

Information, Advice and Advocacy Grant

Summary:

The Council has for many years provided funding to support the provision of Information, Advice & Advocacy (IAA) in North Norfolk. Historically IAA services in the district have been delivered by Citizens Advice

A joint funding agreement with Norfolk County Council (NCC) for the delivery of IAA services in North Norfolk by Norfolk Citizens Advice (Norfolk CA) ended on 31st March 2020.

Cabinet resolved not to extend the contract and to review the IAA service prior to agreeing funding for the financial year 1.4.2020 – 31.3.2021.

The review took place in December 2020. In spite of the Covid 19 restrictions, Norfolk CA has continued to provide IAA services, therefore the full grant for the period 2020 / 2021 was awarded.

Funding of IAA of £66,710 is identified in the base budget towards the provision of IAA services in North Norfolk. Having considered the outcome of the review, a decision needs to be made as to the future allocation of IAA funding.

Options Considered

1. To award the full IAA budget of £66,710 to Norfolk CA for the provision of IAA services in North Norfolk.

This option is not recommended:

Norfolk CA provides generic IAA services which are valued and of benefit to many residents in North Norfolk. However, the age profile data from Norfolk CA shows minimal use of the service by young people under age 18 who can have specific age related IAA needs. There are also residents who due to their personal circumstances require specialist IAA support which Norfolk CA cannot always provide.

To increase equity, a proportion of the IAA budget should be allocated to other Voluntary Community Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations that provide specialist IAA support to residents who due to their age or personal circumstances these residents may not access Norfolk CA.

As a result of the pandemic there has been a significant increase in the use of both phone and digital media to access IAA services.

The continuation of face to face IAA services in outreach locations where data shows use is low will cease thus reducing service costs

2. To award a conditional grant of £55,000 to Norfolk CA towards the provision of generalist IAA services in North Norfolk. This would include the continuation of existing face to face services at dedicated offices in North Walsham, Holt and at an agreed venue in Fakenham.

This option is recommended:

The remainder of the IAA budget (£11,710) will be offered to identified VCSE organisations who provide IAA services in North Norfolk to young people under the age of 18 and / or who provide specialist IAA support to people due to their complex personal circumstances are unable to access or be supported by the range of generic services offered by Norfolk CA.

There would be no reduction in the total IAA budget offered to VCSE organisations. The allocation of the remaining budget would be used more flexibly and equitably. This will ensure that funding from NNDC is used to provide IAA services to all residents including young people and those that are most vulnerable and therefore in need of specialist IAA support services.

Conclusions:

NNDC is committed to enabling all residents of North Norfolk to have access to IAA services that meet their needs. Offering funding towards both generic and identified specialist IAA services will enhance and increase access to IAA services in North Norfolk.

Norfolk CA are aware of and support the recommendations.

Recommendations:

To award a conditional grant of £55,000 to Norfolk CA towards for the provision of generic IAA services in North Norfolk.

In consultation with the portfolio Holder for Culture & Wellbeing to award the remainder of the IAA budget (£11,710) to identified VCSE organisations to enhance IAA services to young people in North Norfolk and / or a VCSE organisation that provides specialist IAA support to residents in North Norfolk who may not be able to access or be supported by generic services IAA services.

NCC are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the IAA services they commission. This will result in a tender process and recommissioned

countywide IAA services with potentially different service providers from 1st April 2022. Until the outcome of the tender process is known it is considered that the NNDC IAA grants should only be awarded for one year from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

Reasons for

Recommendations:

To ensure the IAA funding awarded by the Council enables the continuation of generic IAA services in North Norfolk.

To preserve a face to face generalist Advice Service in designated locations across District.

To ensure the IAA funding awarded by the Council contributes towards the provision of specialist IAA services to young people and / or residents in North Norfolk such as who may not be able to access or be supported by generic IAA services.

The allocation of NNDC IAA funding from 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 will enable future provision of IAA services in North Norfolk to complement recommissioned NCC services

Cabinet Member(s)	Ward(s) affected
Cllr Virginia Gay	All wards in North Norfolk

Contact Officer, telephone number and email:

Sonia Shuter, 01263 516173 sonia.shuter@north-norfolk.gov.uk

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A review of the Information, Advice and Advocacy (IAA) services delivered in North Norfolk by Norfolk Citizens Advice (CA) took place in December 2020. The Chief Executive of Norfolk CA, Cllr Gay – Portfolio Holder for Culture and Wellbeing, Rob Young – Assistant Director for Sustainable Growth and Sonia Shuter – Health and Communities Manager participated in the review.
- 1.2 Due to Covid 19, the majority of the Norfolk Citizens Advice (CA) offices and outreach services in North Norfolk had closed for much of the last year in accordance with Government guidance. Whilst the availability of a face to face service was severely limited, Norfolk CA had provided a service by phone, email, their web site and web chat.
- 1.3 The review did highlight areas of concern which needed to be addressed and could influence the amount of funding offered to Norfolk CA in the future.

1.4 This report will expand on the issues raised in the review and the reasons for the recommendations being presented to Cabinet.

2. Outcome of review of IAA service provided by Norfolk CA

2.1 Funding by NNDC contributes towards a range of IAA services provided by Norfolk CA. This includes:

- Telephone advice line
- Web site
- Email advice
- Web chat
- Dedicated offices for face to face support at North Walsham and Holt
- Outreach services at Fakenham, Sheringham, Cromer and Stalham

2.2.1 Data submitted for the period **1st April 2019 – 31st March 2020**

- Number of clients supported 2,246
- Reason for support - top 5 issues – benefits, debt, employment, housing, relationships
- Main method of contact email 8%, phone 21%, in person 65% other 6%
- Face to Face visits – North Walsham 1,274, Holt 429, Fakenham 308, Cromer 163, Stalham 32, Sheringham 23.
- Some clients from North Norfolk also visited Norfolk CA offices in other areas such as Norwich and Dereham.

2.3 The data showed that only 15 young people aged under 20 had used the service in the reporting period. It was considered young people are more likely to use VCSE organisations offering specialist IAA support to young people rather than Norfolk CA.

2.4 Norfolk CA offers a generic IAA service. Data showed that 46% of people who accessed Norfolk CA IAA services in North Norfolk identified themselves as being disabled or having a Long Term Health Condition. There are other residents some of whom are extremely vulnerable and due to their significant health, disability or complex personal circumstances require specialist IAA support as they are unable to access or be supported by the range of generic services offered by Norfolk CA.

2.5 The review discussed the low use of outreach services at Cromer, Sheringham and Stalham. The services in these locations are only open for a few hours usually once a week in community buildings such as libraries or food banks. It was felt that people who need urgent assistance are more likely to go to a venue in a location that is open more frequently and for longer hours each week such as North Walsham – 5 days, Holt 2 days, Fakenham 2 days

2.6 Data submitted for the period **1st April 2020 – 15th December 2020**

- Number of clients supported 800
- Reason for support - top 5 issues – benefits, debt, employment, housing, relationships
- Main method of contact email 25%, phone 58%, in person 6% other 11%

- 2.7 During 2020, most Norfolk CA offices and outreach services in North Norfolk have been closed in accordance with Government guidelines. There has been a noticeable increase in the use of phone and digital media compared to the previous year's data.
- 2.8 Norfolk CC have advised that as a result of the pandemic they are planning on a 'blended' approach to service delivery in the future. Pre-Covid they were already beginning to expand their digital hub across the county to meet increasing demand. This meant they were able to very quickly change provision to entirely digital when they had to close offices due to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions.

They will continue to expand digital provision which will help meet previously unmet demand on the Advice line, email and web chat as well as new demand from people who are able to access this service.

It is recognised that some people, particularly the most vulnerable, remain digitally excluded and will require 'in person' support. This is also the case for people whose issues are complex and multiple and these numbers are increasing too, so whilst they may have access to be able to access the service digitally they will still need a face to face appointment. Therefore there will be a need for face to face services at key locations in North Norfolk as well as the ongoing digital expansion.

3. Funding of Information, Advice & Advocacy services 2021 – 2022

- 3.1 There is core funding in the budget of £66, 710 towards the provision of IAA in North Norfolk.
- 3.2 There is also a commitment that the IAA budget will be allocated to Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisation(s) that provide IAA services
- 3.3 Based on the outcome of the review discussions have been held with Norfolk CA regarding the future use of the IAA budget.
- 3.4 It is acknowledged that due to the low use of outreach services in Cromer, Sheringham and Stalham prior to the pandemic and the increased phone and digital offer since the pandemic that the outreach services in Cromer, Sheringham and Stalham will not continue. This will generate a budget saving in terms of volunteer expenses.
- 3.5 There is a need for generic IAA services in Fakenham (2 days) at an agreed location, North Walsham (5 days) and Holt (2 days) in dedicated offices.
- 3.6 To enable the delivery of this service in North Norfolk and also contribute towards the generic expansion of the digital and phone Norfolk CA have advised a grant from NNDC of £55, 000 for the period 1st April 2021 – 31st March 2022 would be required.
- 3.7 Subject to Cabinet approval of the recommendation, a grant agreement with Norfolk CA will be written. This will clarify the reporting and monitoring process.

- 3.8 In consultation with the Portfolio Holder of Health and Culture, the remaining IAA budget of £11, 710 will be offered to identified VCSE organisations as a contribution towards specialist IAA service for young people and /or residents who require specialist IAA support.

4. Conclusion

NNDC is committed to ensuring that all residents regardless of age, physical or mental health need or disability have access to appropriate IAA services in North Norfolk.

4.2 The funding for Norfolk CA will ensure the continuation of face to face IAA services in three key towns across North Norfolk. It will also contribute towards the expansion of the phone and digital offer which will all benefit residents in North Norfolk.

4.3. The reduction in Norfolk CA service cost as a result of ceasing outreach services in areas of low use will enable NNDC to offer funding to other VCSE organisations that provide specialist IAA support to young people or those who are unable to access or be supported by Norfolk CA generic IAA service.

4.4 Norfolk CA are supportive of this approach and are fully committed to continue working in partnership with NNDC in the delivery of IAA services.

5. Implications and Risks

The recommendation will mean that Norfolk CA outreach services in Cromer, Sheringham and Stalham where data shows there is very low use will cease this reducing service costs. This will be mitigated by the increase in phone and digital offer and the offer of funding to VCSE organisations that provide specialist IAA support to young people and /or those that are unable to access or be supported by generic Norfolk CA IAA services.

6. Financial Implications and Risks

There is core funding in the budget of £66,710 towards the provision of IAA services. There is no additional financial resource implication.

7. Sustainability

NCC are currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the IAA services they commission. This will result in a tender process and recommissioned countywide IAA services with potentially different service providers from 1st April 2022. Until the outcome of the tender process is known it is considered that the NNDC IAA grants should only be awarded for one year from 1st April 2021.to 31st March 2022.

8. Equality and Diversity

The allocation of IAA funding to Norfolk CA and other specialist IAA providers will increase access to IAA by young people and those that are unable to access or be supported by generic Norfolk CA IAA services.

9. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

9.1 There are no Crime and Disorder considerations