

Chichester District Council

THE CABINET

9 January 2018

Commissioning of West Sussex Community Advice Service

1. Contacts

Cabinet Member:

Eileen Lintill - Cabinet Member for Wellbeing and Community Services

Telephone: 01798 342948 E-mail: elintill@chichester.gov.uk

Report Author:

Dave Hyland - Community and Partnerships Support Manager

Telephone: 01243 534864 E-mail: dhyland@chichester.gov.uk

2. Recommendation

A - RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE CABINET

- 2.1 That the Cabinet agrees to the continuation of the Funding Partnership to commission a Community Advice Service across West Sussex beyond 2018 with West Sussex County Council as the lead authority and subject to confirmation of funding by other partners.**
- 2.2 That the Cabinet considers its likely support for the service beyond the bridging period to guide the recommissioning work of the Funding Partnership.**
- 2.3 That the Cabinet delegates authority to the Head of Community Services to agree the Terms of Reference for the Funding Partnership and changes to the Service Specification in agreeing a Bridging Contract.**

B - RECOMMENDATION TO THE COUNCIL

- 2.4 That the Cabinet recommends to Council that the availability of £74,000 per annum for up to two years to achieve a bridging contract with the existing provider for the Community Advice Service be approved.**

3. Background

- 3.1 On 14 October 2014, and subsequently on 14 December 2014, Cabinet approved recommendations and delegations that saw a Community Advice Service commissioned on a county-wide basis through a Funding Partnership lead by West Sussex County Council (WSCC). Following a tender process a three year contract was awarded to the Citizen's Advice (CA) with Central and South Sussex Citizens Advice (CaSSCA) as the contract holder. The contract was funded by WSCC and all the District and Borough Councils in the county. Chichester District Council's contribution was £74,000 per annum.**

- 3.2 The Chichester Citizens Advice Service is provided by Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice (ACCA), a long established local charity. Face to face advice is available from the Chichester office free of charge to individuals, between 10:00 to 16:00. Outreach sessions are also provided in Selsey and East Wittering. Telephone advice is provided and a “webchat” facility has been phased in. ACCA has also secured external funding that provides a home-visiting service for those unable to visit the office and need face to face support. While ACCA do employ some core staff, as with all CAs, the majority of advice is provided by trained volunteers.
- 3.3 The service in Chichester helped 3,880 clients in 2016-2017, 74% of these presented to CA in person. 15% of enquiries required face to face appointment to resolve issues. Issues relating to Benefits, Employment and/or Debt account for the majority of queries. Local Authority funding (including contributions from Town and Parish Councils) make up around 66% of the costs of the service. ACCA fundraise and bid for projects that support the service.
- 3.4 During the last year of the contract, monitoring meetings have focussed on provision beyond March 2018. The service continues to be of value to local residents which is recognised by all funders in this partnership, and have informally indicated that they wish to see the service continue in future years. However the current contract does not allow for extension.

4. Outcomes

- 4.1 Identification of the most effective economic and efficient means of continuing a community advice service which meets the need of residents within Chichester District. Ensure the sustainability of a generalist advice service providing a specified range of free advice to resident in an accurate and timely way.
- 4.2 In funding this service within Chichester District, this Council wishes to ensure that residents can receive:
- Timely and convenient access to impartial advice
 - Support for avoiding or reducing debt
 - Advice that ensures they are receiving their correct benefits
 - A quality volunteering experience for those involved in delivery

5. Proposal

- 5.1 In the short term, CDC acts together with WSCC and the other districts and boroughs to offer a bridging contract to the existing contract. This would broadly be on the basis of the existing specification and (subject to confirmation from all funders) at the same funding level, and could be put in place for 12 to 24 months. The current contract holders have experienced no let-up in the demand for the services (Q1 of 2017/18 ACCA assisted 957 clients, 2.4% increase on the same quarter 2016/17), and there is County wide satisfaction with the current provision. Within Chichester District, ACCA have recently relocated into East Pallant House.
- 5.2 To achieve the bridging contract, the existing Funding Partnership needs to revise its Terms of Reference in order to continue beyond March 2018, reconfirm WSCC as the lead commissioning body and agree the duration of the bridging arrangements (in consideration of subsequent arrangements). In the longer

term, the Funding Partnership will need to formulate a commissioning process beyond the bridging contract. To inform the ongoing discussions about the form it should take, this Council will need to give indications of the amount and duration of funding available.

6. Alternatives Considered

- 6.1 The District Council could choose not to continue to commission this service, but the current level of usage (and the recent relocation to EPH) is clear evidence that there is a need for such a service.
- 6.2 The CDC could commit to a “bridging” arrangement of up to two years but not make any commitment to longer term funding. Without confirmation of likely funding beyond 2020, it would be unlikely that the funding partnership could achieve an appropriately commissioned countywide arrangement.
- 6.3 The Funding Partnership and countywide contract arrangements were products of the Legal Services Commission commissioning a Countywide Specialist Legal Advice contract which were discontinued prior to the 2014 contract. As time has passed it could be possible to return to local grant giving or commissioning; in this District as a direct grant from this Council to ACCA, or an alternative process to identify a suitable contractor. However there are now greater mutual aid arrangements between the two CAs. The Countywide approach also draws in significant funding from WSCC (currently £350,000 pa) which might be jeopardised.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 Provision for the funding of this service has been made within the CDC base budget, subject to annual review. An indication of future funding intentions could be indicative and made subject to reconfirmation nearer the time.
- 7.2 WSCC has offered (subject to agreement by the Partnership) to lead on the commissioning process; there is a cost benefit to continuing this arrangement over any one of the Districts or Boroughs undertaking to take the lead instead, or indeed coming to individual arrangements locally. There may be some need for support from our own legal team in protecting this Council’s interests in any proposed future contract.
- 7.3 Once a means to bridge the existing contract has been secured then commissioning for the subsequent period (beyond 2019 or 2020 as agreed across the County) can be developed. A subsequent paper will come back to Cabinet to determine support for that further contract.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 Regular monitoring of the current contract has fostered good dialogue with other councils within the Funding Partnership and the wish to continue the funding of the service between the current funders, is unanimous. ACCA has been well supported by councillors, and relationships between ACCA and key services within this Council are positive.
- 8.2 Grants Panel are due to meet on 31 January 2018 and will receive an annual monitoring report in respect of ACCA and an indication of the way forward for

funding beyond March 2018. Ahead of that meeting, a short briefing for Panel Members has been prepared and circulated, who indicate their support for funding to continue.

- 8.3 ACCA continues to actively fundraise to sustain its service to local residents and has been successful in securing funding for additional services during the contract period. The funding they receive through this funding arrangement is invaluable to funding their core offer and as a result ACCA would wish the current funding arrangements to continue.

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1 The decision to make direct award of a contract could be the subject of challenge and review. Whilst that risk is considered low it could require the District Council and the other parties to the contract to terminate the contract and undertake a tender process.
- 9.2 The District Council will seek an appropriate clause in the contract to provide for its termination in the event that a challenge arises to the contract award.

10. Other Implications

Crime and Disorder		No
Climate Change		No
Human Rights and Equality Impact An equality impact assessment was completed during initial tendering exercise and demonstrated a positive impact	Yes	
Safeguarding Through the community advice service arrangement vulnerable people receive help and advice which gives a positive effect	Yes	

11 Appendices

- 11.1 None

12 Background Papers

- 12.1 None