

## **EIT Review of Advice and Information Services – Appendix 5**

### **Response from Executive Scrutiny Committee**

Executive Scrutiny Committee noted the proposed scope and project plan for the review at its meeting on 10 June 2009.

### **Baseline Information Challenge**

Baseline and initial challenge information was presented to Executive Scrutiny Committee on 20 October 2009.

The Committee felt that the information presented was comprehensive and supported the options for further investigation which were summarised as:

- Consolidation of all the advice and information services that the Council commissions from external organisations into a single specification that could then be tendered
- Discussions with Community Legal Services to understand their capacity for taking on additional cases and how the Council could best promote the national telephone advice line
- Further investigation to understand the reasons for the duplication of welfare benefits advice between the Council's Welfare Rights Service and external advice and information agencies and whether this could be eliminated via an alternative service delivery model
- Consider a model for future delivery that ensures more joined up working between all the different parties involved in advice and information giving advice across the Borough

Members made the following comments:

- Although there was a big demand for "face to face" advice, the Committee felt that a web based service for general enquiries would be valuable
- More training for staff in libraries and other public places would improve sign posting
- Whilst it was free to call the National Debt Helpline from a landline, calling from a mobile phone would incur charges
- Information and advice should be more widely available in community/ family centres and local libraries etc.
- Services should have clear titles to make it easier for the public to know who to contact

### **Options Challenge**

At its meeting on 16 February 2010, Executive Scrutiny Committee was presented with final appraisal information together with recommendations for the future development of advice and information services across the Borough. The Committee supported the recommendations going forward to Cabinet.

In respect of the recommendation to consolidate the advice and information services that the Council commissions from external organisations into a single contract, Members asked for assurances that support and advice would continue to be directed to the people who need it. The Head of Customer Services and Taxation confirmed that the important elements of services currently provided would be preserved in the new contract.

In respect of the recommendation for the temporary transfer of the Independent Living Fund Officer to the Personalisation Support Team, Members commented that more work was needed to encourage take up of the fund. The Head of Customer Services and Taxation advised that moving the member of staff into the personalisation team would mainstream the activity and should therefore have a positive effect on take up.