



Title of report: Procurement of Sensory Impairment Service

Decision maker: Cabinet member adults, health and wellbeing

Decision date: 9 September 2026

Report by: Corporate Director - Community Wellbeing

Classification

Open

Decision type

Key

This is a key decision because it is likely to result in the council incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the council's budget for the service or function concerned. A threshold of £500,000 is regarded as significant.

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant having regard to: the strategic nature of the decision; and / or whether the outcome will have an impact, for better or worse, on the amenity of the community or quality of service provided by the authority to a significant number of people living or working in the locality (two or more wards) affected.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 9 (Publicity in Connection with Key Decisions) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the procurement of a Sensory Impairment Service and authority to award and enter into a contract with the successful provider. The procurement will ensure continuity of specialist support for people with sensory impairments and support the Council in meeting its statutory duties.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) the procurement of a Sensory Impairment Service for adults in Herefordshire be approved
- b) That the Corporate Director Community Wellbeing be authorised to award a contract for the provision of the Sensory Impairment Service for an initial term of five years from 1 February 2027 to 31 January 2032 at a total value of £595,000 (£119,000 per annum), with the option to extend for up to a further 24 months from 1 February 2032 to 31 January 2034 at an additional value of £238,000, giving a maximum total contract value of £833,000.
- c) authority be delegated to the Corporate Director for Community Wellbeing to approve any subsequent operational decisions, extensions, variations and contractual matters within the approved budget and in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

Alternative options

1. **Option 1 – Do not procure a replacement service** - This option is not recommended. The current contract will expire and failure to secure ongoing provision would significantly reduce the availability of specialist support for people with sensory impairments. This could lead to increased demand for statutory services, reduced independence for residents and increased risk that the Council would be unable to effectively discharge its duties under the Care Act 2014 and Equality Act 2010.
2. **Option 2 – Bring the service in-house** - This option has been considered but is not recommended. The current service is delivered by specialist providers with established expertise, networks and knowledge of sensory impairment. Bringing the service in-house would require the Council to recruit and retain specialist staff and establish the necessary operational infrastructure. At this time there is insufficient evidence that an in-house model would provide better outcomes or better value for money than a competitive procurement process.
3. **Recommended option** - The recommended option is to undertake a competitive procurement process to secure a specialist Sensory Impairment Service that delivers quality, value for money and continuity of support for Herefordshire residents.

Key considerations

4. Herefordshire Council currently commissions a specialist Sensory Impairment Service for residents who are blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing or living with dual sensory loss. The service provides specialist assessment, rehabilitation, advice, mobility training, communication support and assistive technology. Its purpose is to help people remain independent, active and included within their communities.
5. Contract monitoring information confirms that the service continues to support residents through referrals, specialist home visits, rehabilitation and reablement programmes, provision of aids and appliances and onward referral to other agencies. During 2025/26, the hearing loss element recorded 233 referrals or contacts from identified sources and 183 home visits. The visual impairment element reported monthly activity against contractual KPIs – in the same period there were 117 people starting a programme of reablement, rehabilitation or training. Although the

available data demonstrates active service use and timely response to referrals, the current contract does not require both providers to report all performance measures in a consistent format. Strengthened activity, outcome and demand reporting will therefore be built into the new contract.

6. The current contract is approaching expiry (31/01/2027) and requires reprocurement to ensure continuity of service. The proposed procurement is therefore necessary to avoid service interruption and to ensure that appropriate specialist provision remains available to eligible residents.
7. The service supports the council in meeting its duties under the Care Act 2014 and Equality Act 2010, including duties relating to wellbeing, prevention, independence and accessibility for disabled people.
8. Demand for sensory impairment support is expected to increase due to Herefordshire's ageing population. Local evidence previously prepared for the SIS work estimates that the number of residents living with sight loss could increase from approximately 8,680 in 2021 to around 9,780 by 2030. National evidence also indicates increasing prevalence of hearing and sight loss amongst older people.
9. The service has an important preventative role. It supports residents to maintain independence, reduce isolation, access information and communication, and avoid or delay escalation to more intensive health and social care services.
10. Reprocurement provides an opportunity to update the service specification, clarify requirements, strengthen performance and outcome reporting, and ensure the future service remains aligned with council priorities around prevention, independence, reducing inequalities and supporting people to remain living safely at home for longer.
11. The proposed procurement approach is an open tender. This reflects the specialist and niche nature of the market while ensuring a transparent and compliant process. A request for information (RFI) only had four responses, while information from other areas suggests the market is limited with different approaches to providing sensory impairment services. Although the market is limited, an open tender remains the preferred route.
12. The indicative contract value is currently estimated at £119,000 per annum plus an annual equipment budget of up to £36,000. Over the five-year initial term, the contract value will be £595,000. If the 2-year extension is utilised, the full value will be £833,000
13. Current procurement planning indicates that the tender pack is being prepared, with tender publication planned for early September and a four-week tender window. A mobilisation period of approximately two months is planned to support continuity before the current contract ends.

Community impact

14. The proposed decision will have a positive community impact by securing continued access to specialist sensory impairment support for residents across Herefordshire. The service supports people who are blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing or living with dual sensory loss to remain independent, safe and active within their communities.

15. The service contributes to local priorities around prevention, reducing inequalities, supporting independence and enabling people to remain living safely at home for longer. These priorities are reflected in Herefordshire's Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Better Care Fund plans and the wider Community Wellbeing transformation programme.
16. The service supports communication, mobility, access to information, assistive technology and social inclusion. These interventions help reduce isolation and may prevent or delay escalation to more intensive health and social care services.
17. The proposed decision is not expected to have a direct adverse impact on children in care or care leavers. However, the wider preventative and inclusion benefits of the service contribute to the council's broader community wellbeing objectives. The future service will be expected to deliver outcomes including:
 - Improved independence.
 - Reduced isolation.
 - Improved access to communities and services.
 - Increased use of assistive technology.
 - Delayed or avoided need for ongoing care and support.

Environmental impact

18. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the people of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors, the council shares a strong commitment to improving environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and protecting and enhancing Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
19. The environmental impact of this proposal is expected to be limited, as the decision relates to the procurement of a specialist community-based support service. However, environmental considerations will be reflected proportionately within the service specification and contract management arrangements. The provider will be expected to minimise waste, reduce unnecessary travel where possible, use resources efficiently and consider sustainable ways of delivering advice, assessment and support.
20. Where appropriate, contract monitoring will include consideration of how the provider is minimising environmental impact through service delivery, including use of digital communication where suitable, efficient scheduling of visits, and responsible procurement or recycling of equipment.

Equality impact

21. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires the Council, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
22. The mandatory Equality Impact Screening Checklist has been completed for this decision. The screening identified a low risk of adverse impact and therefore a full Equality Impact Assessment was not required. However, the proposal is expected to have a positive impact on people with disabilities by maintaining access to a specialist service for adults living with sensory impairment. The service provides specialist assessment, rehabilitation, mobility training, communication support,

advice and assistive technology to help individuals overcome barriers associated with sensory loss and maintain their independence.

23. The principal equality consideration for this decision is ensuring that adults who are blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing, or living with dual sensory loss continue to have access to appropriate specialist support. By improving access to information, services, communities and everyday activities, the service helps reduce disadvantage, promotes independence and supports participation in community life. Demand for support is expected to remain significant as the population ages and the number of people living with sensory impairment increases.
24. The proposed procurement will support the Council in meeting its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 by helping to advance equality of opportunity for disabled people and ensuring that specialist support remains available to those who may otherwise experience barriers to accessing services and community life. Equality considerations will continue to be reflected throughout the procurement process and subsequent contract management arrangements.

Resource implications

25. The current Sensory Impairment Service budget comprises an annual contract value of £115,000 together with a separate equipment budget of up to £41,000 per annum. Analysis of historic expenditure indicates that the full equipment budget allocation is not typically required, with actual spend consistently below the maximum available budget. The table below shows actual spend over the past 3 years

**Sensory Impairment
Equipment purchases - Herefordshire Vision Links**

2023-24 £	2024-25 £	2025-26 £	2026-27 YTD end of June £
23,611	16,465	9,697	0

Figures shown relate to purchase period, not financial period processed in

26. Equipment expenditure is demand-led and varies according to the number of referrals, assessed needs and the type of equipment required to support individuals to remain independent. Consequently, annual spend is not expected to be consistent. Historic expenditure shows that the full £41,000 allocation has not been required
27. To strengthen service delivery and support the Council's preventative agenda, it is proposed that £4,000 per annum is transferred from the equipment budget to the core contract budget. This would increase the annual contract value to £119,000 whilst reducing the equipment budget to £37,000 per annum.

28. The proposal is cost-neutral and will be delivered within the existing approved budget envelope for the service. The revised equipment budget remains sufficient to meet anticipated demand based on historic expenditure patterns.
29. The service supports people with sensory impairments to maintain their independence, wellbeing and participation in community life. Demand for support is expected to remain significant throughout the contract period, reflecting demographic trends and the needs of an ageing population. The proposed reallocation of resources will provide additional investment in preventative support and early intervention, helping to maximise service capacity and resilience whilst making more effective use of existing resources. The proposal aligns with the Council's strategic focus on prevention and does not create any additional budget pressure.

Budget details (per annum)	Existing contract (2022 – 2027)	New contract (2027-2031)
Block contract	£115,000	£119,000
Equipment budget	£41,000	£37,000
Total	£156,000	£156,000

Legal implications

30. There are no specific legal implications in this report.
31. The relevant legal provisions for this decision can be found in the council's constitution, www.herefordshire.gov.uk/constitution.

Risk management

Risk / Opportunity	Mitigation
Failure to procure a suitable service could result in loss of specialist support for adults who are blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing or living with dual sensory loss, leading to reduced independence, increased demand for statutory services and reputational risk to the Council.	A competitive procurement process will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2024. Early market engagement has been undertaken through a Request for Information to help inform the procurement approach and encourage market interest.
Limited market interest could reduce competition and affect value for money.	Preliminary market engagement has identified potential provider interest. The procurement documents will be designed to encourage participation whilst ensuring quality and compliance requirements are met.

Failure to maintain continuity of service during transition to a new provider could impact service users.	The procurement timetable incorporates an appropriate mobilisation period and will require robust transition and continuity arrangements to be in place prior to contract commencement.
If the recommendation is not approved, the Council would be unable to progress the procurement and may face a gap in service provision when the current contract expires. This could adversely affect delivery of statutory duties under the Care Act 2014 and Equality Act 2010	Approval of the recommendation enables the Council to secure continued provision of specialist sensory impairment support and maintain compliance with relevant statutory responsibilities.
Demand increases beyond capability to deliver.	Contract monitoring and review to include demand and budget positions
Provider Failure (unable to deliver)	Business Continuity requirements through procurement and contract monitoring

Consultees

32. The proposed procurement was considered by the Strategic Commissioning Group in July 2026 and was supported to progress to procurement.
33. A Political Groups Consultation was held on 15 July 2026. Members expressed support for the continued provision of the Sensory Impairment Service and recognised its importance in helping people with sensory impairments maintain their independence and wellbeing. Members were also keen to ensure that the service reaches as many eligible residents as possible. One member noted that there are a significant number of veterans in Herefordshire who have had their hearing impaired because of their work in the forces. The service specification will be updated to note this and state that the Sensory Impairment Service must make and maintain connections with local veteran groups.
34. A Request for Information (RFI) exercise has been undertaken to inform the procurement approach. four responses were received, which is considered proportionate for a specialist market of this nature. The information received will be used to help shape the procurement documentation.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term / Acronym	Meaning
CMD	Cabinet Member Decision
EqIA	Equality Impact Assessment
ITT	Invitation to Tender
RFI	Request for Information
SIS	Sensory Impairment Service
SCG	Strategic Commissioning Group