

Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee**8th September 2021**

REPORT TITLE:	INFORMATION AND ADVICE SERVICE COMMISSION
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks agreement from the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee to progress Public Health's proposed commissioning intentions for information and advice services.

The proposed actions affect all wards within the borough.

The decisions requested are key decisions.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee is recommended to:

1. Authorise the Director of Public Health to re-commission the Wirral Information and Advice service totalling up to £2,332,898 (£1,166,449 per annum) for an initial one-year contract (1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023) with the option of a one-year extension.
2. Agree that delegated authority be given to the Director of Public Health to award the tender to the successful bidder following the tender process.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To allow Public Health to implement the commissioning intentions for Information and Advice services as outlined in this report.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options considered include not having any service in place which would be harmful to local residents, given the impact of Covid and policy changes due to impact i.e. furlough ending, evictions re-starting, the need for information and advice services is essential.
- 2.2 A reduced service provision has also been considered however the current service is performing 100% over target and the demand for the service is extremely high therefore any reduction in capacity would be detrimental to the ability of a service provider being able to deliver against the contract.
- 2.3 It is necessary to recommission the service highlighted in order to comply with Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Ask Us Wirral is the current Information, and Advice Service in Wirral It is a jointly commissioned service with Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group providing advice and information to all Wirral residents. The service assists with a wide range of issues including benefits advice, debts, employment, housing, relationship and families, legal, consumer, immigration and asylum, utilities, phones, travel, transport, holidays, tax, education and discrimination.
- 3.2 A five-year contract was awarded to Wirral Citizen's Advice Ltd as the lead provider for Ask Us Wirral following a tender process in 2016. This contract is due to end on the 31st March 2022 and to ensure compliance with Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council contract procedure rules it is necessary to retender this service. The current contract value is £946,499 per annum (plus an additional one off COVID-19 grant at the value of £150,000).
- 3.3 Since this service was commissioned in 2016 there have been several, significant national policy changes e.g., Universal Credit which has resulted in increased and unprecedented demand for the service. The service currently supports approximately 60,000 residents a year and is performing at 180% over target and capacity due to demand. There has also been a 40% increase in more complex cases and clients presenting with multiple needs requiring intensive case work. Alongside these changes several third sector organisations who were supporting clients alongside the service have ceased operation or are no longer providing advice which has also contributed to the increase in service demand. The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded these challenges. The service has seen a further and major increase in demand for

information and advice during the pandemic for issues including food poverty, fuel poverty, employment, unemployment, benefits, relationship breakdown, bereavement, and domestic abuse. In response the service has adapted its service model to accommodate all staff and volunteers working from home and a limited number of clients are receiving face to face appointments. Ask Us Wirral have also supported both the food hub and welfare assistance programme through the humanitarian response to the pandemic.

- 3.4 This one-year commission (with the option of a further year) will allow for a review of information and advice provision across the borough. The review will take into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to national policy to inform the provision of information and advice services to best meet the needs of local residents. This work has already begun and will inform the commissioning of future information and advice services from the 1st April 2023.
- 3.5 The current contract will continue during the recommissioning process and a period of service mobilisation will be built into the tender process to ensure there is no loss of service and a seamless transition for existing service users is maintained.
- 3.6 All Public Health contracts are subject to on-going evaluation as part of a clearly defined commissioning cycle, which is designed to maximise return on investment and improve outcomes. This methodology ensures that Public Health services (and contracts) are consistently and routinely tested against a range of criteria. Criteria against which contracts are tested include the following:
- Evidence base e.g. academic research, engagement feedback, Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
 - Performance of targets e.g. financial and activity based and outcomes against plans and benchmarking information
 - Value for money
 - National policy and technical guidance e.g. Public Health Outcomes Framework
 - Strategic direction e.g. Wirral Plan strategic aspirations (narrowing the gap in life expectancy), delivery of Public Health outcomes through council services
 - Legal and contractual frameworks e.g. incorporate national updates to contract templates used for NHS providers.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Public Health grant will fund this contract with an additional contribution from the Better Care Fund totalling £300,000 per annum and a contribution from Children's and Families of £42,000 per annum. The value and availability of the Public Health grant for 2022/23 onwards is not yet known. The total value of the contract will be £2,332,898 (£1,166,449 per annum).

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The recommissioning of the service detailed within this report will need to be undertaken in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (T.U.P.E.) will be applicable.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 It is necessary to recommission the services highlighted in order to comply with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules.
- 7.2 There is always a risk of disruption to service provision during service redesign, recommissioning and commencement of new services. To mitigate against this and minimise disruption, adequate time to plan for, and implement the mobilisation of new services, is built into the procurement process between contract award and commencement.
- 7.3 The procurement process is also subject to scrutiny and at risk of legal challenge. Particular regard is given to contract procedure rules and relevant legislation at all stages of the process and the Public Health team works closely with the Procurement team to ensure compliance.
- 7.4 In the current challenging financial climate, the impact of any future reductions in budget or policy implications on the amount of funding available for Public Health is unknown. The value and availability of the Public Health grant for 2022/23 onwards is not yet known. This risk will be mitigated by the insertion of appropriate termination clauses in the contract.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 In order to inform the development and design of the future service, engagement and consultation will be undertaken with key partners, stakeholders and local communities. This will include:
- Engagement with local commissioners of health and care and community services to understand the impact of COVID-19.
 - Engagement sessions with a wide range of stakeholders to understand their current concerns and challenges that are affecting local residents including any key policy changes i.e. furlough ending etc.
 - Working with 3rd sector and community partners to engage with local communities to understand their needs in relation to information and advice services.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Public Health will adhere to Wirral Council's legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work do not discriminate against anyone. As part of the recommission an equality impact assessment (EIA) will be undertaken to ensure all equality impacts are considered and relevant actions are taken to mitigate any potential negative impacts. The EIA is available here:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 During the procurement process, bids will be evaluated on any social value added to the service. Bidders will need to consider and demonstrate how they can have a positive impact on Wirral's environment and climate.
- 10.2 The content and/or recommendations contained within this report are expected to have no direct impact on emissions of carbon dioxide.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Service Specification Information and Advice Services-DN179845

Modelling of Future Needs of Information and Advice Services-DN179845

Invitation To Tender-Contract ID-DN179845

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE	19 NOVEMBER 2020