

Chichester District Council

THE CABINET

7 September 2021

Commissioning of West Sussex Community Advice and Support Service

1. Contacts

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2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Cabinet recommends to Council the continuation of the Funding Partnership to commission a Community Advice and Support Service across West Sussex for up to seven years from April 2022 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 to the Inter Agency Agreement, 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 2019, the Cabinet recommended to the Council the allocation of £82,100 per annum for up to three years to enable the commissioning of a Community Advice Service across West Sussex, a continuation of a previously commissioned County wide service for over 5 years and arrangements that had been grant funded locally for a much longer period.
- 3.2 Following commissioning, a three year contract was negotiated and agreed under delegation by the Head of Community Services, and is due to conclude in March 2022. Discussions have identified that the existing Funding Partnership are keen to continue the service, and West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) have again agreed to lead the commissioning process. The current contract is currently held by a joint arrangement between Central and Southern Sussex Citizens Advice, and Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice. The service in this District is delivered by 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 complex and increasing demand, especially in response to the pandemic, 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 current contract period and previous rounds (continuous since April 2015). A new contract specification will reflect the changing nature of community welfare advice, particularly in respect of post Covid recovery and changes in the way the service is provided across the county.
- 5.2 At this juncture it is considered that the contract will be procured by open tender to demonstrate best value, although funding partners are still trying to identify third parties that might reasonably be able to deliver to a highly localised specification. The current contact holders have invested directly in the delivery of the service historically, but recognise the need for recommissioning and are well placed to make a strong submission. If it can be demonstrated that the current supplier is uniquely placed then a single tender process could be used (subject to approval by WSCC internal procurement committee).
- 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. To formalise the Funding Partnership, WSCC are proposing an Inter Agency Agreement (IAA) to formalise some of the key commitments and arrangements that have been developed over the last 6 years of the informal partnership. Contract monitoring will be undertaken District by District, allowing for direct engagement with the local provider and for services to be shaped specifically around the needs of this District.
- 5.4 Having seen the value of the service during the pandemic, WSCC are keen to offer a longer term agreement for the contract. It is anticipated that the term of the contract will be negotiated as a “three plus three plus one” model from 1 April 2022. This is viewed as a three year contract based around Covid recovery, with the option to extend for a further three years with reasonable variation reflecting needs at that time, and a further option to extend for a final one year as a precursor to any recommissioning at that time. The potential to offer a contract period of up to 7 years provides support for the service and allows them to plan more effectively. It will be subject to the availability of funds from the various partners; notice to end the contract can be given with 6 months’ notice, which will in effect see funding reconfirmed annually.
- 5.5 WSCC is expected to formally approve the commissioning of the new service this month, and a verbal update regarding the way forward can be provided to the meeting. A new contract should be in place by April 2022, but a short extension to the existing contract could be facilitated rather than result in any loss of continuity

for this key service to residents.

6. Alternatives Considered

- 6.1 The Council could choose to discontinue funding of this service but the current level of use, reported most recently to the Grants and Concessions Panel at their January 2021 meeting, is clear evidence of the need for the service, and there is concern that the need for advice will rise further.
- 6.2 The shift to a countywide commission was initiated by the Legal Services Commission, who have not funded such services since 2014. While it is possible to return to historic mechanisms to grant fund Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice as the local provider, 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 annually for the proposed contract period), which might be jeopardised. In addition, the size of a potential grant would require this council to undertake its own commissioning process, with associated costs.

7. Resource and Legal Implications

- 7.1 Funding for the service to cover this proposal of £86,300 per annum (as at 2021/22) is within base budget and would rise with inflation where the budget allows. Annual renewal of the contribution would be subject to the Council's approval of the budget.
- 7.2 WSCC will be leading on the procurement so staff resourcing implications are low.
- 7.3 The IAA, contract and specification will be reviewed by Legal Services to ensure that the interests of Chichester District Council are protected.
- 7.4 Arun and Chichester Citizens Advice deliver face to face services from East Pallant House; their accommodation and concessionary rent are considered separately to this contract.

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 throughout the contract period, most recently at the meeting of 20 January 2021. In advance of their meeting of 15 September 2021, this report has been circulated to the Panel in draft form. **Members of the Panel have indicated their support for this funding proposal.**

9. Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1 There is justification for a single tender process as summarised at para 5.2, the most recent contract was commissioned by single tender, but when more openly commissioned in previous years there was no interest from the wider 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
Crime and Disorder		X
Climate Change and Biodiversity		X
Human Rights and Equality Impact An EIA on the previous tendering exercise demonstrated a positive impact	X	
Safeguarding and Early Help 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	
Health and Wellbeing Access to advice from a trusted organisation will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of residents	X	
General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) 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