

Cabinet

Report Title	Provision of an Enhanced Assessment Beds Service
Date of Meeting	Wednesday, 11 March 2026
Report Author	Emily Cox
Lead Officer	Executive Director Adult Social Care and Health
Lead Cabinet Member(s)	Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Health & Well-being
Why is this a key decision?	To be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards of the Borough.
Wards Affected	(All Wards);
Identify exempt information and exemption category	Open
Is the report urgent?	No
Reasons for urgency (only where applicable)	n/a
Appendices (if any)	None.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to undertake a procurement exercise and on completion award contracts for the block provision of enhanced assessment nursing beds in Sandwell, comprising 10 non-complex beds and 4 complex beds, using funding allocated from the Better Care Fund (BCF). This will allow for the continuation of capacity within the Borough of Sandwell for short-term, multidisciplinary assessment following hospital discharge, as well as supporting hospital avoidance for individuals in the community. The beds will support predominantly older people who are medically stable but require further assessment before a long-term care decision is made.

2. Recommendations

For the reasons set out in the report, Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Delegate authority to the Executive Director Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Service Director – Governance, and Monitoring Officer to undertake a compliant procurement exercise in order to secure the provision of 14 block Enhanced Assessment Nursing Beds (comprising of 4 complex beds and 10 non-complex beds) in two separate locations in order to secure continuity of provision to replace the existing contracts, which are ending on 30 September 2026.
- 2.2 Delegate authority to the Executive Director Adult Social Care and Health in consultation with the Service Director – Governance, and Monitoring Officer to award and enter into a Contract with the successful bidders, on terms to be agreed, for the provision of Enhanced Assessment Nursing Beds to commence on 1 October 2026 to 30 September 2028, with an option to extend for a further 12 months, taking the contracts up to 30 September 2029.
- 2.3 Delegate Authority to the Service Director – Governance, and Monitoring Officer, or their designated representative, to take any action necessary to give effect to the proposal in recommendation 2.2 for the provision of Enhanced Assessment Nursing Beds.
- 2.4 Approve an exemption to rules 8.10 and 8.11 of the Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules 2024, or subsequent amendment, to allow the Executive Director of Adult Social Care and Health to award contracts to the successful tenderers if the required minimum number of tenders are not received.
- 2.5 Approve variations to the Contract up to a maximum of 10% of the contract value, should they be necessitated, and that authority to approve such variations be delegated to the appropriate Chief Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member, with a decision notice being published on the Council's electronic e-tendering portal should a variation need to be enacted.
- 2.6 Approve an uplift to the weekly bed rate for Enhanced Assessment Nursing Beds from 01 April 2027, 01 April 2028 and 01 April 2029 in accordance with the percentage applied to the Council's standard nursing dementia rate for 2027/28, 2028/29 and 2029/30.

3. Proposals – Reasons for the recommendations

Background and drivers

- 3.1 The Enhanced Assessment Beds (EAB) service is a short term up to 6 weeks Service which provides support to people who require a period of assessment outside of a hospital setting. The Service is designed to help determine the most appropriate long term care pathway and to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions or delays in discharge.
- 3.2 The current contracts in place are due to end on 30 September 2026, have no further extension options available, and therefore the authorisation to commence the procurement process and award a contract to the successful

bidder will ensure there are appropriate agreements in place from 1 October 2026 and there is no gap in service provision.

Policy outcomes and objectives

- 3.3 The Council is statutorily required under the Care Act 2014 to carry out an assessment of anyone who appears to require care and support. Where someone is in hospital, under Discharge to Assess (D2A), funders are required to undertake assessments away from an acute bed setting.
- 3.4 For around half of the people being discharged from hospital, it is expected they will need a period of care, rehabilitation or reablement. This will be provided free of charge for up to six weeks in order to promote independence and recovery, and until assessment for long-term care is undertaken.

Proposals and delivery

- 3.5 The proposed Service will support people who are medically stable but require short-term, multidisciplinary assessment to determine their longer-term care needs. The service will aim to reduce hospital length of stay and thereby relieving pressure on acute beds, avoid long term care admissions attributed to the assessment period, and optimise independence.
- 3.6 The service will operate within locally based provision, supported by therapy and social work intervention. The enhanced assessment model aims to strengthen discharge to assess pathways, reduce hospital length of stay and enhance social worker decision making around long-term care need and provision, with an overall aim of improving the outcomes for adults and their relatives.
- 3.7 Securing block capacity will ensure 7-day accessibility to the care homes of the successful Contractors. Contracts for spot purchasing do not have favourable terms and therefore 7-day admission is compromised. There is evidence when spot purchasing is made, weekend admissions are adversely impacted. It is therefore recommended that nursing beds continue to be block purchased in order to provide some guaranteed access, with the ability to spot purchase on top.

Costs

- 3.8 The rate paid to care home providers for EAB is set each year and historically the council has paid significantly less for such provision compared to its neighbouring authorities (excluding complex nursing dementia EAB), as well as holding the rate for several years despite the challenges faced by EAB providers to deliver a quality service for the specific cohort of individual admitted to the provision. In recognition of the challenges faced by EAB providers and the historic underfunding of EAB by the council, the JPB have agreed the mechanism by which the Council can uplift EAB rates each year i.e. to uplift rates according to the % uplift applied to standard nursing rates each year.

Occupancy

- 3.9 The occupancy for the homes that are currently used for Enhanced Assessment Nursing Beds provision are as follows for the preceding 12 months.

Home	Average % Occupancy
Hilltop Lodge Nursing Home	79%*
The Gables Nursing Home	66%**

* It should be noted this is an average across the 9-month period that the contract has been running so far. Due to fluctuations in occupancy, the beds will be paid at the standard nursing rate and paid only at the enhanced rate when occupied.

** It should be noted for the occupancy at The Gables this fluctuates due to the needs of the people and the suitability of the bed available and its location. Moreover, in the new Service, beds will be paid at the standard nursing rate and paid only at the enhanced rate when occupied given there can be fluctuations in capacity.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 The following alternate options have been considered:-

4.1.1 **Option one: Do not re-procure and allow the current contracts in place to lapse.** This is not seen as a viable option as there will be increased delays in hospital and people not benefiting from admission avoidance leading to system pressure and a detrimental impact on individuals who will spend longer in hospital despite being medically optimised. This option was dismissed.

4.1.2 **Option two: Allow the current contracts in place to lapse and procure beds on a spot purchased basis.** This is not considered a viable option as spot provision does not have any terms that require care homes to expedite assessment and admission, leading to intolerable delays, however, acknowledging that some spot purchasing will be inevitable. Moreover, spot provision is a higher cost to the Council. This option was dismissed.

5. Consultation

5.1 Consultation is underway with other Local Authorities, internal Teams / Officers, and both existing providers of the Enhanced Assessment Beds Service and other nursing care contracted providers. Consultation comprises of establishing what was commissioned in other areas of the Country in relation to enhanced assessment bed services, liaising with internal teams around the future model and service specification.

5.2 Prospective providers have been invited to discuss the future model of enhanced assessment beds. A Market Engagement Event will be held via Microsoft Teams on 12th February, for the wider market to respond to.

5.3 Consultation will continue with internal colleagues from Social Workers, Brokerage, the Contracts Team and Sandwell's Social and Health Care Centre colleagues (Harvest View).

5.4 Other consultation has included surveys with people who have used the Service in the last 6 months. If there are any significant changes that present

as part of the engagement, changes will be made to the specification if relevant/required.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The funding for this service comes from the Better Care Fund and is paid for on a block basis. The proposal will be presented at the 26 February 2026 Joint Partnership Board meeting in order to seek approval for the funding of the service.
- 6.2 The bed rates for Enhanced Assessment Beds are agreed through the Joint Partnership Board and are subject to an annual review. The uplift to the bed rate mirrors the percentage uplift for standard rate nursing dementia that is agreed each year.
- 6.3 There are no anticipated human resource implications for the Council arising from the award of the Agreements. There are no implications for the Council's material assets.

Revenue Implications

- 6.4 The value of the current provision in place is outlined below:

Service	Provider and Term	Bed Rate	Bed Rate per annum
Non-Complex Beds Service (10 block beds)	Hilltop Lodge Nursing Home 01/04/25 – 30/09/26	£1006.36 per bed per week / £143.77 per bed per night.	£524,760.50
Complex Bed Service (4 block beds)	The Gables Nursing Home 01/10/23 – 30/09/26	£1484.28 per bed per week / £212.04 per bed per night	£309,578.40
TOTAL			£834,338.90

The value of the proposed provision from 1st October 2026 is outlined below:

TOTAL for 2 years plus 12 months extension, if agreed (3-year total) *	2,805,934.00
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*3.98% increase in line with 26/27 standard dementia nursing spot rate
5% projected increase from 1st April 2027, 1st April 2028 and 1st April 2029.

7. Legal and Governance Implications

- 7.1 The Service proposed to be contracted falls under the Light Touch Regime of the Procurement Act 2023 which allows for enhanced flexibility for how a procurement is run. However, while there is greater flexibility, the aggregate value of the contract will exceed the Light Touch Threshold. A fully compliant tender process will be undertaken in accordance with both the Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules and the Procurement Act 2023.

- 7.2 The proposed procurement outlined within this report is a compliant route to market and would comply with the Council's statutory obligations and its own Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules.
- 7.3 Local authorities' commissioning and procurement duties under the Care Act 2014 require them to shape a diverse, high-quality, and sustainable care market. Commissioning Officers must ensure that statutory obligations under the Care Act 2014 and more general Best Value duties are met by ensuring tender documents incorporate robust key performance indicators and contract management mechanisms.
- 7.4 The Council's Procurement and Contract Procedure Rules require Cabinet to approve the award of contracts for the estimated value of the service. The form and content of the contracts will be reviewed by Legal Services prior to authorisation being confirmed for these to be entered into.
- 7.5 A Data Protection Impact Assessment has been completed.

8. Risks

- 8.1 Risks identified in respect of the recommendations being sought in the separately completed Risk Assessment include:
- Levels of insurance required - referring to risk of affordability for providers where insurance levels are high, with a risk of no bids or a small number of bids being received.
 - Lack of interest from the market should the indemnity levels be set at prohibitive levels.
 - Provider recruitment of staff and retention.
 - Performance and service delivery.
 - Funding not secured.
 - Lack of Performance Monitoring resources.
 - Provider sustainability.
 - Risk to increase in hospital admissions.
- 8.2 Aside from the above, beds are being spot purchased over and above the number of beds available at Harvest View and therefore if further provision through a procurement is not agreed, there are risks in relation to:
- responsiveness of providers to admit individuals in a timely way given less favourable contract terms;
 - Increase of delays in transferring people from hospital who are medically; and
 - Increased costs outside of block contract arrangements.
- 8.3 These risks have been evaluated and sufficient actions have been identified in the risk assessment to ensure the risks are mitigated to an acceptable level. It is considered that sufficient mitigation is in place so that the proposed contract delivers against the service specification.

9. Equality and Diversity Implications (including the public sector equality duty)

- 9.1 A Full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken to ensure that any future provider can deliver the needs of Sandwell's diverse community, including cultural appropriate services, religious, belief and those with no beliefs, communication support and addressing the needs of the range of people with disabilities that will be accessing the service. Overall, the re-commissioning of this provision will have a positive impact on protected and vulnerable groups.
- 9.2 Equality and Diversity Inclusion (EDI) will be incorporated into the provider contract including EDI monitoring, to ensure equity and fairness in relation to access to services, satisfactory levels and outcomes.

10. Relevant Implications

- 10.1 **Health and Wellbeing** - To support the easing of pressure on acute hospitals through admission avoidance, this service is required to assist vulnerable people for whom the Council has a statutory duty through the provision of timely care and support upon discharge from hospital. Given the nature of the service and delivery of it to vulnerable people who reside in Sandwell, the successful organisation are very likely to employ people from the local area, supporting the local economy.
- 10.2 **Social Value** - Providers are supported and encouraged to recruit locally and engage with Colleges/Universities, and to procure local goods and services so support local communities. Social value has a fixed minimum % amount in the tender scoring process to allow the impact to be crucial to the outcomes.
- 10.3 **Climate Change** - There are no climate change implications in this report.
- 10.4 **Corporate Parenting** - There are no Corporate Parenting responsibility implications in this report.
- 10.5 **ICT / digital implications** - There are no specific ICT/Digital implications arising from this report.
- 10.6 **Procurement implications** - Procurement implications are covered in the legal section of this report.
- 10.7 **Crime and Disorder Act 1998** - There are no direct implications in relation to crime and disorder arising from this report.

11. Background Documents

- 11.1 None.

12. How does this deliver the objectives of the Strategic Themes?

- 12.1 This report will support the delivery of the following Strategic Themes:-

- **Living in Sandwell.** The Enhanced Assessment Nursing Beds Service will provide the right support at the right time to adults in ensuring safe

discharges and the prevention of unnecessary hospital admissions, supporting people to live longer, healthier lives and maintain independence with the care and support they need.

- **Thriving Economy in Sandwell.** Given the nature of the Enhanced Assessment Beds Service and the delivery of the Service to vulnerable adults who reside in Sandwell, the successful providers are likely to employ people from the local area, supporting the local economy. The Service will support people to maximise their independence which can lead to a reduction in long term care needs and demands on other services.
- **One Council One Team Approach.** The Enhanced assessment Beds Service promotes shared working through operating within a multi disciplinary environment with local authority teams, social workers, the ICB, Occupational Therapist, and Physiotherapists, to name but a few.