

POLICY REVIEW AND DEVELOPMENT PANEL REPORT

REPORT TO:	Environment and Community Panel		
DATE:	17 th January 2017		
TITLE:	Information and Advice Services		
TYPE OF REPORT:	Update for Members		
PORTFOLIO(S):	Culture, Heritage and Health and Housing and Community		
REPORT AUTHOR:	Sarah Dennis		
OPEN/EXEMPT	Open	WILL BE SUBJECT TO A FUTURE CABINET REPORT:	Yes/No

REPORT SUMMARY/COVER PAGE

PURPOSE OF REPORT/SUMMARY:
To provide Members with an update on progress of the new Information and Advice Services contract in King's Lynn and West Norfolk.
KEY ISSUES:
Due to a number of performance issues with a previous provider, it was necessary to review the provision of the information and advice services in West Norfolk which were funded by the Borough to ensure an ongoing quality and value for money service was provided. An open tender exercise was conducted in April 2016 for the provision of housing and debt advice (as two separate lots) in King's Lynn and West Norfolk. The tender did not include generalist advice which is subject to a separate contract arrangement managed by Norfolk County Council.
OPTIONS CONSIDERED:
One option would have been to continue with the previous provider, but issues had been attempted to be addressed numerous times, to no avail. In the interests of protecting the public purse and value for money this was not deemed to be an acceptable option. A further option would have been to have stopped funding any information and advice services and let existing organisations provide the support within their existing resources, but this would put undue pressure on organisations already struggling to cope with numbers.
RECOMMENDATIONS:
This report is to update Members on the performance of the new arrangements for the delivery of the information and advice services provided in West Norfolk which are funded by the Borough. Members are requested to consider if further updates on performance should be brought to the Panel and the frequency of these reports.
REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:
Report is an update and provision of monitoring information.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE SERVICES

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In September 2015 a decision was taken to tender for Information and Advice Services, previously undertaken by Norfolk Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). This was due to a number of ongoing performance issues that had not been addressed.
- 1.2 Based on previous data received, the main issues affecting clients seeking information and advice services were housing advice, debt advice and then other more general queries came under the heading of 'generalist advice'. Generalist advice includes things such as immigration, family issues and legal. The generalist advice service was being provided by Norfolk CAB and funded by Norfolk County Council. The service put out to open tender by the Borough Council was split into two separate lots; housing advice and debt advice.
- 1.3 The tender was released on 29th February 2016 and five tender responses were received. The previous provider, Norfolk CAB, only submitted a tender for the 'debt' lot and did not submit a tender for the provision of housing advice.
- 1.4 Tenders were scored using criteria of:
- Cost of the service
 - Comprehensiveness, knowledge and experience of the advice offered, including case studies, CV's of active personnel and the ability to work in partnership with the Council's Housing, Revenues and Benefits teams
 - Methods available for clients to access the services, for e.g. office, telephone and online
 - Operating hours of the service
 - Methods by which active personnel and the organisation as a whole kept up with appropriate legislation
- 1.5 As part of the award arrangements, meetings were held with Community Action Norfolk (CAN), Shelter and the CAB to ensure a 'no wrong door' approach to delivery of the information and advice service.
- 1.6 Tenders were shortlisted and the shortlisted organisations were invited to present to a panel of Members and Officers. The successful organisations were Community Action Norfolk (on behalf of a consortium of organisations) for the 'Housing' lot and Shelter for the 'debt' lot.
- 1.7 CAN, Shelter and the CAB have all been given access to one of the Borough Council's interview rooms, for certain times of the week, in order that they can meet with clients in a confidential setting. All three organisations are responsible for working together to book appointments for the room.

2.0 Post Implementation Review

- 2.1 The two new providers commenced service delivery on 1st July 2016 and have been running for approximately six months. An official launch of the new service took place on 18th October on the Tuesday Market Place, King's Lynn and gave members of the public the opportunity to talk to the new providers about their services. Community Action Norfolk are working on behalf of a consortium of organisations, including Purfleet Trust, Leeway, West Norfolk Carers, Stonham Home group and many more, and a number of their representatives attended the launch.

- 2.2 During the quarter ended September 2016, Community Action Norfolk and their group of organisations saw 18 clients; some of these were referred on to other organisations, some were successfully dealt with at the first visit, and some will need further support and advice.

During the same period, Shelter closed 17 cases.

Both organisations have committed to continue to hold open forums in the King's Lynn town centre in order to continue to promote the service which will hopefully see numbers using the service increase with time.

Unfortunately we are unable to access any data relating to the generalist advice provision, as since the departure of Norfolk CAB's Operations Manager in August, Norfolk CAB are not engaging with the Borough Council.

3.0 Issues for the Panel to Consider

- 3.1 The leaflet attached to the report has been prepared jointly with Shelter, Community Action Norfolk and Norfolk CAB, and sets out the services all three organisations provide, and has been used as the basis for publicity. Details of the service providers (including the CAB) can also be found on the Council's website at:

https://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/info/20003/benefits/12/other_benefits_and_agencies

- 3.2 The Panel may like to know that the County Council are currently reviewing their Information and Advice services, including the provision of generalist advice. This consultation closed on 9th December 2016 and the results are expected at the end of January 2017, with feedback provided during February.

Both CAN and Shelter will be at the Panel meeting to provide more information around numbers of clients seen, the methods of referral and so on.

4.0 Corporate Priorities

- 4.1 The provision of information and advice fits within the following corporate priorities:

- 1) *Provide important local services within our available resources*
- 5) *Stand up for local interests within our region*
- 6) *Work with our partners on important services for the borough*

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The cost for both the housing and debt awards was £76,290 which was only slightly more than the previous grant award to Norfolk CAB of £76,091.

6.0 Any other Implications/Risks

None.

7.0 Equal Opportunity Considerations

None.

8.0 Consultation

Cllr Adrian Lawrence – Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community
Cllr Elizabeth Nockolds – Portfolio Holder for Culture, Heritage and Health
Lorraine Gore – Executive Director of Finance

9.0 Conclusion

- 9.1 Members are requested to note the report and inform Officers as to whether they would like to receive further updates in the future.

10.0 Background Papers

Invitation to Tender – Information and Advice Services
Data from Shelter - quarter ended 30th September 2016
Data from Community Action Norfolk – quarter ended 30th September 2016
Norfolk County Council consultation – Norfolk Citizenspace.com
Borough Council website