

Commissioning of Advice, Volunteering and Car Volunteering Services

Overview and Scrutiny Committee feedback - June / July 2011

Feedback from Member engagement sessions

- Three sessions were arranged following the initial consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2011 of the Executive Report Commissioning of Advice, Volunteering and Car Volunteering Services
- These sessions were arranged to allow Members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to consider each of the three headings of the commissioning exercise in greater detail
- It was agreed that any issues identified in these meetings would be fed back to the 19 July 2011 meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, where the report would be considered in greater detail
- It was also agreed that Members could make separate requests for information from officers. Therefore, attached to this summary is the list of questions raised by Councillor Cartledge and the officer response to these points
- The outcomes of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee exercise are laid out for Council Executive.

Session One – Primary Focus on Advice Services

Monday 11 July, 2011, 10am

Councillor Kieron Mallon – Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Tim Emptage
Martyn Swann – Strategic Housing Manager
Helen Town – Strategic Housing Officer

Outcomes – General

- A key message is that this commissioning exercise should not be just seen as a 'cost cutting exercise' but the main driver is to deliver equitable cost effective services. Actually advice services may experience an overall increase in funding due the reallocation of resources.
- Another key message is that it is important that funding is given on a transparent basis and therefore though commissioning exercises are painful,

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it is sometimes the best way to ensure a fair approach to funding and to ensure services are locally relevant and in line with Council priorities.

- Agreement that the current contract for the Court Duty Desk with Banbury CAB will not be included in this commissioning exercise was made. This is funded from a separate budget with external funding from DCLG. At the point when the Executive Report had been written it was thought that this funding may cease – however, this is no longer the case. The current contract ceases in 2014 and there is no provision to bring to an end early unless DCLG funding is withdrawn. However, given the increased work load in housing services (with a significant increase in people approach the Housing Options Team) this may avoid additional pressure and provide some capacity during the transition period post commissioning.
- Agreement that current advice services provided by Banbury CAB and Bicester CAB are good services but that there is a need for equitable distribution of funding across the District.
- Agreement that the focus of advice needs to be debt, given the Council's statutory duty to prevent homelessness. Less than six years ago the Council was spending huge amounts on homelessness and temporary accommodation ~ we do not want to return to those times. We recognise that debt advice is one of the most important 'homelessness prevention tools' and therefore it needs to be the primary focus.
- Agreement that it makes sense to work with the County Council to find a county solution. The County Council are looking to establish a 'base line' level of service provision across the County as a whole (e.g. each District to have one bus operating three days per week) to which Districts can add additional funding to enhance the provision in their locality. The Executive report mentioned a figure of £30k as a possible contribution from Cherwell towards local provision. Scrutiny Panel members advised that this may need to be reviewed upon completion of the consultation exercise with current service users of BCTA.
- District and County Officers have been trying to 'unpick' the level of service take up and the profile of the service users. This has proved somewhat challenging as although there is data on 'journeys' it is not clear on the needs of those using the service. For example, it is not clear if current service users could in fact use local bus services. However it was agreed that a negative outcome from the commissioning exercise would be for vulnerable residents to be unintended victims of services reducing. Therefore County and District Officers are in the process of sending out a questionnaire to everyone on the BCTA register to ascertain which elements of the service are most vital to retain. It may be that these vital elements of the service can be comfortably be delivered through a combination of the County's baseline service with Cherwell's contribution of £30k, but flexibility may be required on this.

Actions to for Officers to follow up on

- Figures: officers to provide most up to date statistics on service utilisation. Officers explained that for some services (such as CAB) this was straightforward, but other service providers struggle to provide monitoring information, despite input and support from Officers.
- Scrutiny Panel Members also keen to understand level of service take up in Kidlington including that provided by KADIC and by Bicester CAB.
- Other sources of funding: officers to provide a breakdown of other funding sources for key agencies. Officers agreed to source this information from the accounts which are submitted to the Council annually (and are available on the Charities Commission Website)
- County Officers need to provide information on what their 'base line offer' will consist of in relation to Dial-A-Ride and that these services can realistically be delivered.
- Officers need to clarify what level of service Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire District Councils secure for their annual grants payments to community transport of £25k to £30k.
- The consultation exercise/survey will need to identify who the most vulnerable service users are and which routes are essential for continuation.
- The BCTA figures for Kidlington need further examination, however the full picture may not become clear until the survey is completed

Session Two – Primary Focus on Volunteering Services

Tuesday 12 July, 2011, 5pm

Councillor Lynn Pratt – Vice-Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Rose Stratford
Martyn Swann

Outcomes – General

- The original vision was outlined which included:
 - Cost effective services and an equitable distribution of resources based on population and deprivation
 - Increase in volunteering ~ in line with Big Society Agenda
 - Significant changes in relation to community transport at a County Level ~ concessionary fares, huge differences in spend by local authorities (next biggest spender is Oxford City @ £60k, lowest is South Oxfordshire @ £0k)

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- Stronger focus on debt advice
- Co-ordinated promotion and branding to ensure representational take up in relation to age, gender and ethnicity (feedback from Equalities Panel)
- Consistent quality of service provision across the district
- Aware that services funded by the Council represent just a small element of voluntary sector activity in the District
- Aware that Council has always supported the voluntary sector and usually at a much higher level than neighbouring authorities.
- Concerned that some services are over-reliant on council funding and struggle to attract funding from other sources. Whilst this is not an issue for smaller services who do not ask for council funding, those that deliver key services (e.g. advice) do need business continuity. Where services are over-reliant on the input of one or two trustees this presents a huge risk if they are also reliant on council funding.
- The challenges were considered which are:
 - To deliver 24% savings if possible. The reality of this is that as the main area for reduction will be community transport – advice services and volunteering may actually have a slight increase than at present.
 - To work across a large district with urban and rural areas
 - To ensure transparency and openness so that Council funding is not a ‘closed shop’ yet ensure locally responsive services which people want to support through volunteering etc
 - To build capacity into local organisation. This includes advice and information on accessing additional funding (e.g. Funding Training), strengthening boards (e.g.
 - We recognise that current buildings are not adequate in some areas and are currently looking at alternative options.
- The proposal, as per Executive Report, incorporates commissioning based on the relationship between all elements, but not necessarily one organisation delivering all ~ open to bids for individual lots, thematic groupings (e.g. advice) and locality groupings (e.g. all services in Banbury).
- It is believed (and supported by other agencies) that there is a strong link between elements of commissioning ~ volunteering, progression into employment etc. This is also based on evidence that this works elsewhere ~ including Wantage and South Northants
- Specific to volunteering
 - There are a number of different models. OCVA (Oxfordshire Council for Voluntary Action) operate with a huge volume (1700 enquiries per annum) much of which is email and phone advice and information with links into the Do-It Website however CCVS (Cherwell Council for Voluntary Service) operates with a much lower volume (50 placements per annum).

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- All three Volunteer Centres in the County (OCVA, CCVS and Volunteer Link Up in Witney) are currently working towards accreditation with Volunteer England. This has been raised as a challenge to the Council ~ how can smaller volunteer centres as we are proposing be accredited. However we have been in close communication with Volunteer England who believes our model is workable and will support accreditation.
- Both OCVA and CCVS have said that a key area of their work is liaison with the voluntary sector organisations. However we are finding that a number of voluntary groups are anecdotally saying that they successfully recruit volunteers themselves without the help of the volunteer bureaux.
- A key issue with both OCVA model and CCVS model is monitoring outcomes. A key element of new provision will be to ensure monitoring which shows outcomes ~ not just enquiries. In addition we are keen to look at models which enable people to progress to employment as we see this works with many volunteer placements. The proposal therefore is for each locality to have access to the Do-it website (which will require organisations to be affiliated users) and to upload local opportunities onto the site and help local people use the website if they haven't done so before. However it is also hoped that the volunteering element of the commissioning will target people who are unemployed and would not have previously considered volunteering. This will require the service provider to have excellent links with local voluntary groups, good local intelligence, good administrative systems and excellent people skills.
- The above context and way forward was supported by Members
- Agreement was made that the timetable for tendering should allow voluntary organisations to make considered submissions within the context of the summer holiday season – for information, the tender exercise has been extended by and made more straightforward by officers and by removing the requirement for a pre-qualification questionnaire.
- Agreement that there are pockets of deprivation across the District, including Bicester, so it is positive that the funding split recognises this fact

Actions to for Officers to follow up on

- The specification should ensure there is a push for volunteers from all groups – good practice identified through the Bicester CAB where young people receive training which has the additional benefit of assisting them in their future career development
- 'Skills swapping' was identified as a possible contribution to the development of volunteering
- A number of organisation successfully recruit volunteers themselves e.g. League of Friends – so we should continue to acknowledge this and that fact

that the commissioning exercise will compliment existing volunteering and will not 'be the answer' to everything.

Session Three – Primary Focus on Car Volunteering Schemes

Friday 15 July, 2011, 9am

Councillor Trevor Stevens
Councillor Lawrie Stratford
Martyn Swann
Helen Town

Outcomes – General

- Officers confirmed that the current service providers are ORCC for rural transport and BCTA for Dial-A-Ride.
- Officers confirmed that the key issue with rural transport is the need for Council funding to be directed to organisations which can deliver outcomes, which is a concern at present.
- Officers confirmed that the issues with Dial-A-Ride are:
 - the level of funding (Cherwell provides over three times the level of funding of any other district)
 - The cost of the service (it is run completely by paid staff with no volunteers)
 - The over-reliance on funding from the Council and lack of evidence of ability to secure funding from alternative sources (other than a much smaller grant from the County Council)
 - The difficulty in establishing the profile of service users. Though BCTA are able to give data on journeys it is hard to 'unpick' who the actual service users are and therefore identify which services are vital.
- Other parts of Oxfordshire are served by the Octabus Dial-a-Ride service. Funding for this contract expires in March 2012 and County Council is undertaking a comprehensive review of dial-a-ride funding and provision throughout the county with a view to putting in place new, county-wide provision from April 2012. The County Council will provide a base line provision to which District Councils can provide additional funding to increase the provision in their localities.
- Council officers are working closely with County Council Officers to survey all existing service users of BCTA which will hopefully inform the new service specification to be delivered either by the County Council direct or a third party from April 2012. Though a notional figure of £30k has been put forward, it may be advisable to be flexible on this until the findings of the survey are analysed.

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- Scrutiny Panel Members were keen to understand the risks of this commissioning exercise and how risks were being mitigated. Officers explained that the risks include:
 - Early collapse of BCTA before end of contract. County Officers are currently working on a plan to pick up service delivery should this happen. This is a real risk as BCTA operate on a low level of reserves.
 - Vulnerable residents not able to access services. The survey being undertaken should identify these individuals and ensure services for those members are continued through the County arrangements.
 - Confusion for service users. Communication will be crucial and will be the responsibility primarily of the County Council and District Council. However officers have asked BCTA how they intend to communicate the changes to their customers.
 - Risk management is very important to the exercise – for reputation, providers and customers

Actions to for Officers to follow up on

- Advice to be sought from the Council's Head of Finance with regards to the recent paperwork received from BCTA which outlines:
 - The recent purchase of a new vehicle (in the knowledge of contract ending in March)
 - Most recent accounts have not been audited due to uncertainty if BCTA is a going concern or to be discontinued. BCTA accounts need to be submitted to Companies House and the Charities Commission by 30 September 2011.
 - Two closure scenarios (closure in December or March). There are questions over both scenarios in relation to requirements of the Council financially.
 - A schedule of current vehicles
- Consideration as to whether communication should be made with Elected members who are BCTA Board Members. However it was noted that Elected members on the BCTA board had met with Senior Officers from the Council.

Actions for officers to follow up on – answers and progress

Session One – Advice Services

1. Figures: officers to provide most up to date statistics on service utilisation. Officers explained that for some services (such as CAB) this was straightforward, but other service providers struggle to provide monitoring information, despite input and support from Officers.

Organisation	Total usage 10/11	% Cherwell	Grant 11/12 (£)
Banbury & District Samaritans	25,000	40% (10/11)	3,000
Relate Oxfordshire	5000	25% (10/11)	5,000
Oxfordshire Chinese Community & Advice Centre	2000	18.91% (10/11)	2,000
Cherwell Community And Voluntary Service	250 Driver Scheme 20 Vol & Community groups No volunteer figures available for this reporting period	80+% (09/10)	17,000
Kidlington Advice and Information Centre	304	100% (09/10)	7701
CAB Banbury	4800	80% (09/10)	106,968
CAB Bicester	3324 (includes CAB services in Kidlington)	100% (09/10)	86,263

2. Scrutiny Panel Members also keen to understand level of service take up in Kidlington including that provided by KADIC and by Bicester CAB.

CAB Bicester provides an outreach session in Kidlington on Thursday at Exeter Hall (10-3pm) and appointments only on Tuesday. Statistics for the take up of this service are not available, but have been requested.

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3. Other sources of funding: officers to provide a breakdown of other funding sources for key agencies. Officers agreed to source this information from the accounts which are submitted to the Council annually (and are available on the Charities Commission Website)

The table below does **not** include donations, membership fees or funding for projects

Organisation	Other Funding	£
CAB Banbury 10/11	South Northants	12,000
	Brackley Town	2,200
	Banbury Town	6,000
	Northants CC	5,693
CAB Bicester 09/10	Bicester Town Council	8,250.00
	Money Advice	12,000
KADIC 10/11	OCC Good Neighbours Scheme	3,500
Banbury & District Samaritans 09/10		Nil
Relate Oxfordshire 09/10		Nil
CCVS 09/10		Nil
Oxfordshire Chinese Community & Advice Centre 09/10	Local Authorities (excluding CDC)	82,134

4. County Officers need to provide information on what their 'base line offer' will consist of in relation to Dial-A-Ride and that these services can realistically be delivered.

Agreed. Officers are awaiting this information.

5. Officers need to clarify what level of service Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire District Councils secure for their annual grants payments to community transport of £25k to £30k.

Noted.

West Oxfordshire
Community Transport Adviser (CTA) support - £5,615 for 2011/12 (as in previous years)

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Oxfordshire Community Transport and Accessibility Partnership Officer (OCTAPO) - £5,000 - Grant award of six months (April to September 2011) funding only (a full year award would have been £10,000).

Vale of White Horse pay £29.5k per year and get a 9-5 service, 5 days per week.

6. The consultation exercise/survey will need to identify who the most vulnerable service users are and which routes are essential for continuation.

Consultation documents have been forwarded to Parish Clerks. BCTA user consultation is planned for w/c 1 August 2011.

OCC to lead on this exercise, but will receive support from CDC.

7. The BCTA figures for Kidlington need further examination, however the full picture may not become clear until the survey is completed

Noted – see point above

Session Two – Volunteering

1. The specification should ensure there is a push for volunteers from all groups – good practice identified through the Bicester CAB where young people receive training which has the additional benefit of assisting them in their future career development.

Noted - Many organisations offer training (NVQ) to volunteers – i.e. WRVS, Age UK

2. 'Skills swapping' was identified as a possible contribution to the development of volunteering.

Noted

3. A number of organisation successfully recruit volunteers themselves e.g. League of Friends – so we should continue to acknowledge this and that fact that the commissioning exercise will compliment existing volunteering and will not 'be the answer' to everything.

Noted

Session Three – Car Volunteering Schemes

1. Advice to be sought from the Council's Head of Finance with regards to the recent paperwork received from BCTA which outlines:
 - a. The recent purchase of a new vehicle (in the knowledge of contract ending in March)
 - b. Most recent accounts have not been audited due to uncertainty if BCTA is a going concern or to be discontinued. BCTA accounts need to be submitted to Companies House and the Charities Commission by 30 September 2011.
 - c. Two closure scenarios (closure in December or March). There are questions over both scenarios in relation to requirements of the Council financially.
 - d. A schedule of current vehicles

Advice sought from Head of Finance:

- Advised to write to BCTA confirming that:
- CDC will not underwrite any unforeseen costs incurred by delays to closure post 31st March 2011
- CDC is concerned that Board Members are fully aware of their financial and legal responsibilities and liabilities in the case of service closedown.
- If unforeseen costs from delays to closure post 31st March cannot be fully mitigated then BCTA to provide a cash flow forecast for a closure earlier than 31st March and a project plan to accompany this

Head of Finance also advised that we need to fully consider the impact on the Shopmobility Scheme in Bicester as closure of BCTA would necessitate an alternative operator and potential TUPE issues.

2. Consideration as to whether communication should be made with Elected members who are BCTA Board Members. However it was noted that Elected members on the BCTA board had met with Senior Officers from the Council.

CDC's representatives on the BCTA Board have been advised of the arrangements.