



Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee

29th November 2022

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 proposed commissioning intentions for information and advice services.

The report sets out the requirement for a local information and advice service to be recommissioned from April 2024, as a joint commission. The current service is experiencing increasing demand, supporting residents and communities with a wide range of issues. This report sets out the proposed funding model for the re-commission, including use of the Public Health Grant, given the strong links between the service outcomes, and improved population health.

As part of the re-commissioning process, the potential to further integrate other information and advice services in Wirral will be explored. Evaluation undertaken to date will shape the delivery and outcomes of this recommission, and an evaluation of the new service will take place to inform future recommissions.

The report supports the implementation of the Wirral Plan 2021 - 26 and its core purpose to improve equity for people and place through the provision of a pan-Wirral, commissioned service that directly supports people in need

The proposed actions affect all wards within the borough and is a key decision.

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 £7,000,000 (£1,400,000 per annum) for a three-year contract (1st April 2024 – 31st March 2027) with the option of a one year plus further 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 It is necessary to recommission the service highlighted to comply with Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules. Other options related to contract length and contract value were considered, including an option not to renew the contract, and provide this service in house. A cross directorate group formed in 2021 to look at the options however given the current cost-of-living crisis, levels of demand on the current service and in house departments, the skills and qualifications required and the volunteer capacity which subsidises the service to operate it was agreed that the recommission was the best option for economic reasons.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Ask Us Wirral is the current Information and Advice Service in Wirral. It provides 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 one year contract, with the option to extend for a further one year, was awarded to Wirral Citizen's Advice Ltd as the lead provider for Ask Us Wirral following a tender process in 2021. This contract commenced in April 2022 and is due to end on 31st March 2024. To ensure compliance with Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council contract procedure rules it is necessary to retender this service.
- 3.3 The existing contract value is £1,112,499 per annum and the current service is a joint commission between the Council and the NHS. Wirral Council contributes £735,499 from the Public Health Grant, with a further £35,000 from Housing, and £42,000 from Children's Services. Local NHS fund the service to the value of £300,000 per year. Ask Us Wirral have also received additional one-off funding of £135,000 in 2022/23, through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund, for specific fuel poverty initiatives. Given the current cost-of-living pressures and increasing demand on service provision, this report is seeking an increase to the financial envelope for the service to £1,400,000 per annum, a total of £7,000,000 over the term of the contract.
- 3.4 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 along with the increases in cost of living. The service has seen a major increase in demand for issues such as food poverty, fuel poverty, employment, unemployment, benefits, tribunal support and domestic abuse.

- 3.5 Cost-of-living pressures are having impacts on people in every part of our borough. Price rises driven by energy price inflation are having an impact on most households, with those on the lowest incomes likely to be hardest hit, particularly as benefit uplifts do not align with inflation.
- 3.6 By driving people deeper into poverty, or by pushing those who had previously been just coping into financial hardship, it is very likely that the continued rise in the cost of living is going to intensify health inequalities.
- 3.7 Poverty, poor health outcomes and health inequalities are inextricably linked. Professor Sir Michael Marmot and others have set out that the lower one's social and economic status, the poorer one's health is likely to be. People living in the poorest neighbourhoods in Wirral will, on average, die twelve years earlier than the people living in the richest neighbourhoods. People living in poorer areas also spend more of their lives with a disability – an average total difference of seventeen years.
- 3.8 Extensive qualitative and quantitative analysis has been collated to understand current and projected impacts on residents, as well as reviewing evidence for local action that can be taken to mitigate the impacts; this can be found here:
<https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/state-of-the-borough/cost-of-living-crisis-2022-23/>
- 3.9 These ongoing pressures on the cost of living pose a significant risk to health, wellbeing, social care and public health because:
 - Low-income households spend a larger share of their income on energy and food; the Office for Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) is projecting real disposable incomes to fall by 2.2% this year (this would be the largest decline on record), which will therefore particularly affect low-income households and push more people into poverty.
 - It is already well evidenced that deprivation is associated with poorer health outcomes (including through stress; anxiety; substance misuse, diet etc.), further inflationary pressures are likely to widen already existing health inequalities.
 - Rates of fuel poverty have increased since summer 2021 largely due to the increasing cost of fuel, which is predicted to continue to rise. Homes that are cold due to fuel poverty exacerbate health inequalities. Cold homes can cause and worsen respiratory conditions, cardiovascular diseases, poor mental health, dementia, hypothermia, and problems with childhood development. In some circumstances, health problems may be exacerbated to a degree that they may cause death.
- 3.10 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.

3.11 The current service is being independently evaluated by Liverpool John Moore's University, and the final report will be due in early 2023 to inform the specification development and forms 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, including:

- 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.

3.12 A cross directorate and partnership group will be formed to inform the development of the specification to avoid duplication across service areas and ensure the aims and objectives of the proposed service are fit for purpose and ensure value for money. Officers will explore the potential to further integrate other information and advice services in Wirral.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 This contract is commissioned by Wirral Council with financial contribution from NHS partners. There is confirmation of available funding from the Public Health grant and partners to support the continued commissioning of a local information and advice service.

4.2 The value and availability of the Public Health grant for 2024/25 onwards is not yet known. The budget has been allocated based on the grant funding being consistent with this financial year. Should the grant vary and be reduced then contract amounts may need to be varied, and the proposed tender exercises will consider appropriate mitigating measures.

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 (TUPE) 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. There is always a risk of disruption to service provision during service redesign, re-commissioning, 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.
- 7.2 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.
- 7.3 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 2024/25 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 increasing cost of living.
 - 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.
 - Working with third sector and community partners to engage with local communities to understand their needs in relation to information and advice services.
 - Qualitative insight work with local residents to understand the impact and ways support can be tailored to meet their needs.

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 current 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.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

- 11.1 Community Wealth Building is a people-centred approach to economic growth which reorganises local economies to be fairer and stops wealth flowing out of communities, towns, and cities, and instead places control of this wealth into the hands of local people, communities, businesses, and organisations. This commission will support several of the key outcomes within the strategy.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Public Health Grant 2022-23
- Wirral Citizen’s Advice Bureau Ltd Wirral Council Public Health Services Contract (DN568876)
- Information and Advice Commission
- <http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50080457/PUBLIC%20HEALTH%20INFORMATION%20AND%20ADVICE%20SERVICE%20COMMISSION.pdf>

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee in accordance with Section 2.2(c) of its Terms of Reference:

all Public Health functions (in co-ordination with those functions reserved to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s statutory health functions)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
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Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee
Information and Advice Services Commission

8th September 2021