

Decision Maker: CARE SERVICES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

Date: For Pre-Decision Scrutiny by the Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee on 10th March 2016

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Executive Non-Key

Title: WELFARE BENEFITS CONTRACTS EXTENSION

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Chief Officer: Assistant Director: Commissioning ECHS

Ward: Boroughwide

1. Reason for report

1.1 The Council currently commissions three welfare benefits advice contracts from the voluntary sector. These contracts are due to expire on 31st March 2016. This report provides Members with the background, objectives for the service, current performance and proposals for the service post March 2016.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 The Care Services Policy Development and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note and comment on the proposal and future plans for the welfare benefits advice service.

2.2 The Care Services Portfolio Holder is asked to:

- i) Agree to the proposed three month extension from 1st April 2016 to the three welfare benefits advice contracts, in light of the proposals set out in the report, under the Contract Procurement Rule 3.7; and
- ii) Agree that an integrated benefits advice service be tendered to take effect from 1st July 2016 for a period of one year with the option to extend for a further year subject to Portfolio Holder approval.

Corporate Policy

1. Policy Status: Existing policy.
 2. BBB Priority: Supporting Independence.
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Estimated cost £25,471 for three month extension
 2. Ongoing costs: Recurring cost. Subject to tender
 3. Budget head/performance centre: 7580013389
 4. Total current budget for this head: £101,720
 5. Source of funding: ECHS Core budget
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Staff

1. Number of staff (current and additional): n/a
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours:
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: Non-statutory - Government guidance.
 2. Call-in: Call-in is applicable
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): universal services
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? N/A.
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

3.1 Background

3.2 The Council set up these benefits advice contracts in 2013/14 for one year, specifically in order to assist vulnerable groups during the significant changes to welfare benefits brought in by the government. They were commissioned result of concerns expressed by service users and the voluntary sector that Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) did not provide accessible services for more vulnerable groups i.e. people with learning disabilities, mental health needs and older people and that the changes to the welfare benefits regime would disproportionately disadvantage these groups. The Council recognised the need to fill this gap during the period of transition to the new benefits regime.

3.3 The contracts were extended on two further occasions, by the Portfolio Holder in 2014/15 and 2015/16. These extensions were granted as the contracts demonstrated that they were delivering for service users and were still relevant while benefits changes were working their way through the system.

3.4 The three contracts that make up the existing benefits advice service to support vulnerable people cost the Council £101,886 per annum.

3.5 Table 1: Contracts

Service Provider	Service	Annual Cost
Age UK Bromley & Greenwich	Benefits advice for older people	£30,000
Bromley Mencap	Benefits advice for people with Learning Disabilities	£30,000
Broadway	Benefits advice for people with Mental Health needs	£41,886

3.6 In addition to these specialist advice services, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) also receive general enquiries in respect of providing welfare benefits advice. This work by CAB is supported separately with them through their strategic partnership contract with the Council. However, although they deal with high numbers of referrals from the general public they tend to refer people with mental health needs, learning disabilities or older people with more complex needs onto one of these three specialist organisations as they do not have the expertise to deal with the particular needs of these client groups.

4 Objectives for the service

4.1 The purpose of these contracts is to make sure that vulnerable groups are aware of their benefits allowance. These contracts are in keeping with the Building a Better Bromley vision and priorities of supporting independence. They offer practical support to vulnerable residents to maximise their benefit income, thereby reducing dependency on statutory frontline services. It also increases individual's ability to make personalised choices and continue to retain their independence.

4.2 The providers achieve this through:

- providing benefits advice and support to vulnerable people to maximise their income through full benefit reviews;
- prevent poverty or homelessness that may arise as a result of not claiming the benefits appropriate to their circumstance;
- be a point of support for people to navigate the changes to the welfare benefits system;
- offer representation at Benefits Appeals Tribunals; and
- provide consultancy advice and training to professionals e.g. health staff, care managers and third sector organisations.

5 Performance of the contracts

5.1 The providers supply information on the additional income secured for clients who have accessed their support as part of contract monitoring.

5.2 Table 2: Performance

Service Provider	Referrals (April – Dec 2015)	Additional income to Bromley service users in claims (April – Dec 2015)
Age UK Bromley & Greenwich	321	Secured £617k in ongoing benefit payments and £103k in one off payments
Bromley Mencap	195	Secured £177k in ongoing benefit payments and £31k in one off payments
Broadway	322	Secured £790k in ongoing benefit payments and £196k in one off payments

6 Proposals for the service

6.1 These services are due to expire at the end of the financial year, having already been extended on two separate occasions. The services have been subject to consideration as part of the wider corporate savings discussions and setting of an overall Council budget for 2016/17.

6.2 As the welfare benefit changes bed in, there is an opportunity to begin to reduce the amount of support provided over a period of time. The report therefore proposes that the Council continues to commission a benefits advice service for a further year (with the option to extend for one more year) but that significant efficiencies will be achieved by amalgamating the service into one contract.

6.3 There could be an opportunity in the future to jointly commission this service with health as part of the wider work on integrating health and care services.

6.4 Given the short notice for providers it is proposed that the existing contracts are extended for three months to allow providers time to prepare for forthcoming changes and to allow commissioners time to retender the service.

7 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 In line with Building a Better Bromley aims of supporting independence.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 The 2015/16 budget for these contracts is £101k. It is proposed that these contracts be retendered as one service. Providers will also be required to demonstrate how they will achieve significant efficiencies by increasing the use of technology, volunteers and group sessions. Any reduction in cost will contribute to ECHS efficiency targets from 2016/17.

9 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The services provided by the various strategic partners are covered by the 'Light Touch Regime' referred to in Schedule 3 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. As such, contract awards and extensions are primarily governed by the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations.

9.2 This service comes under the general points set out in section 4 of the Care Act, *Providing information and advice* which has been in place since April 2015, where there is a clear expectation that:

In providing information and advice under this section, a local authority must in particular—

a) have regard to the importance of identifying adults in the authority's area who would be likely to benefit from financial advice on matters relevant to the meeting of needs for care and support, and

b) seek to ensure that what it provides is sufficient to enable adults—

i) to identify matters that are or might be relevant to their personal financial position that could be affected by the system provided for by this Part,

ii) to make plans for meeting needs for care and support that might arise, and

iii) to understand the different ways in which they may access independent financial advice on matters relevant to the meeting of needs for care and support.

Non-Applicable Sections:	Personnel implications
Background Documents: (Access via Contact Officer)	[Title of document and date]