

Cabinet

2 June 2026

Gateway 3 Contract Award: Advocacy for Parents with Children in or on the Edge of Care

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

Report from: Kelly Cogger, Assistant Director, Children's Social Care

Author: John Taylor, Service Manager, Commissioning and Placements

Procurement Overview

Total Contract Value: £1 million
Project Budget: £1 million
Contract Term: 36 months with an extension of 12 months
Contract Start Date: 01/07/2026
Initial Contract End Date: 30/06/2029
Extension End Date: 30/06/2030

Summary

Following the recent tender process for the Advocacy Service for Parents with Children in or on the Edge of Care. This report seeks Cabinet agreement to award the contract to the supplier named in Exempt Appendix 1 to the report.

Medway Council believes that where appropriate and safe to do so, every effort should be made to support families to keep their children within their family setting. The Advocacy Service for Parents with Children in or on the Edge of Care service seeks to build on the experience of the original Advocacy service for mothers' contact which ends on 30th June 2026. Working as part of the Families First agenda the service 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. Giving them the confidence to access support and services to ensure they can safely keep their children in their care. This approach is in line with the families First agenda

This multi-disciplinary approach to supporting mothers directly contributed to keeping 29 children out of care in the last 4 years, allowing them to remain with their birth families safely and appropriately. 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 for the Council over 4 years is circa £7million.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. It is recommended that the Cabinet agrees to award the contract to the supplier named in 3.1 of the Exempt Appendix. They have been evaluated as the most advantageous against the Council's award criteria as per the evaluation spreadsheet contained within 2.1 of Exempt Appendix 1.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

- 2.1. The preferred provider best met both the quality criteria and the price requirements, to deliver the service. The provider has effectively demonstrated their knowledge and experience of how advocacy can be used to support parents with children in or on the edge of care to better engage with services to enable them to safely keep their children in their care.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. The Council has committed to prioritising work to strengthen families, and the Advocacy service is referenced in Medway Council's Sufficiency Strategy (2026-2029), A Place Called Home as a key element in Supporting Families. "Protecting children and young people, and strengthening families, so they can live safely at home". 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.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Advocacy for Parents specification has been developed following the successful Advocacy for Mothers programme that was commissioned by Medway Council in April 2022 (see attached GW4 report). Following the evaluation of this service and the impact it had on safely reducing the number of children coming into care the decision was taken to go back out to market to procure a new service which focused on advocacy for both mothers and fathers who had children in or on the edge of care.
- 4.2. Working as part of the Families First agenda, the Advocacy Service will work in a multi-disciplinary way providing early intervention for parents who are at risk of having a child taken into care. Working closely with Health providers, Housing, Welfare Benefits, Social Care advocates will provide non-judgemental support to Parents to enable them to better engage with services. Through this support, parents will become better equipped to continue to look after their children, safely in the family home.
- 4.3. Reflecting the learning from the previous service this service will offer support around anger management and domestic violence as well as mental health support for parents.

4.4. Key performance indicators for this service include improving wellbeing and mental health. The key driver is to safely reduce the number of children coming into care.

5. Procurement Process

5.1. Procurement Process Undertaken

5.1.1. An open (single stage) procedure was undertaken. The table below sets out the procurement process chronology and onward timeline dates.

Procurement stage	Purpose/detail	Deadline
Issue tender documents	Advertise the opportunity to the market	19 January 2026
Return of tenders	Deadline for return of tenders	18 February 2026
Review of tender responses	To evaluate the tender responses– fail any responses that fall under the pre-disclosed quality threshold	30 March 2026
Governance	Seek approval for award of contract including CSMT, Procurement Board and Cabinet.	May/June 2026
Notification of award decision to bidders	Notify bidders of outcome, subject to standstill period	May/June 2026
Conclusion of award of contract	Notification of conclusion of award decision	May/June 2026
Contract Start	Contract has been mobilised to start on this date	1 July 2026

5.2. Evaluation Criteria Used

#	Question	Weighting (%)	Purpose
1.	Service Delivery - How will you use advocacy to support parent/s to	20%	Assess the providers experience and ability to deliver the service

	<p>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. How will you manage the delivery of the other elements of this service, mental health and domestic violence support?</p>		
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. How will you manage the mental health element of the service to ensure the standard of that support is of good quality and compliments 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 of interest working with members of the same family.</p>	10%	To ensure the provider can deliver this service whilst keeping parents, children and staff safe

	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 east 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 vison to develop the local community and improve the quality of our environment
6	Price	30%	

6. Options

- 6.1. This paper proposes the award of a contract to deliver an Advocacy for Parents service. There are several options should cabinet chose not to award this contract.

- 6.2. Cabinet could recommend going back out to market, this potentially could bring bids from different providers. However, as was highlighted in the GW1 report, this is a unique service with a limited number of providers in the market (which is evidenced by only 2 tenders being received). It is unlikely that bids from other providers will be received and the resulting delay in procuring a new service could have a negative impact on some Medway parents currently in receipt of support.
- 6.3. Cabinet may decide not to procure an Advocacy for Parents service and look at alternative approaches to meet need. The proposed service is based on evidence and learning from the previous advocacy for mothers' approach which was successful in safely keeping 29 children out of care from our most vulnerable Medway families. This resulted in far better outcomes for children and families as well as significant cost avoidance for the Council.

7. Advice and analysis

- 7.1. This paper recommends the award of the Advocacy for Parents contract as set out in Exempt Appendix 1 to the report.
- 7.2. Medway Children's services are committed to keeping children safely in their family setting. This is explicit in Medway's Sufficiency Strategy and clear in the Families First agenda. The service under the previous contract directly contributed to keeping 29 children in their family setting. It should be noted that these families were some of the most vulnerable in Medway. The advocacy approach not only enabled them to keep their children safely in the family setting, but it also supported them to access services and work with other professionals in a way many of them had not been able to do previously because of negative experiences or mistrust.
- 7.3. In addition to the benefits to children's and families this service has played a significant role in cost avoidance for children's services. Every child in care costs conservatively £65000 per annum. Reducing the number of children coming into care represents a significant cost avoidance for the Council.
- 7.4. Funding for this service is included in core children's services budgets.
- 7.5. A Diversity Impact Assessment has been completed, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, that shows no negative impact. It does show positive impact in the areas of care experienced, low income groups and pregnancy and maternity.

8. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
If this service is not commissioned it	If this service is not commissioned it is likely more children will come	Service has been commissioned through an open procurement with	CII

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
could contribute to increased numbers off children coming into care.	into care placing them at risk of poor outcomes and with the resulting in increased costs for the authority.	providers subject to quality assessment and robust procurement process.	
Parent/s currently in receipt of a service may be left unsupported if 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
A newly commissioned service is 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 social care and wider services.	Robust procurement process that focuses on providers skills and experience and ensures they can effectively deliver against service KPIs.	CII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table:

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

9. Consultation

- 9.1. Throughout the life of the previous service regular user evaluation sessions have taken place. An independent evaluator, 'ActivMob' was brought in by the provider of that service to work with service users to identify what would improve the service. The findings of that consultation helped shape the specification for the new service.

10. Climate change implications

- 10.1. The provider is committed to minimising the impact of its service on the environment. Their actions will include reducing carbon emissions by allocating caseloads geographically to minimise advocate travel distances; reimbursing and encouraging use of public transport for community visits; conducting supervision, reviews and non-essential meetings remotely where appropriate; operating paperless case management through CharityLog; and working from a single central base at the Sunlight Centre rather than multiple premises.

11. Financial implications

- 11.1. The proposed award of the contract will be within the budget range committed as part of core revenue funding for this service within Children's Services.

12. Legal implications

- 12.1. This procurement activity was above the FTS threshold and therefore an FTS notice was required.
- 12.2. The procedure gives a high degree of confidence that the Council's primary objectives for procurement are met, as required by Rule 2.2 of the Council's Contract Procedure Rules ("the CPRs").
- 12.3. Under the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, the procurement is a Process 3 procurement (Rule 18), and the process set out in this report meets the requirements for such procurements. The procurement was advertised on the Kent Business Portal, in compliance with rule 18.4 of the CPRs.
- 12.4. Medway Council has the power under the Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 and the Localism Act 2011 to enter into contracts in connection with the performance of its functions.
- 12.5. The process described in this report complies with the Procurement Act 2023 and Medway Council's Contract Procedure Rules.
- 12.6. This report has been presented as a High Risk procurement, and therefore the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Procurement Board, will therefore set the risk and reporting stages for the remainder of the procurement process for Gateway 4.

Lead officer contact

John Taylor, Service Manager for Commissioning and Placements

john.taylor@medway.gov.uk, 07970 351920

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Diversity Impact Assessment, May 2026

Exempt Appendix 1 – Financial Analysis

Background papers

[Project Commencement/Options Appraisal – Gateway 1 Report: Advocacy Service for Parents with Children in or on the Edge of Care, Cabinet Report 16 December 2025](#)