



Title of report: Award of contract for the provision of overnight short breaks and outreach service for children and young people

Decision maker: Cabinet member children and young people

Decision date: 26 August 2026

Report by: Commissioning Manager

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.

Notice has been served in accordance with Part 3, Section 11 (Cases of Special Urgency) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) Regulations 2012.

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To approve the awarding of a contract to develop and deliver an overnight short breaks with outreach support service, for children and young people with disabilities from a property secured by the council.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **To award a 5-year contract, with an option to extend for a further 24 months, to PCA Dom 1 Ltd to develop and deliver a registered overnight short breaks with outreach service, at an anticipated contract value cost of £2.1 million over 7 years;**

- b) To authorise the Corporate Director Children and Young People to purchase additional services during the contract term up to a maximum budget of £7.6m (inclusive of the £2.1m anticipated spend) provided within the approved Council's budget and / or within any subsequent in-year additional Government grant funding; and**
- c) To delegate authority to the Corporate Director Children and Young People to take all operational decisions necessary to implement, manage, vary, extend or terminate the contract in accordance with the approved budget and contract terms.**

Alternative options

1. Do nothing and continue to spot purchase. This option is not recommended. It is highly unlikely to secure sufficient capacity, provide consistent market-wide quality and performance oversight or procure provision at best value. It also misses the opportunity to commission more strategically to improve outcomes for children and young people.
2. Award two separate contracts; one for overnight shortbreaks and another for outreach support. This is not recommended. Commissioning a single registered provider to deliver both elements better supports continuity for children, families and staff. Market engagement and work with operational colleagues indicate a single-provider model is more likely to deliver a sustainable, flexible service and maintain a stable local workforce through consistent volumes of work matched to need.
3. To deliver the service in-house. This is not recommended. Developing a new in-house service requires extensive time and resources, a specialism of practice and a requirement to complete Ofsted and CQC registrations.

Key considerations

4. Following the successful completion of a competitive procurement conducted using the Open Procedure under the Procurement Act 2023, which was subject to the Light Touch Regime (Section 9), it is recommended that PCA Dom 1 Ltd is awarded a contract to develop and deliver a registered overnight short breaks with outreach support service, from a property owned by the Council.
5. The contract will support the Council to meet its statutory duty to meet the assessed needs of disabled children and their families. It will secure a guaranteed minimum of 2,520 bed nights and 14,000 outreach support hours over the lifetime of the contract.
6. The contract has been designed to secure a minimum level of provision while retaining flexibility to increase capacity where required. The service is expected to grow over time, allowing the provider to build sustainable capacity and enabling the council to commission additional support in response to demand and emerging needs.
7. At full capacity, the service could provide up to 720 overnight short break bed nights per year, excluding bank holidays, from the registered provision. This assumes support for two children at a time on a 1:1 basis. Exceptionally capacity will reduce where a child requires a higher level of support.
8. As the contract allows for the Council to call off additional overnights and outreach support hours, the absolute maximum spend via the contract over the seven years is £7.6 million. The absolute value represents the absolute maximum spend permitted under the contract, including any permitted extensions, variations, call-off activity or additional commissioned provision. The recommendation includes a delegation to the Corporate Director to purchase additional services provided that adequate budget has been made available.

9. In practice, it is highly unlikely that the provider would have the capacity to deliver the range of support required to meet all assessed need and this contracted provision will be delivered alongside other packages of support commissioned via a block contract or spot purchase arrangement. As of end July 2026
 - a. 13 children receive almost 395 overnight bed nights a year. This equates to 2,765 bed nights over a 7 year period.
 - b. 64 children receive almost 19,500 commissioned support hours per year, which equates to 136,500 hours over a 7 year period.
10. Funding for this contract will be met from the Council's approved Short Breaks budget, which is currently £2.28m (financial year 2026/27). Current expenditure includes £350k on overnight short breaks, £590k on daytime support and £762k via direct payment. All the overnight support and the majority of daytime support is currently commissioned on a spot arrangement. Contract spend will be monitored through regular budget reporting and contract management arrangements, with any additional activity managed within the core Short Breaks budget.
11. As part of individual assessment and care planning, children accessing the service will be considered against the criteria for NHS Continuing Care and, where eligible, a funding contribution from the ICB/NHS will be progressed.

Community impact

12. Herefordshire is committed to becoming a 'child friendly' county, where all children and young people are supported to thrive and feel included in their communities. Central to this ambition is the application of the Right Help at the Right Time framework, ensuring that children and families receive timely, appropriate support tailored to their individual needs.
13. Short breaks for disabled children are part of Herefordshire's local offer for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families. As each child is unique and their family circumstances vary, a range of support is required to meet the different levels of changing need. For the majority of Herefordshire's children and families, their level of needs can be met within mainstream community services, which are not directly funded by the council's short break budget. However, depending on the nature and complexity of the child's disability, some will have higher level of need requiring additional support.
14. The short breaks offer is designed in accordance with Herefordshire Local Area Co-production Charter. The charter has been produced with Parent Carer Voice Herefordshire (PCVH), NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire, Wye Valley NHS Trust and the council. The aim is for all children and young people, inclusive of those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), is to have the best start in life. We want all children and young people to be happy, prepared for adulthood and able to achieve their goals, and for families to feel supported, confident, resilient and connected to their communities.
15. The project has liaised regularly with local neighbours to ensure community impact in the relevant residential area is understood and we have sought to ensure suitable parking is available on the premises to minimise impact as well as maintaining open and constructive communication with local residents throughout the project.

Environmental impact

16. The environmental impact has been considered through the service specification and includes appropriate requirements on the contracted provider to minimise waste, reduce energy and

carbon emissions and to consider opportunities to enhance biodiversity. This will be managed and reported through the ongoing contract management.

17. 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 we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.
18. The service seeks to deliver the council's [environmental policy commitments](#) and aligns to the following success measures in the County Plan.
 - Work in partnership with others to reduce county carbon emissions
 - Improve residents' access to green space in Herefordshire
19. The development of this project has sought to minimise any adverse environmental impact and will actively seek opportunities to improve and enhance environmental performance.
20. The contract includes a number of practical measures intended to minimise adverse environmental and local impact during delivery. For example, the property includes off-road parking for four medium-sized cars, and the provider will be required to ensure that staff, contractors and visitors do not park outside or obstruct access to neighbouring properties. The provider will also be expected to maintain the property, outdoor space and day-to-day service arrangements in a way that supports safe, sustainable and considerate use of the site.

Equality duty

21. Due to the scope of this decision and/or its potential impact on certain protected characteristics, an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is attached as an appendix to this report.
22. In summary, this decision impacts on protected characteristics as follows:
 - a. It will have a positive impact for children and young people with disabilities by increasing access to local, specialist overnight short breaks and outreach support.
 - b. It will promote equality of opportunity through personalised support that reflects each child's assessed needs, communication needs, developmental stage, cultural background and family circumstances.
 - c. The property is also being adapted to support accessibility and sensory needs.
 - d. It will also benefit parents and carers by providing planned breaks from their caring responsibilities while ensuring children are supported in a safe, local and appropriate setting.
23. Although this decision may have a negative impact as noted in the EIA, we plan to mitigate this by:
 - a. Ensuring individual planning considers accessibility, sensory needs, communication approaches, personal care and any specialist equipment required
 - b. Working with the provider, Children with Disabilities Team and families to identify appropriate solutions where specific needs linked to protected characteristics cannot be fully matched
 - c. Reviewing equality impacts through regular contract monitoring, performance data and ongoing review of the EIA during implementation and delivery.

Resource implications

24. The annual contract value of £310,000, together with associated mileage costs, any additional nights and hours purchased, and any approved inflationary price uplifts, will be funded from the approved annual short breaks budget of £2.28m.
25. The council may decide to commission additional spend from the framework, up to a maximum of £7.6m over the 7 year period. This additional spend is only permissible if existing spend is ceased to allow the annual budget of £2.28m for Short Breaks to remain balanced, or if additional funding is identified at a later date.

Legal implications

26. The Council has statutory duties under the Children Act 1989 and the Breaks for Carers of Disabled Children Regulations 2011, to provide sufficient and appropriate short breaks for disabled children and their families. The regulations require local authorities to provide services designed to assist individuals who provide care for disabled children to continue to do so, or to do so more effectively, by giving them breaks from caring.
27. Schedule 2 (section 6) of the Children's Act 1989 states the local authority has a duty to provide services that minimise the effect of a child's disabilities, give children an opportunity to live ordinary lives, and provide support to those people who care for a disabled/additional needs child/children by enabling them to have breaks from their caring role.
28. Section 507B of the Education Act 1996 require local authorities to ensure disabled young people aged 13 up to 25 have access to sufficient educational and recreational leisure-time activities which are for the improvement of their wellbeing. The current short breaks offer supports children with disabilities up to their 18th birthday, when their support services transfer to the council's Adult Social Care.

Risk management

29. Failure to secure overnight short breaks for all children who are assessed as needing them will place the council at risk of legal challenge for not meeting its statutory duties.
30. Furthermore, not fully meeting a child's assessed need can increase risk of their family reaching crisis and could be a contributing factor for the child not being able to remain within their family home. Through an open competitive tender, the Council has identified a provider with specific skills and remit required to meet the majority of need.
31. Regular contract meetings will give assurance on the robustness of budget control and monitoring, highlighting key risks and identifying any mitigation to reduce the impact of pressures on the council's overall position.
32. There is a risk that the provider is unable to secure the required regulatory registrations to deliver one or both elements of the service. This will be managed through clear mobilisation milestones, regular progress reporting, and oversight through contract management arrangements. The contract includes appropriate termination provisions should the provider be unable to secure the necessary registrations within the required timescale.
33. There is a financial risk if demand for additional overnight stays or outreach support exceeds the core contract value. This will be managed through agreed call-off arrangements, budget monitoring, and regular contract management meetings. Any additional activity will need to be approved in accordance with the contract terms, available budget and the absolute maximum contract value.

34. The overnight short breaks element of the service is regulated by Ofsted and is subject to registration, inspection and ongoing regulatory oversight throughout the contract term. The outreach support element is regulated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and must comply with all relevant regulatory requirements and standards. There is a risk that the provider could receive an inadequate regulatory judgement, fail to maintain registration, or have safeguarding concerns identified that impact on its ability to deliver the service. To mitigate this risk, regular contract monitoring meetings will provide assurance regarding service delivery, quality, safeguarding, regulatory compliance, performance and budget management. These arrangements will enable emerging risks to be identified and addressed at an early stage, with appropriate mitigating actions agreed and monitored throughout the life of the contract.

Consultees

35. Engagement has been undertaken with key internal and external stakeholders to inform the commissioning approach, and in developing the service specification.
36. Service Director Corporate Parenting and Service Manager Children with Disabilities have been consulted and are in agreement with the decision.
37. Advice from Commercial and Legal Services has also informed this decision and ensured all appropriate procurement and governance procedures have been followed.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Equality Impact Assessment

Background papers

None