

Meeting:	Employment Panel
Meeting date:	23 September 2026
Title of report:	Establishment of an All-Age Commissioning Function
Report by:	Cllr. Sean Thorpe, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Services
Decision type:	For Decision
Ward(s) to which report relates:	ALL

1. Executive Summary:

This report seeks approval to implement the strategic commissioning recommendations arising from the independent review of Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care undertaken by IMPOWER (a leading UK management consultancy which specialises in public sector reform).

This independent review identified significant opportunities to improve outcomes for residents, strengthen prevention, improve market management, and deliver sustainable financial benefits through the development of an integrated all-age strategic commissioning approach. The review concluded that the Council should establish a single strategic commissioning function bringing together commissioning, sufficiency planning and market-shaping activity across children's and adult services.

We anticipate that an all-age commissioning approach will become the Council's long-term operating model. The temporary arrangements outlined in this report relate solely to leadership and organisational structure during implementation, allowing the Council to make shorter-term improvements in our approach whilst also co-designing arrangements which meet the unique needs of Bury residents and other stakeholders.

2. Recommendations

The Employment Panel is requested to:

- 2.1 Support the establishment of a new All Age Commissioning function within the Council.

- 2.2 Note the temporary expansion of responsibilities for a period of up to 24 months to allow the current Director of Adult Social Services and Community Commissioning to develop this function.
- 2.3 Support an honorarium payment in accordance with Council policy for the duration of these additional responsibilities.
- 2.4 Support consequential interim arrangements to ensure continued operational leadership of Adult Social Care services.
- 2.5 Note that a full review of the operating model and leadership arrangements will be undertaken following implementation.

3. Background

In 2026 the Council commissioned a leading UK management consultancy which specialises in public sector reform to undertake a review of Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care. The review by IMPOWER identified opportunities to:

- strengthen strategic commissioning capability.
- improve sufficiency planning.
- reduce market fragmentation.
- improve transition pathways between children's and adult services.
- strengthen partnership commissioning arrangements with health.
- improve financial sustainability.
- increase the Council's focus on prevention and early intervention.

A key recommendation emerging from the review was the development of an integrated all-age strategic commissioning function, bringing together leadership of commissioning activity across the life course.

The review recognised that many of the Council's most significant demand pressures and financial challenges do not sit within either children's or adult services. Instead, they arise across systems including housing, health, SEND, mental health, learning disability, transitions, and prevention.

The proposed model seeks to address these challenges through a more coordinated approach to strategic commissioning.

4. Progress to Date

The recommendations contained within the review built upon significant improvement activity already underway across Children's Social Care and Adult Social Care.

Workstream 1: Sustaining Practice Improvement

Considerable progress has been made in stabilising demand, strengthening decision-making and improving outcomes across children's and adult services.

Progress delivered in Children's Social Care includes:

- Reduction in the number of children requiring high-cost residential placements from previous peak levels.
- Delivery of substantial cost avoidance through improved practice, demand management, and placement review activity.
- Strengthened oversight through Residential and Complex Care Panels.
- Implementation of the VCARE needs profiling methodology to improve understanding of children's needs and support placement matching.
- Training delivered to practitioners to support more effective assessment and decision-making.
- Review of existing placements to identify opportunities for improved outcomes, placement step-downs, and value for money.
- Growth in fostering capacity and a renewed focus on supporting more children to remain in family-based care where appropriate.

Progress delivered in Adult Social Care includes:

- Continued implementation of strengths-based practice.
- Robust performance from reablement and short-term intervention services.
- Development of demand management programmes focused on maintaining independence and reducing long-term care dependency.
- Identification of significant savings opportunities through service transformation and redesign.

Collectively, this work has created a stronger platform from which to deliver the next phase of change.

Workstream 2: Strategic Commissioning and Sufficiency

The Council has already begun strengthening its commissioning capability and developing a more strategic approach to market management.

Progress delivered in Commissioning Development includes:

- Strengthened commissioning arrangements across children's services.
- Improved integration between operational services, commissioning teams, and brokerage functions.
- Development of provider intelligence and market oversight arrangements.
- Introduction of provider segmentation approaches to better understand market performance and risk.
- Enhanced use of data, market intelligence and forecasting to support commissioning decisions.

Progress delivered Brokerage and Market Management includes:

- Greater collaboration between brokerage and commissioning teams.
- More proactive placement-finding and market engagement activity.
- Improved provider relationship management.
- Increased focus on market shaping rather than reactive purchasing.
- Introduction of tools and methodologies to support placement review and challenge costs where appropriate.

The Council is also actively engaged in Greater Manchester's Regional Care Cooperative and associated regional initiatives, including:

- Regional sufficiency planning.
- Shared market intelligence.
- Foster care recruitment initiatives.
- Regional approaches to needs assessment.
- Development of longer-term placement sufficiency solutions.

This work provides a solid foundation for the development of an all-age strategic commissioning model.

Workstream 3: Prevention and Demand Management

The Council has continued to strengthen its preventative approach through neighbourhood working, early intervention and partnership-based delivery.

Progress delivered in prevention activity includes:

- Continued delivery of LET'S Do It principles and strengths-based approaches.
- Development of integrated neighbourhood and community-based approaches.
- Expansion of family support and early intervention activity.
- Continued operation of Edge of Care and Family Reunification services.
- Ongoing implementation of Family Hub and Families First reforms.

Progress delivered in system integration includes:

- Increased collaboration between children's and adult services around transition pathways.
- Multi-agency work to improve outcomes for young people moving into adulthood.
- Strengthened engagement with health partners around mental health, neurodiversity, and learning disability pathways.
- Early development of an all-age perspective on demand management and prevention.

Whilst substantial progress has already been achieved, the IMPOWER review identified further opportunities to strengthen outcomes, improve financial sustainability, and reduce demand through a more integrated all-age strategic

commissioning approach. The proposed All Age Commissioning arrangements represent the next phase of this improvement journey.

5. Strategic Case for Change

The Council currently operates separate arrangements for commissioning activity across several service areas.

Whilst these arrangements have supported service delivery, they can limit the Council's ability to:

- take a whole-life approach to residents' needs.
- plan strategically across transition points.
- shape provider markets consistently.
- maximise opportunities for joint commissioning.
- coordinate sufficiency planning.
- leverage system partnerships across Greater Manchester.

The proposed All Age Commissioning function represents the next stage of the Council's improvement journey and will provide a single strategic focus for:

- commissioning.
- market management.
- sufficiency planning.
- provider relationship management.
- demand forecasting.
- prevention and early intervention.
- strategic partnerships.

The intention is not to merge children's and adults' services operationally, but to strengthen strategic commissioning leadership across both systems.

6. Proposed Scope of the All-Age Commissioning Function

The proposed function will initially include:

Children's Strategic Commissioning

- Children in Care commissioning
- Independent fostering and placement sufficiency
- residential care commissioning
- preparation for adulthood commissioning
- links to the Greater Manchester Regional Care Cooperative
- community safety, violence reduction, and domestic abuse services
- Independent non maintained education placements

Adult Strategic Commissioning

- adult social care commissioning
- learning disability commissioning
- autism commissioning
- supported living commissioning.
- commissioned community support services
- carers services commissioning

Cross-Cutting Strategic Functions

- market shaping and development.
- sufficiency planning
- provider relationship management
- contract management oversight!
- commissioning intelligence
- demand analysis and forecasting.
- strategic partnership development

Strategic Partnerships

- NHS Greater Manchester
- Integrated Care Board partners
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Regional Care Cooperative arrangements
- housing and prevention interfaces
- Greater Manchester Violence Reduction Unit

These temporary arrangements will also allow the Council to undertake work to understand the interface of commissioning with the Council's procurement activity. An integrated procurement and commissioning function may reduce hand-offs, minimise rework, improve productivity and ensure more consistent, joined-up decision-making that delivers better value for money and service outcomes. The procurement service is of course a council-wide function and does not solely support the people commissioning footprint; it is also a service subject to its own improvement journey at present. Any structure changes will be revisited when progress has been made in the implementation of respective new service arrangements and if/when the strategic commissioning function extends beyond the people focus.

Commissioning of Alternative Education Provision in relation to special educational needs and disabilities is currently out of scope of the All-Age Commissioning approach and is being aligned to the recently published SEND strategy.

7. Benefits

The proposal to create an All-Age Commissioning Function will support delivery of:

Better Outcomes

- improved transitions between children's and adult services.
- stronger focus on prevention.
- more coordinated service pathways.
- improved resident experience.

Improved Market Management

- stronger provider engagement.
- improved understanding of future demand.
- greater market sustainability.
- enhanced sufficiency planning.

Financial Sustainability

- improved financial oversight.
- stronger commissioning capability.
- improved value for money.
- support for delivery of the saving opportunities identified through the IMPOWER review.

Stronger Partnership Working

- improved integration with health partners.
- greater alignment with Greater Manchester commissioning arrangements.
- improved opportunities for joint commissioning.

8. Implementation Plan

The Director of Adult Social Services and Community Commissioning currently holds corporate responsibility for strategic commissioning and market management activity across adult services.

To provide continuity and accelerate implementation, it is proposed that the postholder assumes responsibility for developing the new All Age Commissioning function. The arrangement would be time limited to 24 months effective from 01 September 2026 and would be subject to regular review.

During this period, the postholder would:

- develop the detailed operating model and longer-term all-age commissioning strategy.
- oversee implementation of the IMPOWER recommendations.
- establish governance arrangements and associated decision-making authorities.
- Propose and develop key performance indicators.
- Review related workforce changes and consult on new roles if applicable.
- lead engagement with partners.

To make best use of skills, build on previous achievements, avoid the need to establish and fund a new post, aide retention and minimise the cost to the council, it is proposed that the current Director of Adult Social Services and Community Commissioning post be enhanced and remunerated via an honoraria to implement the new All Age Commissioning Model. The post holder will be nominally referred to as the Strategic Director of Adult Social Services and All-Age Commissioning during this period.

To create capacity for the Director of Adult Social Services and Community Commissioning to fulfil their revised remit, some aspects of their current statutory duties will be delegated to the current Assistant Director of Adult Social Care. This arrangement will mirror the substantive arrangements already in place in Children's Services. Statutory accountability for these delegated functions will remain with the DASS.

Having established the required level of senior management capacity to shape the new function, there are two commissioning posts within Children's Social Care and a post with significant commissioning responsibility within Housing that may require consultation regarding the re-alignment of these posts into a new All-Age Commissioning Function. This is primarily because of the potential change in seniority in their line management arrangements, and the associated impact on their decision-making capacity, levels of operational support and spans of control. In the interim period and pending the outcome of consultation, these three staff will have a dotted line management arrangement to the interim Strategic Director of Adult Social Services and All-Age Commissioning.

There are no roles which exclusively undertake commissioning activity in public health. The professionals in other services who do commission services will, however, be required to take direction from and be supported by the new arrangements when they are undertaking commissioning work.

9. Governance and accountability

IMPOWER advice is clear that implementation of these proposals will require strong corporate oversight with clear accountability, multi-agency governance arrangements and performance frameworks that monitor outcomes, demand trends, and delivery of the projected financial benefits.

To achieve this, it is proposed that the Interim Strategic Director of Adult Social Services and All-Age Commissioning reports directly to the Chief Executive and become a member of the Executive Leadership team. These arrangements will ensure the post has a clear mandate and access to cross-cutting delivery opportunities and the enablers to deliver the programme of work.

Delivery against the demand trajectory forecasts by IMPOWER will be monitored by the Performance, Delivery and Transformation Board and reported within quarterly finance monitoring reports, with reference to the children's social care performance

framework and a set of defined KPIs, such as the numbers and unit cost of commissioned packages of care.

The proposed governance arrangements will be used to keep this arrangement under review. Quarterly review points will be considered and arrangements revised if the forecast benefits are not being achieved, and/or changes, such as RCC implementation, change the context.

10. Statutory responsibility

The Executive Director (Health and Care) will continue to be accountable for the development and delivery of the demand and prevention strategy, drawing on the Public Service Reform network which he already leads. This role is a joint post with the GM ICB and is therefore well placed to lead the system reform work. They will also continue to hold overall accountabilities for all adult social care services in Bury.

The Interim Strategic Director of Adult Social Services and All-Age Commissioning will continue to fulfil the statutory obligations of Director of Adult Social Services (DASS) in relation to the Adult Social Care commissioning.

The Executive Director of Children and Young People will retain statutory accountability for the discharge of children's social care functions, including assurance regarding commissioned services, sufficiency arrangements and outcomes for children and young people. Strategic priorities and statutory assurance remain with the Executive Director of Children and Young People. The Interim Strategic Director of Adult Social Services and All-Age Commissioning will provide professional management and operational leadership of commissioning activity.

11. Financial Implications

To implement these arrangements, it is proposed that.

The Interim Strategic Director of Adult Social Services and All-Age Commissioning would receive an honorarium to the value of Band E, pay point 846 (£151,959). The post holder is already in receipt of a market supplement which would be adjusted retrospectively to mark the end of this arrangement, making the revised total additional cost £8,882 pa. This would be funded from existing budgets in HAC.

The Assistant Director (Adult Social Care) would also receive an honorarium whilst discharging some of the statutory obligations delegated to them by the Interim Strategic Director of Adult Social Services and All-Age Commissioning to Band D, pay point 833 (£118,157). The post holder is also in receipt of a market supplement which would end, making the total additional cost £8,729.00 also be funded from existing budgets in HAC.

There is the potential that other post holders who currently undertaken commissioning activity across the Council, and in Children's Social Care and

Housing, may also be impacted by this change in approach which may require consultation. The budgetary impact of this change will be explored via established job evaluation activity if applicable.

12. Risks and Mitigations

The proposed approach is not without risk.

Loss of specialist focus	Dedicated leadership capacity for children's and adult commissioning will be retained within the operating model.
Scope of role becomes too broad	Implementation will be phased and subject to quarterly review.
Benefits are not realised	A benefits realisation framework will be established and monitored through existing governance arrangements.
Unclear accountability	Clear reporting arrangements and decision-making responsibilities will be established from the outset.
Failure to follow internal HR processes	Phased approach to implementation proposed

13. Conclusion

The IMPOWER review presents a significant opportunity to strengthen commissioning capability, improve outcomes and support the long-term sustainability of services.

The proposed establishment of an All-Age Commissioning function provides the leadership capacity required to implement these recommendations and develop a modern commissioning model aligned to the Council's wider transformation ambitions.

The temporary nature of this arrangement allows the Council to move quickly to establish the foundations of a revised approach, whilst drawing upon the expertise of acknowledged in-house experts in this specialist area.