soft market testing to understand the breadth of other providers who could deliver on the service. This will be in addition to reviewing the need for a bespoke service around SHB, following a review of need/demand from children's social care operational teams.

3.11 **Contract 3**

Incumbent Provider – Positive Future Consultancy

Contract Name – Personal Assistant Recruitment Service

Proposed Contract Extension Length - 12 month extension 01/04/26 to 31/03/27

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £27,500

Statutory Function: Yes

Proposed Finance: Short Breaks Funding (5018-8032-D115)

Individual Rationale: The current contract supports families with children assessed as requiring a Personal Assistant and who require support to recruit their own PA where they may not have the links within their local network and have struggled to identify assistants. It is highly valued by the families that have benefited from the service.

The landscape of Short Breaks is changing in Halton, and there is potential, through developing work designed to redesign thresholds. This may mean that those children who are assessed at being Level 2 may be redirected to commissioned providers. This will mean that services such as this will be integral to supporting children who are not due to enter higher level services, and this work will take approximately six months to complete. This extension will allow continuity of a critical service whilst these developments are finalised.

The provider works closely with the Short Breaks Team and Direct Payments Team, they are not an agency but manage the recruitment and interview process, and support the training and development of the PA and parent as an employer. It is a unique service that isn't replicated within our local region. The contract payment terms provide for payment by results and a quarterly fee to account for the administration of the service, which is a significant part of the process - advertising, shortlisting, interviewing and matching prospective PAs with children. A review of the service is required to fully scope out the potential of the contract going forward.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: Complete the 12 month extension and conduct a full review of the service.

3.12 **Contract 4**

Incumbent Provider – The Childrens Society

Contract Name – Specialist Childrens Domestic Abuse Support Services

Proposed Contract Extension Length - 6 month extension 01/06/26 to 30/11/26

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £110,000

Statutory Function: Yes

Proposed Finance: Community Safety DA funding (£48,930 – 7378 and £22,500 – 7378) and Supporting Families (£38,570 – 8269)

Individual Rationale: The current contract is performing well and meeting all required expectations. It supports direct intervention for adults and families that are on a plan including those through pre-proceeding route. A review of the service provision alongside the changes with the Safeguarding model and families first approach would be beneficial as domestic abuse is still one of the key reasons for referrals into children's services. This contract delivers on a statutory function under the Domestic Abuse Duty so there can be no gap in service provision.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: Complete the short-term extension with a view to review the ongoing work with children Families First reforms and required Safeguarding models and DA commissioning requirements with community safety in line with the new DA JSNA and consideration for statutory requirements under the domestic abuse duty.

3.13 **Contract 5**

Incumbent Provider – VIBE

Contract Name – Friendship Groups

Proposed Contract Extension Length - 6 months 01/04/26 to 30/09/26

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £30,000

Statutory Function: Yes

Proposed Finance: Short Breaks Funding (5018-8032-D116)

Individual Rationale: The current contract is performing well in relation to the core KPI's and meeting all required expectations, with families feeding back that they highly value the service. It provides a short break for families and provides support for disabled children aged 12 up to the age of 18 to access a service with their peers providing equality of opportunity for disabled children compared with their non-disabled peers. Children take part in activities including Lord Derby Awards. We need a review of this service to account for parent feedback that has highlighted a need to further develop the service for children that are able to transition from the Short Breaks Play Service. If successful, this would increase capacity within Friendship groups and open much needed places within the Play Service as children make the transition to Friendship Groups.

Again, Short Breaks is changing in Halton, and there is potential, through developing work designed to redesign thresholds. This may mean that those children who are assessed at being Level 2 may be redirected to commissioned providers. This will mean that services such as this will be integral to supporting children who are not due to enter higher level services, and this work will take approximately six months to complete. This extension will allow continuity of a critical service whilst these developments are finalised.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: Complete the 6 month extension and scope out requirements with parents to support this area of work in line with Early Help and the Families First agenda. We will complete a pre-market engagement to understand

what other providers could provide with a view to going out to market to award a new contract from 1st October 2026.

3.14 **Contract 6**

Incumbent Provider – Newlyn Healthcare

Contract Name – Specialist Seating Service

Proposed Contract Length - 12 months 01/11/25 to 31/10/26

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £75,000

Statutory Function: Yes

Proposed Finance: High Needs Block (8160)

Individual Rationale: The pilot service started April 2025, bringing unused specialist seating into storage to be repurposed; servicing in-use seating to maintain the life of the equipment, supporting the movement of seating between settings so that it travels with the child, and opening up seating options for children in early years.

Prior to the pilot it was estimated that there was approximately 45 chairs being used by children in Halton schools, this was based on feedback collected through questionnaires. It is now anticipated that this is closer to 120 chairs and the budget set aside to deliver the service will be realised early in quarter 3.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: Direct award a new contract to Newlyn Healthcare from 1st November 2025 to 31st October 2026 to continue the pilot and enable the continued development, review and refinement of the service. Scope out requirements for a joint service to support this area of work with Liverpool City Council and potentially Warrington Local Authority as part of the SEND Improvement Plan.

3.15 **Contract 7**

Incumbent Provider – P3

Contract Name – Supported Accommodation Block Contract

Proposed Contract Extension Length - 12 months until 31st March 2027

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £275.571

Statutory Function: No

Proposed Finance: Core Social Care Budget (8033)

Individual Rationale: The current contract is performing well and meeting all required expectations. The contract has robust evidence to highlight cost saving to council and other partners by reducing the need for external supported accommodation placements. Given the market trajectory, the same five placements may result in annual expenditure of above £336,000, and more if inflationary uplifts are exaggerated year on year.

This contract was due to be recommissioned to incorporate the Maya Court development, and a new specification would include the support element incorporating Lavender House, the existing two trainer flats, and Maya Court, under a larger specification.

The service is also due to transition from Lavender House to Park House in Appleton Village, unfortunately, this process is also now halted, and is being managed by Property Services due to historical lease issues. This extension will allow the incumbent provider to remain in situ and properly transition the service across to the new provision.

Unfortunately, there have also been delays in the Grangeway Court development which have directly impacted on the vacation of Maya Court. The development is now expected to take 12 months and this extension would allow the current contract to continue and have time remaining to commission the wider project within the new and expanded specification.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: Complete the 12 month extension, transition the service to the new setting, and redesign the service to incorporate Lavender/Park House, the existing two trainer flats, and Maya Court, before March 31st 2027.

3.16 **Contract 8**

Incumbent Provider – PAUSE

Contract Name – PAUSE Halton

Proposed Contract Extension Length - 12 months until 31st March 2027

Proposed Cost of Contract Extension - £ 195,871

Statutory Function: No

Proposed Finance: Supporting Families Funding (8269)

Individual Rationale: The current contract is performing well and meeting all required expectations. The contract has robust evidence to highlight cost saving to council and other partners by reducing number of children into the care system.

Potential Commissioning Intentions: This will be the final year of funding available of this project and this will be explained to the provider. During this extension, we will scope out requirements to support this area of work in line with social work reforms and Families First agenda and changes in service delivery across the council.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The services highlighted within this report are considered integral to supporting the various existing strategies within Halton, as well as those currently in development. These include:

- The Children and Families Partnership Plan
- The SEND Strategy
- The Children and Families Joint Commissioning Strategy 2025-2028

4.2 In addition, these services also support the improvement journeys of both the ILACS Inspection outcomes and the Area SEND Inspection outcomes.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The financial implications are that existing budgets would have to be projected and ring-fenced for different points of the financial year.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

All of the contracts above relate directly to the well-being of our younger residents and support the pathway to greater independence in adult life.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

Each of the contract extensions will continue to support local providers in being able to provide the much needed services in the local area.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

As above, all of the contract extensions are statutory functions of the council in relation to supporting children and families.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

The contract extensions are designed to continue the support for vulnerable children who require the most support in our borough.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Not Applicable.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

Not Applicable.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 The risks are highlighted previously in the body of the report and are related to capacity of both the commissioning teams, procurement, budget setting timeframes and the current volume of contracts which are in waiver and end in March each year.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 There are no EDI issues or concerns, all of the proposed extension periods are for statutory and non-statutory contracts which positively and actively promote inclusion and equality, actively defending and advocating for the rights of children.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 None.

**10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF
THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

'None under the meaning of the Act.'