

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

Report of the Executive Director - Communities

Housing Options and Welfare Review

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To provide detail of proposals for the future delivery of housing options and welfare advice.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Housing Options function is integrated into the Safer Communities Team
- 2.2 That the Welfare Advice Specialist Service is provided by the Council as an integral service offer in Community Safety.
- 2.3 That the grant to Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB) is reduced to £50k
- 2.4 That the grant of £9.324 to DIAL Barnsley is maintained.
- 2.5 To commence staff consultation with a view to implementation from April 2017.

3. Introduction

- 3.1 Members will recall that on 18 November 2015 a report was presented to Cabinet in respect of the Welfare Review which commenced during 2015 in response to the decision to deliver a saving of £200,000 from the recurrent net welfare budget of £407,010. The recommendation which was approved was that Members agree the proposed model to reduce funding across Citizens Advice Barnsley and the Council's in house welfare rights service and transform the service in 2016/17.
- 3.2 The current welfare advice service sits in the broader housing options service. During this transitional year a number of new developments have taken place that relate to the service. This includes discussions around developing further integration of key functions with the police and considering the outcome of the Community Safety Review. This provides the Council with greater opportunities to deliver services that are easier for customers to access and are more cost effective and efficient.
- 3.3 It is important to note that there is a statutory duty for councils to provide homeless prevention and no statutory duty for councils to provide welfare advice however the significance of changes to the welfare state means the need for advice and support is increasing therefore to remove / cease funding in full of all of the advice services would drive people into more debt which would be counter-intuitive to the Future Council Strategy.

3.4 Current Position:

In addition to the in house service the Council commissions externally funded core services and services commissioned through the localities. These are:

- **Citizens Advice Barnsley (CAB)** – the Council currently funds CAB £112k per annum. This provides partial funding for their core advice service. The core service is available to all of the residents of Barnsley to access (no eligibility) The core funding allows CAB to recruit, train, supervise and manage volunteers. These volunteers provide the advice, reception and administration for the general service which underpins/feeds into the project services. It also contributes to the Chief Executive Salary and provides capacity to bid for other funding.
- **DIAL Barnsley** – the Council currently funds DIAL £9,324 a year toward advice for people with disabilities.
- **Locality Commissioning** – Appendix C provides a summary table of services commissioned through the area governance arrangements.

3.4 MacMillan nationally is understood to be reviewing its service offer and we understand from this perspective that they will no longer support the role within Councils. From the end of March 2017 the funding from MacMillan for the 3FTE advisors will cease. Currently these posts provide the majority of the community based welfare rights provision.

3.5 The outcome of the Community Safety review recommended some fundamental changes to the way the service is delivered. We already know that many of the customers that are supported through the community safety team are the same ones that access the housing options and welfare advice service in the Council. Joint working throughout the last 12 months between staff in both teams has proven the case. There is a further opportunity to align the two functions up much more closely. Therefore the proposals in this report should be read in conjunction with the proposals set out in the Community Safety Review report (CR417)

4. Proposal and justification

4.1 The design around integrated working and the outcome of the Community Safety Review has provided the Council with an opportunity to look at activity and take a view on where the welfare advice function is delivered.

4.2 Our recommended option is to :

Retain a welfare advice specialist service in house as an integral service offer in community safety, reduce funding to CAB from £120k to £50k and maintain funding to DIAL.

The rationale for this option is as follows;

The availability of good quality welfare support is essential to ensure that customers are accessing the right benefits, can manage their money effectively, can prioritise debts, borrow responsibly and ensure that they can maintain their accommodation. Without these foundations it is difficult for people to access further services, build

resilience and live independently. To be successful it is essential that information is available at the right time, accessible and takes a preventative approach, i.e. not waiting until the customer is in crisis.

The rationale for integrating this function with Community Safety is that working in a multi-skilled way will ensure that the potential for a crisis is identified early and that the range of issues customers may be facing, i.e. housing, welfare benefits, ASB, community issues etc, can be dealt with simultaneously and in partnership. It also ensures that clients support is captured early and that clients are not faced with having to be redirected to other services therefore having to repeat their story.

The complete removal of funding from CAB would create significant challenges and completely remove their ability to provide a universal advice service, supervise volunteers and bid for other funding sources. Reducing the grant would enable them to continue to deliver universal advice in part and have the capacity to bid for other funding.

The complete removal of funding from DIAL comes at a time when the service has bigger challenges around funding. In practice the funding supports the core information service which is the telephone advice team and volunteer support. They currently receive a lottery grant which pays the bulk of their services but this funding ends in January 2017. They are looking to resubmit a bid but this needs match funding. DIAL are also actively perusing other funding opportunities and the grant from the council towards the core team supports them to do this.

5. Consideration of alternative approaches

The following two options were also considered and discounted :

a) Procure a third party to deliver a welfare advice specialist service.

The rationale for this option is based on previous decisions to partner with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector. It would allow local market rates to be applied and through strong contract management we could also ensure value for money.

Once savings have been garnered the actual budget available for procurement purposes would be in the region of £60k and therefore it is unlikely that there would be an interest in the market place. There would also be potential TUPE liabilities involved for the current Welfare Rights staff (2 core and 3 Macmillan) and the loss of 5 FTE staff from the council. DIAL and CAB as well as a range of other agencies make referrals into the core welfare rights team, particularly for the more complex cases. . This expertise and capacity would not be available if the in house service ceased to exist. The current joint working between CAB and Welfare Rights for the south area council evidences that having a clear focus in each organisation ultimately benefits the customer i.e. Welfare Rights focus on benefit issues and CAB on debt issues.

b) Decommission the service saving the Council £181,088 (Welfare Rights Advice Element Only).

This option would place considerable pressure on other Council and Partner services. It would essentially mean that there would be no Welfare Rights service in the Borough. Our plans for new approach to Community Safety as an integrated model could therefore not be realised in full.

6. Implications for local people / service users

6.1 The main implication is the reduction in grant to CAB which is likely to mean a reduction in the universal (no eligibility criteria) service they provide.

Whilst it is unreasonable to believe that every reduction can be mitigated we do believe that there are a range of services that remain for people whether they are provided through the Faith Sector, voluntary and community groups or indeed support such as that provided by Community Shop.

During the last period of the Welfare Review we introduced a triage approach to contact from customers for welfare rights advice and access to the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme. We identified that in 50% of contacts there was an ability to self serve / get some of their advice needs met online. Enabling independence not dependency is crucial for all sectors. Strengthening the relationship between the digital champions and CAB could support them in managing demand.

7. Financial implications

Housing Options & Homelessness Team

The current gross expenditure on Housing Options & Homelessness in 2016/17 is £602,756. Gross Expenditure in 2017/18 will be £581,756, this is a reduction in spend of £21,000 as a result of:

- One off earmarked funding in 2016/17 of £21,000 for a Tenancy Support Worker.

The 2017/18 Housing Options budget of £581,756 is made up as follows:

- £327,116 In House Staff – Providing Housing Options & Advice, Tenancy Support, Homelessness Support and Management of both Housing Options & Welfare Rights.
- £167,994 – Rents & Service Tenancies (Offset by income from Housing Benefit).
- £82,035 – Bed & Breakfast & Temporary Accommodation
- £4,611 – General running costs.

The 2017/18 budget and staff for Housing options will be transferred from Healthier Communities to work with the Safer Communities Teams in line with the finding of the Community Safety Review.

Welfare Rights Service

The current gross expenditure on Welfare Rights (including the contracts for Citizens Advice and Dial Barnsley) in 2016/17 is £937,605. Gross Expenditure available in 2017/18 will be £280,605, this is a reduction in spend of £657,000 as a result of:

- One off earmarked funding in 2016/17 of £523,000 (*NB any underspend on this earmarking will be carried forward to 2017/18 to continue funding Local Welfare Provisions*)
- Fallout of contribution from MacMillan of £99,000
- Fallout of contribution from Area Council of £35,000

The 2017/18 Welfare Rights budget of £280,605 will be made up as follows:

- £208,927 In House Staff – Providing Welfare Rights Advice, Local Welfare Assistance, Triage Service and Navigation Support.
- £1,678 General running costs.
- £59,324 of contributions to Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Dial Barnsley.
- £10,676 contribution to the 2020 Efficiency proposals against Welfare Rights.
- As with Housing Options the 2017/18 budget and staff for Welfare Rights will be transferred from Healthier Communities to work with the Safer Communities Teams in line with the findings of the Community Safety Review.

Following recent dialogue with partners, the original extent of grant reductions to CAB and DIAL has been scaled back in order to balance the achievement of efficiencies against the level of provision required to mitigate the risks associated with welfare changes. This has led to a shortfall of £59,000 against the £70,000 KLOE (Appendix A refers).

It should be noted that whilst it has been possible to bring forward £10,000 in savings from 2018/19 to 2017/18 further effort will be required to identify the full KLOE saving of £70,000 (BU8 E7) from 2018/19.

Financial Implications of this report are detailed at Appendix A

8. Employee implications

Loss of 4 FTE Welfare Rights posts all externally funded

9. Communications implications

None directly arising from this report

10. Consultations

CAB and DIAL have been fully consulted.

11. The Corporate Plan and the Council's Performance Management Framework

None directly arising from this report

12. Promoting equality, diversity, and social inclusion

An Equality Impact Statement has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix E to this report. In summary the main equality risks are having an awareness and understanding of the customer base and associated levels of need and providing access to the service. These risks will be mitigated through robust monitoring, ongoing consultation and active participation in the design of the service.

13. Tackling the Impact of Poverty

The integration of teams across healthier and safer communities will enable stronger case management of individuals and families with support to manage issues that cause poverty such as debt management.

14. Tackling health inequalities

The integration of teams across healthier and safer communities will enable stronger case management of individuals and families with early identification of support around health issues.

15. Reduction of crime and disorder

The integration of teams across healthier and safer communities will enable stronger case management of individuals and families who may have been involved in criminal activity. This will provide an opportunity to identify support solutions at the earliest stage and prevent further escalation.

16. Risk management issues

The balance of risks emanating from the recommended option allows the Council to maintain services for the most vulnerable members of the Communities within a holistic service model whilst maintaining strong links and relationships with the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise sector.

17. Health, safety, and emergency resilience issues

None directly arising from this report

18. Compatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights

None directly arising from this report

19. Conservation of biodiversity

None directly arising from this report

20. Glossary

N/A

21. List of appendices

Appendix A – Finance

Appendix B – Loss of FTE

Appendix C – Area Council commissioned services

Appendix D – Staff structure

Appendix E – EIA

Appendix F – Service Delivery Principles

22. Background papers

None

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