
Report To:	Policy and Resources Committee	Date:	5 February 2019
Report By:	Louise Long Corporate Director, (Chief Officer) Inverclyde HSCP	Report No:	SW/14/2019/HW
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Subject:	Externally Commissioned Review of Advice Provision		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Policy and Resources Committee with the findings and recommendations from the externally commissioned Review of Advice Provision.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Members' Budget Working Group (MBWG) requested that an external review of advice provision within Inverclyde was undertaken to ensure that the current delivery model provides best value and quality is being achieved. In addition it was to consider potential options for future delivery models where appropriate.
- 2.2 AT Innovative Solutions were awarded the contract and undertook desktop analysis; questionnaires; stakeholder meetings and focus groups with service users throughout July to September 2018.
- 2.3 The final report has now been received which gives an analysis of the current advice landscape within Inverclyde. The report has identified that there are no specific gaps in terms of meeting statutory obligations for advice provision. For those agencies which responded to the questionnaire, evidence was provided that staff are trained and highly skilled in their areas of operation including money advice (debt), income maximisation, welfare benefits and welfare rights advice, housing rights, consumer advice and employment rights. Agencies providing advice services endeavour to provide holistic support to customers by referring to other advice and support agencies. The report makes a distinction between advice providers providing a range of services in Inverclyde and those providing advice which requires accreditation by the Scottish Legal Aid Board using the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (SNSIAP).
- 2.4 The report identified excellent partnership working and significant investment by Inverclyde Council, over the last 5 years since the advent of welfare reform agenda.
- 2.5 The report also identified important differences in how financial gain is calculated across the partnership, making comparisons difficult and unreliable. It is the view of officers that calculation methods should be harmonised going forward.
- 2.6 Inverclyde compares favourably against similar and neighbouring local authorities in terms of funding, financial gain and effectiveness of resources expended. The analysis and comparison of available local authority data show that the money invested by Inverclyde Council brings a significant return more than comparable with other local authorities and with similar sized local authorities.
- 2.7 The report makes eleven recommendations which are designed to improve, enhance and build on the existing advice platform of provision to the ultimate benefit of the customer accessing the

services. Officers have considered the report and its findings and, in terms of the recommendations, the majority of these would be able to be adopted with no financial implication. However, recommendations one and eleven have implications across the wider Council and HSCP, therefore it is recommended that there is further discussion to more fully understand the merit and potential implications of these specific recommendations across the wider Council, HSCP and its partners.

- 2.8 Since the report was concluded there have been a number of developments which impact on the advice provision locally. In particular the funding allocated from DWP to Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) to deliver digital support for Universal Credit clients and the Scottish Government funding to CAS to deliver financial health checks. Discussions are ongoing with CAS as to how these additional services will work in partnership within the Inverclyde advice provision and this will result in a Memorandum of Understanding being developed to ensure seamless referral pathways locally. In addition, the challenges presented through the delivery of the I:DEAS programme have now been resolved.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the Committee notes the analysis, findings and recommendations from the external review.
- 3.2 That the Committee agrees that officers progress recommendation numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10.
- 3.3 That the Committee agrees that the Corporate Director (Chief Officer) Inverclyde HSCP will take a lead on the further discussion that is required in relation to recommendations 1, 6 and 11, and provides an update to a future meeting of the Committee.

Louise Long
Corporate Director (Chief Officer)
Inverclyde HSCP

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 The aim of the Review of Advice Provision was to carry out a review of all advice provision throughout Inverclyde to ensure that the current delivery model provides best value and quality is being achieved, and that it meets the needs of all stakeholders and communities. In addition it was to consider potential options for future delivery models if appropriate. The Review was externally commissioned and funding of £12,000 was agreed from the Council's Anti-Poverty Fund.
- 4.2 A Stakeholder Steering Group was established which included representation from internal Council services; external partners; providers of services and a staff side representative. The group met to agree the tender specification, including timescales, for procuring the review externally.
- 4.3 The specification was developed and set out the following objectives:
- Identify in full, the statutory and any other obligations of the Council in respect of advice provision and determine the extent to which the Council is complying with its statutory duty.
 - Identify the quantity and distribution of information and advice provision (as determined above) available throughout Inverclyde from both the voluntary and statutory sectors.
 - Assess the quality of information and advice currently given throughout Inverclyde from both the voluntary and statutory sectors.
 - Identify the funding levels of all advice provision which are currently commissioned and financed, in full or part, by the Council and external funding streams.
 - Identify and assess the effectiveness of all monitoring arrangements, both performance monitoring on outcomes and financial, in place for all advice provision which is currently commissioned and financed, in full or part, by the Council and external funding streams.
 - Benchmark the effectiveness of the current Inverclyde model of advice provision against other geographical areas.
 - Assess the overall provision of all advice services and identify any gaps and areas for future development.
 - Identify where possible future demands on the services, based on national and local policy and strategy, and ensure recommendations take account of these.
 - Make recommendations and present potential options for the future provision of advice while achieving best value.
 - As part of these recommendations consider the options for co-location/one stop shop approaches and also opportunities for "channel shift".
- 4.4 AT Innovative Solutions were commissioned to review Advice Provision in Inverclyde. The research consultants undertook a range of activities to ensure a robust approach to the research which will allow Inverclyde Council to assess the value for money, efficiency and effectiveness of current advice services particularly those funded directly by Inverclyde Council. The process was split into three stages:
- Stage 1 – Commissioning, Document Review and development of questionnaire
 - Stage 2 – Communication and Delivery of Questionnaire and partner meetings
 - Stage 3 – Reporting
- 4.5 This review included advice provision covered by The Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (SNSIAP) – housing, money, debt and welfare benefits issues.

In addition it also covered advice available related to employability rights advice; fuel poverty advice and consumer advice. It touches on other advice and assistance provided by agencies in Inverclyde outwith these headings.

5.0 MAIN KEY FINDINGS

- 5.1 Inverclyde has a well-established framework for advice provision which is led by Inverclyde Council. There are a range of organisations providing advice and support across Inverclyde with no major gaps in service being identified. Good practice was identified, excellent partnership working with local agencies, significant amounts of funding provided by Inverclyde Council and excellent services provided to the residents of Inverclyde despite significant current and on-going challenges.
- 5.2 15,167 clients were supported in 2017/18 – 7,683 were for SNSIAP related advice. Inverclyde Council fund and support a wide range of advice in Inverclyde. The advice provided is not limited to income maximisation, welfare benefits, welfare rights and money advice (advice included under SNSIAP). The number of clients supported in the financial year 2017/18 provide evidence of expressed demand for all types of advice. Welfare reform and implementation of full-service Universal Credit places extra demand on services. Universal credit full-service was implemented in November 2016 and since then over 5,000 residents have been moved onto this benefit. The nature of the change to Universal Credit has put pressure on advice services due to the volume and at times, complexity of support needed.
- 5.3 There was £18,957,748 financial gain for SNSIAP related advice (although the report highlights that there are differences in the way that financial gain is calculated, depending on the organisation). The financial gain from advice services is money that otherwise would not have been claimed. A significant portion of this money will be spent locally and therefore the work of advice agencies supports the local economy. However this requires to be caveated as not all agencies calculate financial gain in the same way.
- 5.4 Advice is in the main delivered on a reactive, face to face, office-based basis with clients attending the offices of advice providers using either an appointment or on a drop in basis. Inverclyde Council now use other methods to prioritise residents seeking advice including initial telephone triage and piloting web chat facilities. Few providers offer proactive contacts and service users highlighted the benefits gained from this. Home visits and immediate appointments were desirable for vulnerable customers who prefer face-to-face contact to meet their needs and also value ongoing support relationships with a caseworker.
- 5.5 There are currently no mechanisms or comprehensive measures for managing and accessing performance across different agencies in Inverclyde. These anomalies and differences have resulted in data which is not comparable across agencies. A number of agencies do not record data beyond the number of customers supported and “soft” outcomes related to impact on wellbeing, confidence and mental health are infrequently recorded. In addition, there are 13 different ICT systems and several case management systems in use across Inverclyde Council/Inverclyde HSCP and their partner agencies.
- 5.6 Not all agencies offering Housing, Welfare Rights and Money/Debt advice within tiers 1-3 are currently seeking accreditation via the Scottish Legal Aid Board’s Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers.
- 5.7 In terms of client experience, those who have accessed services were very complimentary about the quality of advice and support which they received and the positive impact on their wellbeing. They highlighted the importance of ongoing relationships with the same staff and that once they were on the journey, their experiences were positive and beneficial. However overall observations are that the advice journey in Inverclyde can at times be confusing for clients.
- 5.8 The report highlights the significant investment in advice provision locally, particularly by the Council, £1.056m for 2017/18, however it also highlights that that the funding landscape can be complex for a number of organisations. Advice agencies have identified future funding as their top risk with customers having more complex needs resulting in longer and more intensive

casework as the next highest risk. Some services rely on a range of temporary funding streams which come to a natural end and, at the time of this report, the future funding for some organisations has not yet been confirmed. If no further funding from these streams is available it will become challenging to continue to deliver the current level of service and services may require to be redesigned.

- 5.9 There are examples of good practice and innovation. Inverclyde continues to develop and implement financial inclusion strategies that link to Community Planning. The current strategy is being refreshed and will cover from 2019 onwards. Partnership working is evident particularly through the I:DEAS project and the webchat and telephone triage service are examples of innovative solutions to a changing environment.
- 5.10 Consideration was given as to whether Inverclyde was disadvantaged by not having a CAB presence locally, however the report findings highlight the range of current services being delivered by a range of partners and also the good joint working that currently exists with Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS). Funding has recently been allocated by DWP and the Scottish Government to CAS to deliver the Universal Credit, Help to Claim Support and the Family Financial Health Checks. As relationships already exist with East Renfrewshire CAB to deliver on an in-reach basis into Inverclyde, discussions are underway to ensure this model of working is continued in order to capitalise on this increased capacity to deliver support and this will be supported through the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between CAS and local providers. Similarly the Scottish Government's Social Security Agency staff will bring additional capacity to the advice sector locally when co-located in 2019.
- 5.11 There is a significant skillset within advice workers in Inverclyde. Five local advice agencies are progressing through the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers. This is in addition to Investors in People and ISO 9000:2000 or specialist skills or training for specific areas of advice. The range of skills and ongoing investment in training to ensure staff are conversant with latest practice and legislation in relation to their area of expertise highlights that there is a well-trained, skilled local workforce in Inverclyde which can undertake specialist advice in complex areas.
- 5.12 Eleven recommendations are contained within the report:

Recommendation one – The Council should consider the merits of co-location and/or moving the management of some or all of Advice Services to the Council's Revenue and Customer Services and consider a rebrand of service name

Recommendation two – Shared database and referral system for advice

Recommendation three – Clearer information on advice available on Inverclyde Council website including providing information on all partner services

Recommendation four – Clear and specific outcomes and monitoring for funds provided by Inverclyde Council and HSCP

Recommendation five – Better clarity on Medium Term Funding for advice services across Inverclyde

Recommendation six – Future funding to be allocated via the FIP

Recommendation seven – All Advice Providers should be working toward SNSIAP

Recommendation eight – Consider whether there requires to be an increased emphasis on Financial Education across all life stages

Recommendation nine – Be more responsive to customers' needs

Recommendation ten – Financial Inclusion Partnership support should be reviewed

Recommendation eleven – The Council should consider the opportunity to combine the Management Arrangements for Anti-Poverty Services

6.0 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 From the findings, the consultants have made a number of recommendations which are designed to improve, enhance and build on the existing advice provision to the ultimate benefit of the customer accessing the services.
- 6.2 The recommendations have been reviewed by the steering group, and members of that group have expressed a need to have more clarity and further analysis with regard to the potential implications of some of the recommendations.
- 6.3 Officers have considered the detailed analysis and findings from this report and agree that some are in line with both the local and national thinking in terms of advice provision, but also agree that the implications of implementation need to be better understood before a final decision is made.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

Finance

- 7.1 The Committee has invested £250,000 recurring funding since 2013/14 to increase capacity within Advice Provision in Inverclyde. In addition, additional capacity is being funded through the DWP and Scottish Government funding to CAS and Social Security Agency and £160,000 of Anti-Poverty earmarked reserves has been made available from 2019 to 2022.

Financial Implications:

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (if Applicable)	Other Comments

Legal

- 7.2 No implications

Human Resources

- 7.3 There is a potential saving of 3 FTE staff.

Equalities

- 7.4 Has an Equality Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES (see attached appendix)
X	NO -

Repopulation

7.5 No implications.

8.0 CONSULTATIONS

8.1 Both the MBWG and CMT support the recommendations contained in this report.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1 AT Innovative Solutions Review of Advice Provision. The report by AT Innovative Solutions, which contains exempt information, is available on request to Members from Ms Helen Watson, Head of Strategy & Support Services.