

	Officer Key Decision
	Report to the Corporate Director of Partnerships, Housing & Residents Services
	Lead Cabinet Member Resident Support and Culture
AUTHORITY TO TENDER CONTRACT FOR DEBT ADVICE SERVICES	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key Decision
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Name: Marta Portalska Job Title: Change and Improvement Project Manager Email: marta.portalska@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report concerns authority to tender for a contract for the delivery of the Debt Advice Service. This report requests approval to invite tenders in respect of procurement of a Debt Advice Service as required by Contract Standing Orders 88 and 89.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That the Corporate Director of Partnerships, Housing & Residents Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resident Support and Culture:

- 2.1 Approves inviting tenders for the Contract for the delivery of the Debt Advice Service on the basis of the pre - tender considerations set out in paragraph 3.11 of the report.
- 2.2 Approves Officers evaluating the tenders referred to in 2.1 above on the basis of the evaluation criteria set out in section iv of paragraph 3.11 of the report.

3.0 Detail

Contribution to Borough Plan Priorities & Strategic Context

- 3.1 The pilot projects support the Brent Borough Plan 2023 – 2027 priorities of 'Thriving Communities', 'A Healthier Brent' and 'Prosperity and Stability in Brent', including a focus on achieving the desired outcome of 'Easing the Cost-of-Living Crisis' for our residents.

<https://www.brent.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/strategies-priorities-and-policies>

Background

- 3.2 The Council requires the provision of Debt Advice Services. Officers have considered whether the Debt Advice Services can be provided by the council itself but have concluded that the Debt Advice Services is best provided by a contractor.
- 3.3 The Council is currently grant funding the delivery of a specialist debt advice service within the Brent Hubs, in partnership with Advice 4 Renters. The debt advice service has operated since February 2023 as a pilot project. Following a successful initial 6 months, the pilot was extended and current pilot arrangements will continue until end of August 2024.
- 3.4 This report requests approval from the Corporate Director of Partnerships, Housing & Residents Services to invite tenders for the delivery of a Debt Advice Service from 1st September 2024, on a 5 year contract term on a 3+1+1 basis.
- 3.5 Whilst the Council doesn't have a statutory duty to provide this service, it is designed to support residents with the impacts of the Cost of Living crisis by providing support with debt related issues and issuing of debt relief orders.
- 3.6 The Council completed an Outcomes Based Review (OBR) in 2022, exploring impacts of the Cost-of-Living crisis. Based on insights and in collaboration with 80+ stakeholders, several pilot projects were identified to be taken forward for development to best support residents through the ongoing crisis. One of the key themes identified was a need for specialist support within the borough, including debt and immigration advice.
- 3.7 The Debt Advice Service was taken forward as a pilot project, commencing in February 2023 and delivered by Advice 4 Renters. The project entails 2 dedicated debt advisors, situated across Brent Council's existing network of Brent Hubs to provide dedicated debt related advice, income maximisations reviews and ability to issue debt relief orders. Debt advisors have capacity to see approximately 15 clients per week (some may be returning clients).

- 3.8 Between February 2023 and January 2024 the pilot service supported 271 residents with debt relief orders, applications to the Brent RSF and other grant schemes, disputing of inaccurate bills, affordable repayment plans and others.
- 3.9 On 5th February 2024, Cabinet approved proposals to move to a new model of support in 2024/2025, focused on moving away from providing short-term financial assistance and focussing on more sustainable long-term outcomes. The ambition is to provide a multifaceted programme including the space, tools and knowledge to support residents to improve their situation and increase opportunities in the longer-term, reducing long-term dependency on services. The approved model includes continuing the delivery of specialist support to vulnerable residents in the borough. This includes a debt advice service.
- 3.10 The contract will be valued at £500,000 on a 5 year term on a 3+1+1 basis, valued at £100,000 per year. The service will be based across the Brent Hubs and the Community Wellbeing Service at the New Millennium Day Centre. Residents presenting at the Brent Hubs will be triaged by a Triage Officer, and referred to a debt advisor if a debt related need is identified. The debt advice service will also receive referrals including from the Brent Resident Support Fund (RSF) form.

Pre-tender Considerations

- 3.11 In accordance with Contract Standing Orders 88 and 89, pre-tender considerations for the procurement of the contract for Debt Advice Services (the “Contract”) have been set out below for the approval of the Corporate Director:

Ref.	Requirement	Response	
(i)	The nature of the services / supplies / works.	Debt Advice Service, to provide residents advice with debt-related matters and issuing of debt relief orders.	
(ii)	The estimated value.	£500,000	
(iii)	The contract term.	5 years (on a 3+1+1 basis)	
(iv)	The tender procedure to be adopted.	Open Tender	
v)	The procurement timetable.		Indicative dates are:
		Invite to tender	3 rd July 2024

Ref.	Requirement	Response	
		Deadline for tender submissions	31st July 2024
		Panel evaluation and shortlist review	31st July – 2 nd August 2024
		Interviews (if any) and Contract award decision	5 th August 2024
		Report recommending Contract award circulated internally for comment	12 th August 2024
		Corporate Director approval	19 th August 2024
		[Minimum 10 calendar day standstill period – notification issued to all tenderers and additional debriefing of unsuccessful tenderers (contracts covered by the full requirements of PCR 2015 only)]	19 th August – 30 th August 2024
		Contract Mobilisation and start date	01 September 2024
		Contract start date	01 October 2024
(vi)	The evaluation criteria and process.	<p>Stage 1: At selection stage shortlists are to be drawn up in accordance with the Council's Contract Procurement and Management Guidelines by the use of a selection questionnaire to identify organisations meeting the Council's financial standing requirements, technical capacity and technical expertise.</p> <p>Stage 2: At tender evaluation stage, the panel will evaluate the tenders against the following criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60% of points awarded for Quality • 30% of points awarded for Price • 10% of points awarded for Social Value 	

Ref.	Requirement	Response
		The highest ranked tenderer will be recommended for the forward of contract.
(vii)	Any business risks associated with entering the contract.	No specific business risks are considered to be associated with entering into the proposed Contract. Financial Services and Legal Services have been consulted concerning this Contract
(viii)	The Council's Best Value duties.	Adoption of an Open Procedure will allow the Council to open the opportunity to the market and ensure best value for money. 10% of the weighting will be for Social Value
(ix)	Consideration of Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012	The Council is under duty pursuant to the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 ("the Social Value Act") to consider how services being procured might improve the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area; how, in conducting the procurement process, the Council might act with a view to securing that improvement; and whether the Council should undertake consultation. Officers have had regard to considerations contained in the Social Value Act in relation to the procurement and social value forms 10% of the evaluation score.
(x)	Any staffing implications, including TUPE and pensions.	See section 9 below.
(xi)	The relevant financial, legal and other considerations.	See Financial Considerations at Sections 5 and Legal Considerations at Section 6 below.
(xii)	Sustainability	There are no negative sustainability implications and the contract will be Procured in line with the Sustainable Procurement Policy.
(xiii)	Key Performance Indicators / Outcomes	Appropriate Key Performance Indicators / Outcomes will be included in the Contract.
(xiv)	London Living Wage	The Contract will require the payment of the London Living Wage
(xv)	Contract Management	A contract manager will be appointed and appropriate contract management provisions will be included in the Contract.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 The Cost-of-Living Outcomes Based Review process included early stakeholder and community engagement, and co-development of prototype ideas with key stakeholders. The Lead Member and Members are regularly updated on the actions the Council is taking to mitigate the impact of the Cost-of-Living crisis on Brent residents.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 The estimated value of this service contract will be capped at £300,000 across 3 years, with potential for a 2 year extension at an additional £100,000 annually.

5.2 It is anticipated that the cost of the Contract will be funded from a combination of Borough Plan funding and funding throughout the 3 years and potential extensions, as set out in section 6 of the background paper.

5.3 There will be no charges made to residents for this service.

6.0 Legal Considerations

6.1 The estimated value of the proposed Contract is above the threshold for Services under the Public Procurement Regulations 2015 (the "PCR 2015") and the procurement is therefore governed by the PCR 2015.

6.2 The procurement is subject to the Council's own Standing Orders and Financial Regulations in respect of Medium Value Contracts given the procurement is valued at £500,000. For Medium Value Contracts, the Corporate Director must approve the pre-tender considerations set out in paragraph 3.11 above (Contract Standing Order 89) and the inviting of tenders (Contract Standing Order 88).

6.3 The tendering process is being undertaken in accordance with Contract Standing Order 95 and the PCR 2015. Once the tendering process is undertaken, Officers will report back to the Corporate Director in accordance with Contract Standing Orders, explaining the process undertaken in tendering the Contract and recommending award.

6.4 As this procurement is subject to the full application of the PCR 2015, the Council must observe the requirements of the mandatory minimum 10 calendar standstill period imposed by the PCR 2015 before the Contract can be awarded. The requirements include notifying all tenderers in writing of the Council's decision to award and providing additional debrief information to unsuccessful tenderers on receipt of a written request. The standstill period provides unsuccessful tenderers with an opportunity to challenge the Council's award decision if such challenge is justifiable. However if no challenge or successful challenge is brought during the period, at the end of the standstill period the

Council can issue a letter of acceptance to the successful tenderer and the Contract may commence.

- 6.5 Officers have set out in section 9.1 that the proposed services will be provided by external contractors. As such, the proposed procurement process is unlikely to have a direct impact on Council staff. There are likely to be TUPE implications as a result of the procurement process due to a continuation of services from the current contract and the new Contract being procured. In this respect, Officers have set out in section 9.2 how it would manage any TUPE issues that might arise as a result of this procurement process.
- 6.6 As the decision that is being sought here is a Key Decision, the decision is subject to a 5 clear day call-in period and Brent will undertake standstill period concurrently. The decision to award may not be implemented until after expiry of the call-in period provided that no call in has been made.
- 6.7 As the decision that is being sought here is a Key Decision, the decision may not be taken by the Corporate Director unless this matter has been published on the Forward Plan. The Key Decision must be published on the Forward Plan (Paragraph 30 of the Access to information rules) and must be included on the Forward Plan not less than 28 days before the decision is to be made. (Paragraph 34 of the Access to Information Rules). The decision in relation to this report will then be published which will commence a 5 day call-in period before the decision can be implemented.

7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

- 7.1 Pursuant to s149 Equality Act 2010 (the “Public Sector Equality Duty”), the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,
- 7.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.3 Having due regard involves the need to enquire into whether and how a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic and the need to consider taking steps to meet the needs of persons who share a protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it. This includes removing or minimising

disadvantages suffered by persons who share a protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic.

7.4 There is no prescribed manner in which the council must exercise its public sector equality duty but having an adequate evidence base for its decision is necessary.

7.5 The proposals in this report have been subject to screening and officers believe that there are no adverse equality implications.

7.6 The proposals in this report have been subject to screening and officers believe that there are no adverse health equalities implications. Support with debt-related issues may improve resident's situations, which could have positive impacts on their health and wellbeing.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 There are none at this stage.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)

9.1 This service is currently provided by an external contractor and there are no implications for Council staff arising from retendering the Contract.

10.0 Communication Considerations

10.1 The tender will follow an Open Procedure and will be published on the publicly accessible London Tenders Portal. Brent Council and the successful provider will develop materials to communicate availability of the Debt Advice Service.

Related documents:

[5th February 2024, Cabinet Paper – Future of Resident Support Fund \(RSF\) and New Model of Support](#)

Report sign off:

Peter Gadsdon
Corporate Director Partnerships,
Housing and Residents Services