



REPORT TITLE: Procurement of the contract for the provision of post-diagnostic community autism support

Cabinet Date	19 July 2023
Cabinet Member	Cllr Carole Allaway-Martin, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care Commissioning
Key Decision	Yes
Purpose of Report	To seek approval to conduct a competitive tender process and award a contract for the delivery of the Community Autism Support and Advice (CASA) Service
Recommendations	<p>That Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Integration, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care Commissioning to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Conduct a competitive procurement process in respect of a contract for the supply of a Community Autism Support and Advice service. The proposed contract shall continue for an initial period of 5 years and include an option to extend its term for a further period of not more than 2 years;b) Award such contract to the preferred tenderer; andc) Determine whether to exercise the option to extend the contract for a further period of not more than 2 years on the expiry of the initial 5-year term.

<p>Reasons for Recommendations</p>	<p>To allow the continued delivery of specialist community Autism service following the end of the current contractual arrangement.</p> <p>The CASA Service is open to adults (18+), young persons aged 17 years who are in transition from children and young people’s services ordinarily resident in Gloucestershire with a diagnosis of autism (with the exception of the community drop ins which are open to those without formal diagnosis). A central point of contact will operate for referrals leading to a triage appointment (either in person, via telephone, or through digital/online options), and may be received through a wide range of sources including, the Autism Diagnostic Service, GPs, Carers, and self-referral.</p> <p>The aims of the Service are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information, advice, and guidance to support individuals have as meaningful, high quality and unrestrictive a life as possible. • Support individuals and their families to understand Autism. • Support local services to increase their understanding of Autism and make reasonable adjustments. • Providing 1-1 support, delivering a person-centred and personalised approach which enables individuals to increase opportunities for social inclusion within their local community. • Support and empower individuals to become self-sufficient, whilst continuing to be available for less intensive support. • Provide Peer Support networks where appropriate.
<p>Resource Implications</p>	<p>The current service provision has been resourced at £100k per annum throughout the term of the current contract. Service provision has responded to increased demand and inflationary cost pressures within budget and there will be expectations that it will continue to do this throughout the new contracting period.</p> <p>The cost of providing the Service will be met from within existing budgetary resources and will be £100,000 per annum.</p> <p>The maximum budget is £700,000 if the optional two-year extension is taken up.</p> <p>Options for budget reduction have been considered and it is recommended that the service continues to be contracted within the current budget.</p>

Background Documents	Gloucestershire's All-Age Autism Strategy 2018 – 2021 Autism support Think Autism National Disability Strategy 2021 National Strategy for autistic children, young people and adults: 2021 to 2026. #YourVoiceMatters – Learning Disability & Autism Strategic Needs Analysis Individual Cabinet Member Decision (10/09/2018): Re-commissioning of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Service
Statutory Authority	Care Act 2014 Health and Social Care Act 2012 Equality Act 2010 Autism Act 2009
Divisional Councillor(s)	All
Officer	Karl Gluck Head of Integrated Commissioning for Adult Mental Health, Advocacy and Autism, 0300 421 1550 kgluck@nhs.net
Timeline	ITT – October 2023 Award Decision – December 2023 Commencement of new Service – April 2024

Background

- 1) It is nationally estimated that 1% of the population have autism¹. In line with Gloucestershire's demographic, this means approximately 4,918 people (children and adults) are predicted to have autism in the county. The population of Gloucestershire is expected to rise by 13.1% between 2017-2035, with data suggesting that the number of autistic people will rise to around 5,563. However, research has suggested that the prevalence could be double (i.e., almost 2% of the population).
- 2) There are currently 370 autistic adults diagnosed in receipt of a social care package of support, and currently 12 diagnosed autistic adults in receipt of ICB funded packages.
- 3) There are 1,850 autistic people identified within primary care records, receiving additional support from their GP.
- 4) The Autism Act 2009 states that there must be a government strategy for improving services for autistic adults, which is underpinned by legally binding guidance to local authorities. The Act's main aim is to address the multiple social disadvantages and health and care inequalities autistic adults face in our society.
- 5) The latest National Autism Strategy (2021-2026) extends the scope to children and young people with an aim to improving the lives of autistic people and their families/carers. It aligns with the existing statutory guidance on implementing the Autism Act for local authorities and NHS organisations to support implementation of the National Adult Autism Strategy (2015). This sets out local authorities' and NHS organisations' duties to support autistic adults and remains in force, which means that local systems should continue to deliver on existing requirements, including having an active Autism Partnership Board, which Gloucestershire has in place.
- 6) The current Autism Service was introduced after existing resources were refocussed to meet increased demand for an adult's autism-only community support service. It provided an alternative approach to service delivery, designed to both increase community provision and provide a more sustainable approach for autistic adults. Post-diagnostic support for autistic individuals was identified as the highest strategic priority for Gloucestershire in the previous All-Age Autism Strategy 2018 – 2021.
- 7) This approach continues to be consistent with the local strategic direction and in line with the 'Gloucestershire's All Age Autism Strategy (2022 – 2026)' in particular: Theme 4 (tackling health and care inequalities for autistic people) and Theme 5 (building the right support in the community). This local Strategy identifies the aspiration of improving support for autistic adults in Gloucestershire, by developing resilient communities, activities, interventions, and services which focus on the person and provide joined up care.

1. The NHS Information Centre, Community and Mental Health Team, Brugha, T. et al (2012). Estimating the prevalence of autism spectrum conditions in adults: extending the 2007 Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey. Leeds: NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care.

- 8) The current service includes:
 - One-to-One Support Sessions for those diagnosed with Autism.
 - Advice, support and signposting to community resources and activities in Gloucestershire.
 - Support for mainstream services to deliver reasonable adjustments for Autistic people.
 - Peer-to-peer support.
 - Training where appropriate.
 - Drop in Service, which is accessible to those without a formal diagnosis of autism and include those on the waiting list for a formal diagnosis.
- 9) The current service has been in place for 5 years. The Service has an average of 122 new referrals per year, with an average of 280 active cases in receipt of one-to-one support. It continues to demonstrate both qualitative and quantitative positive outcomes via Autism Star Scale and case studies.
- 10) The service provides support, advice and guidance to autistic adults and their families. The service is countywide and provides pre and post diagnostic support via a wide range of interventions, The one-to-one service is for those with a diagnosis of autism; and living in Gloucestershire and/or registered with a GP. It is recognised, however, that the current diagnostic wait-times are high, and there is an unmet need for those currently waiting diagnosis or those who self-diagnose as autistic. There are therefore accessible drop ins across the county that are open to anyone who self-identifies and requires peer-to-peer support.
- 11) There is no contractual right to extend the current contract which will come to an end on 31st March 2024. Accordingly, it will be necessary to re-procure service provision if the service is to be maintained.
- 12) To support the development of our commissioning proposals for the Autism service, a review of the current service was carried out. This included:
 - A coproduced client survey with those lived experience which was available online and in a hardcopy.
 - An online Staff Survey
 - Visit to drop ins across the county to inform how the service is run in localities and ensure factors around geographical locations are considered going forward.
 - Utilising contract monitoring data from the current provider.
- 13) The findings of this evaluation are provided in the Engagement Report attached as an appendix to this report.
- 14) A public engagement survey was also carried out, with respondents ranging from autistic individuals, carers and families, and professionals. As well as this, a review recent local research and engagement exercises on community Autism services was carried out. This was supplemented with further engagement with stakeholders and partners to understand local priorities for autism.

- 15) As a result of this work, the recommissioned service will be better placed to accommodate the anticipated increase in need. It is expected this service will work closely with other workstreams and key partners.

Options

- 16) The following options have been considered:
- 17) Option 1: to de-commission the service. Whilst this option would create a saving to the County Council of £100,000 per annum, this option was assessed and rejected. Failure to commission such support on a longer-term basis would remove what is now seen as a key source of information, advice and post-diagnostic support for autistic adults and their families and risks increasing pressures on the wider health and social care system thus likely to increase expenditure in other areas. It also risks the County Council not fulfilling its statutory responsibilities to support autistic people.
- 18) Option 2: to re-commission the current service and maintain the status quo by recommissioning in line and dependent upon the Community Advice Links Mental Health and Support (CALMHS) Service. This option was assessed and rejected. The emerging changes in the legislative landscape will move away from autism being defined as a mental disorder, and it is therefore important that the service is reflective of that and recommissioned independent of the community mental health provision. Moreover, our public engagement on post-diagnostic autism support, as well as evaluation of the current service has indicated strong support for this proposal.
- 19) Option 3: to reduce the service budget by 10% or 25% and thus creating a saving to the County Council. This option was assessed and rejected due to the increased demand on the autism-based service as well as the impact of the emerging changes to legislative landscape. A reduction in budget will have significant impact on service delivery within a small provision. Staffing costs current equates to 75% of the overall service budget, and thus a loss of 10% or 25% to the overall budget will significantly reduce the contribution to staff time and the ability to delivery all aspects of the service. It is likely that due to the demand for 1-1 support, the budget reduction will impact the current countywide drop-in sessions. This serves as an important peer-support function that enables individuals to access support who are currently waiting for a diagnosis or self-diagnose. The removal of this early intervention support which people can access whilst waiting long periods for a diagnosis, will increase the strain on primary care as well as other health and social care services. In addition, the service will no longer be a viable option for the market, following intelligence from the market engagement event. This will therefore lead to the service not being successfully recommissioned, leading to the same impact and risks attached to decommissioning the service referenced above in option 1.
- 20) Option 4: to re-procure and restructure the service to meet current population needs to meet increased demand, as a standalone service. This is the recommended option due to the increased demand on the autism-based service as well as the impact of the emerging changes to legislative landscape. There are

also distinct advantages from commissioning a bespoke standalone autism service compared to relying on mental health and/or mainstream services, including the ability to embed the service within local care pathways, in particular the autism diagnostic pathway, as well as providing tailored support and signposting. Furthermore, it will continue to meet the highest strategic priority for autistic people and their families Gloucestershire. The service will also maintain close links with the newly commissioned Mental Health support and Advice Service (currently known as CALMHS referenced above) to ensure there are appropriate pathways to mental health support for Autistic people, as well as robust links with the local Carers Services.

Risks

- 21) Procurement risk is minimised as a market engagement exercise took place to ensure that the proposal is viable. The procurement process will also be fully compliant with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015.
- 22) There is an external risk in that there is significant public interest in relation to autism. There is a risk that reconfiguration/procurement could lead to challenge and/or delays if not managed correctly. This will be mitigated through a well-managed procurement and implementation.
- 23) If the procurement is unsuccessful or doesn't meet the needs required, there is a real risk of impact to individuals' mental health and wellbeing. This will be mitigated through a well-managed procurement and implementation.

Financial implications

- 24) The 7-year contract for the autism Service (inclusive of the two-year extension option) will have a total maximum value of c£700k. This is based on a maximum budget available.
- 25) Options for budget reduction of both 10% and 25% have been analysed and considered and it is recommended that the service be contracted within the current budget due to the impact and risk these reductions impose.

Climate change implications

- 26) The impact of a locally based service and part remote provision (i.e., delivered by phone, webpage and video conferencing) would be low. We will liaise with Climate Change leads at the Council as we develop the service specification and build consideration of environmental impacts into our approach to social value.

Equality implications

- 27) Has an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) been completed? Yes / No
- 28) Cabinet Members should read and consider the Equalities Impact Assessment in order to satisfy themselves as decision makers that due regard has been given.

Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) implications

- 29) A DPIA will be required for this due to the number individuals this service will cover over the lifetime of the contract, and the personal/special category data that will need to be processed. This DPIA will be completed prior to any further procurement exercise to ensure that due consideration is given to Data Protection throughout the commissioning of the new Service.

Social value implications

- 30) The procurement exercise in respect of the Service will include social value as one of the criteria when evaluating submissions. Based on the National TOMs (Themes, Outcomes and Measures) developed by the Social Value Portal tool that the Council uses to evaluate social value in delivery, tenderers will be required to propose credible targets against which their performance will be monitored.

Consultation feedback

- 31) An evaluation exercise was carried out of the existing Service, with individuals currently accessing the service and the staff team. The findings are provided as part of an evaluation report in **Appendix 1**.
- 32) To also support with the recommissioning of the Service, review of recent local research (e.g., Healthwatch) and previously completed engagement on post-diagnostic support via the Autism Partnership Board was carried out.
- 33) Due to the increased awareness of autism on a both national and local level, it was decided to conduct a public engagement survey from May to June 2023. The survey was available to complete anonymously online, and was promoted via several channels, including targeted social media posts; and distributed to a range of local organisations and stakeholder groups. There were 81 respondents, which ranged from autistic individuals, professionals as well as carers and wider circle of support. A report of these findings is attached as **Appendix 2**.
- 34) A market engagement was held on 23 May 2023, where there were 37 expressions of interest. The event gave further information about the Autism Service Contract in Gloucestershire, prior to tender advertising and the recommissioning process. Additional clarity was provided in relation to the elements of the contract, proposed to continue, which are:
 - 1-to-1 support
 - Peer to peer support
 - Information, support and guidance
 - Training and Advice around reasonable adjustments
- 35) The engagement work has found that the demand for an autism-only service has only increased during the contract term. Moreover, due to the emerging changes to the legislative landscape, it is imperative that the Service works closely with

existing commissioned services in the county and other providers of primary, secondary, and community-based support.

- 36) All the consultation work undertaken will be considered and shape the specification for the new Service going forward.

Officer recommendations

- 37) Discussions have taken place with support services, including but not limited to legal, procurement, finance and communications about the above proposals and potential risks.

Performance management/follow-up

- 38) The Service will be required to submit regular contract monitoring data to include activity reports against agreed indicators, and outcome data.