

## CABINET– 20 OCTOBER 2015

### Information and advice strategy and specialist advice service procurement plan

#### Report by the Director of Adult Social Services

#### Introduction

1. The information and advice strategy (Annex 1) has been developed in response to the requirements in the Care Act 2014 for local authorities to provide information and advice relating to care and support issues for adults and carers.
2. The strategy sets out the council's strategic and commissioning intentions for this area of work whilst ensuring that the financial resources available for the provision of information and advice are used effectively so that the council is able to meet its statutory obligations:
3. *Our ambition and the outcomes we wish to achieve are for Oxfordshire residents to have access to the information, advice and guidance they need in order to get the right support at the right time. We aim to help people to become more self-reliant and better able to manage their personal health and well-being. We want people to be able to lead full and independent lives, to stay connected to and part of their local communities. We will do this by putting in place high quality and well-structured provision that:*
  - *supplies clear, comprehensive and accurate information about adult social care and other related issues*
  - *is accessible and is delivered in a variety of methods and formats*
  - *has a broad, countywide 'reach' - offers a consistent level and quality of service across the county*
  - *complements existing national and local resources from all sectors*
4. The strategy determines the following priorities for information and advice:  
**Priority 1:** Increasing general awareness of information and advice and supporting people to 'self-serve' wherever possible  
**Priority 2:** Ensuring access to more specialised advice and support which enables individuals to fully understand the range of options available to them to meet their care and support needs  
**Priority 3:** Focusing on our statutory responsibilities to support and safeguard the county's more vulnerable residents such as older people and adults with disabilities

## **Background**

5. Following a broad review of the range of internal and external services providing information and advice, a new service model (annex 2) has been developed for a specialist advice service for Oxfordshire focused on providing direct advice to support families and individuals aged over 16 with benefits, debt, budgeting and other financial issues.
6. The new service is deliverable at a cost of £200,000 and will sit alongside and complement other existing information and advice provision, notably the Community Information Network, which the Council remains committed to and funds at an annual cost of £250,000 for three years.
7. The Community Information Network provides a free information and advice service for adults of all ages, local communities and organisations in Oxfordshire, linking up, raising awareness, signposting and keeping everyone informed about the range and variety of support services, activities and other opportunities that exist across the county.
8. Savings of £100,000 against advice services have already been agreed by the council; the grants and contracts for the existing services in scope of these agreed savings<sup>1</sup> are due to end in March 2016. These services currently cost £366,000 per annum.
9. The information and advice strategy and the proposed specialist advice service model were the subject of a public consultation which ran from 13 July - 11 September 2015.

## **Key Issues**

10. The consultation attracted only a very small number of responses.
11. There was broad support for the information and advice strategy; respondents welcomed the recognition in the strategy of the importance and preventive value of prompt and accurate information and advice.
12. There was concern that in order to be effective, the strategy should be adequately funded and that reduced funding for information and advice was a risk to the delivery of the strategy, especially given the new Care Act responsibilities.
13. We believe however that the level of county council funding allocated more broadly to a wide range of information and advice services is adequate to deliver our statutory duties.

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<sup>1</sup> In scope contracts/grants: Rose Hill & Donnington Advice Centre; Berinsfield Information & Volunteer Centre, Blackbird Leys Neighbourhood Support Scheme, Oxfordshire Chinese Community & Advice Centre, Oxford Citizens Advice Bureau, West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK Oxfordshire Welfare Benefits, and Oxfordshire Community Work Agency.

14. There was strong support for the components of the proposed service model that involve direct work with people (telephone advice, outreach and support with appeals, such as unsuccessful benefit claims). The suggested proportion of funding to be allocated to outreach work was felt to be too low, and target numbers were not felt to be achievable within the likely financial envelope.
15. As a result of these responses, the proposed percentage allocation of budget for the components of the specialist advice service have been reviewed and adjusted to give greater weight to the outreach component, which will provide face to face access to specialist advice for the most vulnerable residents countywide.
16. Respondents to the consultation highlighted some particular concerns. These are outlined below, together with the county's response below.

<b>Concerns</b>	<b>Response</b>
<p>17. The loss of council funding from local advice centres could cost the council more in the longer term and undermines the aim of preventing or delaying needs for care and support</p>	<p>Whilst the county council is not the sole or main funder of many of the existing providers, we recognise that the loss of any funding as a result of county council grants and contracts ending will have an impact on existing providers' abilities to continue to provide current levels of service.</p> <p>However, we are confident that the majority of services will have sufficient resources to continue to support Oxfordshire residents, possibly with a reduced service offer.</p>
<p>18. The withdrawal of county council funding will impact on whether local advice centres can carry on providing specialist advice</p>	<p>The council is proposing to commission a single specialist advice service. We are confident that this will enable us to meet our statutory duty.</p> <p>We recognise that this may have an impact on current providers but, as with any procurement, our intentions to purchase a single service does not necessarily mean that a single organisation would provide the service and does not assume that local advice centres could not be involved as the council would welcome tender applications from a range of potential providers</p>

19. The interdependency with other information and advice services, many of which are also subject to review and/or closure
- We would expect any provider of the new specialist service to work collaboratively with the range of information and advice provision in Oxfordshire. We recognise that, over time, this may change in response to need, strategic direction and available funding.
20. The council is facing significant and on-going financial pressures at a time when demand for services is increasing and all areas of spend are subject to scrutiny. If a reduction in spend on information and advice services is not made, then extra savings will need to be found elsewhere in adult social care.
21. The consultation report is attached as Annex 3 and the County Council's detailed response to the issues as Annex 4.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

22. The proposed new specialist advice service model allows us to deliver an effective countywide service for £200,000 (£150,000 from Adult Social Care and £50,000 from Children Education & Families) leading to annual savings of £166,000 from April 2016.

### **Equalities Implications**

23. We know that users of some of the currently funded information and advice services reside in the more deprived areas of the county, and that there is also specialist support provided to some residents where English is not their first language. The reductions in council funding for information and advice may result in a reduction in the availability of existing service provision to support some of these citizens.
24. A Service and Community Impact Assessment is available in the members resource room.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

25. **Cabinet is**
- (a) **RECOMMENDED to approve the Information and Advice Strategy; and**
  - (b) **Subject to the approval of the Information and Advice Strategy (above) Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the plan for the procurement of a specialist advice service for Oxfordshire.**

John Jackson  
Director of Adult Social Services

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October 2015