



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 9 SEPTEMBER 2026.
Subject	REVIEW OF COMMISSIONING – HOUSING, WELFARE AND DEBT ADVICE SERVICES
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Councillor Alaric Smith – Executive Member for Finance Email: alaric.smith@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Mandy Fathers – Head of Environmental Protection, Revenues and Benefits Email: mandy.fathers@westoxon.gov.uk
Report Author	Mandy Fathers – Head of Environmental Protection, Revenues and Benefits Email: mandy.fathers@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary	This report proposes an extension by waiver to the current contract
Annexes	Annex A – Equality Impact Assessment Annex B – 2024/25 Annual Data Annex C – 2025/26 Annual Data
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: 1. Agree a three-year extension to the current contract for Housing, Welfare and Debt Advice 2. Agree that the extension is covered by a ‘waiver,’ signed by the Section 151 Officer and Assistant Director Shared Legal Services; and, 3. Agree that the cost of a three-year extension, including a year-on-year inflationary increase as per paragraph 4.3, is factored into the draft budget and medium term financial strategy as part of the 2027/28 budget setting process
Corporate priorities	Working Together for West Oxfordshire Putting Residents First Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All
Key Decision	Yes
Exempt	No

Consultees/ Consultation	Chief Executive, Director of Governance & Regulatory Services, Director of Finance, Director of Place, Head of Legal Services, Executive Director, Managing Director (Publica)
-----------------------------	--

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council currently holds a contract with West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice for the provision of housing, welfare, and debt advice services. This contract is due to expire on 31 March 2027.
- 1.2 This report seeks approval to extend the existing contract, by way of a waiver, for a further three-year period. The proposed extension will ensure continuity of service provision both in advance of and following the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In March 2023, the Executive approved the introduction of a revised approach to revenue grant funding from 2024/25 onwards. This approach is structured around four distinct funding lots, each supported by three-year service level agreements.
- 2.2 Lot 4 focuses on the delivery of high-quality, independent advice services relating to housing, welfare, and debt. The objective is to empower residents to address their own challenges, while ensuring appropriate support is available for those who are unable to manage difficult circumstances independently.
- 2.3 At that time, it was agreed that a commissioning approach would be adopted for this provision. This required adherence to the Council's commissioning framework and contract procedure rules, with management arrangements proportionate to the scale of expenditure. An annual budget of £150,000 was approved for each of the financial years 2024/25, 2025/26, and 2026/27.
- 2.4 A procurement exercise was undertaken in accordance with the 'light touch' regime. The Council received a single bid submission from West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice, and the contract was subsequently awarded to this organisation for the period from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2027.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1 Since the award of the contract, quarterly contract management meetings have been consistently held with Citizens Advice. Data generated from these meetings provides valuable insight into the range and complexity of issues faced by residents and helps to identify emerging trends and local needs. Citizens Advice seeks to make its services accessible locally through a range of channels, including branch offices and home visits where appropriate. This intelligence adds significant value by informing service delivery, enhancing residents' quality of life, and supporting the achievement of the Council's corporate
- 3.2 During 2024/25, Citizens Advice supported 3408 residents with 8393 presenting issues. In 2025/26, this increased to 4695 residents with 6846 issues. Notably, approximately 59% of residents presented with more than one issue during 2024/25 and 31% during 2025/26, highlighting the often complex and interrelated nature of the challenges faced and the importance of a holistic support approach.

3.3 The original procurement, undertaken during 2023/24, was conducted in accordance with the 'light touch regime'. Where all parties remain satisfied with performance, there is provision to extend the contract via an approved waiver. This is subject to obtaining the appropriate approvals from the Section 151 Officer and the Head of Legal Services and ensuring that the applicable cumulative contract value threshold of £589,148 over the full contract term is not exceeded.

3.4 In light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and given that no alternative bids were received during the 2023/24 procurement exercise, it is proposed that a contract waiver be approved for a further three-year period, from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2030. This approach will ensure continuity of service delivery for residents of West Oxfordshire during a period of significant and unprecedented organisational change across the district.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The current contract value is £150,000 per annum (£450,000 over the three-year period), with no provision for inflationary increases. The service is funded through a combination of grants and donations, with the Council contributing approximately 80% of the total cost. While funding levels have remained static over the past three years, operating costs, including staffing, utilities, and other overheads, have increased.

4.2 Financial projections provided by Citizens Advice for the period 2027/28 to 2029/30 indicate that, if the current funding level is maintained, the service would operate at an estimated deficit of £141,370 over the next three-year period. This financial shortfall may necessitate reductions in staffing to restore budget balance, which would likely have an adverse impact on service delivery and reduce the number of residents able to access support.

4.3 To address this, it is proposed that the Council increases its contribution for 2027/28 by £33,608, representing 80% of the projected shortfall for the first year, bringing the annual contribution to £183,608. For years two and three, it is further proposed that funding is increased by 3% per annum to account for inflationary pressures as follows:

Current value: £150,000 per annum from 2024/25 to 2026/27			
	Percentage increase	Value	Total cost
2027/28 contribution	22.41%	33,608	183,608
2028/29 contribution	3%	5,508	189,116
2029/30 contribution	3%	5,674	194,790
Total value			567,514

This represents an approximate total percentage increase on the current contract of 26.11%. The remaining 20% of the projected shortfall will need to be met through Parish & Town Councils and donations, in line with the current funding model.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Following consultation with the Procurement Team, it has been confirmed that the proposed contract extension is compliant with all applicable internal requirements and external procurement legislation, including relevant Cabinet Office guidance.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

6.1 The key risk of not procuring an organisation to provide housing, welfare and debt advice is increased vulnerability and financial hardship among residents.

6.2 More specifically, the principal risks include:

- Deterioration in residents' financial resilience: Without access to specialist advice, residents may be unable to maximise income, manage debt, or access entitlements, leading to increased poverty and hardship.
- Increased homelessness and housing instability: Lack of early intervention and support could result in more evictions, higher temporary accommodation demand, and associated costs to the Council.
- Financial impact on Citizens Advice which could result in a loss of valuable service to the residents of West Oxfordshire.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken, which concludes that the proposals do not have an adverse impact on any protected characteristics.

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are none associated with this report.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

9.1 The Council may choose to discontinue this provision; however, doing so could lead to a greater number of residents experiencing financial hardship, increased levels of debt, and a heightened risk of homelessness among those who are already vulnerable.

9.2 The Council may also choose to reduce the level of funding proposed; however, this could lead to a diminished level of service provision, resulting in fewer vulnerable residents being able to access the support they need.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 The following documents have been identified by the author of the report in accordance with section 100D.5(a) of the Local Government Act 1972 and are listed in accordance with Section 100 D.1(a) for inspection by members of the public:

- Executive report 8 March 2023 – Item Number 19.

10.2 These documents will be available for inspection online at www.westoxon.gov.uk or by contacting democratic services democratic@westoxon.gov.uk for a period of up to 4 years from the date of the meeting.

(END)