

This briefing paper explores the impact of proposed cuts by the Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board to service contracts in the Thrive programme, which delivers community-based mental health support services in Edinburgh. Change Mental Health deliver some contracts through the overall Thrive programme.

1. Background: First they cut grants, now they're cutting contracts

The Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board has:

- responsibility for the delivery of delegated Health and Social Care services in the City of Edinburgh.
- two parent organisations, both organisationally and financially – the NHS Lothian health board and the City of Edinburgh Council.
- been saddled with a structural deficit since its inception in 2016 of c£32m, from an operating budget in 2023/2024 of £809m with an outturn of £856m. The IJB has proposed £60m in savings for this budget year, and £50m in the next (as of **November 2024**).
- met last on 25 March 2025; their finalised Strategic Plan will come to the Board for approval in June 2025. There is significant feeling that this has been rushed. Draft [here](#).
- allowed the City of Edinburgh Council to launch its own grant funding programme to support charities impacted by the withdrawal of previous EIJB grant funding.

2. What is Thrive?

The Thrive Collective programme is a community-based mental health and wellbeing initiative operating across Edinburgh. Launched in 2020 as a progression from the Edinburgh Health and Wellbeing Strategic Public Social Partnership, it represents **a shift away from traditional clinical models of care**. It addresses diverse needs through an array of early intervention and prevention services – ranging from peer support, physical activity, creative arts, green therapy, advocacy, and carer support – to help individuals manage their mental health and improve their quality of life. The 2024 Thrive Impact Report can be read [here](#).

Who is supported by Thrive?

- Carers, survivors of childhood abuse, individuals from BAME communities
- LGBTQIA+ communities, transgender individuals, people with disabilities, including sensory disabilities
- People experiencing disordered eating and those who are neurodivergent
- People with mental health issues including those with severe and enduring mental illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar, etc.

Key Facts About the Thrive Collective Partnership

Total Thrive Collective Funding for 2024: £1,823,045

People Supported by Thrive programme in 2024: 4,367 individuals

Social Value Generated: £7.13 for every £1 spent

Referral Sources: Self-referrals, third sector referrals, GP and social work referrals, mental health professionals

Specific Thrive Contract Value for Stafford Centre (Lot 3): £188,000

Number of people supported through Change Mental Health's Stafford Centre: 640 people, (plus 9,870 additional hours through Thrive)

80% of Stafford Centre service users agree it has kept them out of hospital

3. How Thrive cuts impact Change Mental Health services

The EIJB Savings and Recovery Programme 2025-26 consists of 19 proposals with a combined savings target of £28.69 million. *Proposal 16 - Block contract management and rationalisation* includes Thrive contracts and aims to save £2.2m. **This would involve the cancellation of the vast majority of contracts within the Thrive Edinburgh Partnership.** Contracts are spread across 9 'lots,' with Change Mental Health playing a central role within the Thrive Collective, delivering services across several Thrive contract lots, including 1, 2, and 3.

We have been informed that our £188,000 contract for Lot 3, which funds the infrastructure of our Stafford Centre on Broughton St has been recommended for cancellation. This building supports the delivery of other contract work and projects including the delivery of other Thrive contracts - losing Lot 3 funding would risk 17 paid Change Mental Health staff, 4 volunteers and 640 service users, as well as the Veterans' Cafe and the Signature Project. **We estimate the Stafford Centre saves NHS Lothian and the IJB £2.2m-4.4m in psychiatric-related hospital admissions.**

4. Contract Cuts would eliminate community mental health services in Edinburgh

The proposed contract cuts to Thrive have serious implications for mental health support in Edinburgh:

- **Economic Concerns:** While cutting community-based services might balance the budget in the short term, it ignores the long-term consequences. Thrive Edinburgh delivers over £7 in savings for every £1 spent. The demand for mental health services will simply be redirected to more expensive NHS services, putting even greater strain on the public health system and could grow budget deficits in subsequent years.
- **Clinical Consequences:** There is robust evidence showing that early community-based support leads to better clinical outcomes for individuals. Without access to these services, vulnerable individuals will either go without support or, more likely, rely on overstretched NHS resources, which can lead to more severe mental health crises, fatalities, and an increased burden on hospitals. The demand and need will not go away by cutting these community services but simply move to expensive acute care.
- **Process and Accuracy Issues:** The process leading up to this decision has been hurried, with little transparency and a lack of meaningful partnership with service providers. The data being used to justify these cuts appears to be inaccurate, and no fair process has been established. The councillors are being presented with a false narrative that these cuts are the only viable option. What appears to be taking place is a paper based fiscal balancing exercise rather than thought out, evidence based long term planning.

5. Our proposed options for the Edinburgh Integrated Joint Board (EIJB)

Option 1: Delay cuts for one year and co-produce a total service redesign

Current Thrive contracts are extended for one year, during which time Thrive partners can work with the EIJB to redesign services to be more integrated, support NHS services to a greater extent, and delivered at a lower cost. This allows time for a more thoughtful, collaborative approach and will de-risk the consequences of cutting services prematurely. Co-production with stakeholders can also ensure new services will meet the needs of the community while staying within budget.

Option 2: Proceed with the cuts and end Thrive services

This option involves following through with the proposed cuts, resulting in the closure of the Thrive Edinburgh Partnership and a significant reduction in mental health support in the community. While this may appear to address immediate financial concerns, it will increase demand for NHS and Council services, escalate future costs, and exacerbate the mental health crisis in Edinburgh.

Option 3: Phased reforms with greater stakeholder involvement

Rather than a blanket cancellation of services, a more balanced approach could be taken by identifying which services are most in need of reform and implementing phased changes over time. This would include a thorough review of the data, and a commitment to ongoing consultation with service users, providers, and other stakeholders. This option balances the need for reform with the need to safeguard essential community-based services, ensuring that vulnerable populations are not left without support.

6. Our Ask

We accept the need for reform and cost reduction, but we believe that the current proposal is flawed in its execution. We urge the EIJB to:

- Delay the cuts for one year to allow for a comprehensive redesign of services that will be more integrated, cost-effective, and better suited to the needs of the community.
- Ensure meaningful partnership and co-production in the redesign process, involving service providers, stakeholders, and service users in the decision-making. So far this has not taken place to any meaningful extent.
- Reassess the financial and clinical assumptions underpinning the cuts, ensuring that accurate data is used in the decision-making process.

We believe this approach will not only address the immediate budget concerns but also create a sustainable mental health support system that benefits the people of Edinburgh, reduces reliance on NHS services, and improves clinical outcomes for those most in need.

The decision being put forward by the EIJB is an important one that will have significant long-term consequences for Edinburgh's health and social care system. We believe that the proposed cuts, while offering a short-term financial solution, will ultimately lead to greater costs and worse outcomes for vulnerable individuals. We ask for your support in pushing for the delay of these cuts and the opportunity to work together to create a better, more integrated, and cost-effective mental health support system for Edinburgh.