



## DECISION RECORD

<b>Service Reference Number</b>	CYPFS/2025/004
<b>Decision Maker</b> Pauline Turner - Corporate Director of Children Services	
<b>Delegated Authority</b> Officer exercising delegated powers pursuant to paragraph 18.1 of Part B of the constitution	
<b>Decision:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That approval is given to undertake a compliant procurement for a contract to deliver speech and language therapy for the Virtual School for the period 01 October 2025 until 30 September 2028 with an option to extend for up to a maximum of 2 x 12-month periods.</li> <li>2. The annual budget is £32,000.00 giving a total contract value is £160,000.00 over the full term of the contract including extension periods.</li> </ol>	
<b>Reasons for the Decision:</b> <p>Hull City Council's Virtual Schools Team has been utilising funding from the Department for Education to screen children and young people with a social worker for speech, language, and communication needs.</p> <p>This programme has been very successful in identifying children and young people that have speech, language, and communication needs. However, once a need has been identified, it has been reported that there was a significant delay in receiving support from the Humber Speech and Language Service.</p> <p>To prevent the delay, the Virtual Schools have spot purchased Bridge Speech and Language Therapy Services ("Bridge SLT"). Once the children and young people have been screened, Bridge SLT have been completing the assessments and providing an action plan for parent/carers and education settings to support the child or young person in the interim.</p> <p>Whilst this originally started at as a 'one-off' piece of work, the demand for this service has been growing. There is no contract in place for Bridge SLT, the Virtual School Business Manager has struggled to get invoices paid. A dispensation has been raised in the interim to alleviate this issue. As such, longer-term, formalised commissioning arrangements need to be considered.</p>	

The Catch Project and the Virtual School will continue to screen those children and young people that either become looked after or have a social worker. It is estimated that the future need, based on figures from the Virtual School, will be as follows:

	Yearly Spend	Number of Bridge SLT Assessments
Catch Project	£20,000	78
Virtual School	£12,000	47
Total	£32,000	125

Whilst it is not yet known if the Catch Project will continue past July 2025 due to a possible change in Government, there is an ongoing need within the Virtual School to continue to provide assessments for children looked after. The Virtual School have decided to allocate core funding to enable the continuation of delivery of the SLT.

The new contract will allow the screening all children and young people with a social worker to identify any speech, language, and communication needs, where there are not already identified needs.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) provides evidence that shows:

- There is a clear correlation between pupils who are more likely to have persistent and severe absence, and the prevalence of speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). This includes children living in areas of social disadvantage, pupils with SEND, those in alternative provision and those in touch with social care services.
- Speech and language therapists report that they are witnessing increased anxiety and Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) since the pandemic, especially in autistic children and young people, those who have social communication difficulties, or those with an anxiety disorder such as selective mutism.
- that children and young people who are more likely to have poorer attendance records are also more likely to have SLCN, there is a need to ensure that identification and support for SLCN is considered as part of the solution when considering responses to persistent absence. This should include training for education staff and improving access to the specialist workforce.

In Hull, the current project has screened a total of 554 children with a social worker. Of the children screened 46.5% have a moderate /severe speech, language and communication needs, with 26% showing severe deficits, showing a clear need for this service within Hull.

**Nature of Decision:**

**Non-Key**

**Exemptions**

Is the accompanying formal report (or other documentation where applicable) exempt? **No**

Reason the report (or other documentation) is exempt: **N/A**

### **Background and Supporting Information:**

In 2022, the Department for Education announced funding available for the Virtual School to support all children and young people with a social worker within education, known as the Catch Project.

In Hull City Council, this project has been used to support children and young people with their speech, language, and communication needs, which from previous research has shown to be an underlying issue.

Funded by the Catch Project, 26 schools had been given a 'Welcome back' screening kit, so they could screen children. However, schools were not completing correctly or did not complete at all. As such, a Pep Advisory Teacher was seconded to screen pupils. Where pupils are screened and as identified as high need, they are referred to Bridge SLT for an assessment, as well as the NHS for SLT support.

Bridge SLT have previously been utilised to support children and young people looked after, due to large waiting lists and children moving from area to area due to placement breakdown. This often would mean that children and young people would be on a waiting list, to move and then re-join a new list. The Virtual School began to commission Bridge SLT to resolve this issue and meet the needs of children and young people.

The Strategic Lead for Children with a Social Worker and PLAC previously utilised Bridge SLT as there was a service level agreement in place between the Virtual School and the provider.

This project has been expanded to train more of the staff from the Virtual School, specifically those under the Phase Leader: EYFS and Primary School. This team has been helping to complete the backlog of children in care; but starting from 27 May 2024, they will get new into care notifications and complete screening on those children and young people that are new into care. The Catch Project will focus on those particularly with a social worker

### Procurement Process

An open tender procedure shall be used under the Procurement Act 2023. It is anticipated that the value of this contract should not exceed current procurement contract value thresholds therefore a below threshold tender process shall be adhered to. Providers shall be invited to tender via the Authority's YORtender system (Mercell).

Tenders shall be evaluated in consultation with Procurement.

The tender documentation shall require suppliers to be able to demonstrate their ability, competency, and experience, in being able to deliver the requirements of the specification. To ensure this, appropriate Quality Questions will be incorporated into the Invitation to Tender (ITT) as tender evaluation and assessment criteria.

### **Equalities Impact Information:**

<p>An EIA screening tool shall be completed</p>	
<p><b>Contact Officer:</b> Janet Strong / James Keal</p>	
<p><b>Chief Officer Comments</b></p> <p><u>Comments of the Director of Legal Services and Partnerships (Monitoring Officer)</u></p> <p>The decision to procure a speech and language provider for the Virtual School is noted and supported. Speech and Language falls under the Provider Selection Regime due to being a healthcare service. The procurement will therefore need to be compliant with the Provider Selection Regime. The use of the procurement route is compliant with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. (PG)</p> <p><u>Comments of the Director of Finance and Transformation (Section 151 Officer)</u></p> <p>The Section 151 Officer notes the decision record and supports the proposed procurement subject to the budget setting process for 2025/26 and funding available within the council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) (JR)</p> <p><u>Comments of the Assistant Director of Organisation Development &amp; Human Resources and compliance with the equality act</u></p> <p>The content of the report is noted. There are no staffing issues arising from this decision which supports children with their development. KH</p> <p><u>Comments of the Portfolio Holder for Holder Children, Young People, Families and Learning</u></p> <p>I support this decision record to continue the Speech and Language offer within the Virtual School that is having a significant impact on children and young people. It is imperative that we continue to support children and young people with their speech, language, and communication needs and to further develop this work.</p> <p><u>Scrutiny Comments</u></p> <p>This decision has not been subject to pre-decision scrutiny. Ref: Sc8652 [MK].</p>	
<p><b>Exceptional Circumstances</b></p>	
<p>Is the decision record currently exempt from publication at the point of decision?</p>	<p><b>No</b></p>
<p>If yes, what date can the decision record be made public?</p>	
<p>Reason the decision record is exempt from publication at the point of decision:</p>	

<b>Signature of Decision Maker:</b>	
Signed: <b>Signature confirmed</b>	
Date signed: ... <b>20.03.25</b> .....	
<b>FOR COMPLETION BY THE SCRUTINY OFFICE:</b>	
Date published on CMIS:	<b>21/03/2025</b>
Can the decision be called in?	<b>Yes/No</b>
Date decision comes into force:	<b>21/03/2025</b>