

Cabinet

16 December 2025

Project Commencement/Options Appraisal - Gateway 1 Report: Advocacy Service for Parents with Children in or on the Edge of Care

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adam Price, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services

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Procurement Overview

Total Contract Value (estimated): £1 million

Regulated Procurement: Yes

Proposed Contract Term: 3 years plus option to extend by 1 year

Summary

This report seeks permission to commence the procurement of the Advocacy for Parent/s of Children in or on the Edge of Care Contract.

1. Recommendation

1.1. The Cabinet is asked to agree to pursue the procurement of an Advocacy service for parents that will work in a multi-disciplinary way to support families on the edge of care and those with children already in care to build their strength and emotional resilience.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

2.1. Medway Council believes that where appropriate and safe to do so, every effort should be made to support families to keep their children with their family setting. This service seeks to build on the experience of the original Advocacy service for mother's contact which ends in March 2026. This service will work in similar multi-disciplinary way to support families on the edge of care and those with children already in care to build their strength and emotional resilience. Giving them the confidence to access support and services to ensure they can safely keep their children in their care. This multi-disciplinary approach to supporting mothers directly contributed to keeping 29 children out of

care in the last 4 years, allowing them to safely and appropriately remain with their birth families. In addition to the benefits for a child in remaining with their birth family, based on a conservative estimated cost of £65000 per year, the cost avoidance over 4 years is circa £7million.

3. Budget & Policy Framework

- 3.1. A key part of Medway Council's Sufficiency Strategy, A Place Called Home is Supporting Families. "Protecting children and young people, and strengthening families, so they can live safely at home". The Council has committed to prioritising work to strengthen families, and the Advocacy service is referenced in the sufficiency strategy service as a key element of this work. Medway Council believes that keeping children in the family home (where safe and appropriate to do so) delivers better outcomes for those children. In addition, reducing the number of children coming into care contributes significant cost avoidance for the Council.
- 3.2. The current service ends on 31 March 2026, so it is imperative to procure this service as soon as possible to minimise any disruption to service users.

4. Background Information and Procurement Deliverables

- 4.1. The overarching priority for this service is to reduce the number of children coming into care. The specification for this service has been shaped by learning from the current successful advocacy service. The successful provider will work with parents in a multi-disciplinary, non-judgemental way to give them the strength and emotional resilience to work with service to enable them to safely and appropriately care for their children in the family home.
 - 4.1.1. The service provider will receive referrals via the Medway family Partnerships co-ordinator. They will then offer support in the form of advocacy, supported by mental health and domestic violence services with the aim to address and then mitigate some or all of the factors that prevent parents from safely looking after their own children.

4.2. Procurement Deliverables

- 4.2.1 As part of the successful delivery of this procurement requirement, the following procurement project outputs / outcomes within the table below have been identified as key and will be monitored as part of the procurement project delivery process.

Outputs / Outcomes	How will success be measured?	Who will measure success of outputs/ outcomes	When will success be measured?
Reducing the number of children coming into care	Number of children remaining with birth families following intervention	Contract Manager working with the contract monitoring group (including relevant senior social care professionals)	Annually
Improving the wellbeing of parents	Impact of service interventions will be measured through outcome stars (or similar agreed assessment methodologies)	Contract Manager working with the contract monitoring group (including relevant senior social care professionals)	Quarterly
Improving the mental health of parents	Impact on parents is measured through nationally recognised assessment tools including GAD 7 (General Anxiety Disorder scale) and PHQ 9 (Patient Health Questionnaire).	Contract Manager working with the contract monitoring group (including relevant senior social care professionals)	Quarterly

5. Parent Company Guarantee/Performance Bond Required

5.1. This will not be applicable to this contract.

6. Procurement Dependencies and Obligations

6.1. Project Dependency

6.1.1. The provider is expected to work in partnership with a range of other services to achieve the best possible outcomes for Parents and families, but it is not dependent on other services to deliver.

6.2. Statutory/Legal Obligations

Not applicable

6.3. Procurement Project Management

6.3.1. The management of this procurement process will be the responsibility of the Category Management team.

6.4. Post Procurement Contract Management

6.4.1. The management of any subsequent contract will be the responsibility of John Taylor, Service Manager for Commissioning and Placements

6.4.2. To ensure the needs of the requirement are met and continuously fulfilled post award, the following KPIs that support the delivery of the project outcomes as outlined in 4.2.1 will be included in the tender and will form part of any subsequent contract.

Title	Short Description	%/measurement criteria
Reduce the number of children coming into care	Referrals to this service will come from the most vulnerable families whose children are already in or on the edge of care. Interventions from this service should see a number of these children safely returned to the care of their families. The length of intervention with the families will vary and it may take longer than a year to see outcomes of court proceedings etc, but the service should expect to see the equivalent of 5 children per year not coming into care and remaining with family. A child coming into care costs	80%

Title	Short Description	%/measurement criteria
	<p>approximately £65,000 per year.</p> <p>Service usage will be further measured by:</p> <p>Number of referrals received per quarter (target 30, monitored quarterly)</p> <p>Percentage of parents who have accepted the offer of support (target 75%, monitored quarterly)</p>	
Improving the wellbeing of parents	<p>Key to the success of the service is improving the emotional wellbeing of parents to build their emotional resilience and enable them to better engage with services to support their children.</p> <p>Impact of service interventions will be measured through outcome stars (or similar agreed assessment methodologies). Specific themes covered in the evaluation will be:</p> <p>Work and Finance Housing Health (inc. sexual health) Wellbeing Community and Services</p> <p>When a parent is accepted onto the service a baseline assessment will be undertaken with further assessments whilst the parent continues to access the service.</p> <p>Whilst scores are expected to fluctuate during intervention the service aim is to see parents leaving the</p>	90%

Title	Short Description	%/measurement criteria
	<p>service have improved their scores.</p> <p>Outcome stars (or other agreed evaluation tool) will be monitored on a quarterly basis as well as at the end of a parents involvement with the service</p>	
Improving the mental health of parents	<p>As part of this contract, mental health support is available to parents who need it. The allocation of the mental health resource is managed by the provider and reported on as part of quarterly monitoring. Impact on parents is measured through nationally recognised assessment tools including GAD 7 (General Anxiety Disorder scale) and PHQ 9 (Patient Health Questionnaire).</p> <p>A baseline will be established with every parent and they will then be monitored on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Parents are expected to demonstrate a consistent improvement in their mental health during their time working with this service</p>	75%

6.4.3. The KPIs as denoted within paragraph 6.4.2 will be monitored on a quarterly and annual basis. Those not performing will be reported to the next available CSMT meeting for discussion and agreed remedial action.

7. Market Conditions and Procurement Approach

7.1. Market Conditions

Successful delivery of this service requires a provider with experienced and qualified advocates. This is a specialist service with a reasonably limited market. However, the number of providers who can deliver this type of intervention is growing. There are a number of Kent based providers who may be interested in delivering this type of service. Given the nature of the procurement it would be reasonable to expect between 4 and 8 tenders.

7.2. Procurement Options

7.2.1. The following is a detailed list of options considered and analysed for this report:

7.2.2. Option 1 – Do nothing:

If the council does not seek to procure this service, when the current service ends it is likely to directly contribute to increasing numbers of children coming into care. This will have a detrimental impact on those children's lives as well as exposing Medway to significant additional cost pressures which could have been avoided with the intervention of the proposed service.

7.2.3. Option 2 – Extend the current contract:

The current service was originally procured for 2 years in 2022 with an option to extend for a further 2 years. This option was taken in April 2024 meaning the service cannot be extended again and should go back to market.

7.2.4. Option 3 – Utilise a framework or existing contract to meet this need:

The specialist nature of this service means there is no current framework or existing contract that could be used to undertake this work. The multi-disciplinary nature of the service, advocacy, support around domestic violence and management of mental health support is a unique approach and as such there is a need to go to market.

7.2.5. Option 4 – Competitive procurement:

7.2.5.1. Open (single stage) Procedure:

This is the most appropriate approach to the market given the specialist nature of the service and the likely low levels of bid responses. It also ensures transparency as the current provider has already expressed an interest in delivering this service.

7.2.5.2. Competitive Flexible (multi-stage) Procedure:

As described above this is a specialist service, the tender is unlikely to receive a high number of responses therefore a multi-stage procedure to short-list bidders is deemed unnecessary.

7.2.5.2.1. Subject to approval, it is proposed the Competitive Flexible procedure is designed as follows:

Procurement stage	Purpose/detail	Deadline
Issue tender documents	Advertise the opportunity to the market	19 th January 2026
Return of tenders	Deadline for return of tenders	18 th February 2026
Review of tender responses	To evaluate the tender responses— fail any responses that fall under the pre-disclosed quality threshold	4 th March 2026
Governance	Seek approval for award of contract including CSMT, Procurement Board and Cabinet.	5 th May 2026
Notification of award decision to bidders	Notify bidders of outcome, subject to standstill period	6 th May 2026
Conclusion of award of contract	Notification of conclusion of award decision	18 th May 2026
Contract Start	Contract has been mobilised to start on this date	1 st July 2026

7.3. Contractual synergies

7.3.1. This is a specialist service and although there are other advocacy services across the council there are none that work in this way with parents of children in or on the edge of care.

7.4. Advice and analysis

7.4.1. The preferred option is an open single stage procurement procedure. This is appropriate for the likely market response and provides a level of transparency to ensure a fair procurement process and achieving the best value for money for Medway Council.

7.4.2. It is recommended that the contract length be a 24-month term with the option to extend for 24 months by mutual agreement.

7.5. Evaluation Criteria

7.5.1. The proposed quality price split for this service is 70% quality, 30% price. This provides the best balance between ensuring value for the council and delivered a high quality service which can effectively deliver against its KPIs.

7.5.2. Whilst not finalised at this stage, Officers propose to evaluate bidders against the following criteria within the tender.

#	Question	Weighting (%)	Purpose
1.	<p>Service Delivery -</p> <p>How will you use advocacy to support parent/s to access other services to enable them to safely and appropriately keep their children in their care. Where a child cannot remain with parent/s, how will you support a parent to manage that process in the best interests of themselves and their child.</p> <p>How will you manage the delivery of the other elements of this service, mental health and domestic violence support?</p>	20%	Assess the providers experience and ability to deliver the service
2	<p>What existing staff do you have in place to deliver this service and how do you plan to recruit additional staff as required. What qualifications and experience are you looking for across your staff team. How will you structure your staff team to ensure advocates receive appropriate line management and supervision.</p> <p>How will you manage the mental health element of the service to ensure the standard of that support is of good quality and complements the advocacy approach.</p>	15%	To give confidence that the provider already employs or intends to recruit suitably appropriately trained staff to deliver this service
3	<p>Provide details of how your organisation will ensure that safeguarding is integral to the delivery of this service. In particular, how you will manage day-to-day delivery keeping participants safe and how you would manage potential conflicts</p>	10%	To ensure the provider can deliver this service whilst keeping parents, children and staff safe

#	Question	Weighting (%)	Purpose
	of interest working with members of the same family. Your response should include details of your policies and procedures and how they meet relevant legislative and regulatory standards including GDPR and safer recruitment.		
4	How will you evidence the impact of your service delivery, both in demonstrating impact against key performance indicators but also evidencing the impact service delivery has had on parents. How will you be able to evidence, the impact of the service in delivering cost reduction for Medway both in terms of reducing the number of children coming into care but also the wider impact it has on parents	10%	Establish that the provider can effectively evidence the impact of the service and provide evidence of deliver value for money for Medway Council
5	How will you mobilise your service to be able to effectively deliver as soon as possible. How will you manage the handover of current cases to your service in a way that is least disruptive to those in currently in receipt of service	9%	To ensure the successful provider can mobilise effectively within agreed timescales
5	Social Value How will the provider deliver the service in line with Medway Council's ambitions to develop the local economy and minimise any environmental impact	6%	To ensure the provider delivers the service in line with Medway Council's stated vision to develop the local community and improve the quality of our environment
6	Price	30%	

8. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Increase in numbers off children coming into care	If this service is not commissioned it is likely more children will come into care placing them at risk of poor outcomes and with the resulting in increased costs for the authority	Service is commissioned through an open procurement with providers subject to quality assessment and robust procurement process	CII
Parent/s left unsupported when the current service ends	Some parents may be in receipt of a service from the current provider when the contract ends. If the new service does not pick up these interventions, the parent may suffer significant consequences the could result in their child being taken into care and a negative impact on their health and well-being	Robust procurement process that focuses on providers skills and experience and ensures they can effectively mobilise to meet current service users needs	CII
Commissioned service unable to deliver against specification	Failure to support vulnerable families with a resulting increase in children coming into care. Failure to achieve best value for Medway Council, including placing increased pressures on	Robust procurement process that focuses on providers skills and experience and ensures they can effectively deliver against service KPIs	CII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
	social care and wider services		

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

9. Consultation

9.1 Medway Council has not undertaken a formal consultation in relation to this service. However, the provider commissioned 'Activ Mob' to undertake a consultation with their service users, the outcome of which was fed back at a quarterly contract monitoring meeting. The views of parents have been included in the development of the specification for this service.

10. Service Implications

10.1. Financial Implications

The anticipated cost for this service is £250,000 per year. This will be funded from social care revenue budget with no need to seek additional funding sources.

10.2. Legal Implications

10.2.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report however good contract management is essential to ensuring that the Council receives the services it is paying for. Managing contracts will provide the Council with the evidence it needs to terminate contracts or recover money where contractors are not performing.

10.3. TUPE Implications

10.3.1. In the event that an alternative provider is awarded the contract and delivers the services from a different location, the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) are likely to apply.

10.4. Procurement Implications

10.4.1. This is an above threshold light-touch service under the Procurement Act 2023. An open procedure would be appropriate for this

procurement activity on the basis of the commissioners' view of it being a limited market.

10.5. ICT Implications

10.5.1. No ICT implications have been identified.

11. Social, Economic & Environmental Considerations

- 11.1. In line with Medway Council's Social Value Policy, officers will include the following standard outcomes and measures (the units have also been included for illustrative purposes) within the tender. Whilst there will be no commitment for bidders to deliver against every line, the accumulative value provided by each bidder will be scored and form part of the price evaluation score.
- 11.2. The Social Value commitment from the winning bidder will be transposed into contractual KPIs.

Outcomes	Measures	Standard Units
More local people in employment	No. of local direct employees (FTE) hired or retained (for re-tendered contracts) on contract for one year or the whole duration of the contract, whichever is shorter	No. people FTE
More local people in employment	Percentage of local employees (FTE) on contract	%
Improved skills	No. of staff hours spent on local school and college visits e.g. delivering careers talks, curriculum support, literacy support, safety talks (including preparation time)	No. staff hours
Improved skills	No. of weeks of apprenticeships on the contract that have either been completed during the year, or that will be supported by the organisation until completion in the following years - Level 2,3, or 4+	No. weeks
More opportunities for local MSMEs and VCSEs	Total amount (£) spent in LOCAL supply chain through the contract	£
More opportunities for local MSMEs and VCSEs	Meet the buyer's events held to highlight local supply chain opportunities	£ invested including staff time

Outcomes	Measures	Standard Units
Social Value embedded in the supply chain	Percentage of contracts with the supply chain on which Social Value commitments, measurement and monitoring are required	%
Creating a healthier community	Initiatives taken or supported to engage people in health interventions (e.g. stop smoking, obesity, alcoholism, drugs, etc.) or wellbeing initiatives in the community, including physical activities for adults and children	£ invested including staff time
Carbon emissions are reduced	Savings in CO2 emissions on contract achieved through de-carbonisation (specify how these are to be achieved)	Tonnes CO2e
Sustainable Procurement is promoted	Percentage of procurement contracts that includes sustainable procurement commitments or other relevant requirements and certifications (e.g. to use local produce, reduce food waste, and keep resources in circulation longer.)	% of contracts
Social innovation to create local skills and employment	Innovative measures to promote local skills and employment to be delivered on the contract - these could be e.g. co-designed with stakeholders or communities, or aiming at delivering benefits while minimising carbon footprint from initiatives, etc.	£ invested - including staff time and materials, equipment or other resources

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Appendices

Exempt Appendix 1 – Financial Analysis

Background Papers

None