

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE

### 1 **ADVICE SERVICES CONTRACT 2022-24**

1.1 This item of business was referred by the Executive on 6 December 2021 to Council with a recommendation on the Advice Services Contract 2022-24 Report. An extract of the key elements of the report to the Executive is attached in Appendix 1.

1.2 A verbal update will be provided at the Council meeting, as necessary.

1.3 It is proposed that Council **RESOLVES**

That the contents of the Advice Services Contract 2022-24 Report be endorsed as per proposals set out in the Report.

If you would like this report in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.

## ADVICE SERVICES CONTRACT 2022-24

### 1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 To agree that the Advice Services Contract should be retendered for a further 2-year period, with the option for the Council to extend the contract for a further one year. It is proposed that the value of the contract would continue to be £70,000 per year.
- 1.2 To recommend that this report is presented to Full Council on 7 December 2021 to endorse the proposals set out in the sections below.

### 2 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Advice Services Contract is part of the Council's current provision to ensure that the general advice needs of residents are met. Demand for free to end user advice, remains high in Rochford District, particularly in relation to debt, housing, money advice, employment and relationship and family issues.
- 2.2 Funding a general advice service, provides support that can help residents prevent an escalation of health, care and housing needs, which in turn reduces the likelihood of them requiring more intensive and costly support in a crisis. Advice Services provide crucial triage support to both the councils housing and benefits services. Retendering provides certainty for the Council that it can meet residents' ongoing need.

### 3 SALIENT INFORMATION

- 3.1 The current service provider is Citizens Advice South Essex, CASE (formerly Citizens Advice Rochford and Rayleigh), who were awarded the Advice Services Contract for 2019-22. The service currently operates from bases in Rochford and Rayleigh. Quarterly monitoring meetings are held between the Council and CASE to discuss how clients access the service and the issues that they seek advice on. Focus is placed on specific outcomes. The Q2 2021/22 CASE monitoring report is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.
- 3.2 As reported by the CASE service, in the last 6 months April –September 2021, 1567, new clients have been seen presenting with 2,623 issues. To date, the top five issues that clients have sought advice on are:
  - Housing
  - Welfare advice
  - Debt
  - Relationships and Family
  - Employment

- 3.4 The Advice Services Contract assists the Council to carry out its early intervention and prevention duties, particularly in relation to housing and continues to have an important role to perform in relation to budget planning with regards to universal credit and employment changes.
- 3.5 Previous analysis, undertaken by CASE, highlighted that any reduction in the value of the Advice Services contract would have the following impact:
- 10% reduction in the price paid by the Council for the Advice Services Contract (assuming that no other material change to the terms of that contract) would result in CASE reducing the numbers of clients that it would be able to properly service – potentially 350-400 fewer clients a week
  - 15% reduction would mean 650 fewer clients and
  - 20% reduction would mean 700 fewer clients (which amounts to around 2,000 issues).
- 3.6 Any reduction in service i.e., the number of clients seen, would put significant pressure on all council and partner services to meet residents support needs, in particular housing and benefits services, where it would not be manageable.
- 3.7 The Q2 2021/22 monitoring report as detailed in Appendix 1, shows an ongoing demand for support from advice services, with the impact of the last 18 months now only just being realised, the likelihood of further demands over the coming months and years is high. Considering future demands, it is highly likely that the anticipated value of the new contract will not change.
- 3.8 It is proposed that the new tender specification will use the information gained from the current contract monitoring process to ensure it remains relevant and robust and meets the current service needs of the district.
- 3.9 Under Best Value Statutory Guidance, a local authority intending to reduce or end funding (where 'funding' means both grant funding and any fixed term contract) or any other support, to a voluntary and community organisation or small business, at least three months' notice should be given to both the organisation involved and the public/service users. Consequently, the timetable being followed is outlined below:
- December 2021: Members approve tender process
  - January 2022: Publish tender
  - January/February 2022: Return of tenders
  - March 2022: Evaluation of tenders and select preferred supplier
  - April 2022: Members approve contract award.

#### **4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 The only option considered was the 'do nothing' option and to allow the current contract to lapse without retendering and, therefore, to effectively discontinue the services. This option has not been fully considered because of the benefits which it brings to the Council, as set out above.

#### **5 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 CASE has delivered a good level of service to residents over the period of the current contract and is a key partner and referral pathway for supporting the Council's most vulnerable residents. A reduction in the current advice services provision would impact adversely on the wellbeing of residents and would significantly increase the workload of Council staff in areas such as benefits and housing, impacting on prevention outcomes and associated savings. It is a service that many residents use and have come to rely on over a number of years for support and independent advice.

#### **6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The value of the contract, subject to Members' views on the service level required, is anticipated to remain at £70,000 per year for two years with the option of extending for an additional year, which would require the current budget to remain unchanged. Funding for subsequent years would be reviewed annually based on delivery of the previous year's outcomes.
- 6.2 It is anticipated that the Council owned accommodation used by the current service provider at Back Lane, Rochford would continue to be made available at a peppercorn rent. Council owned assets are currently under review and the provider would be expected to discuss and consider future accommodation options through the period of the contract.

#### **7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Contract will be subject to a procurement process and awarded to the successful bidder. The successful bidder will be granted the use of the Council premises on a licence for the initial 2 years and extendable by 1 year to ensure it mirrors the contract awarded. A termination clause will be inserted into the licence if either party wishes to terminate earlier than the full term or if there are any breaches in the obligations.

#### **8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty applies to the Council when it makes decisions. The duty requires us to have regard to the need to:
- To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation

- To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
  - To foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 8.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnerships, pregnancy/maternity.
- 8.3 The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.



## Advice Services Monitoring Report 2021/22

### Citizens Advice South Essex (CASE)

	2020/21 baseline (equivalent ¼ previous year)	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar
<b>1. Number of Clients</b>					
Number of new individual clients advised during the monitoring period (quarterly). Individuals must only be counted once in a period.					
	843	669	898		
<b>2. CLIENT PROFILE - Ward</b>					
Please give number of clients for each, if known.					
Downhall and Rawreth	25	23	16		
Foulness and The Wakerings	25	46	25		
Hawkwell East	28	23	19		
Hawkwell West	27	29	18		
Hockley	26	26	21		
Hockley and Ashingdon	31	23	25		
Hullbridge	29	24	26		
Lodge	18	24	10		
Roche North and Rural	47	35	35		
Roche South	49	40	33		
Sweyne Park and Grange	30	26	27		
Trinity	20	20	27		
Wheatley	27	27	34		
Not recorded/not applicable					

<b>3. Channels (some access us more than once in the quarter)</b>					
Phone	443	652	432		
Face to face	0	41	56		
Email	395	258	151		
Webchat	97	10	59		
Letter	9	10	2		
Outreach	0	0	0		

Number of hours provided by paid staff - av per week	104	104	120		
Number of hours provided by volunteers - av per week	100 48% of volunteers are currently active	100	110 61% of volunteers currently active		
** a number of measures are in place re Covid-19 eg hold on evictions for 3 months, furlough payments, creditors hold on debt recovery action. Advice and information is given to manage the situation at the time. issues will become more complex once the measures are lifted.					
<b>4. Issues/Work Categories</b>					
We acknowledge that some clients may be counted in more than one issue or work category.					
Presented by Client:					
<b>Category</b>	Benefits and Tax Credits	350	177	329	
	Benefits Universal Credit	229	140	153	
	Consumer Goods and Services	93	34	79	
	Debt	86	96	143	
	Discrimination	51	10	3* GVA and hate crime	
	Education	5	69	4	
	Employment	315	27	105	
	Financial Services and Capability	74	3	109	
	Health and Community Care	45	24	30	
	Housing	343	194	204	
	Immigration and Asylum	42	20	12	
	Legal	115	76	104	
	Other	56	44	48	
	Relationships and Family	184	92	161	
	Tax	15	10	11	
	Travel and Transport	28	16	16	
	Utilities and Communication	64	36	44	
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2095</b>	<b>1068</b>	<b>1555</b>	
<b>5. Further analysis of above categories</b>					
<b>Benefits</b>	Council Tax Reduction	22	9	24	
	Housing Benefit	20	8	34	
	Help with completing initial UC applications	153	39	68	
	Housing Element	16	12	30	
<b>Housing</b>	Total number of clients seeking housing advice	152	97	113	
	Actual homelessness	10	5	11	
	Threatened homelessness	8	13	15	

	Landlord enquiries	10	2	2		
<b>6. Outcome</b>						
<b>Reduction in levels of Debt</b>	Number of signposting pathways to self-help debt information	21	78	62		
	Number of clients advised on debt issues	42	59	74		
<b>Improved money management skills</b>	Number of clients advised on improving their money management (financial capability)	37	3	88		
<b>Increased income from employment</b>	Number of back to work benefit checks (advised on JSA, UC, WTC)	35	35	36		
	Number of volunteering opportunities (at Citizens Advice) that led to paid work ie volunteers who left to take up paid work)	2	1	1		
	Number of unemployed seeking paid employment (that we are aware of)	37	55	53		
	Furlough enquiries	27	3	1		
	Number of clients advised on applying for jobs	2	1	3		
<b>Tackle fuel poverty (possible Energy Best Deals project)</b>	Number of clients advised on fuel poverty issues	12	11	10		
	Number of clients provided with information on how to get a better tariff	3	0	2		
<b>Increased awareness of support for residents on low income</b>	Number of clients supported in making and managing benefit claims	57	28	60		
	Number of benefit checks completed	38	13	36		
<b>Increased support for relationship issues</b>	Number of issues relating to relationship/family disputes	184	75	77		
	Number of issues relating to neighbour disputes	29	11	4		

7. Other help/assistance					
	Pro bono solicitor assistance	8	0	8	
	Immigration specialist	2	0	4	
	Free Representation Unit)	4	1	2	
	Other	5	1	0	

**Client Experience Dashboard 2021/22**

**Summary:**

Question	Question wording	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive	Positive or Very Positive	All Network
1	How easy or difficult did you find it to access the service?	11	19	28	129	151	83.4%	80.0%
2	To what extent did the service help you to find a way forward?	26	20	47	120	124	87.2%	86.6%
3	To what extent is your problem now resolved?	59	18	56	79	114	77.2%	78.6%
4	How likely would you be to recommend the service?	13	9	15	60	240	90.1%	90.1%

**8. The quality of advice** given and record-keeping of all paid staff and volunteers who advise the public will be monitored by the Provider on a frequent and regular basis.

**Date: December 2020 - Advice Quality Standard renewed for a further 3 years.**

**Quality continues to be good.**