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| <b>Title of Report:</b>                | <b>Generalist Advice Contract 2021-2024</b>  |
| <b>Committee Report Submitted To:</b>  | <b>The Leisure and Development Committee</b> |
| <b>Date of Meeting:</b>                | <b>17<sup>th</sup> November 2020</b>         |
| <b>For Decision or For Information</b> | <b>For Decision</b>                          |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2019-23)</b> |   |
| Strategic Theme                              | Resilient, Healthy & Engaged Communities  |
| Outcome                                      | Council will work to develop and promote stable and cohesive communities across the Borough |
| Lead Officer                                 | Head of Community & Culture<br>Community Development Manager                                |

|                                    |                                   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Budgetary Considerations</b>    |                                   |
| Cost of Proposal                   | £113,906 - £121,011 net (2021-22) |
| Included in Current Year Estimates | <b>YES/NO</b>                     |
| Capital/Revenue                    | Revenue                           |
| Code                               | 33202                             |
| Staffing Costs                     | N/A                               |

|  |  |        |       |
|--|--|--------|-------|
| <b>Screening Requirements</b>            | Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals. |        |       |
| Section 75 Screening                     | Screening Completed:   | Yes/No | Date: |
|  | EQIA Required and Completed:   | Yes/No | Date: |
| Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)             | Screening Completed  | Yes/No | Date: |
|  | RNA Required and Completed:  | Yes/No | Date: |
| Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) | Screening Completed:   | Yes/No | Date: |
|  | DPIA Required and Completed:   | Yes/No | Date: |

## 1.0 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of a review that was undertaken of the Generalist Advice Contract for Causeway Coast and Glens and to seek approval from Members to proceed to commission the service for a one year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, subject to the necessary funds being made available through the Department for Communities (DfC) and Council, with an extension clause to allow the contract to be extended for 2 further periods of one year each.

## 2.0 Background

The Department for Communities (DfC) provides funding for Generalist Advice Provision through the DfC District Councils Community Support Programme (CSP) which contains a ring-fenced amount for frontline advice provision which is then matched by Council.

|   |   |                      |
|---|---|----------------------|
| Total Core contract for Generalist Advice provision 2020-21 | DfC(Community Support Programme) contribution | Council contribution |
| £213,387  | £99,481                                       | £113,906             |

The current contract for provision of Generalist Advice Services in the Borough was awarded, following an open procurement exercise, to Community Advice Causeway (CAC) (Lead Partner for Causeway and Glens Advice Services Consortium consisting of Community Advice Causeway and Limavady Community Development Initiative (LCDI)) for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2019, with an extension for a 2 further years, as allowed for by an extension clause in the contract, and is due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

In preparation for commissioning the service from April 2021, Williamson Consulting were commissioned to carry out a review of the current 3 year contract to allow preparation for commissioning the service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

## 3.0 Findings and Recommendations of the Report

The Report of the Review of the Generalist Advice Contract is attached at **Annex A**.

### 3.1 Key Findings

The Review indicates that the current advice contract has been working effectively. Providers have consistently exceeded the enquiry targets set for them and are believed to be delivering high quality advice. The following table shows the target number of enquiries by area and the number of enquiries actually dealt with during 2018-19 and 2019-20.

#### Contract Compliance - Enquiry Targets 2018-20

|                   | 2018/19       | 2018/19        |                 | 2019/20       | 2019/20       |                 | 2019/20         |
|-------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| <u>Former LGD</u> | <u>Target</u> | <u>Actuals</u> | <u>% Target</u> | <u>Target</u> | <u>Actual</u> | <u>% Target</u> | <u>Actual %</u> |
| Ballymoney        | 5000          | 6707           | 134%            | 5000          | 9489          | 190%            | 23%             |
| Coleraine         | 13000         | 14193          | 109%            | 13000         | 15021         | 116%            | 37%             |
| Moyle             | 2000          | 3101           | 155%            | 2500          | 4025          | 161%            | 10%             |
| Limavady          | 9000          | 10876          | 121%            | 9000          | 12314         | 137%            | 30%             |
| <b>Total</b>      | <b>29000</b>  | <b>34877</b>   | <b>120%</b>     | <b>29500</b>  | <b>40849</b>  | <b>138%</b>     | <b>100%</b>     |

An analysis of need across the Council area was carried out using the geography of both DEAs and the former Local Government Districts. While both showed a similar pattern, the LGDs continue to be the most suitable geographical units for Council to use in allocating advice resources. The analysis showed a need for some changes in the allocation of resources across the Borough, which are detailed in the report recommendations.

In broad terms, it is generally accepted that the need for advice relates to population and deprivation with a much higher proportion of those who are living in disadvantaged areas requiring advice. In recent years a formula has been used which provides four times as much advice resource to the 10% most deprived wards; three times to the 10-30% most deprived areas and one times to the remaining wards. Since the 2008 recession and as a result of Welfare Reform and increasing debt issues, the profile of those seeking advice has changed somewhat with a much higher proportion of “working poor” and people who previously had no contact with the benefit system. As a result the report recommends that Council consider a 3,2,1 ratio as more appropriate.

The Covid-19 pandemic has caused providers to deliver a much higher proportion of advice by telephone (and occasionally email or text message) and clients and advice providers have both adapted well to this enforced change. While some clients will always need face to face advice, there is a strong case for providing as much advice as possible and appropriate by telephone. Monitoring of advice by ‘enquiries’ has been shown to have some limitations and it is recommended that Council consider a change to monitor ‘contacts’ and ‘time spent’ in future.

### 3.2 Report Recommendations

The recommendations for developing a new commissioning agreement for advice in the Causeway Coast and Glens area are as follows:

- i. The term of the contract should be for 1 year, renewable for a further two years subject to satisfactory annual review.
- ii. Council should continue to commission the full advice requirement as a single contract. The current consortium approach is working well with a lead partner taking full responsibility for the management of the contract and such an approach would be welcomed for the new contract. The breakdown of funding or allocation of work within the contract should be by agreement between the bidding partners.
- iii. There is increasing pressure on providers with higher levels of debt, redundancies and Covid-19 pressures. In addition, funding has not kept pace with inflation. Funding should be increased by 8 - 10% if possible, and subject to available Council and DfC funding. In the current difficult funding climate it may be preferable to stage this over the contract period. (An 8% increase in the contract would result in an increased budget requirement of £17,071 per year. A 10% increase would result in an increased budget requirement of £21,339).
- iv. Council should no longer include an ‘eligible costs’ section as the advice is being purchased as any other commercial contract.
- v. Monitoring should be on the basis of compliance with the contract, specifically:
  - a. Number of enquiries (or contacts, if introduced).
  - b. Quality indicators.
  - c. Case studies on specific work to allow for greater understanding of the issues being addressed.
  - d. Provision of quarterly statistics for DfC.

- e. If introduced, provision of a quarterly Excel spreadsheet report from Advice Pro including contacts, contact postcodes, time spent by contact, date of contact, unique client identifier number.
- vi. The review of need across the borough has shown that current geographical targets are not ideal. New enquiry targets for 2021/22 onwards should be as follows:

|                     |                     |                |                   |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Ballymoney<br>5,550 | Coleraine<br>11,900 | Moyle<br>4,500 | Limavady<br>8,000 |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|

- vii. Should Council decide to introduce the more accurate 'contact' and 'time spent' monitoring for 2022/23, the initial contact targets suggested are as follows:

|                     |                    |                |                   |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| Ballymoney<br>2,220 | Coleraine<br>4,770 | Moyle<br>1,800 | Limavady<br>3,200 |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|

- viii. The current primary advice locations (Coleraine, Limavady, Ballycastle Dungiven and Ballymoney) and hours should be retained.
- ix. Providers have shown an ability and motivation to best meet clients' needs by adapting the services as required. We would therefore recommend that Council works with the providers to identify the most appropriate outreach locations, times and methods of delivery. Current outreach locations at Cushendall and Bushmills should be retained but reviewed by providers to ensure they are meeting need and best utilising advisors' time. Moving forward any outreach provision should be on an appointment basis.
- x. Providers should be asked to consider how tribunal support for people living in the Glens area can best be met in future, ideally facilitating tribunals in Ballymena where public transport is necessary. A reciprocal agreement with advice services in Mid and East Antrim could be explored.

#### **4.0 Options for Consideration**

The recommendations of the report (i – x above, excluding iii.) present some changes to the targets, methods of delivery, monitoring and reporting which can be written into a new specification for commissioning the service.

Report Recommendation (iii) recommends that in order to be able to meet the demand and reflecting increasing costs of delivery (the budget allocation has not increased in the 5 years of Council) an increase in contract value of 8 - 10% would be required, possibly increased by stages over the contract period.

An 8% increase in the contract would result in an increased budget requirement of £17,071 per year. A 10% increase would result in an increased budget requirement of £21,339. Given the financial constraints that Council is operating under three budget options are proposed (Options A-C below):

##### Option A: Maintain the status quo

Allocate a budget at the same rate as 2019-20 (subject to DfC funding).

|   |                |                     |
|---|----------------|---------------------|
| Total Contract 2021-22, 2022-23 & 2023-24<br>£213,387 | DfC<br>£99,481 | Council<br>£113,906 |
|---|----------------|---------------------|

### Option B: Staggered increase of 8%

Increase the budget over the period of 3 years to reach an increase of 8% (of 2020-21 rate) by year 3. This would take the form of an increase of 2% (of 2020-21 rates) for Year 1 (2021-22), followed by a further 2% (of 2020-21 rates) for Year 2 (2022-23) followed by a further increase of 4% (of 2020-21 rates) for Year 3 (2023-24).

|   |                 |                     |
|---|-----------------|---------------------|
| Total Contract 2021-22<br>(increase of 2% from 2020-21 rate)<br>£217,655      | DfC<br>£99,481* | Council<br>£118,174 |
| Total Contract 2022-23<br>(further 2% increase from 2020-21 rate)<br>£221,922 | DfC<br>£99,481  | Council<br>£122,441 |
| Total Contract 2023-24<br>(further 4% increase from 2020-21 rate)<br>£230,458 | DfC<br>£99,481  | Council<br>£130,977 |

\*At this stage DfC are unable to provide confirmation of the value of annual funding to be awarded for Advice provision in 2021-22 or subsequent years.

### Option C: Staggered increase of 10%

Increase the budget over the period of 3 years to reach an increase of 10% (of 2020-21 rate) by year 3. This would take the form of an increase of 3.33% (of 2020-21 rates) for Year 1 (2021-22), followed by a further 3.33% (of 2020-21 rates) for Year 2 (2022-23) followed by a further increase of 3.33% (of 2020-21 rates) for Year 3 (2023-24).

|  |                |                     |
|--|----------------|---------------------|
| Total Contract 2021-22<br>(increase of 3.33% from 2020-21 rate)<br>£220,492      | DfC<br>£99,481 | Council<br>£121,011 |
| Total Contract 2022-23<br>(further 3.33% increase from 2020-21 rate)<br>£227,599 | DfC<br>£99,481 | Council<br>£128,118 |
| Total Contract 2023-24<br>(further 3.33% increase from 2020-21 rate)<br>£234,725 | DfC<br>£99,481 | Council<br>£135,244 |

## **5.0 Recommendation**

Giving consideration of the three options above, proceed to commission the service for a one year period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, subject to the necessary funds being made available through the Department for Communities (DfC) and Council, with the possibility of the contract being extended for 2 further periods of one year each i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 and 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, subject to the necessary funds being made

available through the Department for Communities (DfC) and Council, and satisfactory performance.