



REPORT of DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY

**to
COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE
23 MAY 2017**

ADVICE SERVICES CONTRACT UPDATE

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on the Advice Services Contract after Year One of the Three Year contract.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the report is noted.

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 (ECC) 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).
- 3.3 The main features of the new 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.

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

3.4 The first year of the contract has been extremely successful, with the MCA delivering all of the agreed outcomes.

3.5 Some of the MCA key successes (comparing 2016 / 17 data to 2015 / 16 data) have been:

- Significantly increased **opening hours** to the public – **from 18 Hours to 30 Hours** per week.
- Extended **telephone access** for residents – **18 Hours to 30 hours per week**, with access outside of these times to the national advice line, of which MCA is now a participating member.
- Increased numbers of residents being **assisted by telephone up 42%** (3368 clients).
- Increased number of **unique clients** assisted **up 38%** (3421 Clients).
- Increased use of MCA website up by 21% (£45,000).
- Increased numbers of customers receiving help with **debt advice up 22%** (514 clients).
- Increase in clients assisted with debt, resulting in the **debt being written off** through Bankruptcy or Debt Relief Order **up 128%**, total value £547,000.
- Increase in **additional benefit** gained for residents - **£1.9M** secured **up 75%**.
- Increased levels of additional funding secured **£10.6K, plus further 5 years funding totalling £60,000.**
- Maldon District Council (MDC) funding as a **percentage of overall costs** has reduced significantly, from 77 % in 2015/16 to **54%** in 2016 / 17.
- **Increased numbers of Volunteers** recruited to deliver extended service.

3.6 This extended and enhanced service has been delivered at no additional cost to either MDC, 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.

3.7 Following the co-location of the MCA to the Council Offices in December 2015 the service has been delivered from offices which have been updated, including purpose built interview facilities enhancing the environment for both customers and MCA staff.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The first year of the new Advice Services contract has been extremely successful. An extended and enhanced service has been delivered at no additional cost to either MDC 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 has 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 has successfully recruited a number of additional volunteers to deliver the enhanced service.
- 4.4 The co-location of the MCA in the Council Offices has also been 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.

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 in 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: None.

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