

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 06 November 2018

Report Title: Approval to Commission Universal Information and Advice Service

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Liz Wardlaw - Health

Senior Officer: Frank Jordan, Executive Director - Place

Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director - People

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The report is seeking approval to commission a Universal Information and Advice Service from April 2019. This would provide a single clear pathway for the residents of Cheshire East from 1 April 2019.
- 1.2. The service is currently commissioned through a contract with Citizens Advice Cheshire East which ceases as at 31 March 2019. The contract value will be up to £1.385m over 5 years.
- 1.3. The Service supports the following outcomes within the Council's Corporate Plan (2017-2020):
 - 1.3.1 Outcome 2: Cheshire East has a strong resilient economy
 - 1.3.2 Outcome 5: People Live Well for Longer
- 1.4. This approach aligns with the Council's Early Help Framework which has been developed to commission early help services across Cheshire East. A key theme of the Early Help Framework is financial inclusion. The outcome is for residents to receive the financial support and advice they need, leading to reduced demand for statutory services.
- 1.5. It is expected that by jointly commissioning a Universal Information and Advice service across Place and People will ensure that there are strong links with Early Intervention, Prevention services and Adult Social Care Services. The Service will provide free and independent advice for

residents of Cheshire East as an early intervention measure to address the following outcomes:

- 1.5.1 Help residents to receive the benefits they are entitled to
- 1.5.2 Improve financial capability and debt management
- 1.5.3 Proactive support to recover deposits, receive essential property repairs and avoid homelessness
- 1.5.4 Help people remain in employment or end harassment at work

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet

- 2.1. Agree that a competitive procurement exercise is undertaken for the provision of a Universal Information and Advice Service;
- 2.2. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Health and Acting Executive Director of People, to award a contract for an initial period of 3 years with options to extend for a maximum of 2 years.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1. Customers that have complex needs, often spanning multiple issues, would receive a more effective service where all issues are considered under a single pathway rather being passed from one provider to another.
- 3.2. The demand for the service is expected to remain at similar levels initially due to the continuing impact of welfare reform, including the rollout of Universal Credit and rising personal debt. Should demand reduce in the future the service level can be reviewed as part of the contract management arrangements.
- 3.3. The primary need is for face to face and telephone services as there are many online resources already available for direct or assisted access, including Live Well Cheshire East (www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/livewell). In addition to the on-line access available for customers to self-serve at the Customer Service Centres and Libraries there are many voluntary organisations offering facilities.
- 3.4. Other local support is available through the Connected Communities (www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/connected-communities/connected-communities.aspx) where community organisations

come together to provide help and support, strengthening the community, reducing isolation and improving wellbeing.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. There is not a consistent voluntary provision to cover all across Cheshire East but the provider will be required to explore links with the Connected Community Centres.
- 4.2. Joint commissioning with Cheshire West and Chester Council was not considered as the providers delivering a face to face service are geographically based.
- 4.3. To do nothing in terms of not re-commissioning the service would result in more complex issues, more expensive interventions and increased access to statutory health and social care services.

5. Background

- 5.1. The Universal Information and Advice Service for residents of Cheshire East is:
 - 5.1.1 an early intervention service free to service users, offering independent, confidential, impartial and problem solving;
 - 5.1.2 accessible through a variety of channels but primarily face to face and telephone;
 - 5.1.3 a face to face provision within Crewe and Macclesfield with outreach in the following key centres: Alsager, Congleton, Handforth, Knutsford, Middlewich, Nantwich, Poynton, Sandbach, Wilmslow;
 - 5.1.4 available and accessible to those in greatest need & appropriate for people with a physical disability, mental health problems or a learning disability;
- 5.2. The key outcomes to be met include:
 - 5.2.1 Ensure residents receive the benefits they are entitled to including assistance for those requiring help with applications and appeals;
 - 5.2.2 Improve financial capability and debt management;

- 5.2.3 Helping residents with support and legal advice regarding complex housing issues, essential property repairs and avoid homelessness including support with court hearings;
- 5.2.4 Help people remain in employment with the appropriate rights and support;
- 5.3. The contract for this service is due to end on 31 March 2019 and is currently awarded to the Citizens' Advice Bureau across Cheshire East.
- 5.4. **Appendix A** includes statistics from the current contract monitoring to show the existing demand for the service.
- 5.5. The Council recognises the importance of an early intervention approach. To achieve this, the Council needs to offer the right kind of support early to adults and young people. This includes providing them with advice and information which empowers them to make positive choices, supports their health and wellbeing, and builds their resilience to cope with the challenges they face in their life. This approach is fundamental to The Care Act 2014, The Children Act 1989 (amended 2004) and The Children and Families Act 2014.
- 5.6. The Council must orientate its prevention services to effectively target those residents who are identified as most in need. This approach will contribute to improved outcomes for residents by facilitating increased choice and control over decisions that impact on their daily lives. Local residents will benefit from improved health and wellbeing leading to reduced demand for health and care services.
- 5.7. During 2017 – 2018 a series of engagement and consultation events took place which informed and identified the four main key themes for the Early Help Framework these include financial inclusion, social inclusion / social connectedness, children and young people emotional health, and all age health and wellbeing.
- 5.8. Clear pathways will be developed linking the Universal Information and Advice Service to wider services commissioned via the Early Help Framework, Connected Communities and Adults Social Care. For example the Council are commissioning social isolation and loneliness services via the Early Help Framework.
- 5.9. A market engagement event is planned to take place to further inform the development of the proposed Universal Information and Advice service. An area of development for the service will include scope for volunteer led support to meet Social Value objectives.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Legal Implications

6.1.1 The procurement process will need to be undertaken in accordance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's own Contract Procedure Rules. Legal Services will continue to support the commissioning of the new services to ensure the Council meets requirements in this regard.

6.2. Finance Implications

6.2.1 The current budget for the existing Universal Information and Advice service is £277,000 per annum.

6.2.2 The total annual budget for the integrated service is £277,000, with a potential total contract value of £1.385m, all within budget. By combining the contracts there will be an improved service delivering value for money.

6.3. Policy Implications

6.3.1 The development of the Universal Information and Advice service supports the wellbeing elements of the Care Act (2014).

6.4. Equality Implications

6.4.1 An Equality Impact Assessment is being undertaken but the overall commitment is to ensure the Service is available and accessible to all.

6.5. Human Resources Implications

6.5.1 Whilst the proposals do not envisage any HR implications for the Council, TUPE may apply to the existing provider.

6.6. Risk Management Implications

6.6.1 The key risks related to the commissioning of the service include:

- Failure to procure the service within the required timescales;
- Failure to use Council resources in the most effective way;
- Reputational damage to the Council as a commissioner and contract manager should a serious incident occur.

6.6.2 These risks will be managed through effective procurement, commissioning, contract management and mobilisation planning.

6.7. Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

6.8. Implications for Children & Young People

6.8.1 There are no direct implications for children and young people but the early intervention will provide support for their families benefiting the whole household.

6.9. Public Health Implications

6.9.1 There is strong evidence to suggest that reduced poverty, improved access to benefits, improved financial and debt management, housing, employment support and financial inclusion has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals.

7. Ward Members Affected

7.1. The service will be delivered across the whole Borough of Cheshire East, therefore all wards are affected.

8. Consultation & Engagement

8.1. Consultation was undertaken in 2017 as part of the review of the Local Welfare Safety Net, to look at support which should be available for those facing hardship or a crisis. The intention of this scheme is to provide early intervention to prevent situations escalating causing further hardship and more costly interventions. Many of the applicants require further information and advice to help manage or resolve the challenges they face and are referred to the Information and Advice Service. A key finding from this consultation is that services must work together with preventative services as customers often present with more than one issue.

8.2. A Market Engagement event was held on 28 September 2018 to help inform the detail of the specification, supported by further ongoing customer engagement including the Digital Influence Panel.

9. Access to Information

9.1. Local Welfare Safety Net review

9.2. Cheshire East Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

9.3. Cheshire East People Live Well for Longer Commissioning Plan

10. Contact Information

10.1. Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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