

Report of Chief Housing Officer Housing Management

Report to Director of Environment and Housing

Date: 21st March 2015

Subject: Report on Service Level Agreement between Housing Leeds and Leeds City Credit Union for the provision of a Citywide Money Management and Budgeting Service.

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|---|------------------------------|--|
| Are specific electoral Wards affected? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): | | |
| Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-In? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: | | |
| Appendix number: | | |

Summary of main issues

1. This report sets out the proposal to continue to deliver the single City wide Leeds City Credit Union Service providing additional resources to increase accessibility for all council house tenants.
2. This service is primarily aimed at Housing tenants who are in arrears, and struggling to pay their rent due to low incomes or poor money management. The support the MABS service give is aimed to provide timely intervention to avoid court proceedings and the associated enforcement action and costs.
3. In the financial year 2014-15 Housing Management funded Leeds City Credit Union (LCCU) to deliver a Money Management and Budgeting Service (MABS) via a Service Level Agreement (SLA). This service operates on a citywide basis.
4. This funding is due to expire on the 31st March 2015.
5. A meeting has taken place between Income Management and LCCU to further develop this service and a new SLA has been developed which is attached at appendix 1.
6. It is suggested that subject to LCCU delivering the agreed outcomes which will be reviewed annually the intention is to continue the service until March 2018.

Recommendations

1. The report recommends that the Director of Environment and Housing agrees the contents of this report and approves the new Service Level Agreement with LCCU for the value of £90K for a twelve month period expiring on the 31st March 2016.
2. Subject to LCCU delivering the agreed outcomes reviewed annually the intention is to continue the service until March 2018.

1 Purpose of this report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide the Director of Environment and Housing with background information on the services currently being provided by the LCCU MABS service.
- Detail the new Service Level Agreement with additional enhancements and improved performance management information to be provided by LCCU and delivering a City Wide Service
- Seek approval of the new Service Level Agreement

2 Background information

2.1 Housing Leeds has been working in close partnership with LCCU for a number of years.

2.2 A key aspect of this work has been the funding of Money Management & Budgeting Service which has worked directly within housing offices in close partnership with Housing and Financial Inclusion Officers.

2.3 This project has seen a number of successes in relation to assisting customers in financial difficulty in paying their rent and obtaining affordable credit.

3 Main issues

3.1 Through the current SLA, LCCU are currently providing a citywide Money Management & Budgeting service.

3.2 The funding for this service expires on the 31st March 2015. LCCU have stated they are unable to fund this service directly and therefore this would come to an end at the end of March 2015.

- 3.3** LCCU is seen as a key partner of Leeds City Council in dealing with the problems associated with high cost and illegal money lending. Due to the Welfare Reform changes and current financial climate increasing numbers of our tenants are facing financial hardship.
- 3.4** It is felt that the Money Management & Budgeting Service should be extended until March 2018, subject to a satisfactory outcome based review every 12 months, to continue the valuable work undertaken and that the service should be reviewed and enhanced where possible.
- 3.5** The project will support other key initiatives for Housing Leeds this year including action against illegal money lending and the introduction of an enhanced Income Management Service Offer.
- 3.6** The project will focus on delivering a number of outcomes including:
- Increasing the number of face to face interviews and budgeting sessions through local surgeries for customers.
 - Open Budget Accounts where customers can pay their rent and priority bills
 - Offer an outreach and home visit service to customers unable to access our offices.
 - Assist customers in accessing affordable loans and thereby avoiding high cost and illegal lenders.
 - Provide support and training to front line housing staff, and local tenant organisations.
 - Participate in a number of high profile campaigns to promote the services of the Credit Union.
 - Recruit and train additional volunteers to work in the Credit Union and expand the service.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.1** Officers in Housing Leeds have been in contact with LCCU and details of the SLA have been discussed along with improvements to monitor performance of the Service.
- 4.1.2** A satisfaction survey for the area housing teams has been developed and learning outcomes will be delivered during the 2015-16 financial year.
- 4.1.3** Feedback from customers who are referred for advice will be collated to establish how well the service was received, and what could be improved. This will be through a customer survey at the point of initial engagement, and another 6 months later.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1** LCCU is an inclusive organisation that provides a service to all customers irrespective of their age, race, gender or other protected characteristic. LCCU have undertaken work with Touchstone who work with the BME community in Leeds and Adult Social Care who are beginning to refer young people leaving care.

- 4.2.2 The service works with tenants to assist them in being better able to manage their finances, many of the tenants are on low incomes and this type of support helps to alleviate the impact of poverty.
- 4.2.3 An Equality, Diversity, Cohesion and Integration Screening document has been completed for this report and is attached at appendix 1.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The Money Management & Budgeting Service project will assist with key council priorities such as dealing with the issues of tackling debt, poverty and deprivation in the city.

The service supports Housing Priorities Plans; Priority 3 – Increase Rent Collection/Income and Priority 4 to maximise support to tenants affected by Welfare Reform.

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

- 4.4.1 The funding of £90,000 to LCCU for the provision of the MABS for 2015/16 will enable many of Housing Leeds tenants to access this service. This will assist them in being able to better manage their finances, seek affordable credit and increase their ability to maintain their rent payments. This will result in Housing Leeds having to take fewer customers to court for rent arrears which will make savings in staff and associated resources.
- 4.4.2 The latest management report for the MABS project provides information to identify the service provided across 14 venues across the city. The 14 advice surgeries are weekly, and provide pre-booked face to face advice in local and easily accessible venues.
- 4.4.3 There have been 237 new LCCU members from customer engagement, and 185 Budget accounts set up to facilitate rent payment. There have also been 26 Current accounts along with 31 Christmas Club accounts.
- 4.4.4 In the new SLA we are looking to further develop the activities and outcomes produced by LCCU. This will include looking at the following;
- The number of Money Management Sessions completed.
 - The number of successful contacts completed including face to face and telephone.
 - Levels of customer satisfaction with the service via a new questionnaire.
 - Number of tenants supported to avoid accessing high cost lending and the associated savings made.
 - Number of Marketing Campaigns undertaken.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

- 4.5.1 This report does not contain any exempt or confidential information.
- 4.5.2 This report is not eligible for call in.

4.6 Risk Management

- 4.6.1 The MABS service and SLA will be regularly reviewed and monitored. If the service does not meet the requirements as set out in the SLA the agreement will be terminated.

5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Housing Leeds and LCCU have been working successfully in partnership for a number of years. The MABS service has been running in Leeds for almost three years assisting council tenants with budgeting and money management.
- 5.2 Both Housing Leeds and LCCU are keen to continue with this service and to develop and improve it across all areas of the city. This project assists Housing Leeds deliver one of its key priorities and supports our residents in financial difficulty.
- 5.3 It is intended to build on existing practices and enhance the service through a revised SLA.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 The report recommends that the Director of Environment and Housing agrees the contents of this report and approves the new City Wide Service Level Agreement with LCCU for the value of £90K for a twelve month period expiring on the 31st March 2016.

Subject to LCCU delivering the agreed outcomes reviewed annually the intention is to continue the service until March 2018.

7 Background documents

- 7.1 The new SLA between Housing Leeds and Leeds City Credit Union.