

# Chichester District Council

THE CABINET

8 January 2019

## Commissioning of West Sussex Community Advice Service

### 1. Contacts

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### 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Cabinet agrees, subject to continued partner funding, to the continuation of the Funding Partnership to commission a Community Advice Service across West Sussex for up to three years from April 2019 with West Sussex County Council as the lead authority.**
- 2.2 **That the Cabinet delegates authority to the Director of Housing and Communities, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Community Services, to agree the specification and signing of the contract, and delegates the annual monitoring of performance to the Grants and Concessions Panel.**

### 3. Background

- 3.1 At the meeting of January 2018, the Cabinet recommended to the Council the allocation of £74,000 per annum for up to two years to enable a bridging contract to be negotiated for the provision of a Community Advice Service across West Sussex. The existing contract was due to end in March 2018. The purpose of this arrangement was to sustain funding (through a partnership with West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) and the district and borough councils in the county) for the existing providers as an interim measure to enable a formally recommissioned service for a longer period.
- 3.2 The one year bridging contract was negotiated and agreed under delegation by the Head of Community Services, and is due to conclude in March 2019. Discussions have identified that the Funding Partnership are keen to continue the service with the lead contractor, Central and Southern Sussex Citizens Advice, delivered in this District by the local charity Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice.

### 4. Outcomes to be Achieved

- 4.1 To identify the most effective economic and efficient means of continuing a community advice service which meets the needs of residents in the District. In the context of increasing demand, ensure the continued availability of access to:

- Impartial advice
- Support for avoiding and reducing debt
- Advice that ensures individuals are receiving correct benefits
- A quality volunteering experience for those involved in delivery

## **5. Proposal**

- 5.1 The current contract is between the Funding Partnership (WSCC and the constituent District and Borough Councils) and Central and Southern Sussex Citizens Advice as lead provider. The relationship has been successful in supporting the local service for the period of the current contract (since April 2015), but the new contract specification will reflect the changing nature of welfare advice, particularly in respect of Universal Credit and changes in the way the service is provided across the county.
- 5.2 It is proposed that a contract is procured by way of single tender with the current supplier, rather than by competitive tender (subject to approval by WSCC internal procurement committee). It is considered that the Citizens Advice organisations offer a distinctive service to local residents and its methodology of operation, utilising a large number of volunteers in locations across the county, is unique and could not be replicated.
- 5.3 It is proposed that the process will be led by WSCC on behalf of the funding partners, all of whom would be party to the final agreement.
- 5.4 It is anticipated that the term of the contract will be negotiated as a two year contract from 1 April 2019 with an option to extend for the third year. It will also be subject to the availability of funds from the various partners, which will in effect be reconfirmed annually. Providers are happy that the longer term commitment still indicates support for the service and allows them to plan more effectively.
- 5.5 WSCC is expected to formally approve the commissioning of the new service this month, and the procurement process will then follow. A new contract should be in place by April 2019, but the Citizens Advice organisations are fully engaged in the process to ensure continuity.

## **6. Alternatives Considered**

- 6.1 The Council could choose to discontinue funding of this service but the current level of use is clear evidence of the need for the service, and there is concern that the need for advice will rise further.
- 6.2 The original countywide contract arrangements were products of the Legal Services Commission led commissioning of a countywide service that was discontinued prior to 2014. Discussions over the last 12 months amongst the funding partnership have identified different views about the way forward, and it could be possible to return to local grant giving directly between Chichester District Council and Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice as the local provider. However there is now mutual aid between the two Citizens Advice Services, and the countywide arrangement continues to draw in significant funding from WSCC

(£350,000 committed for 2019/20), which might be jeopardised.

## 7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 Funding for the service to cover this proposal of £ 82,100 per annum is within base budget with an inflationary increase for 2019-20 (subject to the Council's approval of the budget in March 2019).
- 7.2 WSCC will be leading on the procurement so staff resourcing implications are low.
- 7.3 The contract and specification will be reviewed by Legal Services to ensure that the interests of Chichester District Council are protected.

## 8. Consultation

- 8.1 The annual performance of Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice has been reported to the Grants and Concessions Panel to its satisfaction. In advance of their meeting of 30<sup>th</sup> January 2019, this report has been circulated to the Panel in draft form. Members of the Panel have indicated their support for the Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice and this funding proposal.

## 9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1 There is justification for the approach proposed as summarised at para 6.2, and the arrangement when more openly commissioned in previous years received no interest from the wider market. It is also felt that uncertainty over future funding levels means there is no justification to re test the market.
- 9.2 Impact on the community will be positive as an advice service will be available.

## 10. Other Implications

Are there any implications for the following?		
	Yes	No
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>		X
<b>Climate Change and Biodiversity</b>		X
<b>Human Rights and Equality Impact</b> An EIA on the previous tendering exercise demonstrated a positive impact	X	
<b>Safeguarding and Early Help</b> Vulnerable people receive help and advice through this commissioned service. The contract ensures that service providers have robust Safeguarding arrangements in place, and can prioritise support to those least able to help themselves.	X	
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b> Access to advice from a trusted organisation will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents	X	
<b>General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)</b> As lead organisation, WSCC have already ensured compliance with GDPR as part of the contract extension April 2018 – March 2019.	X	

## **11. Appendices**

11.1 None

## **12. Background Papers**

12.1 None