

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Briefing Note



DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Subject:
Head of Service /
Officer Responsible

Commissioning of Services to Banbury CAB
Head of Regeneration and Housing

**Background
and Reason for
Briefing Note**

In May 2011 Executive resolved to commence a commissioning process to fund strategically relevant Advice, Volunteering and Volunteer Car Driving services across three geographical areas within Cherwell with effect from April 2012.

Executive referred the issue to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further consideration of the issues and implications.

In summer 2011 the Committee agreed to add this as a work item and nominated Members to meet with officers to discuss the specific issues relating to:

- Advice
- Volunteering
- Voluntary Car Transport Schemes

The review concluded 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

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report to the Executive (5 September 2011) confirming 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.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to retain the item on the work programme to monitor the service arrangements (Volunteering / coordinating role; giving advice; Voluntary Driver scheme) in place 12 months after implementation.

**Head of
Service update**

CAB was successfully commissioned in the above tendering process. The contract included 9 separate lots to provide Debt & Money Advice, Volunteer Car Driving and Services to increase Volunteering. Services were commissioned to be provided proportionately across the 3 geographical areas of the District aligned with Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington. At the time tendering was undertaken, analysis was undertaken showing data on population and housing benefits claims to give an indication of needs for each area. The contract was commissioned for a 3 year period (1st April 2012 to 31 March 2015 with an option to be extended for a further two years to March 2017).

Since the commencement of the contract in 2012, the structures of the Council have changed which has meant the community service elements of the contract, volunteer car driving and volunteering are no longer the responsibility of the Housing service. This report therefore pertains to the Debt & Money Advice service provision lots which continue to be monitored by the Housing service due to its close affiliation with the prevention of homelessness (which is a statutory responsibility of the Council).

Contract monitoring forms an important part of the commissioning. It has not just been about 'checking on performance' but also about working in the context of continuous improvement seeking opportunities to develop services, secure funding from other sources and work collaboratively. CAB have complied with the monitoring as required. They have developed a close working partnership with the Council meeting with Officers quarterly and providing electronic statistical returns which are starting to be entered onto the Council's Performance monitoring system.

Quarterly monitoring consists of

- Number of advice sessions and method of delivery
- Number of new clients
- Number of repeat clients
- Number of Debt/money cases closed
- Number of debts
- Value of Debt
- Benefit realisation
- Homeless Prevention cases
- Equalities information

Services are provided through

- A triage service available through drop in, telephone, letter and email.
- Appointments for follow up casework for issues which cannot be dealt with through triage
- Resources for people to 'self help' through access to computers, information, leaflets etc
- Undertaking targeted publicity to engage people who are currently under represented in accessing advice services. This includes young people and people from ethnic minority
- CAB is a key partner in the delivery of the Homelessness Prevention Action Plan (approved by Executive in November 2013), delivering advice services to support the Personal responsibility and personal resilience strands of the plan
- CAB has been keen to participate in the development of the Cherwell Credit Union and has become a member of the Credit Union Project

Development Board, bring expertise from the wider organisation.

- CAB has been a key partner with the District Council to assist homeowners in mortgage difficulty to be successful in accessing the government's Mortgage Rescue Scheme where Cherwell have become the top performing Council in the south east outside London.
- CAB have taken up opportunities to develop partnership working and have lead a successful bid to the Big Lottery in conjunction with 2 other community organisations ,MIND and BYHP, to improve and standardise the quality of advice given, working efficiently in partnership without duplication.

Barbara Shaw, CAB Chief Executive will be attending the meeting to give a presentation on the current work and performance of CAB in relation to the work of CAB in Cherwell and in particular the Debt and Money element of the contract.

Completed by: Marianne North

Date: 2/12/13

Presented to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: