

Record of Officer Decision

Re-procurement of Mental Health Helpline

Decision Taker and Date Decision Taken:

Director of Public Health on 18 March 2026.

Summary of Matter or Issue Requiring Decision:

The Mental Health Helpline had been operating on short term contracts since its inception by the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector in 2021 as a response to the COVID pandemic and the increasing needs for low level mental health and emotional wellbeing support.

On 16 September 2025 the Cabinet agreed that a procurement exercise for the provision of a mental health helpline be undertaken, and any subsequent contract was to be awarded in line with the Officer Scheme of Delegation (Paragraph 1.3).

The proposal sought to procure the service so that a new contract could commence with a longer-term, more stable financial basis. (The implementation timetable was changed from April to July 2026 following procurement advice to allow for Expression of Interest process to be completed prior to formal closed market procurement). The outcomes will ensure that there is maintained access to signposting, advice and low-level interventions for those people who present with emotional or mental wellbeing needs who do not meet thresholds for statutory mental health services.

Decision Taken:

That following the successful completion of a procurement exercise for the provision of a mental health helpline, that a contract is awarded to Age UK Torbay.

Summary of Reason(s) for Decision Taken:

Following the successful completion of a Most Advantageous Tender for Torbay, the decision to award the contract should be taken to allow continuation of the Service.

Summary of Alternatives or Options considered and rejected and Background Papers:

The alternatives considered were:

Do not procure any service - this option would provide cost savings to both public health and the Local Authority General Fund. However, it would erode any good work brought about by the contract to date, eradicating low level support for residents of Torbay which would likely, in turn, increase demand for and pressure on already stretched mental health (and potentially social care) services. The likelihood was that this would decrease productivity in the communities affected due to time off or inability to work due to unsupported mental health issues. This option was discounted.

Procure a service with a reduced cost basis - this option would also provide cost savings to either or both public health and the Local Authority General Fund. It would however reduce the impact and effectiveness of the service. Cost saving was not the desired outcome in this process and funding had been secured and baselined in both the general fund and public

health budgets. Depending on the value of the reduction in funding the impact on both effectiveness and outcomes, would be proportionate to the reduction. Therefore, this option was discounted.

Procure the service on a like for like basis - this option would not cost more money than was already agreed in the baseline spend for both the General Fund and the Public Health Grant. The gains made through supporting the service to date could be maintained, it would most likely allow the voluntary sector capacity to obtain sustained, longer term secure funding. This was the preferred option.

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Details of any conflict of interest and dispensation granted to the Officer taking the decision or by any Member of the Council in delegating responsibility for any specific express delegation:

None

Implementation:

Procurement was completed in February 2026 and will be implemented from April 2026 once necessary standstill periods are complete.

The new contract will commence from 01 July 2026 as per revised procurement timelines.

A copy of this decision and any supporting documentation considered by the Officer taking this decision may also be available for inspection by the public at the Council's offices or posted upon payment of any copying and postage charges. Any member of the public wishing to take up either of these options is asked to please ring (01803) 207087 or email governance.support@torbay.gov.uk

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Director of Public Health)