



<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities and Councillor Peter Cartridge, Chair of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group	Cabinet	17 April 2024

### **Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group – Final Report**

**Key decision:** No.

#### **1. Purpose of report**

- 1.1** To report the work of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group to the Cabinet.

#### **2. Council priorities**

- 2.1** To provide support to those who need it, including our most vulnerable and financially disadvantaged residents and our ageing population.

#### **3. Recommendations**

That Cabinet considers the report and recommendations (attached at Appendix 1) arising from the Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group which are as follows:

- 3.1** That Cabinet renew the agreement between the council and Citizens Advice Lancashire West for four years.
- 3.2** That Cabinet considers increasing the grant contribution payment to Citizens Advice Lancashire West from £30,000 as per previous service agreement renewals (with free use of a number of Fleetwood Market units worth £18,000).
- 3.3** That within an updated service level agreement, the use of the units at Fleetwood Market be added to formalise the arrangement.
- 3.4** That the council and Citizens Advice Lancashire West consider re-starting the trial of the digital kiosks, particularly over Wyre, and for the £8,000 set aside for this in 2021 be released.

## **4. Background**

- 4.1** The council has had a historic working relationship with Citizens Advice Lancashire West to provide a free advice service to Wyre residents including debt advice.
- 4.2** On 2 June 2021, Cabinet agreed to enter into a three-year agreement with Citizens Advice which would cease on 31 May 2024.
- 4.3** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a task group to consider options for extending the service level agreement beyond 31 May 2024.
- 4.4** The previous review of the Citizens Advice Lancashire West service was conducted in 2020/21.
- 4.5** The current review was carried out over four meetings held on 15 November 2023, 14 December 2023, 18 January 2024 and 2 February 2024. The group heard and received evidence from the following representatives:
- Diane Gradwell, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice Lancashire West
  - Marianne Hesketh, Corporate Director Communities
  - Clare James, Corporate Director Resources
  - Peter Mason, Head of Contact Centre
  - Councillor Lesley McKay, Resources Portfolio Holder

## **5. Key issues and proposals**

- 5.1** Following all the relevant information that was placed before the group, it was clear that the current arrangements between Wyre Council and Citizens Advice Lancashire West (CALW) are effective. The group acknowledged that the service was well used by residents and had been experiencing a rise in demand for the service, to the point that they had increased their outreach services.
- 5.2** The group found that the outsourced service has provided good value for money, enabling a higher number of residents to access services and a varied service provision for those who could not travel to the units in Fleetwood Market.
- 5.3** The group agrees with renewing the service level agreement with CALW, but acknowledged that the service level agreement had not been updated since 2017. The services they now provided were able to meet the rise in demand experienced since 2021, and the group felt it was important to

continue this increased level of service and formalise this in an updated service level agreement, along with the formalised free use of a number of Fleetwood Market units (worth a contribution of £18,000).

**5.4** The group have recommended that the service agreement length be extended from previous renewals, to four years. This would then match with the Council Plan period and support the council in meeting its commitments over the four-year period.

**5.5** The group also believe that the level of cash funding did not match what was currently being provided, and that the charity was matching the council's contribution in order to continue to provide more face-to-face outreach, telephone, video conferencing and web services. The group agreed that the funding level ought to be increased to reflect this.

**5.6** The group acknowledge that the council has waived the rental and service charges for the use of the units at Fleetwood Market and would recommend this be continued. However, the group believes that additions to the service of three more days of face to face outreach, telephone, video conferencing and web services should be continued and therefore should have an impact on the level of funding, beyond the in-kind contribution of approximately £18,000 for the market units.

**5.7** The council could elect to bring this service back in-house but owing to cost and other logistical factors this is not the preferred solution. If the services are not delivered by CALW, or by Wyre Council in the first instance, this could result in a greater financial impact on the borough longer term.

**5.8** The group also considered the need to expand face-to-face outreach across the borough, in particular in the west of the borough. Many residents may experience difficulties in travelling to Fleetwood, and it was noted in evidence provided by Diane Gradwell that Wyre experienced the highest call for face-to-face outreach. The group asked both CALW and officers to consider re-starting the trial of the digital kiosks, which had been delayed owing to capacity at CALW. This could be used to help expand outreach into areas over Wyre.

**5.9** The group is confident that the evidence presented shows the valuable service provided by CALW and that they will continue to provide an effective service throughout Wyre, in line with the recommendations made.

## **6. Alternative options considered and rejected**

**6.1** It was considered by the group to not renew the agreement with CALW and look to providing the service in-house. However, this would have a significant impact on residents who would only be able to access the charity via its national call centres, as face-to-face outreach would cease.

- 6.2 It was considered by the group to renew the agreement with CALW but to not recommend an increase in funding. However, the group decided against this as they felt the evidence showed that the service provision needed to be increased following higher demands on the service and therefore the grant contributions paid by the council needed to be increased.

<b>Financial, Legal and Climate Change implications</b>	
Finance	<p>The current Medium Term Financial Plan includes a £30,000 contribution for the current financial year and nothing for any future years, pending the outcome of this review and a formal Cabinet decision. Any contribution agreed will be met from General Balances. The £8,000 referred to at 3.4 has been retained in the budget for kiosks.</p> <p>The budgeted income at Fleetwood Market reflects the assumption that the units currently occupied by CALW will remain so free of charge (at a cost of £18,000 to the council in loss of income) ongoing.</p>
Legal	<p>If the service is to continue beyond 31 May 2024, and recommendation one approved, then a new service level agreement should be signed by both parties outlining the service to be delivered within the time period and other relevant terms and conditions.</p>
Climate Change	<p>There are no climate change implications directly arising from this report, however should the trial of the digital kiosks be approved and go ahead, then this could have a resulting impact by those residents who no longer have to travel across the borough to access face to face outreach.</p>

#### **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.

<b>risks/implications</b>	<b>✓ / x</b>
community safety	x
equality and diversity	✓
health and safety	x

<b>risks/implications</b>	<b>✓ / x</b>
asset management	✓
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.

report author	telephone no.	email	date
Daphne Courtenage	01253 887476	<a href="mailto:Daphne.courtenage@wyr.e.gov.uk">Daphne.courtenage@wyr.e.gov.uk</a>	20/03/2024

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

## List of appendices

Appendix 1 - Citizens Advice Lancashire West Task Group report - final