



**REPORT of
DIRECTOR OF SERVICE DELIVERY**

**to
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
28 AUGUST 2018**

ADVICE SERVICES CONTRACT UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an update on the Advice Services Contract after Year Two of the Three Year contract. This report does not discuss the future commissioning of an Advice service which will be subject to consideration by Members as part of the 2019-20 Strategic Financial Planning process, with a report coming back to the Community Services Committee to determine the details of a future procurement process, including the contract specification, timetable, and period of contract.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) that the report is noted, and Members comments invited.

3. SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

3.1 On 1 April 2016 Maldon Citizens Advice (MCA) commenced a new contractual arrangement with the Council to deliver an Advice Service. Prior to this advice services had been delivered through a Service Level Agreement, and funded through an annual grant.

3.2 Essex County Council also aligned its funding for Advice Services to this new commissioned service, resulting in a total contract award of £81,300 (this was in line with previous levels of grant) of which £73,500 was paid by MDC

The main features of the contract specification were:

i. A new focus on key priorities, including a stronger focus on securing external funding:

- Planning for future known changes
- Promoting, encouraging and enabling Digital Inclusion
- Encouraging Self Help
- Delivering High Quality Services that achieve the best value for money
- Maximising the opportunities for securing external funding,
- Maximising opportunities for working with partners-
- Adding value and enhancing the services delivered by the Council,

- Focused on outcomes

- A greater focus on outcomes for customers**
- Increased frequency of Monitoring**
- Increased Opening Hours**
- Delivery of an Outreach Service at Burnham** (although not funded under this contract)
- Provision of Accommodation for a peppercorn rent.**

3.3 The first two years of the contract has been extremely successful, with the MCA delivering all of the agreed outcomes.

3.3

3.4 Some of the MCA key successes (**comparing data to 2015/16 data**) have been:

Activity	2017/18
Increased opening hours	 Up 65% from 18 hours to 30 hours which has been sustained since start of the contract
Extended telephone access	 Up 65% from 18 hours to 30 hours with access outside of these times to the national advice line of which MCA is now a member which has been sustained since start of contract
Increased numbers of residents assisted by telephone	 Up by 24% to 2932 clients
Increased unique Clients	 Up by 24 % to 3076 clients
Increase in use of website	 Up by 15% to 42.6K hits
Increase in clients accessing debt advice	 Up by 22% to 514 clients
Increase in additional benefits secured for clients	 Up by 48% to £1.6M
Increase in additional funding secured	 £83.7K which includes £60K over 5 year period from 2017
Decrease in MDC funding as a percentage of overall costs	 Down from 77% in 2015 to 44.5%

- This extended and enhanced service has continued to be delivered at no additional cost to either the District Council, or ECC, at a time when residents have been facing a number of challenges, including significant welfare reform changes, increases in the threat of homelessness and increasing levels of personal debt.
- As the contract was for a set value and made no provision for an annual inflation increase (which the service level agreement previously did) in real terms the Council has achieved a saving of £3956 over the life of the contract
- The co-location of the MCA to the Council Offices in December continues to provide a much improved level of service to residents, both in terms of interview facilities, and closer partnership working between the Council and MCA.
- MCA are working with the Housing team to support residents as part of the Councils new Homelessness Duties that came into force in April 2018.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The first and second year of the new Advice Services contract have been extremely successful.
An extended and enhanced service has been delivered at no additional cost to either the District Council, or ECC, at a time when residents have been facing a number of challenges, including significant welfare reform changes, and increasing levels of personal debt.

4.2 The MCA have continued to deliver a high quality service, with recognition through its annual external audit of the high levels of service and quality of advice.

4.3 MCA have been able to sustain this enhanced service through the first two years of the contract, and into the third year.

4.4 The co-location of the MCA in the Council Offices continues to be extremely successful, offering both MCA staff, and residents a significantly enhanced environment to deliver what is a vital service to some of our most vulnerable residents. It has also led to greater partnership, both working with clients, and on events and activities.

4.5 Members have approved the extension of the current contract with MCA for 12 months until 31 March 2020. A decision about future commissioning of the Advice Services Contract beyond March 2020 will be subject to consideration by Members as part of the 2019-20 Strategic Financial Planning process, with a report coming back to the Community Services Committee to determine the details of a future procurement process, including the contract specification, timetable, and period of contract and is therefore not discussed in this report.

5. IMPACT ON CORPORATE GOALS

5.1 The effective procurement of an Advice Service reflects the corporate goal of delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services.

5.2 The delivery of the Advice Service through the use of volunteers helps to support the corporate goal of strengthening communities to be safe active and healthy.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- (i) **Impact on Customers** – The effective delivery of an Advice Service reflects the corporate goal of delivering good quality, cost effective and valued services. The current contract with MCA also supports volunteering within the community.
- (ii) **Impact on Equalities** – A service which is easily accessible to residents, through website, telephone, face to face, outreach and which can undertake visits for the most vulnerable residents is essential to ensure equality of access
- (iii) **Impact on Risk** – An effective advice service is essential to deliver a range of services which are not delivered by the Council. A lack of an effective advice service would impact adversely on the wellbeing of residents and would significantly increase the workload of the Council's own staff.

- (iv) **Impact on Resources (financial)** – The Council has made provision within its Medium Term Financial Strategy to fund an advice service. The current contract is line with that budget
- (v) **Impact on Resources (human)** – Failure to deliver an effective advice service would have a significant impact upon the Council as it currently does not have the capacity or skills to deliver this service.
- (vi) **Impact on the Environment** – None identified.

Background Papers: Maldon Citizens Advice Annual Accounts to 31 March 2018

Enquiries to: Sue Green, Group Manager :Customers (Tel: 01621 875892).