

Report of Executive Officer Advice Services

Report to Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)

Date: 6 January 2017

Subject: Leeds Advice Consortium Extension

Are specific electoral wards affected? If yes, name(s) of ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes x No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes x No
Is the decision eligible for call-in?	x Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, access to information procedure rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes x No

Summary of main issues

1. This report provides an update on Leeds Advice Consortium, made up of Citizens Advice Leeds, Citizens Advice Chapeltown and Better Leeds Communities, which is now in the final year of a 3 year contract awarded in April 2014
2. It evidences the good work that has been undertaken to improve access to advice services and the huge increase in the number of clients assisted since the start of the contract.
3. It highlights the emerging issues in relation to advice which will need to be considered when retendering for this service

Recommendations

1. To agree an 1 year extension to the Advice Consortium Contract
2. To agree to a market sounding exercise to establish the level of interest amongst providers in the provision of this service from April 2018

1.0 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the Leeds Advice Consortium contract and to highlight areas of good performance as well as challenges, emerging areas of concern, risks relating to the contract and the re-tendering exercise in relation to this service.

2.0 Background information

- 2.1 Following a market sounding exercise undertaken in 2012 and the subsequent Exec Board decision, Leeds Advice Consortium was awarded a 3 year contract to deliver a new citywide advice service. The aim of the new service was to improve access to advice by increasing opening hours and expanding telephone based advice to help deal with the ever increasing demand.
- 2.2 The initial contract was awarded with the option of 2, 1 year extensions.
- 2.3 Prior to the award of this contract several departments across the Council gave grants to the advice sector to deliver services on behalf of their clients with all monitoring being done independently.
- 2.4 This contract is now managed by the Executive Officer - Advice Services who also manages the Council's in house Welfare Rights Unit. This has enabled a more cohesive approach including, improved partnership working and the sharing of best practice to allow for more effective use of resources.

3.0 Main issues

- 3.1 In response to the Market Sounding Exercise the consortium members stated that during 2011/12 they dealt with a total of 15,788 individual clients. To deal with the ever increasing demand and meet the target to more than double the number of people receiving advice the consortium had to improve access by increasing opening hours, expanding the telephone service and use resources more effectively.
- 3.2 In the first year the target to deal with 21,530 was challenging however the consortium rose to the challenge and actually dealt with 26,359 unique clients. The funding allocation in 2014/15 was £1,645,000.
- 3.3 The target for year 2 following the reconfiguration of Citizens Advice Leeds was increased to 30,575 however this was coupled with a reduction in funding of almost £40,000. The consortium dealt with 28,964 individual clients and although below target this was still an increase of just under 10%.
- 3.4 This year, 2016/17, given all of the improvements the consortium had made to the way the service is being delivered it was felt appropriate to increase the targets again to 34,756. As at the end of quarter 2 the consortium had dealt with 22,817 individual clients so are on track to actually exceed the target. The funding for 16/17 was £1,651,657 due to Adult Social Care awarding a one of amount of £46,639 for a specific worker to offer advice to those affected by the changes to the charging policy for those in non-residential care.
- 3.5 It is without doubt that this contract is now delivering value for money however with further improvements in technology even more clients could be helped in the future.

- 3.6 Given the improvements made to how the service is delivered and as a direct result the number of clients assisted the consortium should be awarded a 1 year extension. During this time it is recommended that a further Market Sounding Exercise takes place to see who may be interested in providing this service from April 2018.
- 3.7 Although encouraging a consortium bid this had led to several issues:-
- The lead organisation has to sub-contract to the other agencies within the consortium which comes at a cost.
 - Whilst targets are established and monitoring meetings take place with the lead organisation they then have to go the other agencies to request data and ensure compliance. As the other agencies do not have the direct link with the Council they can be less inclined to engage and be less proactive in making improvements to the service.
- 3.8 When re-tendering for this service several organisations may show an interest and ultimately a new provider may be awarded the contract. As this contract provides the main source of funding for Citizens Advice Leeds and Citizens Advice Chapeltown the re-tendering exercise will create a period of uncertainty for these organisations.

4 Corporate considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

- 4.1.1 This report is not proposing any changes to the current service provision and as such there is no need for wider consultation.

4.2 Equality and diversity / cohesion and integration

- 4.2.1 This report is not proposing any changes to the current contract and as such there is no need for an EIA screening document to be completed.

4.3 Council policies and best council plan

- 4.3.1 The performance information received by the Board allows it to assess and challenge performance in relation to the Advice Services Contract and the in-house Welfare Rights Team in relation to the Best Council Business Plan 2015-20.

4.4 Resources and value for money

- 4.4.1 The information provided within this report demonstrates how advice across the city has been provided to ensure best use of resources and value for money.

4.5 Legal implications, access to information, and call-in

- 4.5.1 As the value of the extension exceeds £250k per year then it constitutes a key decision and as such will need to be published on the Council's List of Forthcoming Key Decisions for 28 days it will also be subject to call-in.

4.6 Risk management

- 4.6.1 In many cases access to advice can help to secure a client's income, reduce indebtedness and help them to remain in their homes. Without this type of service further costs may be incurred not only for the local authority but also for the NHS.

5 Conclusions

- 5.5.1 As a result of this contract more people are accessing advice than ever before. By extending opening hours, expanding the telephone service and introducing other access channels including email and skype the service is also more responsive to client's needs.

6 Recommendations

- 6.5.1 It is recommended that the 1 year extension to this contract is improved and a Market Sounding Exercise undertaken with a view to a new contract being granted from 1st April 2018.

7 Background documents¹

- 7.7.1 None

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.