

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

Penistone Area Council Meeting:
15th September 2022

Report of Penistone 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 7 and agree the preferred option for the Penistone Area.**

2.3. **An Area Council workshop is arranged to take forward the preferred option.**

3. Background

3.1. BMBC, through our Healthier Communities Service, currently funds a town centre-based core 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. Penistone currently has a contract with CAB until March 2023 and DIAL until January 2023 both are paid for through the Working Together Grant Fund. In addition, Age UK provide 7.24 hours per week as part of their contract funded by the Supporting Vulnerable and Isolated Older People grant which concludes June 2024.

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 Penistone welfare advice services operate 13.4 hours per week and during 2021 had 646 cases. 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 Penistone Area on an independent cycle, based on local need through the PAC grant funds
- 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 as appropriate.

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