

REPORT TO: Executive Board Sub Committee

DATE: 29th March 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children & Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Waiver of Procurement Standing Orders: Citizens Advice Bureau 'IDEAL' Service

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform members of the proposed revisions to the 'IDEAL' Service contract delivered by Halton Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and to seek suspension of the relevant Procurement Standing Orders, under the exceptional circumstances set out in this report, which place a requirement on the Council to tender or obtain quotes for contracts set up with external providers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1. on this occasion, in the light of the exceptional circumstances set out below, for the purpose of standing order 1.8.2 (d) where compliance with Standing Orders would result in the Council having to forego a clear financial benefit, Procurement Standing Orders 4.1 be waived in order that the Council does not have to forego a clear financial benefit; and**
- 2. the Strategic Director be authorised to enter into a contract with Halton Citizens Advice Bureau in respect of the revised 'IDEAL' Service contract, in the sum of £80,000 per annum for the period 1st April 2012 to 31st March 2013, with a possible option of extension to the contract for a further one year from April 2013 to March 2014.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 BACKGROUND

Since 2007, Halton Citizens Advice Bureau has delivered an enhanced service (the 'IDEAL' Service) to parents and carers of younger children, funded initially

through the General Sure Start Grant and currently via the Early Intervention Grant. The service specification requires CAB to provide a dedicated advice and support service that is targeted at parents and carers with young children (0-5 years) but is open to families with children aged 0-19 where these are identified by Children's Centres/Team around the Family staff. The funding provides two general advisors (the 'Sure Start funded advice team'), whom parents/carers can access via a direct telephone line which ensures that they are prioritised or 'fast-tracked'. Service requests are submitted by Children's Centres/Team around the Family staff via a secure online system or verbally via telephone. CAB then delivers advice and support through home visits, face to face consultations at CAB offices or in Children's Centres, email or telephone. Within the service specification, the advice and support required is defined largely as meeting the debt, employment and benefits needs of parents/carers.

As part of a global revision of commissioned services' provision across the Children and Families Services Division, a review of the 'IDEAL' Service was implemented. The review included a borough-wide gaps analysis to inform the recommendations arising from this process and determined the following areas of work that are met by the CAB IDEAL Service but are not currently available through other identified service provision:

- i. Prioritisation and fast tracking for parents/carers with young children, or with children aged up to 19 where appropriate, identified and referred by Children's Centres and Team around the Family staff and partner services including Midwifery and Health Visitors.
- ii. A dedicated home visiting service for parents/carers offering advice and support with debt, benefits and employment rights, with a requirement to refer to other services as appropriate via Team around the Family and Children's Social Care colleagues.
- iii. Provision of specified budgeting talks and consumer rights and benefits awareness sessions within the community, identified in partnership with Children's Centres/Team around the Family staff teams.
- iv. Delivery of informal training sessions and provision of advice at team meetings (e.g. Children's Centres, Health Visiting Teams) and delivery of advice sessions within groups at Children's Centres.
- v. Support for parents in applying for grants, where this cannot be supported by other services such as the Carers' Centre.

Following this review, a revised service specification has been developed, comprising the following dedicated advice and support provision that:

- Delivers legal advice and support regarding debt, benefits and employment rights issues to parents and carers whose families are identified by Team around the Family staff and partner services as having additional needs and requiring targeted support;

- Delivers services in an holistic *Think Family* context which considers the needs of all family members so that these can be fully supported and entails a requirement to share concerns and refer or signpost to other services and specialist provision where appropriate;
- Prioritises parents and carers of children under 5 years but will be open to families with children of all ages as identified by Team around the Family staff members;
- Delivers a prioritised fast track service for parents and carers whose individual circumstances, following appropriate screening, are identified as requiring an urgent response in order to prevent the escalation of issues and corresponding significant negative impact upon children and young people's well-being and outcomes;
- Delivers the service from premises in both Runcorn and Widnes that are easily accessible to residents and within Halton Children's Centres;
- Offers a dedicated home visiting service to parents and carers who, following the screening process, are identified as having additional needs and requiring targeted support and whose individual circumstances meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - parents/carers are experiencing health issues, relating either to themselves or their children, which means that it is not feasible for them to access support at local premises or Children's Centres;
 - parents/carers are experiencing child care issues which means that it is not feasible for them to access support at local premises or Children's Centres;
 - parents/carers whose current organisational capacity means that it is not feasible for them to access support at local premises or Children's Centres;
 - parents/carers whose work commitments or caring commitments mean that it is not feasible for them to access support at the local premises or Children's Centres;
 - parents/carers who need to access the service outside usual office opening hours.
- Delivers the service from premises in both Runcorn and Widnes that are easily accessible to residents and within Halton Children's Centres;
- Provides budgeting talks and consumer rights and benefits awareness sessions within the community;

- Delivers informal training sessions and provides advice at team meetings of partner services (e.g. Children's Centres, Health Visiting Teams);
- Provides support for parents/carers in applying for grants, focused particularly where this cannot be supported by partner services;
- Reflects government policy changes, such as those to benefits entitlement, with a focus upon addressing identified risk factors relating to these;
- Ensures that the employment-focused aspect of the service is clearly aligned with local provision, including Halton People into Jobs' delivery of the Work Programme and linked initiatives, in order to support Halton's Child and Family Poverty agenda and maximise integrated service delivery.

The funding agreed for this contract is £80,000 per annum for a period of one year from 1st April 2012.

3.2 BUSINESS CASE

The gaps analysis undertaken as part of the review of the 'IDEAL' service has determined that withdrawal of the funding for this provision from CAB would result in the Council having to forego clear financial benefit, as detailed below:

- i. The current structure of CAB delivery provides clear financial benefits in relation to the Council's Welfare Rights Service (WRS), in a climate of extremely high demand from residents due to fundamental and wide-reaching changes to the whole benefits system including housing costs.
- ii. Existing working practices across CAB services and the Council's Welfare Rights Service (WRS) mean that, in effect, the two organisations work with different clienteles – specifically, CAB provides services predominantly to working-age residents and their families, while WRS almost exclusively supports elderly and disabled residents. This complementary working arrangement has been driven externally by changes to government policy, resulting in a very high level of demand for support required from WRS for vulnerable client groups claiming specific benefits (largely Employment and Support Allowance/Incapacity Benefit, generally in relation to reassessment), which in turn exerts significant pressure upon WRS's overall capacity. CAB also delivers an employment rights service, which is not part of current WRS provision. Both services regularly refer clients to the other in order to provide the best possible service to residents.
- iii. In the light of the information above, withdrawal of the 'IDEAL' Service from CAB would inevitably result in increased demand upon the core CAB services; this would necessarily impact negatively upon their capacity to provide the current volume of support to working-age residents and their families. In turn, this would lead to increased pressure upon WRS to

compensate for this reduction in capacity and volume, with implications relating to the need for the provision of additional services to residents and the corresponding cost implications.

- iv. The current 'IDEAL' service is delivered as an element of a broader core CAB service and therefore benefits significantly from the expertise and capacity provided elsewhere in the organisation. Therefore, residents accessing the 'IDEAL' Service are able to access a broader spectrum of provision than could be delivered by an alternative provider without this infrastructure in place. This in turn provides clear financial benefit to the Council as it delivers a more holistic service to residents and their families, which evidence from Performance Management data over time has demonstrated to be instrumental in averting the escalation of needs for many families and the costs to Council services linked to this.
- v. Delivery of the 'IDEAL' Service from centrally based and established premises in both Runcorn and Widnes is critical to the service's reach and accessibility. Evidence drawn from the 'IDEAL' Service Performance Management Framework confirms that CAB's provision of established 'drop-in' offices in both Runcorn and Widnes provides a point of contact accessed by highly vulnerable families who have not previously sought support from local services but who can then be fast-tracked for advice and guidance where this may be an urgent need. The costs relating to existing CAB premises in Runcorn and Widnes are minimised within the costings for the current 'IDEAL' service due to the organisation's specific funding arrangements, which allows the maximum proportion of the Council funds allocated to this contract to be used for front-line delivery to residents. This confers a clear financial benefit to the Council.

3.3 VALUE FOR MONEY AND COMPETITION

As noted previously, the costs for the 'IDEAL' Service are predominantly for staff. Comparisons with a broad range of similar posts currently advertised in the Merseyside region have identified that the costs identified for CAB's delivery of the 'IDEAL' Service are competitive and represent very good value for money.

However, officers will keep the situation under review to ensure that desired outcomes continue to be achieved and that the method of service delivery remains the most cost effective option for the Council.

3.4 TRANSPARENCY

In order to ensure transparency, it is proposed that the service will continue to submit performance reports to named lead commissioning officers. The frequency and detail will be agreed by the relevant Commissioning Manager as part of the contract compliance process. Subject to issues of commercial confidentiality, information about the contracts would be accessible under the Freedom of Information Act and under the annual audit process.

3.5 PROPRIETY AND SECURITY

Actions in respect of this contract comply with Halton Borough Council's standing orders and procurement processes. The contract specifications set out requirements in respect to minimum standards for the delivery of care and support and will include comprehensive standards relating to the safeguarding of children and young people and vulnerable adults. The cost of entering into these contracts will be contained within existing available budgetary provision.

3.6 ACCOUNTABILITY

The Operational Director for Children and Families would be responsible for the award of the contracts. The contracts and the award process are open to PPB Scrutiny and the internal and external audit.

3.7 POSITION OF THE CONTRACT UNDER THE PUBLIC CONTRACTS REGULATIONS 2006

These are Part B exempt services under the Contracts Regulations 2006 and do not need to be advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In the context of current and imminent changes to the benefits system, and the identified risks arising from these, the withdrawal of funding for CAB to deliver the 'IDEAL' Service would exert a negative impact upon the capacity of Council services as detailed previously and therefore upon the achievement of Halton's Child and Family Poverty Strategy. For the same reason, this may also adversely affect the achievement of Halton's focus upon Early Help and Support.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

This will relate specifically to outcomes for children and young people regarding their economic well-being and the ability of their parents/carers to provide an appropriate level of financial support and an acceptable standard of living.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

This relates particularly to parents and carers regarding advice and support in the area of employment rights, volunteering and training opportunities.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

This relates to the broader health benefits arising from families receiving advice and support for issues such as debt and benefits.

5.4 A Safer Halton

There are no direct implications arising from this recommendation.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

There are no direct implications arising from this recommendation.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 Key Risks and Control Measures

The key risks are outlined in Sections 4.0 and 5.0, with the Recommendations in Section 2.0 comprising the control measures.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The proposed actions will address potential equality and diversity issues as stated in the Equality Impact Assessment (2011).

8.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION

Not applicable.

9.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Not applicable.

10.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Not applicable.

11.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Document

Place of Inspection

Contact Officer

Equality Impact
Assessment (2011)

Contracts &
Commissioning Team,
Second Floor,
Rutland House

Kelly Byrne