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**REPORT TO THE MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE 24 MARCH 2022****PORTFOLIO: COMMUNITY****REPORT FROM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES****SUBJECT: ADVICE SERVICES CONTRACT 2022-24****1 DECISION BEING RECOMMENDED**

- 1.1 To agree the outcome of the Advice Services tender and award the Advice Services Contract 2022-24, to Citizens Advice South Essex (CASE).
- 1.2 To recommend that this report is presented to Full Council in July 2022 to endorse the proposal as set out in the sections below.

**2 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 The only bid for the contract received was from Citizens Advice South Essex (CASE), however, the tender submission met all the requirements of the specification. CASE was able to demonstrate using the organisation's local experience of need, that social value can be clearly delivered through economic benefits, early interventions, community engagement, all of which will be able to add value to services provided by the Council.

**3 SALIENT INFORMATION**

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 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 Council's housing and benefits services.
- 3.3 Agreement to proceed to tender, to provide certainty for the Council that it can meet residents' ongoing need, was approved by the Executive 2 December 2021 and endorsed by Full Council on 7 December 2021. It was agreed that the Advice Service Contract starting in June 2022 would be tendered for 2 years, with the option for the Council to extend the contract for a further 1 year. The value of the contract was estimated to be £70,000 per year.
- 3.4 The tender was subsequently published in January 2022 and an evaluation panel, consisting of the Portfolio Holder for Communities, Assistant Director People & Communities and the Council's Strategic Partnership Officer, reviewed the returned tenders and decided on which organisation should be

awarded the contract. As detailed in section 3.1, one bid was received from CASE and on evaluation it was confirmed that this met all the requirements of the specification and hence CASE should be awarded the contract.

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

- 4.1 The only option considered was the ‘do not approve the tender outcome’ and to allow the current contract to lapse and, therefore, to effectively discontinue the service. This option has not been fully considered because of the benefits which it brings to the Council, as summarised in section 4.

#### **5 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 CASE has proven to be a partner who have 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 current value of the contact remains unchanged and will be £70,000 per year for two years from June 2022, with the option of extending for an additional year. This has been included within the budget for 2022/23. 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 at Back Lane, Rochford would continue to be made available to CASE, at a peppercorn rent. That said, Council owned assets are under review and CASE would be expected to discuss and consider future accommodation options through the period of the contract

#### **7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 CASE will be granted use of the Council premises on a licence for 2 years, extendable by 1 year to mirror the contract awarded. A termination clause will be inserted into the licence agreement, should either party wish to terminate earlier than the full term or in the event of any breaches in the obligations.
- 7.2 The licence is a form of consent for CASE to use the Council premises and will contain certain obligations but is not a lease. This enables both parties to determine the arrangement should anything unexpected arise without being tied in to any legal obligations required under a formal lease.

**8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Maintaining an advice service with the value of the contract being held will ensure all residents continue to have access to free impartial advice in the District and will have a positive impact on each of the protected characteristic groups.

I confirm that the above recommendation does not depart from Council policy and that appropriate consideration has been given to any budgetary and legal implications.

LT Lead Officer Signature: \_\_\_\_\_



**Assistant Director –People & Communities**

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**Background Papers:-**

None.

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