

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 8 July 2019

Report Title

Advice Services Review - Phase Two

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)

Steve Eling, Policy and Partnership Officer
01709 254419 or steve.eling@rotherham.gov.uk

Jackie Mould, Head of Performance, Intelligence and Improvement
01709 823618 or jackie.mould@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-wide

Executive Summary

Continuing austerity and the impact of welfare reforms including the roll out of universal credit is having a significant effect on many of the most vulnerable Rotherham residents especially people with disabilities and families with children. The provision of good quality advice services provides essential support particularly for those individuals and families experiencing difficulties arising from:

- Bedroom tax;
- Benefit cap;
- Sanctions;
- Employment Support Allowance;
- Appeals for Personal Independence Payments; and
- Debt.

The need for advice support continues to increase with many individual cases covering a number of complex issues which require specialist help and guidance.

In response to this growing challenge the Cabinet agreed on the 16th October to undertake a comprehensive review of advice services provided by the Council or in partnership with other organisations, primarily in the voluntary sector. The review aims were to secure responsive and effective service provision meeting growing complex needs for these services, with maximum efficiency within the challenging budgetary climate.

The review was set in the context of significant need for advice services by the residents of Rotherham and the first phase of the review was to bring together arrangements for Council supported open door advice provided in the voluntary sector.

This achieved the co-design of services in accordance with the “Rotherham Compact”, where Citizens Advice Rotherham and District (CARD), liaising with the Advice in Rotherham Partnership (AiR), produced a single Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Council that included services provided by both CARD and Kiveton Park Independent Advice Centre. The amount agreed by Cabinet for commissioned advice services was £240,000 per annum for a three year period commencing from April 2018.

The second phase of the review, addressed in this report includes advice services provided directly by the Council and the enhancement of partnership working through AiR.

Proposals now include bringing together under one management Council provided advice services and enhancing partnership working and referral systems. This will provide a more efficient set of inter-related services and improve access and referral routes for clients through a new “Single Advice Model”.

It is projected that bringing services under one management can be achieved by September 2019.

Some of the components of the “Single Advice Model” including a new referral system are now being introduced. Further enhancements to partnership working will be developed in discussion with partners.

The changes can be achieved within existing budget and staffing allocations.

Recommendations

1. That the management of Council provided advice services be consolidated under the management of Housing Services within the Adult Social Care & Housing Directorate and co-location within Riverside House by September 2019.
2. That the role of partnership working through the Advice in Rotherham Partnership (AiR) be enhanced to provide full alignment and added value across advice services in Rotherham through the introduction of a new “Single advice model.”

List of Appendices Included

None

Background Papers

Report to Cabinet – 16th October 2017.

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 3 July 2019

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Advice Services Review – Phase Two

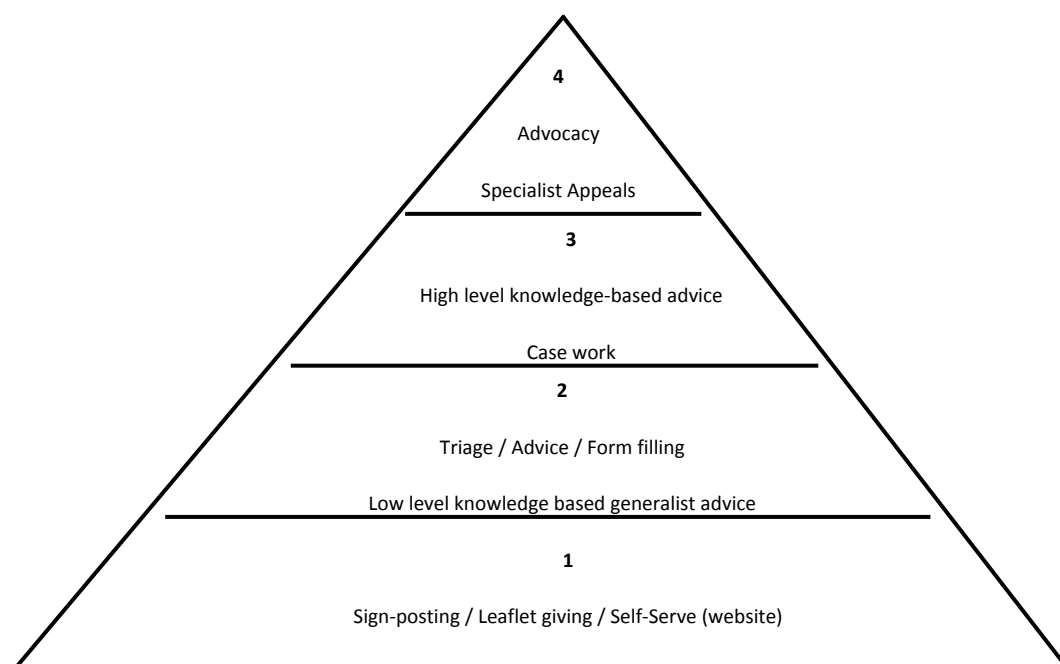
1. Background

- 1.1 At the meeting of Cabinet on 16th October 2017 it was agreed to undertake a comprehensive review of advice services provided by the Council or in partnership with other organisations, primarily in the voluntary sector. The review was commissioned in response to the growing number of vulnerable people in Rotherham experiencing difficulties arising from welfare reforms and continuing austerity.
- 1.2 The Council remains committed to working in partnership with others to provide support to our most vulnerable residents particularly during times of economic hardship. The pressure on Council resources and the complexity of advice support cases point to the need to refresh the advice offer in Rotherham to ensure that resources can be used more efficiently to meet growing need.
- 1.3 This first phase of the review brought together arrangements for Council supported open door advice provided in the voluntary sector. This was achieved through the development of a co-design where Citizens Advice Rotherham and District (CARD), liaising with the Advice in Rotherham Partnership (AiR), produced a single Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Council.
- 1.4 The second phase of the review, addressed in this report includes advice services provided directly by the Council and the enhancement of partnership working through the Advice in Rotherham Partnership (AiR).

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 Welfare reform, low income, job insecurity and long term health issues, along with other social and economic factors, continue to create considerable challenges and stress for the people of Rotherham.
- 2.2 The annual real terms loss to Rotherham people from welfare reform measures was estimated by Sheffield Hallam University at £66 million in 2016/17 and is projected to double to £132 million by 2020/21. The movement of thousands of households from benefits such as Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support onto Universal Credit by 2023 is expected to cause difficulties for many as is the ongoing movement of disabled people from Disability Living Allowance (DLA) to Personal Independence Payments (PIP). The current benefit freeze means that 39,000 households will be £487, on average, worse off in real terms by 2021. The lower benefit cap affects 950 households with the average loss being £2,500. People claiming benefits and tax credits are under increasing pressure with inflation running at between 2% and 3% and are likely to need advice to maximise their entitlement and avoid growing debt.
- 2.3 Whilst the advice review phase one brought together the open door advice services provided in the voluntary sector through co-design and SLA, the overall advice provision remains fragmented and difficult to navigate for service users, who are often among the most vulnerable in society.

- 2.4 The services are also largely unreformed, and whilst many of the issues facing residents remain the same, the overall provision is not fully fit for purpose to meet current and future demands.
- 2.5 The objectives taken forward in the phase two review are to develop service models and partnership working across agencies that deliver a seamless set of services to the residents of Rotherham, better meeting their needs and within the organisational and resource capacity available. This will especially benefit residents who require the support of more than one advice organisation, which is often the case, bringing added value to service delivery.
- 2.6 The scope of the review takes in all welfare and financial advice and support including benefit advice with the exception of where this may form part of mainstream social work support to families or children's centres.
- 2.7 The current advice provision either provided by or contracted by the Council can be summarised in the following five formats which encompass a complex range of services and funding arrangements:
- Housing Financial Inclusion services to council tenants;
 - Housing Advice Team resettlement officers;
 - Age UK provided support for claiming Attendance Allowance;
 - Advocacy and Appeals Service - specialist debt and welfare benefits advice;
 - Advocacy and Appeals Service - Macmillan Benefit Advice Service;
- 2.8 The range of services provided by the Council are very different to the "open door" services supported through voluntary sector provision by Citizens Advice Rotherham & District (CARD) etc; with services either being for specific client groups or directed towards specific rather than generalist advice.
- 2.9 Levels of Social Welfare Law Advice - information and advice on various aspects of Social Welfare Law is offered under a hierarchy of four levels, depending on the level of complexity and knowledge required, as illustrated in the diagram below:



- 2.10 Level four services are provided by the Council's Advocacy and Appeals Services.
- 2.11 Level three services are delivered both through the Council and the voluntary sector provides a range of services mainly focussed on:
- Debt;
 - Housing;
 - Employment;
 - Education;
 - Consumer;
 - Immigration;
 - Welfare;
 - Family; and
 - Legal.
- 2.12 Services for Council Tenants are provided by the Financial Inclusion Team within Housing Services, funded by £699,449 from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The team seeks to secure sustainable tenancies, especially in light of the threat to rent income from the roll-out of Universal Credit and increased arrears levels. Part of the support is a pre-tenancy stage where work is done to ensure that people will be able to sustain their tenancy. Increased capacity has also been put in to address income recovery with financial inclusion. Much of this work is preventative seeking to avoid arrears arising in the first place and maximising income to the HRA. In addition, a £60,000 contract with Age UK funded from HRA further supports council tenants over 65 to access their benefit entitlement with support for claiming Attendance Allowance and other benefits.
- 2.13 The Advocacy and Appeals Service is currently managed within the Regeneration and Environment Directorate and has a budget of £151,825 the service provides specialist debt and welfare benefits advice, mainly at level four including appeals against Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) decisions not to award benefits. Its services are open to all although many clients are referred from other services. Housing makes referrals to the service, which is part funded through a £80,000 contribution from the HRA. Whilst support is generalist, it is not designed as fully open door in the way that the voluntary sector providers are.
- 2.14 The outcomes gained by the service are largely to protect and/or increase the incomes of people who rely on benefits, which helps to maximise HRA income, benefits disadvantaged people and families, and supports the local economy. Benefits gained for Rotherham residents from the Advocacy and Appeals in 2017/18 were £559,015 lump sum payments, £23,057 Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs), and £1,006,774 weekly income, a total of £1,588,846.
- 2.15 Other services are more specialist, either focussed on a specific client group or in specific circumstances. The Advocacy and Appeals Macmillan Benefit Advice Service is funded by £101,384 from Macmillan Cancer Support to provide a broad ranging advice service for people affected by cancer and long term, life limiting health conditions. Access to the service is provided through hospital appointments, ward visits, office appointments and telephone advice. Access to

the service is by referral from any other professional working on the case or self-referral.

- 2.16 Until recently, the Council was providing “Universal Support” funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for people claiming Universal Credit. This was in two categories.
- “Digital Support” helping people to make an on-line claim; and
 - Budgeting support, helping people manage monthly budgeting where it has been assessed that support is needed or where they have fallen into arrears on rent etc.

From 1st April 2019, DWP entered into a national contract with Citizens Advice to provide what they describe as a “new service” focused on supporting people making claims rather than budgeting support. In Rotherham CARD provide a “Help to Claim” service at Rotherham Jobcentre on Mondays to Thursday. There is provision on alternate Fridays at either Dinnington or Maltby Jobcentres. Housing Services will continue to provide some HRA funded budgeting support through its tenancy support and money advice functions. The digital support offer will remain too as will locating staff at the Jobcentre. The services provided to support Universal Credit claimants will be kept under review.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The demand for the full range of advice service continues with increasing complexity of cases presented.
- 3.2 As part of the broader review of advice services, AiR were asked to consider how advice in Rotherham might be shaped going forward. This resulted in a paper being produced by CARD in August 2017 which looked at options around co-location, website and other joint working arrangements.
- 3.3 A problem that the report identified was that advice services had minimal interconnectivity with clients often signposted from pillar to post, repeating their story to different people in the hope that eventually someone will take on their case. It also found that there is no co-ordinated oversight of advice in Rotherham, no centralised process for a quality client referral journey and finally no way for the client to know where to go for what advice, or to what extent an individual agency is quality assured.
- 3.4 The main challenges facing advice services looking forward relate to the ongoing roll-out of Universal Credit, including a potential increase in rent arrears, dealing with other impacts of welfare reform such as the benefit freeze and roll-out of PIP, debt and the need for crisis support. Working groups at both strategic and operational levels, drawing in people from across the Council and key external agencies are identifying and dealing with issues arising from Universal Credit.
- 3.5 There is a significant opportunity to add value through changes to working models including bringing together Council provided advice services under a single management and enhanced partnership working across the broader range of advice agencies.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1 Three options have been considered:

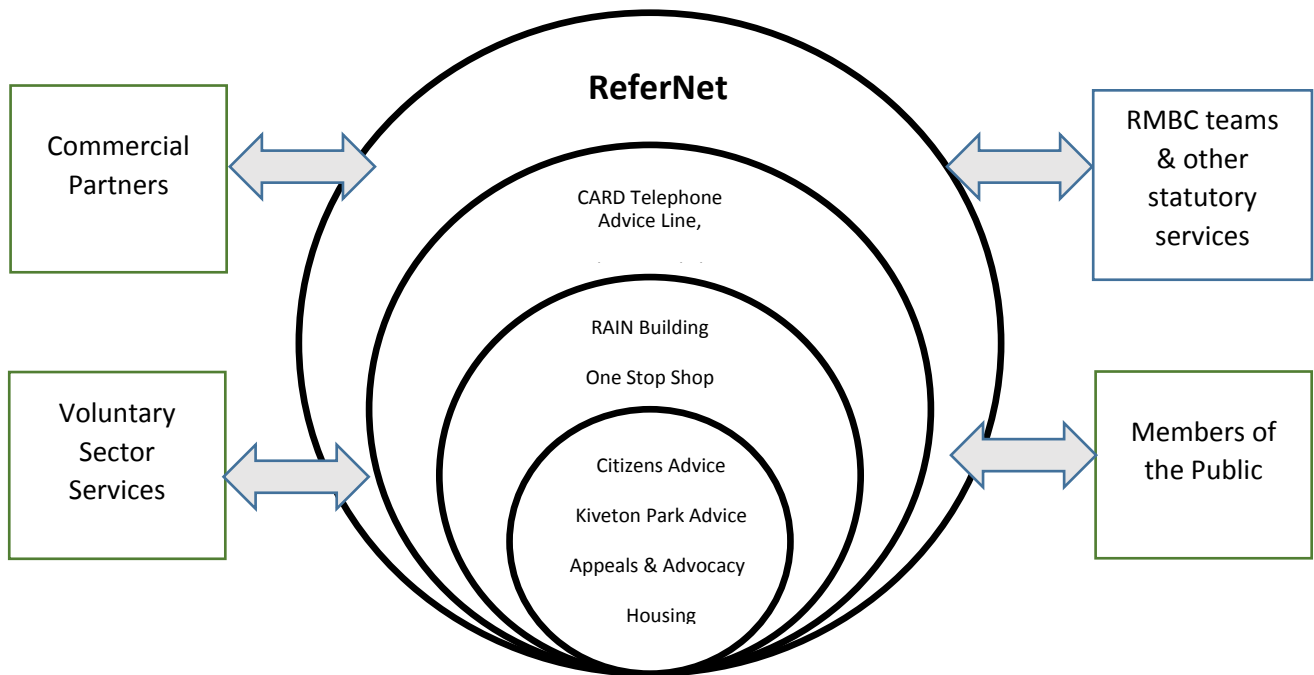
4.2 Option one is to scope and examine the full effectiveness of advice provision within the Council and contracted services, which is the scope of phase two of the review; and in external advice agencies including crisis support. It may be worth considering how advice provision aligns to the Council's functions of providing discretionary support through housing payments and Council Tax relief. Cross service working is already in place as is cross service funding but there is potential for greater integration, bringing together advice services provided by the Council that would streamline management and give a greater overview of the services provided. The disadvantage with this option would be that it would not achieve full alignment with advice services provided in the voluntary sector including those funded by the Council.

4.2 Option two would be to integrate advice services provided by both the Council and CARD into a single service which could be co-located at a suitable central location such as Riverside House, taking forward the "Single Advice model". This would require a more detailed review of the levels and types of advice to be provided and the job roles required to deliver such a comprehensive advice service. The ambition for the future would be for a co-located model which would provide the full breadth of support from one place. Whilst not yet at this stage we would also wish to explore making access to the range of partnership advice services easier including the possibility of a single telephone number and website.

4.3 Option three (preferred option) would take forward the new "single Advice Model" through developing a collaborative approach of sharing provision, capacity and resource where it delivers benefits to do so. It would also bring together the Council in-house provision into one service. The role of the Advice in Rotherham Partnership would also be enhanced in this approach to provide an overarching framework and leadership. This would also support outreach and "surgery" style provision to enhance accessibility to the range of services available. As part of this option the aim would be to continue to provide services in different locations across the Borough making outreach an integral part of the new model. Co-location would still be an option in the future

4.4 Option three is the preferred option from the review along with combining teams within the Council. In recommending the combining of teams attention is required to problems that could result from separating the roles of tenancy support from financial inclusion. Advocacy and Appeals is part funded by HRA so there is already a link with Housing. The most practical solution therefore is to group Advocacy and Appeals with Financial Inclusion and Tenancy Support, as part of the Housing Income Service within the Adult Social Care & Housing Directorate and co-location within Riverside House by September 2019. This will retain the integrity of the Housing related advice services whilst realising the benefit of co-ordination across the services; and maintaining corporate service provision within the new arrangements.

4.5 The option also takes forward the “Single Advice Model”



4.6 Key tools such as “Refernet” are already in place but not yet being used by all services. Those providing levels one and two advice should be able to access this to directly book people into advice as well as signposting. The full alignment and added value to be achieved through partnership working will probably require facilitated evolutionary change around a common agenda. The strategic approach will need to centre on added value with the range of providers participating through mutual benefit. A programme of action will need to be developed with the Advice in Rotherham (AiR) partnership which includes representatives from a range of organisations including Citizen’s Advice Rotherham and District, Rotherham Ethnic Minority Alliance (REMA), Clifton Learning Partnership (CLP), Age UK Rotherham, Voluntary Action Rotherham, Kiveton park Independent Advice centre, Live Inclusive and the British Red Cross.

5. Consultation

5.1 Consultation has taken place with the Advice in Rotherham Partnership that resulted in the development of the “Single Advice model” proposal.

5.2 Within the Council discussions have taken place with service managers to identify the actions and management arrangements to take the preferred option forward.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 It is planned to have achieved the bringing together of services under single management and co-location within Riverside House by September 2019.

6.2 Refernet is already being rolled out as part of the “Single Advice Model”. Discussions will be held with the AiR Partnership on developing and implementing other service alignment and enhancements.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 The proposed changes can be met from within existing budgets.

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 Although there will be no impact on staff's terms and conditions of employment as a result of the preferred recommendation, there will be a change in the line management arrangements for staff within the Advocacy and Appeals service with the proposal to move them from the Regeneration and Environments Directorate to the Adult Care Housing and Public Health Directorate. Therefore staff engagement and information sharing will be required with affected staff regarding this change.

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 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.

11.2 An Initial Equality Screening Assessment has been undertaken. The screening at this stage in the process relates only to movement of the Advocacy & Appeals to the management of Housing and proposals for enhanced partnership working. It does not cover potential future service developments but the changes proposed at this stage will enable proposals to be brought forward for future service enhancements, which will have a positive impact for service users, and in doing so improve equalities outcomes too. An Equalities Assessment will be undertaken on the future service enhancements.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.2 Issues for both Council services and partnership working are set out in the report.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 There is the risk that the collaborative approach of the “Single Advice Model” fails through disagreement between the parties. This will be mitigated by working with a strategic approach that centres on added value with the range of providers participating through mutual benefit.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Shokat Lal, Assistant Chief Executive

Approvals obtained on behalf of:-

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	Sharon Kemp	24/06/19
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	21/06/19
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Bal Nahal	21/06/19
Assistant Director of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Theresa Caswell	18/03/19
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)	N/A	N/A

*Report Author: Steve Eling, Policy and Partnership Officer
01709 254419 or steve.eling@rotherham.gov.uk*

*Jackie Mould, Head of Performance, Intelligence and Improvement
01709 823618 or jackie.mould@rotherham.gov.uk*

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