

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 14 April 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy: Waiver Request

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To request a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders, to extend the contract for Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy for a period of 11.5 months. The Waiver is requested to allow a comprehensive review and reshaping of the provision to be undertaken, focused upon current and emerging needs and demands on the service, particularly regarding the impact of Covid-19 on children's development and learning.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board approves the waiver of Parts 3.1 and 3.2 of Procurement Standing Orders by virtue of Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv, to extend the Contract for Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy, for a period of 11.5 months.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1. Halton Borough Council (HBC) and Halton Clinical Commissioning Group (HCCG) have jointly commissioned Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy since 2017. Both partners support the waiver request.

3.2 The current annual contract value is £685,875.87, to which HBC contributes £222,223.78. In order to comply with Light-Touch Regime (LTR) rules and ensure that the value remains within current LTR thresholds, the waiver is requested for 11.5 months at a cost of **£659,496**, to which HBC will contribute **£213,676.70**. It is anticipated that extending the contract for 11.5 months will incur minimal additional costs. These additional costs relate to salary uplifts, which would apply irrespective of the waiver request.

- 3.3 The current contract started on 1 September 2017 and is due to end in August 2022. Its terms and conditions do not allow for further contract extensions, hence the request for a Waiver of Standing Orders.
- 3.4 HBC and HCCG are in agreement that extending the current contract for 11.5 months does not pose a clinical risk or a risk in relation to service delivery for children and young people in the borough.
- 3.5 The review and reshaping of the current service will be undertaken within the context of a wider focus on children and young people's communication and language development across all relevant service areas. It will also encompass the learning gained from the successful TALK Halton project funded via the Department for Education's Early Opportunities Fund (EOF), and how the benefits of the project can be sustained now that EOF funding has ended.
- 3.6 An important focus of the review will examine the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on the communication and language development of all children and young people, including vulnerable groups such as Early Years and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and how their needs can be most effectively met going forwards.
- 3.7 A key element of the review will entail comprehensive consultation with a broad range of stakeholders including parents/carers, young people, schools/settings and colleagues across Education, Health and Team around the Family provision. This will provide opportunities for the reshaped service to be co-produced in partnership with all stakeholders.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The *SEND Code of Practice: 0-25 years (2015)* states that 'partners **must** engage children and young people with SEN and disabilities and children's parents in commissioning decisions...so that commissioning decisions on services for those with SEN and disabilities are shaped by users' experiences, ambitions and expectations'. It further notes that, for co-production to be most effective, all partners should be brought in at the earliest opportunity when planning or designing support or services. A contract extension of 12 months would enable this process to be undertaken in line with the *Code of Practice*.
- 4.2 Reviewing and reshaping the provision as part of a broader focus on communication and language development across services and sectors will support the integrated approach of key partners towards working together to maximise outcomes and efficiency.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Provision of Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy services is a statutory requirement for both HBC and HCCG. Reviewing and reshaping the service will support ensuring best value and highlight further opportunities for pooling resources.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The delivery of Speech and Language Therapy provision to children and young people is key to supporting the priorities in the Halton Children, Young People and Families Plan, particularly in relation to Early Intervention and Achievement and Ambition, and the One Halton Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority of improved levels of early child development.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Support for children and young people with identified Speech and Language needs exerts a critical impact upon their learning and future employment and skills development.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Speech and Language Therapy services impact directly upon the health and well-being of children and young people with an identified language or communication need, including their mental health.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Speech and Language Therapy services provide support to vulnerable children and their parents/carers, and help them to access appropriate service provision within their local communities. This links to satisfaction with services and overall perception of the area in which people live.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

Undertaking a tender process in the near future in order to award a new contract for September 2022 would not allow sufficient time to carry out the review and co-produce a service specification that meets current and emerging needs and aligns with broader developments in children and young people's communication and language. This approach would not provide adequate scope to explore the impact of Covid-19 on our most vulnerable children and young people and agree the most effective way to address these concerns through reshaping the service. It would also impact negatively on the shared exploration of the revised service specification costs arising from the review, particularly in the context of the potential for innovation, including the use of technology, and associated best value.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The current proposal would not impact upon any equality and diversity issues as all relevant protected characteristics will continue to be provided for during the contract extension period.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.