



Doncaster Council

Report

Date: 15th February 2022

To Councillor Nigel Ball, Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Culture and Planning

Citizens Advice Borough Doncaster Grant Agreement Extension

Relevant Cabinet Member(s)	Wards Affected	Key Decision
Councillor Nigel Ball Cabinet Member for Public Health, Leisure, Culture and Planning	All	Yes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. A strategic review of the generalist advice service provided by Citizens Advice Doncaster Borough (CADB) to all residents in Doncaster has been completed and highlighted that the free confidential advice delivered by CADB is in increasingly high demand, is of excellent quality and highly valued by residents and partners.
2. CADB has been granted by the Council to provide generalist advice for over seven years and offers free, impartial advice to all residents of the borough. CADB has seen an increase in residents seeking support for over the last four years. From April 2020 to March 2021 the top issues requiring support are debt, benefits-Universal Credit, benefits and tax credits and unemployment. This is in line with the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the financial security of Doncaster residents.
3. It is proposed to use the current financial envelope for 3 years (with 1 year extension) and grant ward Citizens Advice Doncaster Borough to continue to deliver expert generalist advice across Doncaster under a new agreement from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2025. The grant value is £152,150 per annum and is profiled into the annual budget for the full length of the contract and option of extension. Grant amount for 3 years totals £456,450.

EXEMPT REPORT

4. There is no exempt/confidential information in this report

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. To approve the use of the current financial envelope for 3 years (with 1 year extension) and grant ward Citizens Advice Doncaster Borough to continue to deliver expert generalist advice across Doncaster under a new agreement from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2025.
6. The grant value is £152,150 per annum and is profiled into the annual budget for the full length of the contract and option of extension. Grant amount for 3 years totals £456,450.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

7. All citizens of Doncaster will have continued access to free, independent, confidential, and impartial advice on their rights and responsibilities, thus increasing financial resilience, reducing socioeconomic isolation, improve life choices and contribute to improved wellbeing. Support is available across the borough and a longer grant agreement arrangement would provide greater stability to CADB and its staff and volunteers and provide a stronger platform for CADB to leverage in additional funding and resources into the borough to provide targeted evidenced based support.

BACKGROUND

8. Citizens Advice services have been delivered in Doncaster Borough for over 50 years in various forms, providing advice services facing a range of issues such as debt, homelessness prevention, immigration, employment, benefit, and consumer issues. They also act as a referral and sign-posting organisation to more specialist advice across a range of public sector services and other voluntary organisations.
9. Doncaster Council has been commissioning Citizens Advice to provide generalist advice through individual local Citizens Advice branches across Doncaster since at least 2015. In 2017 Citizens Advice Mexborough and Citizens Advice North East Doncaster merged to form CADB and is the current provider of generalist advice for the Council.
10. A strategic review of the generalist advice service provided by CADB to all residents in Doncaster has been completed and highlighted that the free, confidential advice delivered by CADB is in increasingly high demand, is of excellent quality and highlight valued by residents and partners.
11. The strategic review also highlighted impact the Covid-19 pandemic has had nationally and locally and that CADB has seen an increase in year on year demand for services. From April 2020 to March 2021 the top issues requiring support are debt, benefits-Universal Credit, benefits and tax credits and unemployment. This is in line with the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the financial security of Doncaster residents.
12. Further information can be found in the Strategic Review- see Annex 1

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

13.

Option Recommended:

14. Use the current financial envelope for 3 years (with 1 year extension) and grant ward Citizens Advice Doncaster Borough to continue to deliver expert generalist advice across Doncaster under a new grant agreement from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2025.
15. This will provide greater stability for the provider whilst also aligning with a community centred approach to commissioning and the option to extend provides the Councils with flexibility. The new grant agreement will also include revised KPIs and outcome measures to reflect the current landscape and ensure the service is fit for purpose across the life of the agreement.
16. The funding for the life of the agreement is secured through recurrent Council core funds at £153,150 per annum and is profiled into the annual budget for the full length of the contract and option of extension. Grant amount for 3 years totals £456,450. Contract management arrangements are in place through Public Health and Operational Commissioning.
17. Now that the UK have left the European Union (EU), the UK is no longer bound by EU State aid rules, however, without proper controls, subsidies could potentially cause economic harm or distortive effects, for instance, by giving unfair advantage to one enterprise over their competitors. The government has designed a subsidy control regime that strikes the right balance between enabling the benefits that can be derived from subsidies, while limiting the most harmful impacts. This includes an oversight and enforcement mechanism that incentivise compliance with the rules and hold public authorities to account when they do not comply.
18. Public authorities will be required to upload information to the Government's national transparency database about their schemes and subsidies if the subsidy is above a specific threshold. The generalist advice grant agreement will be in-line with the new subsidy regime and will be added to the database if it meets an identified threshold (criteria to be confirmed).

Below outlines other options considered and rejected

- Do nothing, let the contract lapse:
- The current grant agreement comes to an end on 31st March 2022. Notice will be given to the provider and generalist advice support would cease operation at the end of March 2022. This was rejected as the service is considered a vital to residents of Doncaster.
- Procure and award the service at the current contract amount:
- Procure a provider to deliver generalist advice under a new contract from 1st April 2022 under the current secured financial envelope for the full length of a 3 year (with 1 year extension) This was rejected due to due to the length of the agreement the amount would require a key decision which would delay the procurement leading to a break in service delivery. Due to the nature of the service and limited providers available to meet the requirements the Council has the options to award a grant, eliminating the risk of a break in service due to a procurement process and any handover period if a new provider was awarded.
- Secure additional funding to increase contract amount and procure and award the service:
- Secure funding with an increased financial envelope for the full length of a 3 year (with 1 year extension) contract to allow for increased capacity to meet demand. Procure a provider to deliver generalist advice under a new contract from 1st April 2022. This was rejected due to additional funding not being available and if it was sourced, due to the length of the agreement the amount would require a key decision which would delay the procurement leading to a break in service delivery.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

19. The recommended options will enable the continued provision of a quality service for all residents of Doncaster, eliminates the risk of a break in service at a critical time for the financial security of Doncaster residents and will strengthen and provide stability for a key community anchor organisation. As the funding is already secured there is no additional cost incurred by the council and the move from administering agreements year on year will reduce demand on staff resources.

IMPACT ON THE COUNCIL'S KEY OUTCOMES

20.

	Outcomes	Implications
	Doncaster Working: Our vision is for more people to be able to pursue their ambitions through work that gives them and Doncaster a brighter and prosperous future;	Access to free, confidential generalist advice will support residents in understanding their rights and responsibilities and better able them to pursue their ambitions including work

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better access to good fulfilling work • Doncaster businesses are supported to flourish • Inward Investment 	opportunities.
	<p>Doncaster Living: Our vision is for Doncaster's people to live in a borough that is vibrant and full of opportunity, where people enjoy spending time;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town centres are the beating heart of Doncaster • More people can live in a good quality, affordable home • Healthy and Vibrant Communities through Physical Activity and Sport • Everyone takes responsibility for keeping Doncaster Clean • Building on our cultural, artistic and sporting heritage 	Access to free, confidential generalist advice will support residents in understanding their rights, responsibilities, and financial entitlements and better able them access and maintain housing.
	<p>Doncaster Learning: Our vision is for learning that prepares all children, young people and adults for a life that is fulfilling;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child has life-changing learning experiences within and beyond school • Many more great teachers work in Doncaster Schools that are good or better • Learning in Doncaster prepares young people for the world of work 	People who access generalist advice will be better supported to live and learn through more fulfilling lives.
	<p>Doncaster Caring: Our vision is for a borough that cares together for its most vulnerable residents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have the best start in life • Vulnerable families and individuals have support from someone they trust • Older people can live well and independently in their own homes 	All Doncaster residents have access to free support to have improved social and health outcomes.
	<p>Connected Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A modern, efficient, and flexible workforce • Modern, accessible customer interactions 	Partnership working will be key to effective delivery and oversight of performance of the project.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operating within our resources and delivering value for money • A co-ordinated, whole person, whole life focus on the needs and aspirations of residents • Building community resilience and self-reliance by connecting community assets and strengths • Working with our partners and residents to provide effective leadership and governance 	
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RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

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- Generalist advice not awarded at the end of current agreement would leave a gap in providing much needed support to Doncaster residents
- If generalist advice is procured and awarded to a new provider, it may lead to a break in service through the transition period
- Tight timeframes to ensure the contract is procured and awarded before the current contract ends
- Lack of competition through a procurement process due to service details and lack of prospective providers

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials SRF Date 24.01.22]

22. In accordance with S1 of the Localism Act 2011 (the so called general power of competence), "...a local authority has power to do anything that individuals generally may do".
23. The Grant to Citizens Advice should be provided in accordance with the requirements of the Council Financial Procedure Rules including the requirement to enter into a Funding Agreement with the recipient.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS [Initials HR Date 20/01/22]

24. £152,150 is included in the current budget (2021/22) for the purposes of awarding this grant, it will also form part of the 2022/23 budget to be approved by full Council in March 2022 including being listed in the appendix outlining grants awarded to voluntary bodies.
25. The funding for this grant is general fund and there are no plans to cut or reduce this amount in the medium term.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials EL Date 21/01/2022]

26. There are no direct HR implications in relation to this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials.....PW... Date 19/01/2022.]

27. There are no technology implications in relation to this report.

HEALTH IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...ENH.... Date 21.01.22...]

28. Generalist Advice contributes to better health and wellbeing by addressing wider determinates of health and is accessible and supports all resident. Steps have been taken to mitigate risk of widening inequalities.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS [Officer Initials...ENH..... Date...21.01.22.....]

29. It is important commissioners and service providers tailor services to meet the needs of the population and take on board comments and suggestions to ensure services are accessible, responsive and appropriate for the population they serve. This approach fits with the councils' digital inclusion strategy as it provide locally based access to support and will be located across the borough according to need. The service is a free service for all Doncaster residents

CONSULTATION

30. The development of the generalist advice was in response to national and local data and insight regarding the current and potential financial position of Doncaster residents, use of the current service provided and implications of COVID-19 and user and stakeholder feedback.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

31. Generalist Advice Strategic Review –Annex 1

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CADB- Citizens Advice Borough Doncaster

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Annex 1



**Generalist Advice
Strategic Review Jan**