

Summary Sheet

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making Meeting – 16 October 2017

Report Title

Advice Services Review

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

Yes

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

All

Summary

This report arises from a review of advice services in Rotherham and makes recommendations about future strategic direction for the services together with commissioning arrangements.

The review is set in the context of significant need for advice services by the residents of Rotherham, including those already impacted by welfare reforms, especially people with disabilities and families with children; and the anticipated additional demands arising from the full roll-out of Universal Credit from April 2018.

The primary focus of the review is services provided in-house of Advocacy and Appeals and Financial Inclusion, together with external services provided by Citizen's Advice Bureau; Kiveton Park Independent Advice Centre; and Rotherham Diversity Forum immigration and nationality advisor.

The overall objectives of the review are to secure responsive and effective service provision meeting growing complex needs for these services, with maximum efficiency within the challenging budgetary climate.

The way forward seeks to establish a streamlined and collaborative approach across advice services and providers over the medium term. This looks for a two stage approach. The initial stage invites a consortium approach to commissioning from voluntary sector providers through a co-production model. Funding would be awarded aligned to a three year service level agreement(s) commencing in April 2018, with annual reviews to further the evolution of the full collaborative approach and ensure that priority needs continue to be met. The proposed processes for production of the model and commissioning are compliant with the “Rotherham Compact”. The second stage, timed for 2019 would move to an integrated model of advice provision both in-house and with the voluntary sector.

Recommendations

1. That the outcomes of the review be noted.
2. That approval be given to progress arrangements for advice services in Rotherham, including:
 - Co-design with voluntary sector organisations for services to be delivered by voluntary sector advice providers for three years commencing from April 2018;
 - That the scope of services to be delivered by the voluntary sector focus on provision in levels two and three of the advice model through core service level agreements to a total value of £240k per annum, with the provision for additional project based arrangements covering specific advice service demands and developments over the medium term;
 - Collaboration to produce an integrated model of advice provision across advice services including in-house provision effective from April 2019;
 - Commissioning and funding model options that will best provide flexibilities for service development over the medium term through a consortium approach in the voluntary sector; and
 - Identify as part of the Council’s Customer Services and Efficiency Programme, improvements to level one signposting and self-serve provision.
3. That, subject to the achievement of the objectives of this approach, service level agreement(s) be entered into with voluntary sector providers, including the expectation of leverage of external funds; adoption of priorities; and performance arrangements.
4. That the detailed arrangements be subject to annual review and participation in the further alignment and other developments of advice services in Rotherham in 2019.

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

Monitoring information received from advice providers and survey forms completed by service users as part of the review.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel
Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 11 October 2017

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Advice Services Review

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That the outcomes of the review be noted.
- 1.2 That approval be given to progress arrangements for advice services in Rotherham, including:
 - Co-design with voluntary sector organisations for services to be delivered by voluntary sector advice providers for three years commencing from April 2018;
 - That the scope of services to be delivered by the voluntary sector focus on provision in levels two and three of the advice model through core service level agreements to a total value of £240k per annum, with the provision for additional project based arrangements covering specific advice service demands and developments over the medium term;
 - Collaboration to produce an integrated model of advice provision across advice services including in-house provision effective from April 2019;
 - Commissioning and funding model options that will best provide flexibilities for service development over the medium term through a consortium approach in the voluntary sector; and
 - Identify as part of the Council's Customer Services and Efficiency Programme, improvements to level one signposting and self-serve provision.
- 1.3 That, subject to the achievement of the objectives of this approach, service level agreement(s) be entered into with voluntary sector providers, including the expectation of leverage of external funds; adoption of priorities; and performance arrangements.
- 1.4 That the detailed arrangements be subject to annual review and participation in the further alignment and other developments of advice services in Rotherham in 2019.

2. Background

Overview

- 2.1 Advice services are critical services to many of the most vulnerable residents of Rotherham, including those already impacted by welfare reforms and especially people with disabilities and families with children who are struggling to make ends meet. The full roll-out of Universal Credit from April 2018 is expected to create significant additional demand for advice services as people are expected to adapt to monthly payments and suffer delays in the processing of benefits creating additional hardship.
- 2.2 Advice services in Rotherham are provided by a number of organisations including the Council, with the Council providing financial support to some advice service providers in the voluntary sector. The current service level agreements with voluntary sector providers expire in March 2018. The services provided are currently structured around a four tier model.



2.3 Level one provision is provided by many service providers both within the Council and by external providers including health services and voluntary sector organisations. Within the Council, Customer Services provide signposting including provision through libraries alongside children’s services. Many organisations, especially those in the voluntary sector provide support to people in their communities, and while not being direct advice service providers will recognise advice needs of the people they work with and will signpost accordingly. It is almost certain that the bulk of signposting and referrals is outside of the formal advice provision services specifications or service level agreements. Notwithstanding this, there will be the opportunity as part of the review to explore how self-serve, especially web based, could be used to reduce demand on face to face services for levels two and three provision. There is the potential to link to the Council’s Customer Services and Efficiency Programme to identify how signposting and self-serve can be improved.

2.4 Levels two and three cover most of the recorded advice provision work of face to face advice support delivered both within the Council and through the voluntary sector. Twelve providers have been identified as currently providing some forms of levels two and three advice in Rotherham, albeit that most only provide specific categories of advice or cater for a particular client group. The primary categories of advice available are:

- Debt;
- Housing;
- Employment;
- Education;
- Consumer;
- Immigration;
- Welfare;
- Family; and
- Legal.

Some offer open door access whilst others will only take clients by referral. The organisations currently funded by the Council for generalist and immigration advice all offer open door access as well as using an appointment booking system “Nellbooker” shared across voluntary organisations and the Council.

Within the Council, Neighbourhoods provide extensive advice and financial inclusion services funded by the Housing Revenue Account for the benefit of Council tenants. This is a referral service providing housing related support alongside financial inclusion and the impact on tenants of the benefits cap and bedroom tax. It should be noted though that many Council tenants present for advice support at voluntary sector providers that are being funded through the Council’s General Fund. As part of the review there will be the opportunity to better align financial inclusion type advice support irrespective of budget source.

- 2.5 Level four services are primarily provided by the Council’s Advocacy and Appeals Service; however there is some provision at this level within the voluntary sector. Funding for the Council provided service is a combination of General Fund; Housing Revenue Account; and some external funding provision.

Planning for the future

- 2.6 As part of planning for future provision, a review of advice services has been commenced. This has identified that an issue with the current provision is that it is fragmented both within the Council and across different advice providers. There are also issues where depending on the funding source; some advice services are not accessible to everyone in need of help. These issues can only be addressed through a comprehensive review that overcomes barriers between services to provide seamless services to the community and provides good and effective access to information that can reduce the demand for more intensive advice support.
- 2.7 The primary focus of the review has been services currently provided in-house by Advocacy and Appeals and Financial Inclusion, together with external services provided by Citizen’s Advice Bureau (CAB); Kiveton Park Independent Advice Centre; and Rotherham Diversity Forum (RDF) Immigration and Nationality advisor. The overall objectives of the review are to secure responsive and effective service provision meeting growing complex needs for these services, with maximum efficiency within the challenging budgetary climate, establishing a streamlined and collaborative approach across advice services and providers over the medium term.

Demand for services

- 2.8 Key information for the advice service review is being produced for service providers to gain a common understanding of the objects of the review. In addition, a presentation has been made to the July meeting of the Advice in Rotherham Partnership. Survey work has been undertaken through the service providers to seek the experiences and views of service users. This information is being used alongside monitoring data of service demand and usage and any trends identified that indicate changes in, and future demand.

2.9 Detail of the surveys and monitoring information from CAB; Kiveton Park and the Council's Advocacy & Appeals and Neighbourhoods services show that over 15,000 people accessed the services in the last year. Debt and welfare featured highly with over £3 million being gained in benefits for service users at CAB and Advocacy & Appeals.

2.10 The survey of service users provides more fine grained information. The surveys have been completed by nearly 200 service users at the following service providers:

- CAB;
- Kiveton Park;
- Rotherham Diversity Forum (RDF);
- The Council – Advocacy & Appeals; and
- The Council – Housing Financial Inclusion.

2.11 The top six reasons for seeking advice and support revealed by the user survey were:

Finance (debt)	69
Welfare (benefits)	52
Housing	33
Immigration	29
Health	24
Legal rights	22

Within this, it should be noted that some people presented complex needs across more than one category. Typically this will include finance / debt and welfare; housing and welfare; and health with other categories of need.

2.12 A significant amount of the demand at 98 of those surveyed required help with filling in forms. This was across a broad range of issues indicating a lack of confidence among many in completing forms and getting them right. Requests for advocacy applied to 49 of those surveyed, the majority with the Advocacy and Appeals service, but also at CAB and Kiveton Park.

2.13 There was a 50/50 split between people accessing the services directly and those who were referred there by another service provider. Open access was far more common at CAB; Kiveton Park and RDF than for the Council's in house services. The client bases varied between providers where the RDF client base was primarily drawn from BME communities with most of the immigration enquiries, whilst Housing Financial Inclusion dealt with Council tenants with issues resulting from benefit cap; employment; and rent arrears featuring highly. It should be noted that only RDF and CAB are registered to provide immigration advice. Neither is registered at level three that allows them to represent people in tribunals, but this level of service is available in Sheffield.

2.14 86 of those surveyed had disabilities.

2.15 Of those who indicated how they accessed the services, by far the most at 119 made a personal visit, whilst 69 contacted by phone. Only four accessed the services on-line.

2.16 The survey also collected post codes for users of the service and means of access. The post code data shows that demand arises from across Rotherham, but as expected is greater in the more deprived neighbourhoods.

The areas with the highest levels of demand identified from the survey are set out in the table:

S25 2	Dinnington
S26 6	Kiveton
S60 2 & 5	Canklow and Brinsworth
S61 1, 3 & 4	Ferham, Kimberworth, Greasbrough
S62 7	Rawmarsh
S63 7	Wath
S65	Eastwood, Clifton, Herringthorpe, East Herringthorpe, Thrybergh
S66 2	Wickersley

2.17 The ongoing demand for advice service provision and to provide advocacy shows no sign of reducing. The complexity of cases including interrelationship between welfare reforms; debt; employment; and other legal matters shows the needs for an integrated approach to advice services. Immigration advice continues to be in demand. It is clear too that many of the processes and forms to be completed are challenging for people resulting in significant demand for the services, as people fear the consequences of getting them wrong. This shows that whilst channel-shift to self-serve for level one provision could assist, there will be ongoing demand for telephone and face to face advice provision.

The way forward

2.18 In developing the proposed way forward, consideration is taking account of the four tier model of advice currently used; the sources of funding; and options for change over the medium term as well as short term changes.

2.19 Achieving the overall objectives of the advice review is complex because of the number of providers; different budgets being used; and restrictions relating to the beneficiaries of some budgets. Whilst the review will tackle these complexities, this will not be possible in the timeframe for awarding new service level agreements for voluntary sector provision from April 2018. There is also an issue of changing and increasing demand over the medium term, especially in relation to further welfare reform that cannot be accurately quantified. Consequently this report recommends a two staged approach as follows:

- **Stage One** – Commissioning provision from the voluntary sector through a consortium co-design process as provided for in the Rotherham Compact, for core advice service provision with a value of £240k per annum. This to be subject to the award of three year service level agreement(s) (SLAs) commencing from April 2018, with sufficient flexibility around annual reviews to future-proof for changes to service specifications arising from stage two of the process. In addition, further project based arrangements may be introduced with the voluntary sector around specific issues including demands arising from welfare reform subject to the demonstration of demand and availability of resources. In particular, the core service SLAs will cover requirements around access to services; outputs and outcomes including:
 - Opening hours and home visit provisions;
 - Open access services in person, by telephone and internet;
 - Referrals and appointments;
 - Specific services offered;
 - Monitoring and report on demand and volumes;
 - Securing financial resilience for service users especially where welfare reform and debt is concerned;
 - Flexibility in service provision adapting to changing needs; and
 - Compliance with grant conditions including partnership working and participation in the advice service review to achieve its objectives and the level of resources available.

The SLAs are timed to be in place by February 2018 at the latest, to be effective from April.

- **Stage two** – Completion of the wider review for delivery and alignment of advice services including the use of and allocation of available resources. This review to be completed by autumn 2018 for implementation from April 2019. Further reports will be required in the interim to agree changes to in-house services required to meet the objectives of the review.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The demand for the full range of advice service continues with increasing complexity of cases presented.
- 3.2 The roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) in Rotherham from April 2018 is expected to generate extra demand as all new claimants go directly to UC. The migration of existing benefit claimants will follow on.
- 3.3 There is a significant opportunity to add value through changes to working models including greater use of self-serve where appropriate, and lever in additional resources as match funding to the Council's investment in the voluntary sector.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1 The recommended option for stage one invites a consortium approach to co-designed collaborative proposals from the advice services in the voluntary sector for their provision for three years commencing in April 2018 and includes provision for voluntary sector engagement in producing the arrangements for stage two. The co-design proposals would be required to demonstrate:

- The priority needs of residents to be met through the services and how residents would access or be referred to them;
- The scope of services to be delivered by the voluntary sector to cover provision in levels two and three of the advice model as a minimum through a core service level agreement with a value of £240k per annum;
- The service provision will be provided within the resources provided by the Council and seek external leverage of resources;
- Collaboration to produce an integrated model of advice provision across advice services including in-house provision effective from April 2019; and
- Identify as part of the Council's Customer Services and Efficiency Programme, improvements to level one signposting and self-serve provision.

4.2 Alternative options provide for the simple letting of new contracts for the service provision by way of competitive tendering. These could be through a single contract to one provider or multiple contracts. Whilst this approach would provide for continued service provision, it would not develop the type of working relationships that would be needed to move the whole review of advice services forward, and would be an opportunity lost. It would probably make the objectives of stage two of the process more difficult to realise. It would also be difficult to provide service specifications for the contract documentation for the medium term given the changing and complex demands for advice, especially with the next stage of welfare reform about to commence.

5. Consultation

5.1 Consultation has taken place with the Advice in Rotherham Partnership. The response from providers supports a co-production collaborative approach to the future of advice provision.

5.2 A survey of 200 advice service users at Kiveton Park; CAB; and RDF; together with the Council's Advocacy and Appeals and Housing Financial Inclusion services has provided valuable information covering types of support requested and user experiences.

5.3 The views of the Overview and Scrutiny management Board will be reported to Cabinet at the meeting.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 6.1 A decision is required at this time to ensure that there is continuity of voluntary sector advice service provision from April 2018. A further report will be presented in autumn 2018 to make recommendations for implementation of stage two of the review. Further reports will also be required for approval of any other arrangements proposed to be awarded to voluntary sector advice providers for the delivery of any specific advice projects identified through new and changing demand.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1 The financial planning assumptions for the stage one core advice services service level agreement(s) with the voluntary sector involve the commitment of £240k per annum for three years to be funded through general fund budget allocated to the Assistant Chief Executive.
- 7.2 Budgets relating to other Council funded advice services and any project funding are not included in the stage one commissioning, but will be reported when making recommendation for stage two, or as appropriate.
- 7.3 Section 11 of appendix 5 to the Council's constitution (Financial Regulations) sets out the monitoring arrangements to which grant recipients must adhere. The Compact proposes that these arrangements are covered within a Service Level Agreement. This will facilitate a consortium based collaboration co-produced model. This will require all voluntary sector advice providers to have the opportunity to participate, but will need to be separate from the Advice in Rotherham partnership as this includes Council based advice providers. The Financial Regulations set out the relevant requirements for awarding grant programmes together with monitoring, review and accountability and the Compact sets out processes for dispute resolution.
- 7.4 The detail and status of the consortium can be determined as part of the co-design. This could be in the form of a body with its own legal identity that could hold a single service level agreement, or be an umbrella for a legally binding agreement between the voluntary sector advice providers that hold service level agreements with the Council. In the latter model, the service level agreement arrangements between the Council and the voluntary sector providers could be through a single service level agreement with one provider, or through direct service level agreement with each provider within a consortium service provision requirement.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The provision of the advice services covered by this report are discretionary, enabled by the General Power of Competence provided for by Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 (c. 20). Advice services provided under the statutory provisions of Section 4 of the Care Act 2014 (c. 23) and advice provisions contained in the Children Act 1989 (c. 41) are not included.

9. Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 There are no implications at this stage for Council staff arising from this report. However, the proposals to establish a streamlined and collaborative approach may result in Council staff co-locating with external advice providers, with the potential for secondment of staff in the future.

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 10.1 Many of the users of advice services will be from families with children and vulnerable adults, many with disabilities. Continuation of the advice services is important to safeguarding and is consistent with being a child friendly borough.

11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

- 11.1 The co-design consortium model development has to commence without historic specific allocations to any voluntary sector provider. Advice services provide support to a wide range of people and the future provider(s) will need to identify how they can support individuals with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and to address the potential for any disproportionate detrimental impact as a result of the new arrangements.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

- 12.1 The direct arrangements for services delivered in the voluntary sector and proposals for a collaborative approach, set out in stage one, is set to follow the terms of the Rotherham Compact agreed in partnership.
- 12.2 The broader review of advice services, set out in stage two, will have implications for other directorates within the Council. These will be the subject of future reports in the autumn of 2018.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 There is the risk that the co-production collaborative approach fails through disagreement between the parties. In these circumstances, should the processes set out in the Compact not produce a resolution, the Council would need to instigate other arrangements to secure continuity of service delivery.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive

Approvals Obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services	Graham Saxton	28.09.2017
Assistant Director of Legal Services	Stuart Fletcher	26.09.2017
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)	Karen Middlebrook	26.09.2017

Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	N/A	
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