

Report of:	Meeting	Date	Item No.
Cllr Alan Vincent, Resources Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader of the Council and Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities	Cabinet	2 June 2021	

Grant Funding for Citizens Advice Lancashire West

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To recommend that the council enters into a three year service level agreement with Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW) for the provision of welfare advice services in the Borough until 31 May 2024 and that the council also agrees to participate in a trial of digital service kiosks at a number of locations across Wyre.

2. Outcomes

- 2.1 Access to a free, confidential, impartial and independent advice service for local residents with the provision of additional outreach services in those areas of greatest need.
- 2.2 Transform the way customers access services through making better use of technology.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 To agree that the council enter into a three year service level agreement with CALW until 31 May 2024 at a cost of £30,000 per annum.
- 3.2 To agree to participate in a trial of digital kiosks / self-help terminals at a number of locations across Wyre at a cost of £8,000.

4. Background

- 4.1 The council has had a service level agreement with CALW for over ten years with the most recent extension agreed to May 2021.

4.2. Overview and Scrutiny Committee have recently carried out another evaluation of the service and their draft report was agreed at their meeting on 26 April 2021 and is presented to Cabinet on this same agenda as a separate earlier item. There are three recommendations:-

1. That Cabinet wholeheartedly support the continuation of Wyre working with the Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW).
2. Wyre Council should look more into the feasibility of a trial into the Digital Service Kiosk proposed by CALW. The group asks that this be included in any negotiations with the CALW and that the CALW will advise on the best location for such a service.
3. That Cabinet look into the possibility of reviewing the current level of funding provided to CALW.

5. Key issues and proposals

5.1 The CALW service includes a five days per week call centre which operates from 9am-5pm. This provides access to advice by telephone, webchat and email. The funding also supports a general advice service delivered by the volunteer hub based at the Fleetwood Town Council offices in Poulton Road. This comprises two days a week where an open door drop-in service is available (Tuesday and Thursday) with dedicated specialist appointments, including form-filling support, being available on the other three days. All advisers are AskRe trained, which helps them to identify clients with domestic abuse issues and refer them to appropriate support agencies. Outreach for general advice and debt is provided by way of pre-booked appointments for up to three weeks each month on a Thursday depending on demand. This currently operates from the library in Garstang. Digital assistance and simple advice queries are also dealt with at Cleveleys library (Friday mornings) and Knott End library (Mondays). Further expansion into other locations such as Over Wyre Medical Centre as well as the Fleetwood Hospital development are currently being investigated.

5.2 As part of our COVID-19 response and recognising increased demand on CALW, the council has provided an additional £15,480 for support up to end of September 2021. This funding has helped to extend opening hours to accommodate early evening and weekend sessions as well as adding Video advice sessions delivered via 'Attend Anywhere' software that creates a virtual reception area and meeting rooms.

5.3 Whilst not part of this service level agreement, CALW also operate the successful Digital Help Centre which is based at Fleetwood Market and this has been an invaluable resource to Fleetwood residents to help them to get online and access a range of benefits. The unit at Fleetwood Market is provided at no cost to CALW so in effect they benefit from an in-kind contribution of an estimated £7,500 per annum (rent plus service charge).

5.4 Quarterly performance information is provided by the CALW which indicates they have supported 3,503 cases over the period 1 April 2020

to 31 March 2021. Debt advice and advice and guidance relating to benefits, universal credit and tax credits are the largest areas of demand. During the pandemic there has been a marked increase in demand for support relating to employment issues.

- 5.5** CALW are keen to work with Wyre to pilot their new digital kiosks. It is recommended that the council participate in this pilot which will see development of an automated self-help terminal that uses speech recognition to assist clients with little or no IT skills. These terminals could be placed in a number of locations around Wyre as a pilot to assess demand and effectiveness. If successful, it could lead to a wider roll-out across Wyre. It is envisaged that this could expand the service provision in many more locations e.g. GP Surgeries and community venues. The system provides self-help tools as well as direct access to Video advice and the ability to book appointments for a call back. Given the ongoing pandemic and the desire to reduce unnecessary face-to face contact and journeys, particularly for those who are vulnerable, it is intended to utilise specific covid funding for the pilot.

Financial and legal implications	
Finance	<p>£30,000 had already been included in the budget for 2021/22. This funding will now be slipped to 2022/23 and the £30,000 2021/22 grant will be met from covid-19 COMF funding to reflect that the service is now primarily providing additional support to those that have been adversely affected by the pandemic. This leaves a shortfall of funding for 2023/24 which will be met from general balances unless alternative funding becomes available.</p> <p>The one-off £8,000 in relation to the Digital Service Kiosk pilot will be funded from covid-19 COMF funding in 2021/22.</p>
Legal	The service level agreement with the CALW will be amended accordingly.

Other risks/implications: checklist

If there are significant implications arising from this report on any issues marked with a ✓ below, the report author will have consulted with the appropriate specialist officers on those implications and addressed them in the body of the report. There are no significant implications arising directly from this report, for those issues marked with a x.

risks/implications	✓ / x
community safety	x
equality and diversity	x

risks/implications	✓ / x
asset management	x
climate change	x

sustainability	x
health and safety	x

ICT	x
data protection	x

Processing Personal Data

In addition to considering data protection along with the other risks/ implications, the report author will need to decide if a 'privacy impact assessment (PIA)' is also required. If the decision(s) recommended in this report will result in the collection and processing of personal data for the first time (i.e. purchase of a new system, a new working arrangement with a third party) a PIA will need to have been completed and signed off by Data Protection Officer before the decision is taken in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

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List of background papers:		
name of document	date	where available for inspection
None		

List of appendices

None