



**Havering**  
LONDON BOROUGH

## Notice of Non-key Executive Decision

<b>Subject Heading:</b>	Approval to extend the Autism Hub peer support and social inclusion contract for a period of 6 months and waive contract procedure rules to ensure continuity of the service
<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Councillor Gillian Ford, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care Services
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Gillian Ford, Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care Services
<b>SLT Lead:</b>	Barbara Nicholls, Strategic Director of People
<b>Report Author and contact details:</b>	Sophie Barron, Commissioner & Project Manager, T: 01708 431082 E: <a href="mailto:Sophie.Barron@havering.gov.uk">Sophie.Barron@havering.gov.uk</a>
<b>Policy context:</b>	Delivering Integrated services and working in partnerships to achieve improved outcomes and value for money services for residents.
<b>Financial summary:</b>	The current contract is £80k annually, and is an offer for adults 18+. The cost of the 6 month extension will be £40,000.00.
<b>Relevant Overview &amp; Scrutiny Sub Committee:</b>	People
<b>Is this decision exempt from being called-in?</b>	The decision will be exempt from call in as it is a Non key Decision

**Non-key Executive Decision**

**The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives**

People - Things that matter for residents x

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place.

## Non-key Executive Decision

### Part A – Report seeking decision

#### **DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION**

The Cabinet Member of Health and Adult Care Services agrees:

1. To the extension of the Autism Hub (Peer Support and Social Inclusion) contract with the Sycamore Trust for a period of 6 months (from 1 February 2024) at a cost of £40,000.00.
2. To waive the contract procedure rules to enable this 6 months' extension to be awarded without competition.

#### **AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE**

Part 3.3 of the Constitution provides that a member of SLT may:

(a) ... take any steps necessary for proper management and administration of allocated portfolios.

The Strategic Director of People is therefore entitled to authorise the extension of the contract.

Part 3.2 of the Constitution provides that a Cabinet Member may:

(g) ... approve an exception to the Contracts Procedure Rules set out in Part 4 of this constitution, in accordance with Rule 14(1) of those Rules.

Part 3.3, Section 3.1 – General provisions and limitations provides:

(d) A staff member may refer any matter within a delegation or authorisation to them to the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet, the relevant individual Cabinet member or to an appropriate Council committee or sub-committee for decision provided that the matter is within the delegated powers and duties of whom or to which it is referred.

By virtue of the above provisions, both decisions are to be taken by the Cabinet Member for Health and Adult Care Services.

#### **STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION**

##### **Background**

Having currently commissions the Sycamore Trust to deliver a preventative offer for Adults with Autism and related conditions only, at a cost of £80,000.00 per annum. The current contract ends on the 31st January 2024. The current provider has delivered this service since 2018. In 2021 a procurement exercise was completed but the procurement cycle failed due to no suitable bids being received. As a result of this, an extension was awarded to the Sycamore Trust as an interim measure from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021 to ensure continuity of service for users of the service, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and was considered in the best interests of the council.

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### **Summary**

Throughout 2023, various options have been explored to secure additional investment to expand the adult service to an all-age offering to deliver on our 'All Age Autism Strategy', agreed by Cabinet in August 2022. It is now understood the Sycamore Trust do deliver an all age offer from the hub but by utilising funding from other sources. There is currently no peer support and social inclusion offer for Havering Children with Autism other than signposting and advice and a Parent Support Group. Unfortunately, despite exploring various funding streams it has not been possible with the current budget pressures impacting Havering and our Health partners, to secure any additional funding. This means completely redesigning the service offer to maximise the impact of the council funding of £80k.

With the launch of the all-age strategy and the development and expansion of NELFT's Autism Diagnostic pathways earlier in 2023, the current service specification is no longer fit for purpose. In addition, there have been some service delivery-related issues with the commissioned provider, i.e. low numbers of new referrals when now compared to the numbers coming through the new NELFT diagnostic pathways; and a large spend on rental costs. The service currently only supports 3.1% of Havering's predicted adult autism community which supports that a review of current autism services is required.

The Council is also aware that there is increased demand for support for parents of children with autism due to a large demographic shift of children with additional needs moving into the borough which is detailed in the 2021 School Census. This has also been an increase in requests for peer support for those over 30, which is currently not delivered within the current contract.

Whilst exploring the decision to let the contract lapse at its end date, the Council was asked by the provider to decide on the future of the contract due to a break clause in their rental agreement of just over three months. They needed to give notice to their landlord by mid-October to avoid any financial difficulty caused by extending the lease post the expiration of the contract.

Given the need to consider whether the current service is delivering best value for the residents and the council and given that this contract was coming to a natural end in any event, officers recommended to the Strategic Director of People that the current contract with Sycamore should not be extended further. It has been the case since the failed procurement in 2020/21, that the service required redesign. Due to the impact of COVID and its effects on staffing capacity, this has been delayed. As a result, a service redesign is planned to be followed by a new commissioning exercise, which will commence imminently.

After formal notification, concerns were raised by service users of the Autism Hub regarding lack of interim support between the contract lapse and the recommissioning of a new all-age autism service. Through the Equalities Impact Assessment, it was recognised that due to the timescales, there would be a risk of a gap in service, which had the potential to impact on the wellbeing of current users of the service.

To mitigate concerns raised by service users and identified through the Equalities Impact Assessment, it is now recommended that the current contract be extended for a further 6 months to enable the Council to engage with residents with Autism, their families and communities and review similar services with the intention of commissioning a new offer.

### **Rationale**

#### **1) NELFT's expanded Autism Diagnosis pathways**

NELFT have recently begun offering pre-diagnosis support in the form of signposting and advice. Those awaiting assessment also have access to a monthly virtual pre-diagnostic group which is a 5-week rolling programme covering various themes each month. They are planning

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to launch a post-diagnosis offer in January 2024, which coincides with the end of Sycamore Trust's contract. This offer will include user-led peer support groups, drop-in sessions and training to support service users, carers and parents to best support those with autism. Due to the service recently expanding, more work is needed to understand in further detail the full scope of their offer both now and in the future for both the Adults and Children's Autism Diagnostic Pathways.

### 2) Alternative peer support and social inclusion groups

Details of the following peer support and social inclusion groups available in Havering have been shared with the Sycamore Trust however they have expressed that these services are insufficient due to not delivering autism specific support. Further work is required to understand this in depth which will form part of the review of services.

- Havering Association for Disabilities (HAD)
- Bridge of Friends Group
- Romford Autistic Group (RAGS)
- Havering MIND

### 3) Service Delivery

In addition, there have been some service delivery-related issues with the commissioned provider, i.e. low numbers of new referrals vs. numbers coming through the diagnostic pathways and significant spend on rental costs amounting to 23% of the annual contract value. This further supports the need to redesign the current service offer.

### 4) Demand for Autism support for Children

We are also aware that there is a demand for support for parents of children with autism. As detailed in the Office of National Statistics (ONS) 2021 Census, Havering has a higher proportion of children aged 0-17 (22.3%) than 80% of local authorities in England and demand for autism related services for Children and parents has been in demand as a result. There has also been an increase in requests for peer support for those over 30, which is currently not part of the service offer.

### 5) Rental issues

We needed to notify the provider to advise them on the future of the contract which was expedited by a break clause in their rental agreement. They needed to enact this with their landlord by mid-October to avoid any financial difficulty caused by extending the lease post the expiration of the contract.

## **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

### **Option 1**

To expand the service to offer a jointly funded all age offering that aligns with our All Age Autism Strategy. Due to the council's financial constraints, work was undertaken to look at commissioning a new jointly funded service with our health partners in the ICB to coincide with the end of this contract. After several discussions we were invited to bid for some funding from both the Health and Inequalities fund and the Babies and Young Children's group. Unfortunately, both bids were unsuccessful due to the sheer demand and complexity of applications received. This option has been rejected as we were unable to obtain the funding needed.

### **Option 2**

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Another option would be to let the contract lapse at its current end date of January 31<sup>st</sup> 2024. As identified in the EHIA in Appendix A, this decision would create a potential gap in service provision which may result in an increase for demand in statutory services.

#### **Option 3**

Another option would be to extend the current contract to enable us to carry out the review of services and consult with people with Autism their families and communities about what the current needs are. The recommendation is to extend the Sycamore Trust's contract for an additional 6 months to provide an interim support offer whilst the Council determine what will replace the current offer. This option takes into consideration feedback from users of the Autism Hub.

### **PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION**

Although no formal consultation has been undertaken regarding the extension of this contract, an EHIA was completed on the initial recommendation to let the contract lapse. This document highlighted some risks around a potential gap in provision which may result in an increase for demand for statutory services.

### **NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER**

Name: Sophie Barron

Designation: Commissioner and Project Manager

Signature:



Date: 06/12/2023

## Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

### LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Provision of autism support services are not statutory and therefore the Council would not be in breach of a statutory obligation by withdrawing the service. However, the Council is mindful that the service is valuable to the community.

Any award of a contract without competition (including extension) does carry some risk of challenge although the risk in this case is thought to be minimal due to the short term nature of the extension and the considered use of the waiver provisions appearing at part 4.4, para 14.

#### 14 WAIVERS

14.1 No exception to these Rules shall be permitted except upon approval by an individual Cabinet member using an Executive Decision. The report shall set out the background, the rule being waived, the reasons the waiver is required, how value for money will be demonstrated, any legal or financial risks or implications and shall be approved by the Director of Legal and Governance and the Chief Executive.

- This executive decision (ED) satisfies the above provision.
- The rule being waived is 1.6.
- The Director of Legal & Governance and the Chief Executive have approved the ED.

The Cabinet Member is satisfied that the remaining provisions of para 14 of the contract procedure rules apply to this decision, including that the contract extension is in the best interests of the Council for the reasons outlined in this report.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

This decision paper is seeking approval to extend the autism hub peer support and social inclusion contract for a period of 6 months commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2024 and to waive contract procedure rules to ensure continuity of the service.

The current annual cost of the contract is £80,000 per annum and this is fully funded from the Better Care Fund. The cost of the six-month extension will be £40,000.

The performance data suggests that this contract is not currently delivering value for money with low number of referrals and high overhead costs. The data suggests that the service currently only supports 3.1% of the adult autism community. The extension of this contract is therefore not the best use of financial resources for the council. However, as detailed in the decision paper, the equalities and impact assessment has highlighted that a gap in the service is a risk that would potentially impact on the wellbeing of current service users.

A review will be undertaken during the extension period to redesign and develop a service that is fit for purpose within the available funding.

### HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

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As identified in the EIHA under Appendix 1, the lapsing of the service will have an initial negative impact on the current service users. The services main offer is around peer support and social inclusion which gives adults with autism the opportunity to interact socially with other people with Autism with the aim of increasing their wellbeing and independence.

However, the service currently supports 3.1% of Havering's predicted adult autism community which indicates that the current investment will be an opportunity cost to other efficient services that serves the wider autistic population.

In addition, there are other communities and organisations offering peer support and social inclusion support that autistic residents can access (not exhaustive):

- Havering Association for Disabilities (HAD)
- Bridge of Friends Group
- Romford Autistic Group (RAGS)
- Havering MIND

It is crucial to provide service users a continuity of care which also prepares for a smooth transition into a new all-age service model whilst the commissioners appraise the options and develop a new all-age service model.

### **EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

An Equalities Health Impact Assessment (EHIA) is attached as Appendix A. This EHIA captures the risks and issues which has led to the recommendation to extend the contract for an additional 6 months.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

There are no Environmental and climate change implications and risks.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

### **APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix A</b>	<i>Equalities Health Impact Assessment</i>	<i>Open</i>
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**Part C – Record of decision**

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

**Decision**

Proposal agreed

**Details of decision maker**

Signed



Name: Councillor Gillian Ford

Cabinet Portfolio held: Adults and Wellbeing

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2023

**Lodging this notice**

The signed decision notice must be delivered to Committee Services, in the Town Hall.

**For use by Committee Administration**

This notice was lodged with me on \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_