

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 APRIL 2018

**COMMISSIONING SERVICES FOR WELFARE BENEFIT ADVICE, HOUSING
ADVICE, DEBT/MONEY MANAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT ADVICE**

**REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER FOR REVENUES AND HOUSING SUPPORT
SERVICES**

(Contact: Jon Dearing, Tel: (01993) 861221)

(The decisions on this matter will be recommendations to the Cabinet)

1. PURPOSE

To consider the proposed commissioning specification for services currently supported by the Grant to Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Cabinet be recommended to approve:-

- (a) the proposals for the future commissioning of Welfare Benefit Advice; Housing Advice; Debt/Money Management; and Employment Advice;
- (b) the process for commissioning these services by means of a competitive tendering exercise;
- (c) the period of any contract award to be for a period of 18 months;
- (d) the value of commissioning for each Lot and that any surplus budget be transferred back to the Grants Fund for organisations to bid for grant funding in respect of specific projects which enhance the commissioning contracts awarded as referred to in paragraph 3.12 below.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. On 10 January 2018 the Cabinet approved the report of the Head of Leisure and Communities regarding the review of the management of revenue grants; and the re-classification of the future budget provision (from 2018-19) in support of the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) as a commissioning activity that falls outside the future grants approval process.
- 3.2. A commissioning approach is more applicable where the Council seeks to support a core service to meet an identified need and where it wishes to specify the design and intended outcomes of the service. It also applies in situations where the Council takes a decision to outsource a core service which would otherwise need to be provided directly to exercise statutory functions. In such cases, the deployment of expenditure is governed in accordance with the processes set out in the commissioning framework and contract rules.
- 3.3. The contract for commissioning purposes will be advertised as 4 separate 'Lots'. As the estimated contract value of each 'Lot' will be between £50,000 and the EU Threshold, the invitations to tender will be advertised on the Councils procurement portal as well as the Governments Contract Finder website. The full tendering process will follow all relevant statutory provisions, including the Council's Procurement Procedure Rules and Procurement Strategy.

- 3.4. Through commissioning these specific services the Council can ensure that the delivery will be undertaken by organisations that are experts in providing the support in respect of each 'Lot'. As a consequence there will be improved first contact support for customers and less sign postings to other organisations. This in-turn leads to improved value for money service delivery.
- 3.5. Through internal reviews, which also included informal consultation with the Chief Executive Officer of the CAB we have determined that the 4 'Lots' for commissioning are those most closely linked to the Councils responsibilities; both legislative and within the Councils Delivery Partnership Agreements with the Department for Work and Pensions. They are also closely linked to the Council's aims and objectives. Any consultation undertaken with the CAB has been in general terms as we are mindful that they will be a potential bidder. It would be improper to hold detailed discussions that could be deemed advantageous for the organisation.
- 3.6. The types of support commissioned need to compliment the services already delivered by the Council.
- 3.7. The specifications for each 'Lot' will identify the exact services required. This is important because we will not require full service provision, (for example) in relation to Housing, as the Council's Housing Service already provides the majority of Housing functions. It may however, require independent advice to be available for those wishing to appeal against a Council decision on (for example), a housing band decision.
- 3.8. The service functions we are looking to commission are as follows:
- Lot 1: Provision of Employment Advice Services (Value <£10,000 per annum)
 - Lot 2: Provision of Housing Advice (Value <£10,000 per annum)
 - Lot 3: Provision of Welfare Benefit Advice (Value <£20,000 per annum)
 - Lot 4: Provision of Debt/Money Management Advice (Value <£30,000 per annum)
- 3.9 Initially we would look to commission the services for 18 months. During this period all Services commissioned would be closely monitored and reviewed against quality of provision and cost to ensure we have:
- a) commissioned services applicable to the Councils aims and objectives;
 - b) that the cost of these services is presenting value for money, within the Council's specified contract value.
- 3.10 The specific services required under the tendering documentation is detailed within the specification at Appendix A.
- 3.11 A further report will be submitted to Cabinet following this exercise confirming submissions and seeking approval to award the required contracts.
- 3.12 This activity is to ensure that any provision commissioned is properly monitored and managed by the Council and that revenue is correctly proportioned to each process. It must be stressed that the commissioning of services will not impact on budget provision and that there will be no reduction to Grant funding. Any Grant funding underspend will be available for organisations to apply for should they require additional financial support for specific projects.

4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

These areas of service provision are the ones most closely linked to those already administered by the Council; however, Cabinet may decide to widen the scope and include other service provisions not listed in this report.

The four proposed areas are:

- Employment Advice Services
- Housing Advice
- Welfare Benefit Advice
- Debt/Money Management Advice

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial commitment in terms of the overall procurement of Lots has been determined as part of the budget setting process. The proposed new arrangements for the commissioning of services are intended to be managed within existing resources. Any remaining funding will be transferred back to the Grants Fund and organisations can bid for grant funding against the activities detailed within the Lot's if they have a specific project around (for example), education.

6. RISKS

There could be a reputational risk that the commissioning of such services is taking away valuable grant funding from other external organisations; however, this will be a competitive tendering process, open to all to bid for individual Lots.

There is also a financial risk against the commissioning process that services may not provide value for money; however, this risk will be reduced if Cabinet approve the reduced contract period of 18 months.

7. REASONS

The proposed new process of commissioning services is intended to offer an efficient and value for money approach in accordance with the Council Plan. The continued award of revenue grants and the commissioning of voluntary and community sector activity provide one way in which the Council can support the achievement of outcomes that contribute to achieving Council Plan priorities on the environment, economy and community ambitions.

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Background Papers:

None