

**WELFARE BENEFITS ADVICE GRANT**

**Formal Member Question from County Councillor Keith Witham  
to Adult Social Care Select Committee 11 April 2013 and Response**

Q. Would the Director set out

**1. The County Council decision making and approval and scrutiny process followed regarding the contract of £500,000 for a Welfare Benefits Advice, Information and Support Service;**

- The bidding process for the Welfare Benefits Advice, Information and Support Grant was considered by the Adult Leadership Team (ALT) in July and October 2012. ALT gave approval for a grant to be bid for the provision of a free, independent, confidential service to provide information, advice and support in respect of welfare benefits to all people in Surrey. This is in recognition of the impact that the Welfare Benefits Reform will have on particular sectors of the Surrey population (Adult Select Committee Report by Toni Carney, Benefits and Charging Consultancy Team Manager, Adult Social Care, May 2012) and in order to support our objective of providing free and effective information and advice to Surrey residents.
- As this is a grant the governance of the Procurement Standing Orders (PSOs) does not apply (as detailed in the Introduction to the Procurement Standing Orders Dec 2010). As detailed in the Financial Regulations 8.5 commissioned services must assure value for money for the County Council.
- Guidance on the Grant process is currently under review and by June we will have confirmation of the Grant process. Voluntary sector representatives are a part of this process. It is anticipated that this will be completed in June of this year.
- In consultation, and with advice from Procurement colleagues, the decision was taken to award a grant of one year with the option to renew for a further two years.
- The current approach for grant approvals is one which does not overburden the voluntary, community and faith sector and is informed on a case by case basis according to value and profile. The current process is being reviewed to ensure appropriate authorisations are secured in line with good practice. Additionally, dependant on value, consideration is being given to grant vs. contract.
- Because of the profile and value of the grant in this case, the decision was taken to follow best practice of the PSOs for going to market, evaluating bids and awarding the grant.
- The key processes followed were
  - Approval by ALT in July 2012
  - Co-design of the specification with the voluntary sector
  - Provider event

- Bid advertised and issued through SCC e-sourcing system
- Compliant bids were evaluated by a panel comprising council officers, carer's representative and a representative from the Surrey Coalition of Disabled People.
- Recommendation of award and endorsement by ALT February 2013.
- The bid document contained evaluation questions and scoring criteria. At the provider event bidders were walked through the process and it was emphasised that bids would only be evaluated on what was submitted.
- This level of rigour taken for the welfare benefits information and advice service was over and above that of a normal grant process in recognition of the value and profile. This process is supported as best practice by the voluntary, community and faith sector in Surrey.

**2. Explain the rationale behind the decision to award the contract, including an assurance that the new Advice Service will have the infrastructure and capacity to deliver, and on what criteria the service providers will be judged;**

- Bids were scored by the evaluation panel and the recommended bid - a partnership consortium led by Surrey Disabled Peoples Partnership (SDPP) - had the highest overall score.
- In total bids from three organisations were received:
  - Cherchefelle – a housing association, who provides home based care, supported living, housing support and housing management services for adults in Surrey, West Sussex and Richmond.
  - Citizens Advice Consortium Surrey – Current members of the Consortium are Surrey Welfare Rights Unit, and Citizens Advice in Ash, Camberley, Caterham and Warlingham, Epsom and Ewell, Esher and District, Guildford, Leatherhead and Dorking, Runnymede, Walton Weybridge and Hersham, Reigate and Banstead, and Waverley. Each bureau provides advice services to people in their community on a broad range of issues as well as volunteering opportunities
  - Surrey Disabled Peoples' Partnership as lead provider - A registered charity based in Woking, focusing on the rights of disabled people. They currently deliver Surrey's County wide advocacy service. In relation to this grant, they are the lead provider for a number of partner organisations: Age UK Surrey, The Youth Consortium, Deaf

Positives and SAVI. The intent was to formalise their relationship with Surrey Welfare Rights Unit for training and expert assistance on complex issues if they were successful with the bid.

- The bids were evaluated across six domains:
  - Partnerships
  - Delivery of service outputs
  - Quality assurance and monitoring outcomes
  - Access, awareness and engagement
  - Relevant experience
  - Value for money
  
- From the evaluation we are satisfied that the service will have the capacity and infrastructure to deliver.
- Monitoring of the service will be quarterly, involving a panel including a representative from Children's Services, Adult Social Care and services users and carers.
- Monitoring will cover a wide range of performance including:
  - the area of Surrey the referral originated from;
  - the numbers of people served ,
  - inappropriate referrals
  - timeliness of the service i.e. referral acknowledged in one working day and contact made in three working days.
  - How the service: promotes personalisation, prevention, positive experience and protection from avoidable harm

**3. Explain why it was deemed appropriate to exclude Surrey Citizens Advice Bureaux from involvement in providing this Welfare Advice and Information Service, at least in part;**

Overall, the successful bidder scored more highly than the other two bidders. Based on the evidence presented, the partnership and value for money domains were identified as areas of development for Surrey Citizens Advice Bureaux. Surrey CAB has been fully briefed on the outcome of its bid and reasons for non-selection.

**4. How the above fits in with the Surrey Local Assistance Scheme (which does involve CAB);**

This tender exercise was separate from the Surrey Local Assistance Scheme. The latter refers to the national policy to transfer funds previously held by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to local authorities. The Scheme is replacing the DWP Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants from 1 April 2013. Three organisations are involved in the delivery of this service: The CABs are signposting and assisting applicants to complete the application form provided to Surrey County Council's Shared Services Centre. Surrey Reuse Network will be supplying household goods and recycled furniture where appropriate.

Additionally Surrey CAB is part of a Consortium of three organisations (the other two are Surrey Independent Living Council and Help and Care) which was successful in its bid to be appointed to run Healthwatch Surrey effective from 1 April 2013.

- 5. If this decision cannot now be reviewed and reconsidered, give an assurance that when the Welfare Benefits Advice Information and Support Service contract is reviewed, prior to the end of its initial 12 month term, that it will be re-tendered and that CAB involvement will be reconsidered at that time.**

As stated above, the contract will be monitored on a quarterly basis and this will allow us to have sound information on how well the contract is being delivered.

Should there be a reason to believe that the service can be delivered more effectively in another way, e.g. in partnerships with other agencies, or that the provider is not performing satisfactorily, negotiations, an improvement plan or re-bidding can be considered within the first year.

END

26 April 2013