

Welfare Reform Review

**1. Purpose of Report**

1.1 To apprise Members of locality-based review of welfare services provision.

**2. Recommendation**

2.1. **Members refer to sections 3 to 7 of this report and discuss and review the options available in section 7 and agree the preferred option for the South Area.**

2.2. **An Area Council workshop can be arranged to take forward the preferred option. Members can agree, if they wish to hold a workshop with other area councils, specifically for this commissioned service.**

**3. Background**

3.1. BMBC, through our Healthier Communities Service, currently funds a core town centre-based welfare provision, offering information, advice and guidance.

3.2. Across the borough a range of different provision is currently in place to support communities. This provision is funded by both Area Councils and Ward Alliances. The provision varies significantly in terms of scale across the borough.

3.3. The feasibility of a universal borough wide hub and spoke model was explored through a review led by colleagues in Healthier Communities, but the funding is not available in order to expand the existing centrally commissioned provision. However, the potential efficiency in commissioning practice was identified as we currently have several different commissioning arrangements.

3.4. The Area Councils have been requested to review their arrangements for the commissioning and procurement of welfare services to determine whether there is any efficiency which can be derived from a more coordinated approach.

3.5. The South Area Council currently have a contract with CAB until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024. Contract value is £83,000 per year, 3 year contract, start date was 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021

#### **4. Area Council Provision**

All Area Councils have provided data for all locality-based advice services to evidence the level of demand in each area in order to steer the initial review. The data that was provided covers the periods 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22, and indicates there has been demand for advice services across the borough during these periods.

- The data shows a significant increase in utilisation between 2019/20 and 2020/21, which is maintained in the first half of 2021/22. As the increase coincides with the covid pandemic, it is assumed that this is either due to services being able to accept more referrals when not providing face to face clinic, and/or, an increase in demand linked to issues relating to the pandemic. Within the South Area, welfare advice services have provided community-based outreach provision and 29 hours of face-to-face consultations a week. The service delivers generalist and specialist benefit outreach advice to residents and workers in Darfield, Hoyland Milton, Rockingham and Wombwell wards via outreach services.
- Since this project was delivered solely by Citizens Advice from 1st July 2017 the project has made:
  - **5715** client contacts
  - In excess of **£7.16 m** of additional welfare benefits gain
  - In excess of **£1.90 m** of debt managed
  - A return on investment of **£20** per **£** spent

It is anticipated that requests for such services will increase due to the increase in costs that many families are facing.

#### **5. Opportunities identified**

- 5.1. Combined commissioning provides an opportunity to condense the management fees
- 5.2. Encourage collaborative tendering by providers to co-deliver
- 5.3. The providers are all operating to the same standards and are AQS accredited.
- 5.4. The 'approved provider' list is concise.
- 5.5. Standardised collection of performance data to compare data between different areas.

#### **6. Threats identified**

- 6.1. The increase in the cost of living will require an uplift in contract value when contracts are renewed to ensure the same standards of provision can be maintained or reduced delivery expectations to reflect the financial envelope.

#### **7. Options**

- 7.1. Do not continue to fund a locality-based welfare provision service.
- 7.2. Continue to commission a welfare provision service for the South Area on an independent cycle, based on local need.

7.3. Align commissioning cycles and procure provision for multiple areas in one process, using different lots for individual area councils. This would require giving notice to the existing provider prior to the current end date of June 2024.

**8. Next Steps**

8.1. If the Area Council wish to explore aligning commissioning cycles with other areas the Area Manager will arrange a workshop to work up a delivery model for the priority, with the support of specialist officers.

8.2. It is recommended that this workshop includes colleagues from Healthier Communities and the AQS accredited providers. Therefore, it would make sense to work with other Area Councils in a workshop environment to identify a way forward for this commissioned service. Member are requested to indicate if they are in agreement with this suggestion.

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**Date:**  
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