

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

16th FEBRUARY 2010

REPORT OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

EFFICIENCY, IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION (EIT) REVIEW OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICES

SUMMARY

This report presents the options appraisal information relating to the EIT Review of Advice and Information, together with recommendations for the future development of advice and information services across the borough.

RECOMMENDATION

That the options appraisal and recommendations arising from the review be noted. Comments and feedback from Members would be welcomed.

DETAIL

1. The Executive Scrutiny Committee noted the proposed scope and project plan for the EIT review of Advice and Information at its meeting on 10th June 2009. The review is a “reporting-in” review.
2. On 20th October 2009, the Committee considered a report describing the outcome of the baseline and challenge phase of the review, noted a number of options for further investigation in the second phase of the review and endorsed the direction of travel. The four options to be investigated were:
 - Consolidation of all the advice and information services that the Council commissions from external organisations into a single specification that could then be tendered, including the advice and information services that are currently included in the Core Funding Agreements that accompany allocations of grant from the Voluntary Sector Support Fund.
 - Enter into discussion with A4e, the organisation that operates the Community Legal Advice Service on behalf of the Legal Services Commission, 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 co-ordination and joined up working between all the different parties involved in advice and information giving across the borough.

3. A report summarising the conclusions from the baseline and challenge phase, describing the findings from the options appraisal and making recommendations for the future delivery of advice and information services is attached at Appendix 1.
4. Recommendations are made after each section of the full report and are listed below:
- i. At Paragraphs 18 to 31 of the full report - That the five separate contracts described in paragraph (28) of the full report and their associated budgets be pooled, and the Council develop a new specification for advice and information services that meet residents' needs and the Council's strategic priorities, particularly around financial inclusion and also takes account of the current economic climate. That the Council embark on a tendering exercise for a three-year contract, with option to extend for a further two-years, with a contract start date of 1st April 2011.
 - ii. At Paragraphs 32 to 37 - That the availability of free, independent legal advice and information via the Community Legal Advice telephone helpline and website for people who are entitled to Legal Aid be promoted more widely across the Council by displaying posters and leaflets and raising staff awareness of the service so that more signposting takes place.
 - iii. At Paragraphs 48 to 51 - That the temporary post of ILFO transfer from the in-house welfare rights team to the temporary Personalisation Support Team, followed by a further review to consider the optimum place within the organisation for this role, when the work of the Personalisation support team concludes.
 - iv. At Paragraphs 38 to 54 – That, subject to consultation with staff and unions, an organisation restructure be undertaken within CESC to merge the rest of the in-house Welfare Rights team with the CESC Client Financial Services team and that the focus of the Welfare Rights team within this new structure be on (but not exclusively):
 - supporting social care clients to maximise their income and access other services that might enhance their wellbeing (thereby bringing in additional income for the Council)
 - undertaking specific projects linked to other Council services and key Council agendas, particularly how to make use of internal information and customer insight to target campaign work
 - acting as a reference point for advice and referrals from Social Care staff
 - co-ordinating Advice and Information provision across the borough
 - developing referral protocols with the external provider selected to deliver the contract for advice and information services described in (i) above in an attempt to cut down some of the task duplication and enable a more specialist approach to certain tasks (such as representation at Tribunals)That the service enter into discussions with the PCT to seek to draw in funding by delivering advice sessions at GP practices, similar to models adopted by other local authorities.
 - v. At Paragraphs 55 to 62 - That the Web Development Team, part of the new Communications Team develop a specification and work with Xentrall ICT to create a directory of Advice and Information providers across the borough.
 - vi. At Paragraphs 63 - That Customer Services and the Library Service promote the availability of the new directory and become points of contact for customers seeking sources of advice and information in face-to-face situations and over the telephone.

- vii. At Paragraphs 64 to 68 – That an advice providers’ network be created, with responsibility for setting up and leading this network sitting within the restructured Welfare Rights team recommended at paragraph (54) of the main report (iv above).
- viii. At Paragraph 69 - The newly formed advice providers network explore options of bidding for Big Lottery grant to support the activities of the network.

- 5. The review is scheduled to present a final report and recommendations to Cabinet in March 2010.

FINANCIAL & LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 6. The proposals around contract rationalisation release potential savings, currently assessed at £61,500 over three years, commencing 2011/2012, however it is suggested that the specification be worded in a way that gives the Council the option of re-investing these savings to expand the range of advice and information services provided under the contract, as the impact of the current economic climate becomes clearer. The proposals offer the potential for further savings in relation to bringing income in to the Council, but these sums cannot be quantified at this stage.

Legal

- 7. TUPE may apply where providers have appointed staff to undertake the work associated with the existing contracts that are to be consolidated under the new corporate advice and information contract. This will be discussed further with current providers as the tender documentation and specification are being prepared and, if necessary, the TUPE details will be included.

RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8. The review is classed as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

- 9. Enhanced service delivery through the EIT process. The objectives of the review are to ensure that those who need advice and information, both now and in the future, have access to suitable services and that available resources are targeted so that these services are delivered in a way that is of value to customers and best meets their needs and expectations.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD COUNCILLORS

- 10. Viewpoint residents survey and discussions with voluntary sector organisations as described in the report at Appendix 1.

Debbie Hurwood
Head of Customer Services & Taxation
Telephone: 01642 527014
Email: debbie.hurwood@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers:

EIT Review of Advice and Information, Scoping Document and Project Plan (Executive Scrutiny Committee 10th June 2009)

Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation Review of Advice and Information Services (Executive Scrutiny Committee 20th October 2009)

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors: Not Ward specific.

Property: The SBC Welfare Rights service is currently based in Billingham Council Offices. The team may need to be relocated in the event of an organisation review which is one of the options under consideration in this report.