

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Cabinet
2.	Date:	13 th March 2013
3.	Title:	Bridging Support for Advice Services in Rotherham
4.	Directorate:	EDS

5. Summary

Advice services in Rotherham will be critical in helping the people of the Borough through the significant changes to welfare benefits that will start to be implemented from April.

However, at the same time, the principal advice services will experience a reduction in external funding of £431,000 owing to the time expiry of Big Lottery funding and cut in Ministry of Justice grant from April 2013.

To address this situation, Citizens Advice Bureau has made a bid to the Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund for £339,375 over two years, £75,000 of which would support front-line advice support, however the outcome of the bid will not be known until June. The bid, if successful will support advice services in Rotherham and will be hosted through Citizen's Advice Bureau. Consequently it is proposed that bridging support to the value of £30,000 is provided to five advice agencies and "Nellbooker", the advice online booking system.

The proposed funding will form part of the Council's overall approach to local welfare provision for the period 1st April to 30th June 2013.

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet provide bridging support for three months as follows:

Age UK	£10,000
Citizens Advice Bureau	£6,500
Rotherham Diversity Forum	£1,250
Kiveton Park Information Advice Centre	£3,500
South Yorkshire Centre Independent Living	£5,600
Nellbooker	£3,150

7. Proposals and Details

Advice services in Rotherham are currently delivered in the main by 5 VCS agencies:

- Rotherham Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) [All areas of social welfare law, including debt]
- Kiveton Park Independent Advice Centre (KPIAC) [welfare rights, debt and some civil law]
- South Yorkshire Centre for Inclusive Living (SYCIL) [welfare rights for disabled people]
- Rotherham Age UK (RAUK) [welfare rights, community care older people]
- Rotherham Diversity Forum (RDF) [immigration advice BME]

The time expiry of existing Big Lottery funding together with withdrawal of Ministry of Justice funding at the end on March will leave a significant gap in the ability to address demand for advice services.

The current context for Rotherham advice services is:

- There is an increased demand for advice services, both as a result of the welfare reforms and the adverse economic conditions (for e.g. more working people requiring debt advice –not just those on benefit):
 - Through the monitoring of Nellbooker, the advice online booking system, we can see that there are fewer appointments available for support staff across agencies to book clients directly into advice appointments causing anxiety and frustration both for the client and those delivering the services.
- The ending of non RMBC advice funding streams:
 - Big Lottery funding secured for Rotherham advice services by VAR over the last 4 ½ years (over £500K) ceases at the end of March 2013;
 - Ministry of Justice no longer fund civil law advice through Community Legal Services which until recently funded Howells Solicitors and Shelter to provide free advice.
- The reduction in funding for advice services, coincides with unprecedented demand on services:
 - All of the advice services report an increased demand for their services and in some service areas there are waiting lists of people requiring advice;
 - From March 31st 2013, Howells will no longer provide 'free' advice services and Rotherham Shelter has announced its closure, no longer providing free face to face advice in Rotherham, which means a combined demand of approx 1800 advice cases a year, which undoubtedly puts further pressure on the existing stretched remaining services.

The outcome of a CAB led bid for Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund (BLASTF); is due in June 2013. If this bid is successful it will mean an additional £75,000 over 2 years for front line advice services in Rotherham. The eligibility of the

fund does not allow for a greater element of the funding for front line advice, but for co-ordination and systems (approx £264,000). However, this means that even if the BL ASTF bid is successful, it will not make up for the current funding coming to an end from other sources and will not be available for the first three months of the financial year.

In order to sustain provision pending the outcome of the bid it is proposed that the Council provide interim grant support for a 3 month period (April – June 2013) to five advice agencies to maintain the provision of advice services at current levels. This will also mean that the SYCIL and Age UK advice services will not cease in Rotherham at the end of March 2013 owing to total loss of funding. It is also proposed that the £30,000 interim grant support would include £3,150 for the maintenance and support of the Nellbooker advice on line booking system, pending the outcome of the Big Lottery bid.

Through the interim grant support, the 5 advice agencies will be able to provide an additional 509 generalist advice clients worked with / supported during the period April – June 2013. The proposed details are:

Age UK	£10,000	190 clients
CAB	£6,500	124 clients
RDF	£1,250	23 clients
KPIAC	£3,500	66 clients
SYCIL	£5,600	106 clients

Sub-total £26,850

Nellbooker £3,150

TOTAL £30,000

As part of the Council-wide approach to dealing with welfare reform, the contracts with the external organised organisations concerned will be managed by the Community Engagement Team of the Resources Directorate.

8. Finance

Currently the advice provision is supported by a combination of funding either through mainstream funding to Advice services or Lottery funding to support paid activity. This paid activity is also supported by significant additional support through donations and volunteering.

Citizens Advice Bureau is making a bid to the Big Lottery Advice Services Transition Fund for £339,375 over two years, £75,000 of which would fund front-line advice support.

The £30,000 required for the period will be met from funding for local welfare provisions provided by the Department for Work and Pensions, in support of one of the four key elements of the Council's approach to local welfare provision known as 'Fund for Change' which are:

- Immediate crisis support;
- Crisis loans through credit union;
- Community grants; and;
- Bridging support for advice.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

Whether the BL ASTF bid is successful or not, it is proposed that a discussion be had regarding the continued increased demand for advice services, the reduction in both overall provision and funding and agreement is reached re proposed further funding / actions for advice services in Rotherham for the period beyond 30th June 2013.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The loss of, and changes too, funding arrangements for advice services comes at a critical time when demand is set to increase owing to the Government's welfare reform agenda. This in turn will impact on the Council achieving its policy objectives, especially those included in the "making sure no community is left behind" theme of the Corporate Plan.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Partners Welfare Steering Group papers of the 30th January 2013.

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