



ADUR & WORTHING  
COUNCILS

Joint Strategic Committee  
7 September 2021  
Agenda Item 9

Key Decision [Yes/No]

Ward(s) All

## **Recommissioning of advice provision**

### **Report by the Interim Director for Communities**

#### **Executive Summary**

##### **1. Purpose**

Generalist advice is an important service that is provided across West Sussex. The current contract for this work is held and delivered by Citizens Advice and includes work around optimising benefit claims for our communities and a free drop in advice service for our communities in locations in Adur and Worthing.

This service has provided a vital response to the ongoing impacts of the COVID pandemic, where increasing numbers of local residents are facing challenges in relation to insecure housing, financial sustainability and accessing appropriate support. All of which makes the work of an advice service even more necessary for the next contracting period. During the current contract, Citizens Advice have also secured additional funding sources for specific projects to bolster their core programme, including work around housing support and Covid related champions.

This work forms an important part of AWC's 'Platforms', and to our pandemic response and recovery plans to support our most vulnerable communities in relation to advice, and financial capability work as evidenced in the JSC report 'Proactive interventions to support local income residents' (July 2021).

This report includes key data from the service to demonstrate their reach and impact. In addition, work is also being carried out across our departments to ensure this service is aligned to the changing needs of our communities now and into the future as a result of the pandemic, ensuring a good reach across all our communities and especially to those experiencing poverty and hardship, and inequality.

The current contract for this service will expire in April 2022, after a period of three years. Discussions are being held with WSCC about the reprocurement of this work. Members of the Joint Strategic Committee are asked to consider and approve arrangements for West Sussex County Council to procure a generalist community advice and support service on behalf of the County Council and all other District and Borough Councils in West Sussex from April 2022.

The current funding for this service is addressed in the report :

- Adur District Council - £83,824
- Worthing Borough Council - £79,829

Members are being asked to enter into a procurement process for a new contract with WSCC and the other D&Bs for a period of seven years, through contract periods of three years, plus three years, plus one year (3+3+1), for a core 'generalist community advice and support service'. At the end of each contract period there will be an opportunity to review and amend it.

Any additional activity would need to be separately funded through commissioning or grant funding processes.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1 Endorse a new contract for Citizens Advice on the basis of a 3+3+1 year agreement

2.2 Support the proposed allocation of funds of ADC £83,824 and WBC £79,829 per annum for the contract period 2021-2028.

### **3. Context**

3.1 Adur and Worthing Councils' are signatories to a procured contract for advice services co-ordinated on behalf of all Districts and Boroughs by West Sussex County Council. The current contract for this is with Citizens Advice and is due to end in April 2022.

3.2 The provision of advice to residents is recognised as a core service enabling citizens to exercise their civic rights and access support and help across West Sussex. The core part of the contract is offering a free advice service that informs people about their rights and responsibilities in areas such as Universal Credit, Blue Badges, benefits and taxes, and housing and debt.

3.3 Citizens Advice has been delivering advice for over 80 years with services in three locations in Adur and Worthing - the Shoreham Centre, Lancing Town Hall and Worthing Town Hall. Services from Lancing Town Hall were suspended as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic although Citizens Advice is seeking to reopen as soon as possible.

3.4 Citizens Advice is a recognised large national non government agency with a known and trusted brand and a track record of providing people seeking advice with reputable information. Citizens Advice also consistently engages large numbers of local residents and volunteers to support the service and to reflect the local communities they work in.

3.5 In the last year (2020 to 2021) for Adur and Worthing, Citizens Advice received 11,542 calls for advice. Of these the greatest number of issues being inquired about were benefits, universal credit, consumer rights, debt, financial services, employment and housing rights. This is a significant enquiry caseload which is focused on important issues for Adur and Worthing. The service has resulted in significant additional funds coming into West Sussex due to optimising residents' benefits and entitlements.

3.6 Data for use of the service has been changing in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The lack of face to face advice has changed how people are accessing advice and advice from the service suggests that this particularly affected residents in Worthing. Anecdotally face to face work is starting to grow in demand again.

3.7 For the first quarter of the 2021-2022 funding year, Citizens Advice provided advice to 3,804 clients in Adur and Worthing, addressing 9,125 issues. Of these, 3,246 cases related to benefit issues and the recorded financial gain for residents in Adur and Worthing was £379,698 for that quarter alone. In relation to ethnicity, 85%

of all people in receipt of advice identified as white, 6% as black and 5% as Asian. 60% of those receiving advice were female, and 45% reported having a long term health issue or a disability.

3.8 During the last contract period, Citizens Advice also secured funding for locally specific projects in Adur and Worthing. This includes the WHAT project designed to provide impartial housing advice to those with a housing issue or threatened with homelessness, which Adur and Worthing Councils provided funding for of £30,000. This provides a dedicated Citizens Advice staff member working alongside the Councils' Housing Needs team to ensure that they are integrated as part of a wider service offer.

3.9 In this role Citizens Advice provide advice and support to clients to help maintain their tenancies and to support them to prevent homelessness. The tenure of those accessing the service ranges from rough sleeping to people living in social housing and support is provided on a wide range of issues - domestic abuse, anti-social behaviour, debt and arrears, mental health, and disrepair. The service provides an access point for those who may not approach the council until it's too late and cases are referred into the Housing Needs team if a tenancy continues to be at risk and a collaborative approach is needed.

3.10 In addition the Councils' also commissioned Citizens Advice to provide budgeting advice in the early stages of the roll out of Universal Credit in response to changes in benefit arrangements.

3.11 Whilst the lead role for this commission sits with the Wellbeing Team, the work of Citizens Advice also connects to several areas of Councils' work, including Revenues and Benefits, Housing, our Good Work programme around access to employment and employment issues, and more recently in relation to the Proactive project, which has been reported to this [Committee in July 2021](#), focusing on identifying and targeting people who are experiencing financial hardship and to support them from falling into greater debt. This contract will form part of our strategic landscape of support and advocacy for our residents in relation to finance and debt and will link to and support the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Adur and Worthing Councils' currently under development.

#### **4. Issues for consideration**

4.1 This contract comes to an end in March 2022 and work is being carried out between Officers of Adur and Worthing Councils, WSCC and the other District and Boroughs to develop a procurement process for a new contract

4.2 Moving forward with any recommissioning, one of the key factors for consideration being discussed between Officers is to provide a contract with enough longevity to enable good planning and sustainability for the service provider. For this reason, Officers are recommending that the Councils' support a contract for a period of seven years, structured as contract periods of three years, plus three years, plus one year (3+3+1). After each time period, the contract will be reviewed and where necessary amended to reflect changing priorities.

4.3 In addition, this approach will enable frequent review and better flexibility to respond to changing local needs and respond to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic. It will also mean that the three year contract periods align with Council and District budget cycles.

4.4 The tender process is due to commence in September/October for the new contract to be in place from 1 April 2021, and WSCC has advised that this process is on schedule. It is not clear at this stage whether this will be an open tender or single tender process, and this will be clarified by WSCC shortly.

4.5 Whilst the core contract is for a 'generalist' Community Advice and Support Service (essentially a free advice service offered to all residents with case work follow up if necessary), the new contract will allow for more tailored responses in relation to District and Borough needs. The revised specification will include more emphasis on local service delivery and the capacity to review local service delivery. Advice work in each Borough and District will be guided by a Local Delivery Plan which will include service locations and service outreach. This will provide greater opportunity for Adur and Worthing to work with the provider to adapt the service accordingly for our residents.

4.6 It is intended that the revised specification will also include capacity limits based on the level of funding provided by each District and Borough. This is to try to ensure that service demand can be better matched to the funding provided. The specification for these limits is currently under development by WSCC and the District and Borough working group and should be finalised by November 2021.

4.7 In addition, if Boroughs and Districts want specific services to be delivered in their local areas this will need to be separately funded through commissioning or grant funding processes.

4.8 Adur and Worthing Councils' have been represented in developing this new approach and the move towards a more tailored response to the issues impacting on local residents is supported. Increased funding and contract certainty will also

support the organisation to engage in long term initiatives that will deliver more systemic outcomes.

4.9 It is expected that the funding required from Adur and Worthing Councils over the course of the contract will be based on the contribution levels set out below of:

Adur District Council - £83,824

Worthing Borough Council - £79,829

**Total Contribution - £163,653 per annum**

4.10 It is important to note that the level of investment by Adur District Council is higher than for Worthing Borough Council. The difference in investment levels between the two councils is a historical legacy and the Local Delivery Plan for Adur and Worthing with the contracted service provider will reflect these differences.

4.11 There is also a significant in kind contribution made directly by the Councils' through the charging of peppercorn rent for office space in the Shoreham Centre and Worthing Town Hall. This in kind contribution is evenly spread for Adur and Worthing and amounts to over £19,000 for each venue.

4.12 WSCC will also continue to fund countywide outcomes that are delivered locally. The amount they will contribute for the new contract is yet to be confirmed, but for the last one it was a total of £350,000 for the County, distributed as £50,000 per Borough and District.

## **5. Engagement and Communication**

5.1 To inform Councils' input into the development of a new contract specification, work was carried out in April and May 2020 with key departments to identify areas where the Advice Service and the contract might be improved.

5.2 Staff identified a number of areas that needed further work, including:

- How the service can be better promoted and taken up across different key parts of Councils' including Housing and Revenues and Benefits, and how it can better connect to the Proactive Project;
- Developing a 'pathways' approach to support more vulnerable clients;
- Clearer information about cases and trends (e.g. what is changing in service usage, are requests for advice increasing in some areas, do some types of clients use the service more than others, what are the cases by location)
- Strengthening the feedback mechanisms for referring agencies in relation to outcomes to support learning

5.3 In response to this some key areas for inclusion for the new contract will be requested, including reporting requirements that give more granular information about service usage and outcomes for Adur and Worthing.

5.4 The new contract lists service priorities that are particularly highlighted for the service provider to work with. This includes people who are socially excluded, who have health inequalities or mental health needs and those with complex sets of issues. It does not include older people because it should be noted that WSCC does fund AGE UK and Guildcare to provide advice services for older people. Officers will also work with WSCC to ensure that black and minoritised communities are also included as a service priority in the new contract.

5.5 There has been a significant amount of work done to develop the next contracting cycle in collaboration with all of the Districts and Boroughs in West Sussex.

## **6. Financial Implications**

6.1 The Councils have the following budgets available to fund the proposed new contracts:

Adur - £86,790

Worthing - £83,690

## **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 s1 of the Localism Act 2011 empowers the Council to do anything an individual can do apart from that which is specifically prohibited by pre-existing legislation.

7.2 Under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has the power to do anything that is calculated to facilitate, or which is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

7.3 s1 Local Government (Contracts) Act 1997 confers power on the local authority to enter into a contract for the provision of making available assets or services for the purposes of, or in connection with, the discharge of the function by the local authority.

7.4 Under the Public Contract Regulations 2015 where a Public Authority is to enter into a contract for the supply of goods & services, and the value of those goods and services exceeds a financial limit of £189,330 (or for Schedule 3 Social and Other Specific Service procurement a sum of £589,148) then any procurement exercise to contract for those goods and services must be conducted in accordance with the Regulations. Prior to contract, Adur and Worthing Councils must be satisfied that the procurement carried out by WSCC is in accordance with those Regulations.

### **Background Papers**

A previous report to the JSC outlining progress with contract recommissioning for 2019 to 2022 is attached [here](#).

### **Officer Contact Details:-**

Deborah Georgiou

Wellbeing Manager

07552952687

deborah.georgiou@adur-worthing.gov.uk

## **Sustainability & Risk Assessment**

### **1. Economic**

Funding a 'citizens advice' service has a positive impact on the economic development of Adur and Worthing by ensuring that incomes for our poorest community members are optimised and thereby reinvested in the local economy. It also helps build people's personal capacity so they are enabled to participate in economic activity.

### **2. Social**

#### **2.1 Social Value**

This service has a significant positive impact for Adur and Worthing Councils' most vulnerable communities, including older people, people from minoritised communities, those with disabilities, and those living in areas of disadvantage. The service is currently accessible in two key locations across the Councils, and offers an extensive range of advice.

#### **2.2 Equality Issues**

The Councils' will be looking to add additional groups to the list that the advice service must particularly engage with, including people from minoritised ethnic communities and older people. This will help to address some of the key themes identified in the Thrive Board Equality Summary and Approach including:

- Removing or minimizing disadvantages suffered by equality groups
- Taking steps to meet the needs of equality groups

Due to extensive research into the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic outlined in the Marmot Review, it is known that it has had a greater adverse impact on minoritised ethnic communities, young people, and those with disabilities.

This is supported by the experience of Adur and Worthing and improving the access of members of Councils' priority community groups to the provision of advice services is an important measure to address such inequalities.

#### **2.3 Community Safety Issues (Section 17)**

Matter considered and no issues identified.

#### **2.4 Human Rights Issues**

This measure is completely consistent with the Human Rights Act. Funding advice services that are accessible and non-discriminatory is a core component of the UKs approach in upholding human rights values in the context of private citizens and their individual rights.

**3. Environmental**

Matter considered and no issues identified.

**4. Governance**

This proposal is in line with Council's Platforms and And Then.... aspirations. It has been developed through constructive collaborative work with all other Boroughs and Districts and West Sussex County Council. There are no implications for risk management, health and safety and governance of the Councils.