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| 17 July 2024 | | ITEM: 12 Decision: 110727 |
| Cabinet | | |
| Unpaid Carers – Procurement for Carers’ Support, Information and Advice Service | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Key | |
| Report of: Councillor Mark Hooper – Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing | | |
| Accountable Assistant Director: Les Billingham, Assistant Director – Adult Social Care and Community Development | | |
| Accountable Director: Ian Wake, Executive Director for Adults and Health | | |
| This report is Public | | |
| Version: Final / Cabinet | | |

Executive Summary

An unpaid carer is defined as anyone who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, fragility, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction, and cannot cope without their support. The care given is unpaid.

Nationally, 1 in 5 people are currently identified as an unpaid carer, with more than 3 in 5 people having provided care to a loved one at some point. We have seen a 100% increase in demand locally on our current information, advice and support service in comparison to pre-pandemic numbers and this does not seem to be slowing.

With an increase in unpaid carers coming forward, it is becoming even more important to provide high quality information, advice and support services to unpaid carers that is person centred and meets their individual needs.

It is our statutory duty under the Care Act 2014 to provide an information and advice service for all unpaid carers to support them whilst preventing, reducing, or delaying the development of long term needs and to help them look after their own wellbeing.

The contract for the current service comes to an end on 31st March 2025 and requires re-tendering. This report outlines the details of the tender process and award of the new contract.

Commissioner Comment:

Commissioners have been consulted on the report and have made no comment.

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1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 **That Cabinet agree to proceed with a tender for the support, information, and advice service for unpaid carers, with contract commencing on 1st April 2025 for the duration of 6 years, with the option to extend for a further 2 years. The value of this contract, including the extended period, is £1.39M.**
- 1.2 **For Cabinet to agree that the award of the contract be delegated to the Executive Director for Adults and Health in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing.**

2 Introduction and Background

- 2.1 It is estimated that 10.6 million, or one in five people, are unpaid carers in the UK. It is also estimated that the value of unpaid care provided, is £193 billion a year, exceeding the cost of the NHS. During the pandemic it was clear the importance of supporting unpaid carers to continue their caring role, whilst ensuring their physical and mental health is prioritised.¹
- 2.2 The national data is not reflective for the Thurrock demographic due to lockdown restrictions at the time the census was undertaken, along with the recognised issues with wording contained within the census, the consequences of this is that the number of unpaid carers is not fully reflective in the census 21 data.
- 2.3 In line with the national picture, self-identification within Thurrock is a barrier to referral into the carers service. Nationally, 51% of unpaid carers say it took over a year to recognise themselves as an unpaid carer, with over a third (36%) taking more than three years to identify as an unpaid carer.²
- 2.4 Locally the number of unpaid carers in Thurrock is estimated to be 22,000. Thurrock has a unique demographic, due to the placement of two specialist schools, and as a consequence Thurrock has a higher-than-average percentage of parent carers, to children with highly complex needs.
- 2.5 Having seen a 100% demand on carers service, in comparison to pre-pandemic figures, the current provider supports on average 1,500 unpaid carers per year.
- 2.6 Nationally, unpaid carers say they are extremely worried about the future: 61% said they were uncertain about what practical support they might be able to access in the next 12 months. 40% of unpaid carers also indicated that they had not taken a break from their caring role in the last year.³
- 2.7 To ensure the needs of Thurrock's unpaid carers are met, it is recommended that the Council tenders for a service that provides support, information and advice to unpaid carers aged 18

¹ [State of Caring 2022 report | Carers UK](#)

² <https://www.carersuk.org/policy-and-research/our-areas-of-policy-work/identification/#:~:text=Our%20State%20of%20Caring%20Survey,recognise%20themselves%20as%20a%20carer.>

³ [State of Caring 2022 report | Carers UK](#)

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and over. The aim of this service is to support the unpaid carer to realise and release their potential, to achieve a well-rounded life outside of caring and to remain mentally and physically well. This will be achieved by ensuring that the specification is outcome focused and delivers quality support, information and advice services that meets the needs and outcomes of the individuals accessing them.

- 2.8 Thurrock will ensure that the Human Learning Systems (HLS) approach is applied to the service, ensuring that the individual needs of unpaid carers are at the heart of the support, information and advice offered. This will be achieved by the service being able to deliver solutions that wrap around the individual and that continuously learn and adapt in a flexible manner – ensuring that the best quality outcomes are met. The main elements of the HLS approach are as follows:
- The capacity to respond to human variation, recognising individual strengths and needs and how they are most effectively met by bespoke solutions, empowering staff to deliver and provide these.
 - The ability of the service to change and evolve, whilst using learning to adapt.
 - The ability to shape the chaos within the system through collaboration and influencing. Building relationships, increasing visibility and emotionally intelligent engagement with residents is helpful in shaping how people and services relate to one another.
- HLS is central to our Integrated Care Strategy (The Case for Further Change), which reflects the direction of travel for the Council's Operating Model, and is key to ensuring the best outcomes for people, which also means that it secures the best use of resources.
- 2.9 In keeping with Thurrock's Adult Integrated Care Strategy, the service will organise itself around and respond to Thurrock's localities, organising local health and care, where it makes sense to do so, into four geographical areas based on footprints of Primary Care Networks. Shifting to a place-based approach is fundamental to our Integrated Care Strategy and is the ambition for how the vast majority of health and care in Thurrock is organised. The Council is looking to reflect a locality-based approach within its new Operating Model.
- 2.10 In response to the post pandemic growth in local demand, an increase in unpaid carers reporting mental ill health nationally, and a general need to refresh our understanding of issues faced by unpaid carers, Thurrock engaged Healthwatch Thurrock to undertake an independent review in 2022. Healthwatch Thurrock reached out to hundreds of unpaid carers to seek and capture their views of the service, what was going well and what could be improved upon. It was important to ensure that lived experience shaped improvements to Thurrock's carer service.
- 2.11 The report clearly captured the views and needs of the unpaid carers locally, so much so that it was agreed at Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Board that this report would not just inform but become the body of Thurrock's Unpaid carers' strategy with the addition of a robust action plan, developed alongside unpaid carers and partner agencies.
- 2.12 The Healthwatch report highlights the areas requiring improvement, especially those issues and concerns brought about by the pandemic. The strategy and action plan set out aims to improve the experiences and lives of unpaid carers in Thurrock. The report stated that unpaid carers receiving support from the current Thurrock carers service, found that it was useful and contributed to allowing them to continue their caring role. Overall views and feelings gathered

from the Healthwatch report evidences the importance of a good quality support, information, and advice service for unpaid carers.

- 2.13 Much like the Unpaid Carers Strategy and action plan, the service specification is being co-produced to ensure the support, information and advice received is reflective of the needs of unpaid carers locally. Ensuring throughout the life of the contract that we remain connected with the unpaid carers in our community therefore allowing the delivery of the contract to also be co-produced.
- 2.14 Whilst this report details the proposal around adult carers, both the Healthwatch report and the Thurrock's Unpaid Carers Strategy and action plan, are 'All Age'. These documents provide evidence of our commitment to working together with Children's services to deliver our strategy and support young adult carers in a seamless transition into their adulthood.
- 2.15 Research suggests that as many as two children in each classroom, on average, will be a young carer. As such, Thurrock provides or commissions several services to support young carers to minimise the impact of their caring role. These include.
- Support within the Family Hubs for Child Carers (aged under 8)
 - The Young Carers service (8 to 18 years old) is run by Carers Centre SA (formerly Carers of Barking and Dagenham)
 - The Young Carers service also works in partnership with the Adult Carer Service to provide peer support activities to young carers transitioning to becoming an adult carer.
- 2.16 "No Wrong Doors for Young Carers" is a template Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) designed to improve joint working between adult and children's social care services, Integrated Care Boards (ICB) and other key organisations in respect of identification and support for young carers and their families. It covers a range of areas such as identification, whole-family approaches to support and transitions from children to adult services.
- 2.17 No Wrong Doors was first published in 2009 and refreshed in 2015. It was a formal agreement between the Director of Adult Social Care and the Director of Children's Social Care. Its aim was to promote joint working between the departments so that young carers and their families could access seamless support.
- 2.18 In Thurrock, both departments adopted the MoU and have since strived for a joined-up approach to young carers including continued ASC representation at the Young Carers Strategy Group, the recent refresh of an agreed process for young carers transitioning from children's to adult services, a peer support group for transitioning young carers run jointly by the young carers and adult carers support services and joint promotion events on Carers Rights Day and Carer Awareness Day.
- 2.19 The Council will ensure, through continued co-production and engagement activities on an 'All Age' basis, that the service specification is not only reflective of what unpaid carers need, but that it also sets out a clear requirement to increase the identification of unpaid carers that are not currently known, expanding the Council's reach and the support, information and advice that is available.

- 2.20 One of the main improvements identified through the strategy development process was the identification of carers and improved working across health and social care. In addition, research undertaken by The Health Foundation in 2023⁴ found that less than 7% of carers are known to both health and social care i.e. we have very little cross over. An opportunity arose for Adult Social Care (ASC) to bid for Accelerated Reform Funding on behalf of the system to fast-track this improvement.
- 2.21 Thurrock seeks to expand the reach of unpaid carers supported, by utilising the Accelerating Reform Fund (ARF⁵) to undertake the following activities to test and learn. The provider will work closely with the local authority to roll out these activities and ensure that the project aims for unpaid carers are met and later unstilled in their business as usual:
- Undertake a project in collaboration with Southend City Council and Mid and South Essex Integrated Care Board (MSE ICB) leads, to implement a process with GPs and local carer organisations for identification and support of unpaid carers.
 - The circulation and promotion of the 'Think Carers' approach, providing professionals and the public literature and printed information to help identify unpaid carers and how to signpost to relevant support.
 - Provide a resource to the Complex Housing Intervention Programme (CHIP), to identify and support unpaid carers, caring for someone with complex needs. Providing person-centred and specialist signposting, be creative in support provision available and be flexible to meet the needs of the unpaid carer identified.
- 2.22 We anticipate that this will also lead to shared carer contingency planning documentation across health and social care, which will in turn result in more seamless support for unpaid carers. If there is capacity within the project, we will also seek to introduce a consistent emergency card across the greater Essex area to aid identification of carers by emergency service partners who work on this larger footprint.
- 2.23 These initiatives will help not only identify a greater number of unpaid carers but will help with greater understanding of developing needs within the community. The learning from these projects will be used by the Council and partner organisations to inform commissioning activities in the future and shape the solutions available to unpaid carers.
- 2.24 This contract's purpose is to provide solutions, as opposed to services, and therefore it is expected that the provider will link with existing assets in the community, joining up with other services when necessary to ensure demand can be met and person-centred solutions are available. Some examples of what the provider will be expected to deliver are:
- Provide and develop support that is personalised for both the carer and cared-for person.
 - Undertake carers assessments and contingency plans on behalf of the local authority.
 - Provide support aimed at improving carers wider well-being including increasing the number of carers accessing employment, education, and volunteering opportunities.
 - Develop and facilitate carer support groups in accordance with carer requirements.
 - Support the transition to peer led support groups when appropriate.

⁴ The Health Foundation, *Can you tell we care?* <https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-11/Can%20you%20tell%20we%20care.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/accelerating-reform-fund-for-adult-social-care/accelerating-reform-fund-for-adult-social-care-guidance-for-local-authorities>
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- Identify unknown carers, providing them with appropriate support, information, and advice.
- Provide a response tailored to the individual wherever possible.

- 2.25 In addition to the above deliverables, we will expect and support the provider to ensure the provision is well advertised, so that carers know who provides the service and what support they provide. Raising awareness for the invaluable work unpaid carers do will directly support the provider to support carers effectively in their caring journey. They will work together with other local organisations and stakeholders to increase their reach and work to embed the service within the local community.
- 2.26 The recommendation is to tender for a 6-year contract (with the option to extend for a further 2 years, in yearly increments). With this approach, providers will be able to better plan resources, be more attractive when recruiting staff and build a presence in the community where they work. This provides continuity of services within localities, allowing providers to really shape and develop their provisions to meet the very best outcomes for unpaid carers. It will allow the provider to form impactful and lasting relationships with unpaid carers, enabling them to provide a personalised service. By having continuity of a worker to contact, the unpaid carer is less likely to have to repeat their story when accessing support, this was captured as issue for many.
- 2.27 The contract will include a break clause at the halfway point, to ensure either party can end the contract on a no-fault, mutual basis, in addition to usual termination clauses This will minimise any risk posed by longer contract lengths.
- 2.28 During the duration of the contract yearly reviews will be undertaken to ensure that the service is responding adequately to demand, along with proportionate quarterly performance metrics. In addition to this monitoring the Commissioning Team will meet with the provider regularly to identify, understand and implement learning as part of a 'commissioning for learning' approach.
- 2.29 The recommendation is to seek competitive bids to fully test the market to ensure value for money. Due to the nature of the service and the importance of the unpaid carer, the quality of the service must be paramount. We therefore propose the following weighting: Quality 50%, Social Value 10%, Price 40%. Providing a service to carers that enables them to care for longer is a significant 'invest to save'. One of the key reasons for individuals requiring care from the Council is due to carer breakdown. Looking after carers is an essential element of managing demand and preventing, reducing and delaying the need for care and support.
- 2.30 The estimated contract value, based on current yearly spend is £152k per annum. With assumed inflation increases throughout an 8 year contract, the total is estimated to be £1.39m. – See *appendix A for breakdown*.

3 Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The current Support, Information and Advice service will be coming to an end on 31st March 2025. This service is statutory, as no further extension on the current contract with Thurrock and Brentwood MIND can be made, a tender process must be undertaken.

3.2 Option 1 - Do Nothing (not permitted)

3.2.1 The current contract ends on 31st March 2025. It is a statutory requirement of the council to provide a Support, Information and Advice service to unpaid carers. Doing nothing is not an option.

3.3 Option 2 - Tender with a declared price (not recommended)

3.3.1 Whilst a declared price may be preferable if going for a short-term contract length, it is clear from feedback from providers that with rising costs and market sustainability, the preferred option across the market is longer contract lengths. It is clear from the Healthwatch report carried out, that stability of support is a priority for unpaid carers.

3.3.2 Providers will be expected to operate the service in a different way than is currently provided, moving towards a HLS approach and embedding locality working, therefore historical pricing may not be a reflection of future activity.

3.3.3 The risk of declaring a price, is the potential impact on interest and bids from good quality providers. In addition, it is a necessary point in time to test the market to ensure that contracts are being priced competitively, due to the lack of local and national data to inform accurate pricing.

3.4 Option 3 - A competitive process (recommended)

3.4.1 A competitive process, opposed to a declared price is recommended. This means that those tendering for the contract will be asked to cost the activities set out in the specification. (Bidding for the total value).

3.4.2 It is recommended that the contract will be re-tendered for 6 years (with the option to extend on a yearly basis, for up to two years). This approach will build stability and will allow providers to form impactful and lasting relationships with unpaid carers, providing continuity to the community by embedding their service within localities and therefore allowing for a more person-centred experience.

3.4.3 Whilst achieving value for money is a priority, the best way to achieve this is to focus on quality as supporting carers helps to prevent, reduce, and delay greater levels of formal support within the system. Carer breakdown is one of the most common ways in which people end up requiring support from Adult Social Care

Governance and Procurement Timetable:

| Task | When |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Publish tender | 2 nd September 2024 |
| Tender closing | 11 th October 2024 |

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| Evaluation (inc. interviews if required) | 14 th Oct – 8 th Nov 2024 |
| Notification of outcome | 11 th November 2024 |
| Standstill | 12 th – 21 st November 2024 |
| Award | 22 nd November 2024 |
| Handover / TUPE | December 2024 – March 2025 |

4 Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The contract with the current provider (Thurrock and Brentwood MIND) is coming to an end on 31st March 2025 and cannot be extended further.
- 4.2 The support, information and advice service is a statutory duty under The Care Act 2014.

5 Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Extensive consultation was carried out by Healthwatch Thurrock for the purpose of strategy development, speaking with hundreds of unpaid carers. The health needs of those being cared for varied and a diverse range of respondent views were captured.
- 5.2 An independent steering group is being led by Healthwatch, consultation around the tender process and specification shaping, from those with lived experience and partner agencies are being undertaken and captured.
- 5.3 Those with lived experience will form part of the tender evaluation process.

6 Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The carers' Support, Information and Advice Service impacts on the following Council priorities;

People – a borough where people of all ages are proud to work and play, live and stay.

Prosperity – a borough which enables everyone to achieve their aspirations.

7 Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Assistant Director Corporate and Strategic Finance

15/04/2024

The financial implications of this report for a 6 year initial contract with a 2 year extension.

The annual values of the contract are as follows:

| Year Commencing | Increase % | Annual Value with Inflation |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2025/26 | 3% | £161,960.83 |
| 2026/27 | 2% | £165,200.05 |
| 2027/28 | 2% | £168,504.05 |
| 2028/29 | 2% | £171,874.13 |
| 2029/30 | 2% | £175,311.61 |
| 2030/31 | 2% | £178,817.84 |
| 2031/32 | 2% | £182,394.20 |
| 2032/33 | 2% | £186,042.08 |
| Total Contract Value | | £1,390,104.79 |

For the total duration of the contract, including the extension period, the total value equates to £1.39Million.

There is an allocated budget of £0.161m with the Adult Social Care and Health directorate for the contact costs, therefore there are no variations required to the existing budget, which was set in accordance with the initial contract sum for 2024/25.

The annual inflation increases have been made in line with the assumptions contained with the Councils Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The MTFS makes allowance for contract inflation, and the annual increase will be contained within that allocation

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Kevin Molloy**
Principle Solicitor Contract Team
11/04/2024

Following issue by the Council of a s114 notice, the Council must ensure that its resources are not used for non-essential spending. Under section 1 of the Carer Act 2014, the Council has a general duty to promote an individual's general wellbeing, for people in their local area. The Council may also in any circumstances where the Care Act does not apply, rely on its power in s.1 of the Localism Act 2011 to do anything an individual may do (the general power of competence) to commission this service. It is advised that none of the limitation on this power in s.2 to 4 apply to prevent the use of the power. It is advised that the use of the power, as set out in the report, is rational exercise of the power.

The contract at issue here is essential and the provision of it a statutory duty under legislation. The value of the proposed contract will be above the threshold at which the relevant provisions of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 apply. Therefore, this contract award will need to be conducted in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Public Contract Regulations 2015, and in accordance with its own internal procurement rules. This proposed method outlined above is a compliant route to market and would comply with the rules referred to above. Officer should ensure Legal Services are kept informed as they progress through the procurement.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities
18/04/2024

A CEIA has been undertaken alongside this report, it has been reviewed by the Diversity and Equality Team and updated accordingly. Please refer to CEIA located in section 9, Appendix B.

The contract will achieve additional social value benefits for residents to improve equality outcomes.

The CEIA will be reviewed by the steering group and any material changes will be updated.

We are committed to reviewing the CEIA as part of the ongoing development and implementation of our Unpaid Carers Strategy

7.4 Risks

N/A

7.5 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children

N/A

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

State of Caring 2022 - [State of Caring 2022 report | Carers UK](#)

Unpaid Carers Strategy - <https://www.thurrock.gov.uk/adult-care-strategies-and-plans/unpaid-carers-strategy>

9. Appendices to the report

Appendix A - Estimated Contract Value

Appendix B – Community Equality Impact Assessment

Report Author:

Hayley Bird

Commissioning Manager

Adults, Housing & Health