

CABINET

DATE	21 st August 2024
REPORT OF	Cllr Margaret Cracknell – Portfolio Holder for Children and Education
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	Ann-Marie Matson Director of Childrens Services
SUBJECT	Recommissioning of the Speech and Language provision for children in North East Lincolnshire
STATUS	Open
FORWARD PLAN REF NO.	CB 08/24/05

CONTRIBUTION TO OUR AIMS

The recommissioning of specialist speech and language provision for children across North East Lincolnshire would support the council's aims and priorities by:

Enabling children to have the best start in life and a happy, healthy and fun childhood:
Providing an efficient and timely speech and language assessment and therapy service will enable children to reach their full potential via skills and learning. This means children will grow up being able to confidently communicate their choices and live an independent life.

Working with our partners, including children's social care, health, education, schools and settings (including early years), to improve outcomes for children with emerging or identified SEND to reduce the need for statutory assessment and services:

It will be clearly outlined in a new specification any service that will undertake this service, will be expected to work in close partnership with the public health nursing team and other local services. So that a universal offer and a specialist service can be delivered in conjunction whilst meeting demand.

Reducing Health equalities:

Our Public Health Nursing Service will be able continue to fully offer the national Healthy Child Programme to all those aged 0-19 (25 SEND) and by renewing the provision, we will ensure we maximise opportunities to meet the needs of our communities, and especially for those at greatest risk of poor health outcomes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The council and Integrated Care Board (ICB) have a shared statutory duty to provide a speech and language provision across the borough.

The council commissions an external provider to deliver its element of this statutory responsibility. The current contract ends in March 2025 and this recommissioning exercise is to identify the most suitable provider to continue delivery of these services from April 2025.

At this point in time there is no change to the budget for these services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Approves the undertaking of a procurement exercise for speech and language provision as set out in the report.
2. Authorises the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education to commence the above procurement exercise.
3. Delegates authority to the Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Education to award, and take all ancillary actions reasonably arising, including implementation and mobilisation.
4. Authorises the Assistant Director Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) to complete and execute all requisite legal documentation arising from the above recommendations.

REASONS FOR DECISION

The council and Integrated Care Board (ICB) have a shared statutory duty to provide a speech and language provision across the borough.

The council assumes responsibility for universal speech and language therapy (SALT) services for 0-16 and commissions support for 0-5 above the level of need addressed by the Public Health Nursing Team. For those aged 5-16 the council commissions services to support young people in addition to the statutory responsibility on schools and at a sub-clinical level. This contract for the commissioned support is due to expire in March 2025.

1. BACKGROUND AND ISSUES

- 1.1 The current contract has been in place for five years and expires on 31st March 2025. Without recommissioning, the council will cease to meet its statutory duty at that time.
- 1.2 In the time this contract has been in place there have been delivery challenges as well as a significant increase in the volume and complexity of cases being referred for SALT Support.
- 1.3 There have been external factors which have contributed to the rise in demand and complexity. The Covid lockdowns which had a particular impact on the early years cohort at that time; an impact which continues to be detectable in performance data. There have also been changes in the local context, such as the scope and structure of the local universal offer for families; staffing and resourcing of family hubs and other changes. All of this has impacted the overall capacity of families to meet the development needs of children and changed the profile of need.

- 1.4 There have also been innovations in the industry which will affect the options available from the market and which may enable young people to access support more easily. An example of this is the development of online platforms for support. A PMC has been conducted between 28th June 2024 and 17th July 2024 to better understand the market and identify if there is more than one possible provider available.

2. RISKS, OPPORTUNITIES AND EQUALITY ISSUES

- 2.1 If unable to provide this specialist support, there is both a reputational risk as well as potential legal challenge if the council fails to meet this duty. As well as having a statutory duty the council recognises the importance and impact speech and language assessment, intervention and therapy is at a young age. It provides a timely and effective service which will not only help children reach their full potential through skills and learning, but also aim to provide them with the skills to become independent as they develop into adults. It will be crucial that any company or organisation is able to have the workforce resilience to deliver the desired level of provision continuously over the lifetime of a contract. Statistics show the demand for speech and language therapy has grown in the duration of the current contract and may continue to grow. We are hoping the recommissioning of this service will improve the suitability of our model to meet the needs of children and young people in North East Lincolnshire.

3. OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Due to the current contract already being extended twice, a further extension is not an option. The remaining option would be to **Do nothing**, it is felt this option is not feasible as the council would be failing to meet its statutory duty to provide this service for the children of North East Lincolnshire.

4. REPUTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS CONSIDERATIONS

There are potentially both positive and negative reputational implications for the Council resulting from the decision. Although the recommissioning exercise will be aiming to improve our services and sustainability of speech and language provision within North East Lincs, a mobilisation plan will be agreed with the awarded provider to ensure business continuity and any families that are using the service will be communicated with to update them of any upcoming changes.

5. FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 We currently have a budget for the SALT contract - this is £165,400 of which £115,400 is council funded and £50,000 High Needs Dedicated School Grant funded.
- 5.2 The contract will be procured in line with existing arrangements and therefore there will be no further call on council reserves, or requirement for capital.
- 5.3 In order to ensure value for money, Key performance indicators will be included in any contract issued and monitored via robust contract management.

6. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IMPLICATIONS

The desired outcome for providing efficient and timely speech and language assessments and therapy across North East Lincolnshire is to:

- To enable all Children in North East Lincolnshire reach their full potential through skills and learning.
- Where young people have choice and are equipped with the skills to exercise that choice.
- To empower families to be skilled and knowledgeable in their own child's needs to effectively support them in their everyday life. This will mean parents and the upcoming generation can have their say about things that are important to them and participate fully in their communities.
- Will work towards giving every child the best start in life and to provide high quality evidence-based health and wellbeing services for children, young people, and families.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Although not a direct impact on climate change or environment, a new and refreshed model aims to make Speech and language therapy more accessible within our local communities and in turn reduce travel from families to the local hospital.

8. CONSULTATION WITH SCRUTINY

Presented to Children and Lifelong Learning scrutiny on 25th July 2025

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The recommissioning of the Speech and Language Therapy service will be within the existing budget envelope, which is funded by the Dedicated Schools Grant and core council budget.

Any variation to this position would cause a budget pressure.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. The Preliminary Market Consultation and the procurement exercise are governed by the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. The Preliminary Market Consultation activity enables the specification to be developed, in line with the appropriate contractual documentation. Such activity enables the seeking or accepting of advice from independent experts, authorities or from market participants, providing it does not distort competition nor breach the requirements for non-discrimination and transparency. The contract is the key governing document through which the resulting relationship will be governed, and Legal Services will complete the contractual documentation on award.

10.2. The procurement of a speech and language provision within North East Lincolnshire is consistent with the stated aims and objectives of the Council underpinning its strategic objectives of Stronger Economy, Stronger Communities.

10.3. The procurement exercise will be conducted so as to comply with the Council's policy and legal obligations, specifically in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, and supported by relevant officers.

10.4. The delegations sought are consistent with an exercise of this nature.

10.5. Officers should note that an award constitutes a further decision and will be subject to completion of an Officer Decision Record. Where key decision criteria are met such Officer Decision Record will be subject to call in. Award and implementation timelines should accommodate this.

11. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

11.1. There are no direct HR implications arising from the contents of this report.

12. WARD IMPLICATIONS

This provision is likely to benefit all wards within North East Lincolnshire.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken which concluded that this exercise will in no way reduce services to any vulnerable group and seeks to improve accessibility for vulnerable children, young people and their families across North East Lincolnshire.

14. CONTACT OFFICER(S)

Rebecca Taylor- Head of SEND and Inclusion

Councillor Margaret Cracknell
Portfolio Holder for Children and Education