Report to CABINET

Contract extension – Oldham Advocacy Service

Portfolio Holder: Not Appointed

Officer Contact: Jayne Ratcliffe, Director of Adult Social Care

Report Author: Kate Wrigley, Contracts and Quality Manager
Email: Kate.Wrigley@oldham.gov.uk

29 September 2026

Reason for Decision

To approve the extension of the current Oldham Advocacy Services contract in place with VoiceAbility for a further 1 year to 30th October 2027.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Director of Adult Social Services exercises the delegated authority previously approved by the Council to extend the existing contract with VoiceAbility for the delivery of Oldham Advocacy Services until 31 October 2027.

This extension will ensure continuity of statutory advocacy provision, maintain service stability for residents, and retain a provider that is currently delivering the required quality and performance standards. The extension will also allow sufficient time for the development and procurement of a new contract arrangement from 1 November 2027, while ensuring robust contract monitoring and performance oversight continue throughout the extension period.

Cabinet N/A
Emergency Powers 2nd November 2026

Contract extension – Oldham Advocacy Services

1 Background

Statutory Advocacy Services, through Voiceability's commissioning arrangements

1.1 The Council has a legal duty to ensure the availability of independent advocacy services to support adults who may experience difficulties participating in decisions about their care, treatment or wellbeing. Advocacy services play a critical role in enabling individuals to understand information, express their views, secure their rights and participate as fully as possible in decisions that affect their lives. The commissioning of advocacy services supports the Council to meet its statutory obligations, promotes person-centred practice and helps ensure compliance with wider duties under the Care Act 2014, Mental Capacity Act 2005, Mental Health Act 1983 and associated regulations.

1.2 **Care Act Advocacy**
Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities must arrange for an independent advocate where an individual would experience substantial difficulty in being involved in an assessment, care and support planning process, review, safeguarding enquiry or carer's assessment, and where there is no appropriate person available to support and represent them. Care Act Advocacy ensures that people remain at the centre of decision-making and that their wishes, feelings and outcomes are properly considered throughout statutory processes.

1.3 **Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA)**
The Council is also required to commission Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy (IMCA) services under the Mental Capacity Act 2005. An IMCA must be appointed in specific circumstances where a person lacks capacity to make a particular decision, has no appropriate family or friends to consult, and decisions are being made about serious medical treatment or long-term accommodation arrangements. IMCAs may also be instructed in safeguarding cases and care reviews where the legal criteria are met, ensuring that the person's rights and views are represented within best-interest decision-making processes.

1.4 **Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA)**
Under the Mental Health Act 1983, local authorities and health partners must ensure access to Independent Mental Health Advocacy (IMHA) services. IMHAs provide support to qualifying patients who are detained under the Mental Health Act, subject to Community Treatment Orders or certain guardianship provisions. The role of the IMHA is to help individuals understand their legal rights, participate in decisions regarding their care and treatment, and ensure their views are communicated effectively within mental health services.

1.5 **Relevant Person's Representative (RPR) and Paid Representative Advocacy**
The Council is additionally required to commission or secure access to Independent Mental Capacity Advocacy for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) cases, where eligible individuals are subject to authorisation arrangements and meet the statutory criteria. This advocacy function provides an important safeguard for individuals whose liberty is restricted,

ensuring that their rights are protected and that they are able to access support to challenge arrangements where appropriate.

1.6 The commissioning of advocacy services therefore represents a critical component of the Adult Social Care system, providing assurance that legal duties are met, people's rights are protected, and individuals are enabled to exercise choice, control and independence. Effective advocacy provision also supports the Council's wider ambitions around co-production, inclusion, safeguarding and the promotion of wellbeing across the adult population.

1.8 To meet the statutory duties, a tender process commenced via The Chest on 31st May 2023 for a maximum contract term for the period of 4 years i.e. initial 3 years with a 1 year extension provision. The maximum annual financial envelope for the tender was advertised at £720,000 for the maximum 4 year duration. The successful bidder identified from the competitive procurement exercise was VoiceAbility. Their submission price was £707,400 for the 4 year period, which is within the allocated budget. The contract commenced on 1st November 2023.

1.9 VoiceAbility provides support to individuals to ensure their voices are heard, with their views and choices expressed in decision making around their health and wellbeing, and to ensure they understand their rights. IMCAs, IMHAs, Learning Disability and Autism Advocates, Relevant Person Representatives are all provided by VoiceAbility through a single hub model.

2. Contract and Quality Monitoring

2.1 VoiceAbility produces quarterly reports which are reviewed by the Contracts and Quality Team considering the key themes, performance indicators, and any areas requiring attention. Quarterly meetings are held to explore the reports in greater depth, discuss emerging trends, and consider any actions or assurances needed.

2.2 The outcomes are measured under 3 themes:

- Quality of Life – '*Our clients are treated with respect and dignity. They are receiving the care, treatment or support they need and feel confidently independent*.'
- Rights – '*Our clients feel safe from harmful people and situations. They have sufficient knowledge of rights and how to use them and their rights are upheld*.'
- Voice and Control – '*Our clients feel listened to and are having their wishes or beliefs represented and considered. They understand available choices can access information and make decisions, and they can challenge, appeal or raise concerns about decisions*.'

2.3 The service has consistently demonstrated value for residents, throughout the length of the contract, by delivering measurable positive outcomes in quality of life, rights, and voice and control; ensuring access to independent advocacy; supporting individuals through safeguarding and care processes; and enabling vulnerable adults to have their views heard and their rights protected. The high levels of positive outcomes across all three themes provide evidence that the service is making a meaningful difference to residents' wellbeing, independence and ability to influence decisions affecting their lives.

2.4 In the latest monitoring information (Quarter 1 2026/27) data gathered in relation to the outcome measures above demonstrated:

- 91.6% of respondents reported either an improvement or no deterioration in their Quality of Life which suggests that residents are receiving the care, support and advocacy necessary to maintain or enhance their wellbeing, independence, dignity and overall life experience. For residents, this means they are more likely to feel respected, supported in achieving their personal outcomes, and able to live as independently as possible.
- 94% satisfaction for Rights demonstrates that residents are being supported to understand and exercise their legal and human rights. This is particularly valuable for vulnerable individuals who may otherwise struggle to challenge decisions, access services or protect themselves from abuse, neglect or discrimination. It indicates that advocacy support is helping to ensure residents remain safe and that their rights are upheld.
- 96.4% satisfaction for Voice and Control demonstrating that residents are being empowered to participate in decisions about their care and support, have their wishes and preferences heard, and understand the choices available to them. Increased voice and control can lead to more person-centred care and greater satisfaction with services.
- The service received 236 new enquiries during the quarter. IMHA accounted for the largest proportion of activity, with 126 enquiries (53.4%), reflecting the significant demand for statutory mental health advocacy across the borough. Both Care Act Advocacy and Relevant Person's Representative (RPR) services received 30 enquiries each (12.7%).
- Within Care Act Advocacy, support was most commonly provided for Section 42 Safeguarding Enquiries, Care & Support Planning, Care Needs Assessments and Care Reviews. The service also continued to deliver specialist General Advocacy, predominantly supporting individuals with learning disabilities, demonstrating the breadth of advocacy available to meet the needs of vulnerable adults across Oldham.
- Across the reporting period, VoiceAbility continues to demonstrate strong and consistent performance.

2.5 VoiceAbility have consistently met the expected contractual standards throughout the length of the contract. They take a proactive and reflective approach to maintaining quality within their service delivery. Their documentation is thorough and well-structured, staff practice remains professional and person-centred, and they respond promptly and effectively to any issues as they arise. Collectively, this reflects a stable, well-managed, and quality-driven provision that maintains a clear focus on safeguarding, advocacy standards, and positive outcomes for individuals.

2.6 In considering the recommendation to extent the contract, officers have assessed both service performance and the strategic risks associated with changing provider arrangements within a statutory advocacy service. Advocacy provision is a critical component of the Adult Social Care system, enabling the Council to discharge its duties under the Care Act 2014, Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Mental Health Act 1983. Any disruption to service delivery could impact the Council's ability to meet its statutory responsibilities and ensure vulnerable residents receive timely access to advocacy support. Extending the current arrangement provides assurance that these statutory services will

remain in place without interruption whilst long-term commissioning arrangements are developed.

2.7 VoiceAbility has established effective operational relationships with Adult Social Care, Mental Health Servies, safeguarding teams, health partners and other referring agencies across Oldham. These relationships support timely referrals, effective partnership working and positive outcomes for residents. Maintaining continuity of provision protects these established pathways and reduces the risks associated with provider transition, including potential impacts on referral management, workforce capacity, service quality and resident experience.

2.8 The performance information presented throughout the contract period demonstrates that VoiceAbility is delivery positive outcomes across the key domains of Quality of Life, Rights, and Voice and Control. Satisfaction and outcome measures consistently exceed 90%, providing evidence that residents are benefiting from the advocacy support provided and that the service us helping individuals to understand their rights, participate in decision-making and influence outcomes affecting their lives. This sustained performance provides confidence that the provider continues to deliver a high-quality service that meets the needs of Oldham residents.

2.9 The proposed extension will also provide sufficient time to undertake a comprehensive review of future advocacy requirements across Adult Social Care, taking account of changing demand, legislative developments, service pressures and opportunities for redesign. This work has commenced, to support with the 6 month procurement activity. This review work will enable commissioners to engage stakeholders, review service specifications, consider future commissioning models and undertake a robust procurement process for implementation from 1 May 2027, for new contractual arrangements to be in place by 1 November 2027. Extending the contract therefore represents a proportionate and pragmatic approach that balances service continuity, statutory compliance, value for money and effective future market planning.

2.10 Officers are satisfied that the proposed extension represents the option that presents the least operational and implementation risk to the Council whilst continuing to secure positive outcomes for residents. The extension maintains stability within a well-performing service, provides assurance regarding the continued delivery of statutory advocacy functions, and enables the Council to undertake a planned procurement exercise from a position of service strength rather than introducing avoidable disruption to a critical support service for some of the borough's most vulnerable residents.

3 Commissioning intentions

3.1 As this contract is due to expire following this extension request to 30th October 2027, the extension to the contract will allow sufficient time for Commissioning colleagues to carry out a tender exercise for this service.

4 Options/Alternatives

4.1 Option A – Approve the extension to the current contract from 1st November 2026. This would enable continuity of services with a provider that provides good quality services whilst meeting their contractual obligations.

4.2 Option B – Not to approve the extension and let the current contract expire on 30th October 2026. This would mean that a tender exercise would be required for the Oldham Advocacy Services contract which could not be successfully completed within the time frame before the contract expires.

5 Preferred Option

5.1 Option A is the recommended option because, as outlined above, this option supports the continuity of the service currently being provided with VoiceAbility enabling the council to fulfil statutory duties under the Care Act 2014. There are no concerns in relation to the contract delivery to date, with high levels of satisfaction and a positive working relationship in place with the provider.

6 Consultation

6.1 VoiceAbility has been made aware that an extension to the contract is currently being sought.

6.2 The Advocacy Services are delivered across all wards within Oldham.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 The current contract in place with VoiceAbility for the period 1st November 2026 to 30th October 2027 has a total cost of £176,850. All expenditure will be contained within the recurring annual budget established within the MTFS of £176,850 for VoiceAbility.

Andrew Pearson, Accountant.

8 Legal Implications

8.1 The proposal is lawful and complies with the Contract Procedure Rules. The contract was let under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 with express provision to allow for a one year extension. On this basis, pursuant to regulation 72(1)(a), the council may extend the contract.

Bryan Boese, Solicitor

9. Procurement Implications

9.1 Taking into consideration and on good faith, the context and detail contained in this report, along with the critical nature of this service and the commitment to retender, there are no restrictions to approving this extension.

Tom Pyne, Assistant Director: Procurement, Contract Management and Social Value

10 Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People

10.1 Not required

11 Key Decision

11.1 Yes

12 Key Decision Reference

12.1 Key Decision Refence is KDD-26-07

13 Background Papers

13.1 N/A

14 Appendices

N/A