

**Report for:** Cabinet, 20 October 2026

**Item number:** 14

**Title:** Approval to procure an out of hours emergency contact handling service

**Report authorised by:** Barry Francis, Corporate Director of Environment and Resident Experience

**Lead Officer:** Debbie Penglis, Head of Customer Experience and Resident Support

**Ward(s) affected:** All wards

**Report for Key/  
Non-Key Decision:** Key Decision

## **1 Describe the issue under consideration**

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to commence a competitive procurement exercise for the provision of the Council's Out of Hours (OOH) Emergency Contact Handling Service from 1 June 2027. The service provides residents with access to urgent and emergency support outside normal office hours across housing, homelessness, social care, highways, environmental and emergency response functions.

## **2 Cabinet Member Introduction**

- 2.1 The Out of Hours (OOH) Emergency Contact Handling Service that this report seeks approval to procure is critical to ensuring residents can access support overnight or during weekends, whether for an emergency housing repair, an emergency homeless placement, a response to flooding or other emergencies.
- 2.2 The council operates multiple services outside of normal opening hours to keep residents and the community safe. An effective out-of-hours service is critical to ensure residents can access support overnight or at weekends and holidays in emergency situations. For example, repairs for dangerous faults, crisis homelessness placements, or responses to serious incidents, such as flooding.
- 2.3 With our current contract coming to an end, this report seeks approval to run a competitive procurement process for an Out of Hours (OOH) Emergency Contact Handling Service. Our aim is to identify a supplier able to offer the best balance of quality, cost, and social value to ensure we are providing the best help to residents in need of assistance out-of-hours.
- 2.4 I believe the proposed contract length provides service stability and improves the value for money available from suppliers. It also has the flexibility to end or extend after the initial three-year term for a period of up to two years.

- 2.5 As an administration, our preference is not to outsource services to private providers. We are seeking to build the foundations needed to move away from contracting large private firms by default. For different services this means exploring options to bring them in-house, share with other councils, or award contracts to smaller local and third sector providers.
- 2.6 For this service, call volumes are too low for it to be financially viable to run in-house. A workable model needs to span several councils, which is what private providers can offer. A preferred option would be shared with other councils, but in this instance, we could not identify another council to buy the service from.
- 2.7 While we will continue to explore options for shared services within the public sector in the future, given the importance of a functional service that best serves our residents, I support the case that it makes most sense to test the market. We will do this through a process that is as open and transparent as possible.

### **3 Recommendations**

- 3.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the commencement of a competitive procurement exercise for the provision of an Out of Hours Emergency Contact Handling Service from 1 June 2027.
- 3.2 Cabinet is recommended to approve a proposed contract term of three years, with an option to extend for up to a further two years, subject to satisfactory performance, continued business need and available budget provision.
- 3.3 Cabinet to note the estimated annual value of the contact as set out in Exempt Appendix A.

### **4 Reasons for decision**

#### **4.1 General**

- 4.1.1 The OOH service is a business-critical, resident-facing service that enables the Council to receive, triage and assign all urgent and emergency contacts made outside normal working hours to the relevant on-duty team or contractor. This includes evenings and overnight periods, weekends and bank holidays. The service helps protect resident safety by ensuring that urgent issues are routed appropriately, whilst protecting on-duty staff from receiving out of hours calls that do not meet the emergency criteria. The procured provider also forms part of the Council's wider business continuity arrangements by providing additional contact handling resilience for daytime services where required, including if the council's phonelines are disrupted, or during exceptional demand, emergency incidents or other circumstances where normal daytime contact routes are affected.
- 4.1.2 The service also enables the Council to meet statutory responsibilities that arise outside normal office hours, including duties under homelessness legislation to respond to households who may be homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need, and wider duties linked to safeguarding, emergency

accommodation, adult social care, children's services and civil contingency responses. Maintaining an effective OOH contact handling service is therefore necessary to ensure residents can access urgent Council support at the point of need and that statutory functions can be discharged without avoidable delay.

- 4.1.3 A competitive procurement is required to secure a compliant, value-for-money and sustainable longer-term service from June 2027, when the current contract with Capita expires.
- 4.1.4 Through the procurement the Council will review and where relevant strengthen the service specification, reconfirm operational pathways with service areas, establish a commercial performance management model, ensure that future provision reflects current and emerging resident needs, and ensure the contract allows for reduction of contract cost in line with any reductions of demand, likely to be facilitated by the council's introduction of a voice-based digital triage tool.
- 4.1.5 The recommended approach enables the Council to test the market, benchmark quality and pricing, secure best value, and promote stability through a longer-term contract.
- 4.1.6 Although the procurement process is being led by Customer Services, and the OOH supplier will continue to be contract managed by Customer Services, the cost of the contract will be met through the budgets of the three principal service areas that use the provision. These are Customer Services (General Fund), Homelessness (General Fund), and the Housing Repairs Service (Housing Revenue Account).

## **4.2 Current demand and future service requirement**

- 4.2.1 Existing service activity demonstrates that the OOH service continues to manage urgent resident contacts across a range of statutory and operational service areas, including housing repairs, homelessness, safeguarding, social care, environmental incidents, emergency planning and other urgent Council functions. This demand arises outside normal office hours and therefore requires a reliable contact handling and escalation service that can operate during evenings, nights, weekends and bank holidays.
- 4.2.2 Between October 2025 and June 2026, the OOH service recorded 16,874 contacts, averaging 1,875 per month and giving an annualised trajectory of approximately 22,500 contacts. This represents average demand of approximately 3.5 contacts per operating hour, although demand varies considerably across the week and during seasonal or emergency pressures. Around 88.5% of contacts were recorded against an actionable OOH service category, with approximately 11.5% categorised as general information. Further analysis of completed handoffs and escalation outcomes will inform the detailed specification and performance framework for the new contract.

- 4.2.3 Demand is expected to remain ongoing throughout the proposed contract period but will fluctuate due to seasonal pressures, housing demand, severe weather, emergency incidents and wider service pressures. The procurement project will request demand forecast scenarios from individual services, including predicted impacts from housing growth and climate change, so suppliers can model their resourcing and pricing accordingly. The procurement will therefore need to secure a provider with sufficient capacity, resilience and flexibility to respond to both routine out-of-hours demand and short-term peaks in urgent contact volumes.
- 4.2.4 For the purposes of this procurement approval report, demand is summarised at a high level to demonstrate the continuing business need and to support the proposed contract value and service model. Detailed historic, current and forecast demand data will be used to finalise the service specification, pricing schedule, performance framework and evaluation requirements issued through the procurement process.
- 4.2.5 The current contract has supported the continued delivery and active performance management of the Out of Hours service. The new procurement provides an opportunity to update the service specification so that it reflects current service needs and expected outcomes, including refreshed measures for call answering, response times, abandoned calls, service quality and resolution outcomes, supported by clearer and more consistent reporting requirements. Bringing this information together will provide a more complete view of demand, repeat contact, emerging issues and customer outcomes. This will enable the Council and the provider to identify priorities, agree evidence-based improvements and assess their impact. The updated specification will also provide clear and proportionate remedies where agreed performance standards are not met, including improvement plans, agreed timescales and follow-up monitoring. This will support prompt resolution, sustained improvement and the continued delivery of a reliable, consistent and accountable service for residents.

### **4.3 Proposed approach**

- 4.3.1 The Council will undertake a compliant procurement exercise for the future provision of the Out of Hours service. The procurement will be conducted in accordance with Contract Standing Orders, procurement governance requirements and applicable procurement legislation.
- 4.3.2 The final procurement route has not yet been determined and will be agreed with Strategic Procurement, Legal and Finance following completion of the procurement planning stage.
- 4.3.3 The tender documentation will include a refreshed service specification, pricing schedule, performance framework, mobilisation requirements, business continuity expectations, data and reporting requirements, escalation routes, accessibility requirements and contract management arrangements. The specification will also set out the circumstances in which the provider may be required to support business continuity for daytime services, including surge capacity and emergency contact handling should the council's phonelines suffer

unexpected interruption. The evaluation approach will include quality, price, social value, resilience, operational capability and mobilisation deliverability.

- 4.3.4 The proposed contract term is an initial three years from 1 June 2027, with an option to extend for up to a further two years. Any extension will be subject to satisfactory performance, continued business need, affordability and the Council's governance requirements at the relevant time.

#### 4.4 Financial implications

- 4.4.1 The competitive procurement process will enable the Council to test the market, benchmark pricing and identify any further value-for-money opportunities. Any pressures will be contained within the service. Additional finance comments appear in Exempt Appendix A.

#### 4.5 Supplier performance monitoring

- 4.5.1 The contract will include a clear performance management framework to ensure the supplier delivers a safe, responsive, accessible and resilient service throughout the contract term, including remedies for underperformance.
- 4.5.2 Performance indicators will include, where appropriate, call answer times, abandoned call rates, call handling quality, resident experience, complaints, accuracy of triage, correct use of allocation and escalation to on-duty council staff and contractors, speed of work allocation and escalation, accessibility standards compliance, and incident response timescales. These measures will be reviewed and finalised as part of the procurement documentation.
- 4.5.3 Existing performance, complaints and feedback data will be reviewed as part of the procurement preparation process to identify service strengths, issues, and areas for improvement. This analysis will inform the final service specification, key performance indicators, quality standards, escalation requirements and contract management arrangements for the new contract.
- 4.5.4 Supplier performance will be monitored through regular contract management meetings, review of management information, operational feedback from service areas, incident reviews and periodic service improvement discussions.

#### 4.6 Key risks and mitigations

| Risk                                                                        | Mitigation                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Limited market interest results in insufficient competition</b>          | Early market engagement, robust specification, use of an appropriate compliant procurement route                                                                                       |
| <b>Procurement timetable slips, affecting mobilisation before June 2027</b> | Clear procurement timetable, named project ownership, regular governance review, early preparation of tender documents and mobilisation planning built into the procurement timetable. |

|                                                                   |                                                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Procurement does not deliver anticipated value for money</b>   | Competitive procurement process, evaluation of quality and price, involvement of service leads, Strategic Procurement and Finance |
| <b>Service disruption during transition between providers</b>     | Detailed mobilisation plan, contract management arrangements and business continuity requirements                                 |
| <b>Successful provider fails to meet performance expectations</b> | Clear KPIs, performance framework, contract management and escalation arrangements                                                |

## 5 Alternative options considered

5.1 The following options were considered before recommending a competitive procurement for a new outsourced OOH service.

| Option                                         | Description                                                                                    | Outcome / reason for rejection or selection                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Do nothing</b>                           | Allow the current contract to end without securing future OOH provision.                       | <b>Not recommended.</b> This would create unacceptable risk to resident safety, and the Council's ability to respond to urgent issues outside normal office hours.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>2. Bring the service in-house</b>           | Establish a dedicated Haringey Council OOH operation.                                          | <b>Not recommended.</b> Previous modelling indicated that an in-house option would be materially more expensive. The estimated cost per annum compared with the estimated outsourced model cost set out in Exempt Appendix A. An in-house model would also reduce the additional business continuity resilience available from an external provider if Haringey daytime systems or services are disrupted.                    |
| <b>3. Buy the service from another council</b> | Pay another council to provide out of hours emergency contact handling for Haringey residents. | <b>Not recommended at this time due to current absence of affordable options.</b> A shared service with one or two other councils can't achieve the same economies of scale as established suppliers operating across a larger national client base. There are also resilience risks during London-wide incidents, such as extreme weather, where several boroughs experience increased out-of-hours demand at the same time. |

|                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>4. Continue with short-term extensions</b>  | Continue the current approach through further extensions or interim arrangements.                                                                                                                        | <b>Not recommended.</b> A further short-term extension to the current contract would not be compliant with procurement rules.                         |
| <b>5. Procure a new outsourced OOH service</b> | Run a competitive procurement for a new contract (within the strongest ethical framework and social value possible) from 1 June 2027 for an initial three-year term with an optional two-year extension. | <b>Recommended.</b> This provides the strongest balance of compliance, value for money, resilience, service quality, transparency and deliverability. |

## 6 Background information

- 6.1 The Council's OOH emergency contact handling service provides a single access point for residents who need urgent assistance outside normal office hours. The service receives calls, applies agreed scripts and workflows, triages the issue, and escalates matters to the appropriate Council duty officer, contractor or emergency response route. This includes urgent issues relating to housing repairs, homelessness, social care, environmental matters, highways, security, emergency planning and other essential services.
- 6.2 The service must be accessible, responsive and resilient. It must operate effectively during periods of urgent demand, severe weather, local incidents and other borough-wide pressures.
- 6.3 Cabinet approval is now required to commence the procurement of a new longer-term service from 1 June 2027.

## 7 Contribution to the Corporate Delivery Plan High Level Strategic outcomes

- 7.1 The proposed procurement directly supports the proposed new Corporate Delivery Plan priority of Making Council Services More Accessible and Responsive to Residents.

## 8 Carbon and Climate Change

- 8.1 The procurement will seek supplier commitments to environmentally responsible operations.

## 9 Statutory Officers comments Finance, Procurement, Legal and Equalities

### 9.1 Finance

9.1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval to commence a competitive procurement exercise for the provision of an Out of Hours Emergency Contact Handling Service, commencing on 1 June 2027. The proposed new contract will be awarded for an initial term of three years, with an option to extend for up to a further two years, subject to satisfactory performance and the Council's priorities at the time. Additional Finance comments appear in Exempt Appendix A.

## 9.2 Procurement

9.2.1 The proposal to tender for a new longer-term out of office provision will be led by Strategic procurement as the anticipated contract value will be within threshold of procurement legislation

9.2.2 As required by CSO 2.01b Cabinet approval is required to commence a procurement exercise for contracts valued at 500k or more

## 9.3 Legal

9.3.1 The Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) was consulted in the preparation of the report.

9.3.2 Pursuant to the provisions of the Council's Contract Standing Order (CSO) 2.01(b), Cabinet may approve the commencement of procurement process where the value of the contract to be procured is £500,000 or more and as such the recommendation in paragraph 3 of the report is in line with the Council's CSO.

9.3.3 The Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer) see no legal reasons preventing the approval of the recommendation in the report.

## 9.4 Equality

9.4.1 The council has a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and people who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not

9.4.2 The three parts of the duty apply to the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/faith, sex and sexual orientation. Marriage and civil partnership status applies to the first part of the duty.

9.4.3 Although it is not enforced in legislation as a protected characteristic, Haringey Council treats socioeconomic status as a local protected characteristic.

- 9.4.4 The decision sought in this report is approval to commence a competitive procurement exercise for a future Out of Hours Emergency Contact Handling Service from 1 June 2027. The service provides a route for residents to access urgent and emergency Council support outside normal office hours, including evenings, nights, weekends and bank holidays. The service receives, triages and allocates urgent contacts across a range of functions including housing repairs, homelessness, social care, safeguarding, highways, environmental matters and emergency response.
- 9.4.5 The proposed procurement is expected to have a broadly positive impact on equity because it will maintain a critical route for residents to access urgent support when daytime services are closed. The service is likely to be particularly important for residents who may be in vulnerable or crisis situations, including older residents, disabled residents, residents with communication needs, residents for whom English is an additional language, residents experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity, and residents affected by poverty or other forms of socioeconomic disadvantage.
- 9.4.6 There is a potential risk of negative equality impacts if the future service is not sufficiently accessible, if call handling arrangements do not meet the needs of residents with hearing, speech, language, cognitive or mental health needs, or if urgent contacts are not triaged and escalated correctly. These risks will be mitigated through the procurement by including clear accessibility, inclusion, vulnerability, safeguarding, customer care, language support, reasonable adjustment, escalation and performance management requirements within the service specification, evaluation criteria and contract management arrangements.
- 9.4.7 The future contract will require the provider to deliver the service in a way that supports equitable access for Haringey's diverse communities. This will include requirements for staff training on equality, diversity, safeguarding, vulnerability and communication needs; appropriate arrangements for residents with hearing or speech impairments and residents who need language support; accurate recording of relevant access or vulnerability information; and quality monitoring to check that residents are treated with dignity, sensitivity and consistency.
- 9.4.8 The procurement will also strengthen performance and management information requirements. This will support ongoing monitoring of call handling quality, accessibility standards, incident response, complaint themes, repeat contact, escalation accuracy and service improvement actions. These arrangements will help the Council identify and respond to any emerging equality issues during the life of the contract.
- 9.4.9 Available service information indicates that the OOH service handles a significant volume of urgent contacts, with demand linked to housing repairs, homelessness, social care, safeguarding and other essential services. These service areas are likely to include residents with protected characteristics and residents experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. Detailed current and forecast demand data, complaints, feedback, call quality information and operational insight will be reviewed during procurement preparation and used to inform the final service specification and performance framework.

9.4.10 No separate public consultation has taken place specifically for the procurement approval decision. However, the procurement process will include engagement with relevant Council service areas to confirm service requirements, escalation routes, accessibility needs and performance expectations. Equalities considerations will be reviewed as part of the development of the final specification and evaluation model.

9.4.11 A full Equality Impact Assessment will be completed as part of the procurement process where required through the Council's standard equalities process. This will ensure that equality impacts are considered before the future service is finalised and before any contract award decision is made.

9.4.12 As an organisation carrying out a public function on behalf of a public body, the successful contractor will be obliged to have due regard to the need to achieve the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty as stated above. Appropriate contract management arrangements will be established to ensure that delivery of the service does not result in any preventable or disproportionate inequality.

## **10 Use of Appendices**

10.1 Appendix A, Exempt Report

## **11 Background papers**

11.1 None.