

Executive

Overview and Scrutiny Reports: Commissioning of Advice, Volunteering and Voluntary Car Driving Schemes in Cherwell

5 September 2011

Report of Interim Head of Legal and Democratic Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider the overview and scrutiny report on Commissioning of Advice, Volunteering and Voluntary Car Driving Schemes in Cherwell.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will attend the meeting to present the reports.

This report is public

Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- (1) To note the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scrutiny review into the Council's approach to Commissioning of Advice, Volunteering and Voluntary Car Driving Schemes in Cherwell.
- (2) To note the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's support for the Executive's decision to proceed with the commissioning project.

Executive Summary

Introduction

- 1.1 Proposals for a commissioning exercise to deliver a consistent and equitable approach to the funding of advice, volunteering and volunteer driving services in Cherwell and to consider the implications for a potential countywide Dial-a-Ride service were discussed by the Executive on 23 May 2011.
- 1.2 The Executive approved all of the recommendations in the report but asked that it be referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further consideration of the issues and implications.

Proposals

1.3 This topic was confirmed as a review item at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting on 14 June when Councillors Mallon, Emptage, Pratt, Stevens, L Stratford and R Stratford volunteered to meet with officers to discuss the specific issues relating to:

- Advice
- Volunteering
- Voluntary Car Transport Schemes

The notes of those informal working group discussions were tabled at the Committee meeting on 19 July 2011 alongside a question and answer statement in response to questions raised by Councillor Cartledge (Appendices 1 and 2 refer). At that meeting the Strategic Housing Manager and the Strategic Housing Officer briefed Members on the key issues arising from the informal discussions and explained the details underlying the written answers provided.

In discussion the following points were made:

- That the commissioning project should not be seen as a cost-cutting exercise but as a vehicle to ensure the delivery of transparent, equitable cost effective services to the widest range of residents.
- Statistics and data analysis: the officers explained that statistical data should be treated with caution as it was not always possible to check the source data. For example when looking at call centre volumes for some of the charitable organisations it was not clear whether the figures were all first time callers or included a number of repeat calls. Clearly this had implications for performance assessment and the quality of service provided. This was an area that was targeted for improvement through the commissioning process which would require a more rigorous methodology for data collection and analysis.
- Volunteering: the commissioning project should seek to encourage volunteering from all age groups and backgrounds and replicate good practice from across the county. It was also important to recognise that volunteering schemes should complement service offerings and not be seen as a cheaper alternative delivery option.
- Community Transport: the Committee noted the current status of the County Council's review of dial-a-ride services across Oxfordshire and their intention to provide a base-line service which could be "topped-up" with funding from the individual District Councils. A survey to be led by the County Council of existing Banburyshire Community Transport Association (BCTA) customers was planned which would inform the new service specification to be delivered by either the County Council or a third party. This would also inform the District Council about the appropriate level of "top-up" funding that might be required. Officers also briefed the Members on the current status of the discussions with BCTA and the support that had been offered in the light of the Council's decision in principle to terminate the dial-a-ride funding agreement in March 2012.

In conclusion the Committee agreed that it was important that the Council used the commissioning exercise to ensure that the funds available were channelled towards strategically relevant services and projects which would meet the needs of residents securing positive outcomes for them. It was also acknowledged that the understanding of customer needs will become more refined as the commissioning exercise progresses and in this context a degree of flexibility is required in terms of the amount set aside to support the development of a County Council dial-a-ride service.

Conclusion

- 1.4 The Committee confirmed their support for the Executive's decision to proceed with the commissioning project and agreed that it was important that the project progressed according to the set timetable to ensure that no residents were disadvantaged in April 2012 because contracts and suppliers were not in place.

Key Issues for Consideration/Reasons for Decision and Options

The following options have been identified. The approach in the recommendations is believed to be the best way forward

Option One To note the conclusions contained in the Overview and Scrutiny report.

Option Two Not to note the conclusions contained in the Overview and Scrutiny report.

Consultations

See Appendix 1 and 2 for details

Implications

Financial: There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Comments checked by Sarah Best, Senior Accounting Assistant 01295 221736

Legal: There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

Comments checked by Paul Manning Solicitor 01 295 221688

Risk Management: There are no risk implications arising directly from this report.

Comments checked by James Doble, Democratic, Scrutiny and Elections Manager, 01295 221587

Wards Affected

All

Corporate Plan Themes

Cherwell, a District of Opportunity
Cherwell, an Accessible Value for Money Council

Executive Lead Member

Councillor Debbie Pickford
Lead Member for Housing

Document Information

Appendix No	Title
Appendix 1	Notes of working group meetings
Appendix 2	Responses to Councillor Cartledge
Background Papers	
None	
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