

Report of the Director of Public Health to the meeting of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 30th June 2022

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Subject:

The following report outlines the position of Welfare Advice services in the district and advises of the intention to commission these services under section 7.2.1 of the Council's standing orders in relation to contracts of the value of over £2million

Summary statement:

The following report outlines existing Welfare Advice services across the district as funded by Bradford Council, details current delivery systems and recommends that a new procurement process is instigated to identify future service options and needs

EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:

The district is facing unprecedented economic conditions as a result of the COVID pandemic and the wider national and international economic climate. As such there are expected to be reductions in household earnings and access to stable and suitably paid employment opportunities as well as a steep rise in inflation, fuel costs and the overall cost of living.

Bradford district already has a high proportion of low income households, the above is therefore expected to exacerbate debt problems and drive more families and single people towards welfare benefits in order to balance household budgets and maximise income. Many of these residents live in areas of multiple deprivation and come from communities with specific cultural, faith and religious backgrounds and therefore are likely to be adversely impacted by the new economic climate. Additionally, there is a specific service aimed at people with complex and long term health conditions, many of whom will experience greater difficulties due to their health status.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Corporate

1. SUMMARY

The following report outlines the position of Welfare Advice services in the district and advises of the intention to commission these services under section 7.2.1 of the Council's standing orders in relation to contracts of the value of over £2million

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Commissioned WA services in Bradford are delivered through five separate contracts. Four are constituency based (Shipley and Keighley are combined) and one is for people with long term and/or complex health conditions.

2.2 There are four lead providers who employ a combination of sub-contractors and/or partners to support service delivery. These are; Bradford and Airedale Citizens Advice Bureau and the Law Centre, Equality Together, Family Action and St Vincent De Paul/CHAS. (*For full details see Appendix 1*)

2.3 The service was commissioned in 2016/17 for a period of 4 years plus one. In 2020/21 contracts were extended by 1 year to end on the March 31st 2023. A new commissioning process has started to identify and source future services.

2.4 There may be facility to extend the existing contracts for a further 3-6 months to allow time for a more robust new procurement process to be delivered and for the outcome of transformation pilots to be evaluated.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Transformation Pilots

3.1.1 In 2018/19 a consultancy firm; FutureGov was employed to explore demand factors in respect of commissioned Welfare Advice services and the relationship between these and those of the Council's own Customer Contacts services. The work identified contact patterns relating to case management in welfare advice services; repeat visits and considered the roles and expertise of both the Council's Customer contacts services and welfare advice services. See appendix 2 for FutureGov report diagram.

3.1.2 The report findings supported greater integration between the two services; to streamline and improve access and manage rising demand with the intention of resolving customer queries more efficiently. To move this forward officers and welfare advice providers came together to develop a pilot programme to test outcomes and explore any efficiencies this approach could bring. As work was moving towards pilot implementation the COVID pandemic changed the landscape and delayed the roll out.

3.1.3 In 2018/19 access to welfare advice services was almost entirely through 'face to face' and 'walk in' routes. There were also a range of 'sessions' offered, based in Children's Centres, community buildings, hospitals, specialist agencies, (mental health & alcohol and drug projects) etc. as well as direct access 'drop ins' and appointments in local community centres and office bases, both locality, town and city centre based.

3.1.4 During the pandemic, routes into service changed to comply with national restrictions; protecting the public and staff alike. Access was by telephone and digital routes in the main. The impact was that numbers coming into service overall dropped. On examination this was impacted by the changes in access systems, the hiatus in court services and tribunals (mainly placing complex cases into abeyance) and also influenced by the support

systems introduced by the Treasury nationally (e.g. the £20 per week top up for Universal Credit claimants and Furlough). Service usage figures are rising now and although digital and telephone access is still place and many of the community based projects have recommenced face to face.

3.1.5 The Pilot work recommenced in late 2021. One of these is operational, working between the Council's Customer Contact services and Bradford and Airedale Citizens Advice Bureau and Law Centre (CAB) in Britannia house, using a fast track appointment system through a 'tablet' for those customers identified as having debt issues. There are further three starting shortly utilizing opportunities for joint work based in Keighley Library, Shipley Library and Eccleshill library to test the assumptions made. All four will require time to embed and demonstrate learning outcomes. There is a small steering group for these which meets fortnightly.

3.2 Commissioning Programme

3.2.1 To take forward the commissioning programme an interdisciplinary Project team led by Public Health has formed and meets monthly. Members include representation from Children & Young People's services, Neighbourhoods, Corporate services, Housing, Revenues and Benefits, Adult Services, Anti-poverty Policy leads, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence, Libraries and Health Colleagues.

3.2.2 This team reports to the Council's Transformation Steering Group, chaired by the Director of Corporate Services, with membership from the Directors of Place, Public Health and Finance.

3.2.3 To date the Project team has conducted an initial needs analysis; mapping service delivery, demand, clarifying existing service use and exploring new ways of working. Additionally, consultation and involvement work has started to understand more about needs and service use. This has included conducting a public survey and running a stakeholders' event.

3.2.4 The survey was advertised in February 2022, asking the public about their experiences of using WA services and what was needed for the future. This went out online via the Council's website and information and links were sent out across a range of local organisations. To facilitate a wider reach, it was made available in printed format as well. Over 450 returns were received and the responses showed that there was a keen interest in these services for the future.

3.2.5 Survey Outcomes

- The most common area where respondents sought for help/ information was around benefits (e.g. Universal Credit, Personal Independence Payments etc.), with other half of respondents selecting this option (52.1%). This was followed by debt/ financial issues (26.4%). Only 4.4% of respondents sought for help/ information around trading standards
- The most commonly used service was the Citizens Advice Bureau, with 24.4% of respondents using this for help. This was followed by Bradford Council, with 14.9% of respondents turning to the Council for help.
- The majority of people sought this help via telephone

- The majority of respondents described themselves as having English as their first language however 27.15 said it was not
- The majority of people responding to the survey were women and the majority were aged 45-54 years (20.6%). The second most represented age category was 35-44 year olds (19.5%). 16.9% of the respondents were aged between 18-24 years, making this the third most represented age category in this survey. Only 1.8% of respondents were aged 75+.
- Over half of the respondents described themselves as White English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British (51.2%). The second most represented race/ ethnicity was Pakistani Asian/ Asian British (18.8%)

3.2.6 Stakeholders Event

A stakeholders' event was held on the 12th May, this was 'in person' at Margret Macmillan Towers and over a 150 people from a wide mailing list of people/agencies were invited. 50 people from more than 30 organisations attended. The half day event included presentation of the needs work, the survey outcomes and several workshops asking participants to consider the following;

- What is essential to the delivery of 'good' welfare advice services?
- Where and how should they be delivered
- Service limitations-role, expertise, staffing, capacity, delivery
- What/who are key partner/ and partnerships
- How can we ensure quality services –performance management/outcomes

3.2.7 Feedback from the workshops are below;

Performance Management: participants felt this needed to be consistent across providers, measure outcomes, include customer input and feedback as well as retaining Advice Quality Standards.

Customer focus: There was a feeling that services needed to be timely and based in locations and delivered at times suitable for the customer inc 'out of hours', at places where vulnerable people go. They should be able to cope with multiple issues and there was a strong feeling that translation and language skills were paramount

Training & sustainability: Attendees felt that communication needed to be improved and that staff training and support was needed. There were suggestions of developing a Community Advice Network and developing apprenticeships and supporting local volunteers. Concern was expressed that staff teams were already stretched and that there was a danger of staff leaving and/higher sickness levels due to this

Publicity / marketing: As above communication was seen as the key here as well as increasingly using social media and other digital options to reach younger populations

Expert triage: was agreed as a must in all services so that services could filter people effectively, resolve on first contact where possible and assist people to self-help where right and appropriate

Efficiency: It was felt that services needed to focus on filling gaps in support from national provided services (tap into national services for online info, telephone advice provision), be

targeted at areas of highest need and extend to the use of facilitated technology to enable virtual face-to-face from trusted settings and for vulnerable people in less-deprived localities

3.2.8 Bradford's diverse communities mean that translation, interpretation and skills across staff teams is important to making sure that all people who need it can access services. Across the existing providers there are staff from a range of cultural, language and faith backgrounds which is positive, however it should be noted that these needs in the population are fluid and with that comes the requirement to use formal translation and/or interpretation services regularly.

3.3 Interdependencies

WA advice services have a number of interdependencies which need to be explored further to understand how best to invest the finances from the Council. These are the following;

- How welfare advice and local community based services; children's hub's, psychosocial hubs and localities planning work together is important to ensure good access and target services towards those in most need.
- Other commissioned welfare advice, such as those funded through the 'Redressing Inequalities in City-RIC's' need be understood better. Work is needed to maximise the impact across these and any new Council welfare advice services programme
- The specialist service for people with complex and/or long term health conditions offers some hospital based services as well as ones connected with Adult social care. Closer working with the Hospital Trusts, Primary Care and Adult social care needs to be explored
- New needs for welfare advice services in maternity services and/or through health visitors have been identified recently and links are being made to understand this better
- The Council's statutory duties under Homelessness and Housing legislation and funded welfare advice services need to be better integrated to enhance prevention and early intervention options.
- Debt work is a key component of welfare advice services, relationships to Government funded debt services and the Credit Union are important to cement.
- The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) provide employment support and return to work services, how these relate with funded welfare advice services should be examined further
- The role and siting of independent welfare advice services operating in the district needs to be understood to avoid duplication

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

The budget for welfare advice services is £2 million pounds and Council budget proposals in 2022-23-24 do not include changes to this.

Additional funding was granted in 2019- 2020-2021 in recognition of the extra needs of the district's residents due to COVID and its economic impacts. This supported new IT equipment and increased staffing levels. This funding has now ceased.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

A clear Governance structure has been created to ensure that Welfare Advice services and subsequent procurement programming is managed efficiently. As noted above this

consists of the multiagency Welfare Advice Project Team and reporting to the Transformation Steering Group.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 The Council has a statutory obligation in regards to the delivery of these services, and the existing contracts may not be extended any further and remain in compliance with legislation. There is a requirement therefore to commission services.

6.2 In order to meet the legal framework in procuring these contracts, the procurement must be carried out in accordance with the Council's contract standing orders and public contracts legislation. The services must be subjected to competition to secure a compliant, economically advantageous and fair contract. The time required to meet procurement processes means that the new procurement must be authorised and commenced well in advance as set out in this report.

6.3 The implications of non-compliance with the legislative requirements would be the risk of a successful procurement challenge, judicial review, or a complaint to the local government ombudsman. The preparation for the new procurement as anticipated in this report will mitigate the likelihood of these risks crystallising and ensure the Council procures the contracts through a robust process.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Welfare advice is delivered from a variety of bases across the district. These include community centres and City/Town centre options. As such they add to wider networks of services and where possible act together to reduce customer journey times and support more joint work

7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

During the pandemic service operated predominately digitally and as paperless as possible using scanned documentation to manage case work. This continues to be the case wherever possible.

7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None

7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Welfare advice services offer support and help pertaining to a wide range of issues which impact on an individual's Human Rights. These include housing law; landlord and tenant in relation to maintaining one's home; immigration advice for those seeking asylum and/or relocating to the United Kingdom, support to manage debt and support to access welfare benefit entitlements. As such they contribute to the following rights within the act;

- To liberty and security
- Respect for private and family life
- To a fair trial

- Prohibition of discrimination

7.5 TRADE UNION

There is a considerable workforce employed via the five contracts and individual organisations will maintain their own trade union agreements

7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS

Current Welfare Advice services are aligned to existing ward and constituency boundaries. 4 of the 5 contracts are delivered this way and include community based service delivery

7.7 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS (for reports to Area Committees only)

The Area co-ordinators are part of the Welfare Advice Project team and input according to their needs and those of their respective neighbourhoods

7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Welfare advice services serve some of the most vulnerable communities in the Bradford district. As such they are often seen as early intervention for families with children who may be struggling to manage pressured budgets. Prior to the pandemic it was a requirement that all area based services offered session in the Council's Children's centres. This is slowing restarting but subject to staff availability.

There is work being considered to extend digital access options for welfare advice services through key services such as children's social care and health visitors however this has not commenced at the point to writing this report

7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

The outturn information required from this contract is subject to GDPR requirements. As such the Council's receives anonymised data only.

As effective whole service support can require cross referral to other specialist agencies those accessing services are expected to agree the transfer of relevant data at point of entry.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None

9. OPTIONS

1 To read and note the contents of this report and agree the release of the contract for procurement under the Council's standing orders

Pros:

Gives officers the views of committee members to influence and support commissioning processes

Will allow officers to continue moving forward with the commissioning programme

Will allow officer to continue to manage the pilot work, using outcome from this to influence

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future service delivery

Cons:

Activity in the pilots may not be forthcoming to impact on procurement

2 To read and note the contents of this report only

Pros: Gives officers the views of committee members to influence and support commissioning processes

Cons:

May delay procurement processes

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

1 To read and note the contents of this report and agree the release of the contract for procurement under the Council's standing orders

11. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: List of existing contracts and costs by provider and including subcontractors and/or delivery partners

Appendix 2: Pyramid Diagram drawn up to demonstrate the repeat hierarchy of contact made into services, included in the FutureGov report 2019