

Delegated Decision by the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety

4 March 2025

Approval of Contract Extension to Housing Single Point of Contact Contract - Better Housing, Better Health

Report by the Director of Public Health and Communities

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Authorise the extension of the Better Housing Better Health contract for two years from 28 October 2025 to 28 October 2027.

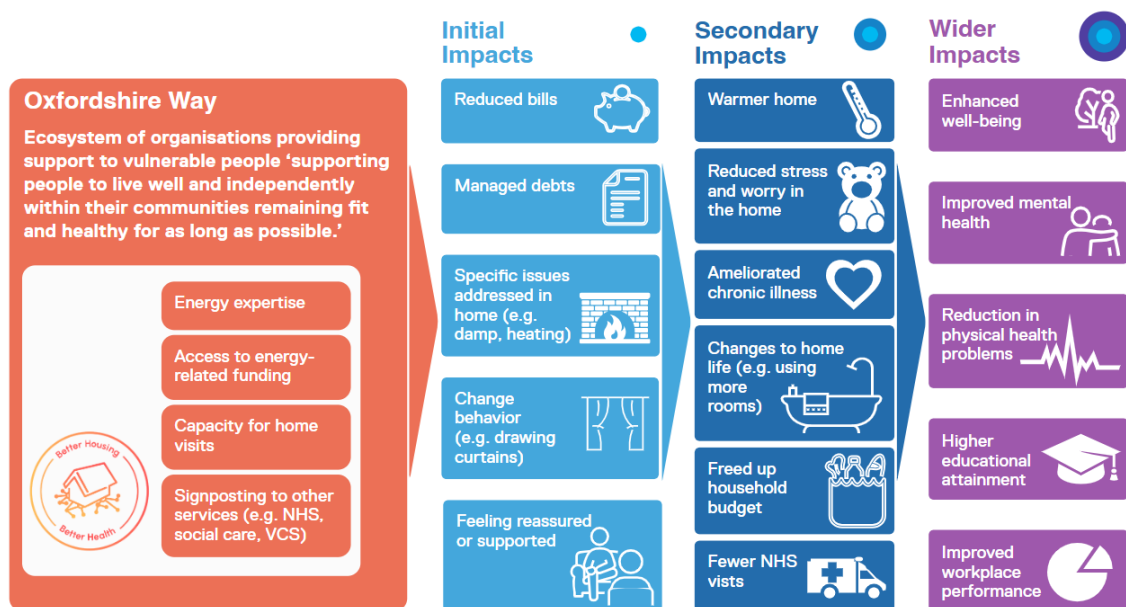
Executive Summary

1. The current contract for the Housing and Health Single Point of Contact (HHSPoC), known as Better Housing Better Health (BHBH) started on the 29th October 2023 and ends on 28th October 2025 and it has an option to extend for an additional maximum of two years to 28th October 2027.
2. The contract is delivering as required and the provider National Energy Foundation is performing satisfactorily.
3. The service continues to deliver against the County Councils strategic priorities
 - a) Put action to address the climate emergency at the heart of our work.
 - b) Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
 - c) Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.
4. In addition to supporting residents experiencing fuel poverty, the service also contributes to the aims of Adult Social Care supporting residents to stay independent at home for longer and the Climate Actions team retrofit team to deliver the Home Upgrade Grant and other similar schemes.
5. The minimum contract value is £130,000 a year. This provides 900 telephone “warm and well” assessments and 250 home visits. The total minimum value would be £260,000 for a 24 month extension.
6. The total maximum value per year (which includes the £130,000 and the value of additional services available as options to the Council) is £350,000. The total maximum value would be £700,000 for a 24 month extension.

7. The additional services could include additional telephone assessments and home visits, funds to cover the cost of small energy efficiency measures, such as fuel vouchers, or energy saving equipment, eg slow cookers. Other services may include administration costs associate with distributing funds to residents, developing bids, staff time for attending events as well as administering building works. The Council is able to specify the provider delivers these additional services through a contractual mechanism called an Options Uptake.
8. Additional funds placed with the provider through this Options Uptake mechanism of the contract in the last two years have totalled £202,710. This provided for additional home visits, telephone assessments and administration of small energy efficiency measures (£84,710) and £118,000 of small measures, between November 2023 and January 2025.
9. The funding for the minimum contract value is comprised of financial contributions from Oxford City Council, Cherwell District Council, South Oxfordshire District Council, Vale of the White Horse District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council. Additional funds have come from the County Councils Cost of Living budgets and allocations from the Household Support Fund. There is sufficient budget available and committed to service the minimum cost of the contract extension. The provision of any additional services in the contract extension period will be contingent on additional funding sources being made available.

Background

10. The aim of the service is to support residents with health conditions, low income, disabilities, amongst other risk characteristics to living in cold, damp and otherwise unsafe homes, by providing access to advice, support, financial aid and equipment. It also supports the wider system in the Oxfordshire Way to provide expertise on fuel poverty. The following Theory of Change was produced as part of an evaluation of the service to identify the range of impacts.



11. National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) Guidance¹ recommends a tailored service to provide housing, specifically fuel poverty and energy efficiency, advice and support. The HHSPoC service provides advice over the phone, as well as options to provide home visits and other services. The UKHSA Adverse Weather Planning Guidance² identifies the need for such a service.
12. The current Contract for the provision of Housing and Health Single Point of Contact is provided by National Energy Foundation a charity registered with liability.
13. The Contract Commencement date was on 29th October 2023 and was for a fixed period of two years, with an option to extend for up to a further two years. Notice must be given 6 months before the end of the contract as to whether the service is to be extended or not.
14. The minimum value of the contract is £130,000 per year, to provide telephone advice, home visits and associated follow up case management. District and City Councils each contribute £10,000 a year for telephone support, with the County Council funding the balance of £80,000. The Public Health grant is liable for this £80,000, made up of £10,000/year towards the telephone support and £70,000/year for home visits.
15. Agreement has been secured by all the Oxfordshire District and City Councils to contribute to a further one year's funding at £10,000 each. The existing Memorandum of Understanding will be updated with the new timeframe and financial commitment from partners.
16. The contract has an Options Uptake mechanism which allows for additional services to be provided if additional funding becomes available. The total

¹ <https://shap.uk.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/nice-guidance-ng6.pdf>

² [Adverse Weather and Health Plan - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674442/Adverse-Weather-and-Health-Plan.pdf)

additional funding that can be processed through this contract across the full four years is £880,000, which is comprised of the original 2 year term, plus the optional 2 year extension.

Key Issues

Effectiveness of Current Service

17. In 2023/24, the core contract provided 900 telephone assessments, and 226 home visits were completed, which includes additional case work where appropriate. Demand for telephone support is high, particularly during colder months, with up to 200 assessments per month in winter compared to 70 in summer. The cost-of-living crisis in winter 2022/23 increased demand significantly.
18. A qualitative evaluation by the University of Salford³ highlights the value of home visits in empowering residents and improving mental health. Stakeholders view the service as proactive and knowledgeable about funding and support.
19. Research by the Oxfordshire Policy Lab data showed home visits lead to more long-term interventions for vulnerable residents, providing financial savings despite higher upfront costs. A proposed health economic evaluation will assess the service's financial impact.
20. The service effectively reaches target groups, with 45% of supported residents receiving at least one benefit and 43% being social housing tenants. Target groups include those who are over 65 years of age, those under 5 years old, those with a long term health condition and those on means tested benefits.
21. Over the period, 2,912 interventions were made, including debt advice referrals and energy efficiency grants totalling approximately £281,623.80. The estimated carbon savings were 696,828 kg.
22. The minimum number of home visits were completed, however additional capacity for home visits was not achieved. A review was carried out to understand what could have been done differently. One key finding was understanding the ratio of telephone assessments to generate the commissioned number of home visits.

³ <https://salford-repository.worktribe.com/output/2674439/better-housing-better-health-a-qualitative-study-of-energy-advice-and-support-in-oxfordshire>

23. Safeguarding, governance, continuity, and safety have had no issues, and the provider is responsive to feedback. Contract reports are of good quality, and relevant staff attend meetings. Partnerships with 54 organizations, including top referrers like Oxfordshire County Council and Citizens Advice, remain strong.

24. Feedback from residents and stakeholders has been positive, with no formal complaints. A sample of people who had used the service were asked if they would recommend BHBH to a friend or family member, 98% responded that they would be happy to. Of those asked about any improvement in comfort and wellbeing 52% reported an increase.

25. The original procurement process two years ago involved a market testing phase which yielded only one bid, by the now incumbent provider, NEF. The provider market has been monitored since then, including sharing information with other services who procure services from a similar market. The provider market has not changed to such an extent to justify a re-procurement to allow other providers to bid for a new contract.

26. In conclusion, the contract is

- meeting a need to residents at risk of fuel poverty,
- performing satisfactorily
- supported by current funders as they have agreed to fund it for a further period and are satisfied with it.
- working in partnership with a range of stakeholders, within and external to the County Council
- delivers on many shared priorities across health, social care, climate change and equality.

Budgetary implications

27. There is funding within the existing Public Health budget, sourced from the Public Health Grant.

28. There is a well-established history of partnership working alongside a Memorandum of Understanding to jointly fund the service between County and City and District Councils

29. There is a clause in the contract which allows the contract to be terminated in the event of a reduction of funding.

Comments checked by:

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Equalities implications

30. The HHSPoC is a service which is targeted at those known to be most likely to experience fuel poverty. This approach reduces the widening of health inequalities. Groups most likely to experience fuel poverty are single households, such as care leavers, those with disabilities or long-term health conditions. People from Black, Asian and other Ethnic Minorities are also more likely to experience fuel poverty.
31. The original contract had an Equalities Impact Assessment completed for it which has been reviewed and requires no update. Equalities Impact Assessment.

Legal implications

32. The Council has the statutory power to purchase and provide the services under the contract to be extended under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
33. The contract as originally procured contains a unilateral right for the Council to extend the contract as proposed in this report. Such extension is therefore compliant with procurement legislation and does not pose any legal risk.

Comments checked by:

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Sustainability implications

34. The involves work to reduce energy usage which contributes to the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from domestic heating there are no amendments to the overall strategy.
35. The HHSPoC has links to the County Council's Climate Action Framework as reducing energy usage reduces emissions of carbon dioxide from domestic heating, from gas central heating, as well as supporting the uptake of heat pumps and solar panels. For further information about possible impacts of the service on sustainability please see the BHBH Climate Impact Assessment.

Risk Management

Through the original Business Case and on further review the contract risks are identified as follows.

Risk Identified	Risk Level	Mitigation Strategy
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Market: The provider market shrinks and competitiveness reduces.	High	Extending the contract, to ensure the a provider with suitable expertise and capacity is available to continue.
Level of Demand Demand for housing visits lower than contracted for	High	Ensure targeted marketing and processes raise awareness and trust in the service for both referrers and residents.
Financial Envelope/demand: Inflationary costs could be significant with a budget this size.	Med	Development and maintenance of transparent and positive relationship with the provider to identify and negotiate inflation costs early. The contract has terms to allow for the termination of the contract with six months notice.

Communications

36. The service was developed in light of a consultation in January 2023⁴ and an evaluation by the University of Salford, involving those who use the service as residents, and also those partners, such as the VSCE sector who make referrals to it.
37. Key stakeholders such as the Oxfordshire District and City Councils and other County services who fund or who work with the provider were consulted on the proposal to extend the contract.
38. The contract extension has not been subject to public consultation however, contract reports include the surveying of residents to confirm likelihood of recommending to friends and family and case studies are gathered to ensure the service is achieving overall outcomes.
39. The Portfolio Holder has been briefed on the general performance of the contract and need for contract extension in advance.

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⁴ [Helping people stay warm and healthy in their homes | Let's Talk Oxfordshire](#)