

BARNSELEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

North Area Council Meeting:

12th September 2022

Agenda Item: 5

**Report of North Area Council
Manager**

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, with additional insights from the anti-poverty priority working group.**
- 2.2. **Members review the options available, section 8 and agree the preferred option for the North Area.**
- 2.3. **An Area Council workshop is arranged to take forward the preferred option.**
- 2.4. **Member 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 Council's 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. North Area Council currently have a contract with CAB and DIAL until 30th June 2023. This ties in with the current core commissioning by Healthier Communities and provides the North Area Council with the greatest degree of flexibility.

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 North Area, welfare advice services provided community-based outreach provision and provided 37 hours of face-to-face consultations a week. During Year 4 of the contract (September 2020-August 2021) the number of cases reached 2515. During the same time period total benefit gain for the North Area totalled, £1,208,964 and the debt handled was £93,937.

The North Area Anti-Poverty Steering Group meets quarterly to review the contract. The North Area Council representatives have been very satisfied with the contract and supportive of continued provision to date. 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 North 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.

8. Next Steps

- 8.1. The Area Manager will arrange a further 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:

30th August 2022