



Operational Officer Decision Record

Where the decision has a financial value of between £100k - £350k and does not have a **significant** impact on two or more wards

1. Subject and details of the matter (to include reasons for the decision and detail of any previous cabinet decision)

Direct Award (Procurement Act 2023 Exemption on Urgency) of Contract for External Consultant Support for Focus Independent Adult Social Work in relation to statutory ASC Function delivered on behalf of NELC. This is required due to the 'Requires Improvement' finding of the CQC inspection and the requirement to deliver measurable improvements by the time of reinspection which could be any time from 12 months after the original inspection.

This work is required following a 'requires improvement' grade in our recent CQC inspection of Adult Social Care (ASC) in August 2025 (Report published December 2025) and focuses on frontline staff within Focus Adult Social Care, a CIC who deliver ASC services on behalf of NELC. We could potentially be inspected any time from 12 months after the date of our first inspection so need to have this work completed by August 2026.

The development activity proposed is a staff upskilling programme with associated systems review and will take six months to complete and that is the source of the urgency. In order for it to be complete by August it needs to begin in the next few weeks. The programme is also unique and has been created on a bespoke basis specifically for NEL. We are the only authority which commissions out their Adult Social Care Provision and the only area with the degree of integration with health

care services and budgets. There is no realistic opportunity to open this activity up to competition and still achieve completion before the reinspection window.

Agreed at BDG 14th January 2026 to use flexible use of capital receipts to fund this activity at a cost of £230,000.

2. Decision being taken

That the Director of Adult Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, awards a contract for external consultant support for Focus Independent Adult Social Work to Outcomes Matters Consulting Limited.

3. Anticipated outcome(s)/benefits

Better management of increasing adult social care demand
Impact on adult social care expenditure with expected avoided costs
Introduction of AI to support with efficiency.

4. Details of any alternative options considered and rejected by the officer when making the decision

Focus have not demonstrated the required capacity to improve within their organisation. The relevant expertise and capacity is not available within NELC including the Transformation Hub due to the specialised nature of the support required.

Three Consultancy firms were approached in relation to this work and this was the only one able to deliver the required support within this financial envelope

Full procurement considered but not possible to complete within required timescale.

5. Background documents considered (web link to be included or copies of documents for publishing)

None

6. Does the taking of the decision include consideration of Exempt information? If yes, specify the relevant paragraph of Schedule 12A and the reasons

No

7. Details of any conflict of interest declared by any Cabinet Member who was consulted by the officer which relates to the decision (in respect of any declared conflict of interest, please provide a note of dispensation granted by the Council's Chief Executive)

None Identified.

8. Monitoring Officer Comments (Monitoring Officer or nominee)

The decision is an operational decision and within the constitutional remit for the named Director and Portfolio Holder. A direct award is available and justifiable pursuant to the Procurement Act and approved via an exception request. Procurement and legal colleagues will continue to support.

9. Section 151 Officer Comments (Deputy S151 Officer or nominee)

The funding route is appropriate, and sufficient resources are available to support the proposal. The financial envelope is defined and manageable within current planning assumptions. The anticipated benefits—particularly the potential for avoided costs through improved practice, demand management, and system efficiencies—represent a reasonable value-for-money proposition, subject to ongoing monitoring. It will be important that clear milestones, deliverables, and expected financial impacts are established at the outset, with regular reporting to ensure that projected benefits are realised and any risks to delivery are identified early.

No additional financial concerns arise at this stage.

10. Human Resource Comments (Head of People and Culture or nominee)

There are no direct HR implications arising from the contents of this report, although upskilling in staff should lead to improvements in practice with is positive.

11. Risk Assessment (in accordance with the Report Writing Guide)

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12. If the decision links to a previous one taken by Cabinet, has the Cabinet Tracker been updated?

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13. Decision Maker(s):

Name: Katie Brown

Title: Director Adult Social Services

Signed: REDACTED

Dated: 6th February 2026

14. Consultation carried out with Portfolio Holder(s):

Name: Councillor Stan Shreeve

Title: Portfolio Holder for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care

Signed: REDACTED

Dated: 6th February 2026