

Cheltenham Borough Council

SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – 2ND APRIL 2007

SINGLE ADVICE CONTRACT

Report from the Chair of the Working Party established by Overview and Scrutiny to examine the justification for the creation of a single contract for advice services in Cheltenham.

1. Executive Summary and recommendation

- 1.1. O&S established a 3 member working party on 10th January to look at “the justification for the creation of a single advice agency – and if it is justified, the best way it can be achieved”. This was in response to the Cabinet accepting a paper entitled ‘Single Advice and Benefits Contract for Cheltenham’ at its meeting of 12th December 2006 which proposed that instead of having four agencies funded separately to provide advice for residents of the town, a single contract should be created to deal with Housing and Benefits Advice.
- 1.2. The working party consisted of Cllrs Webster (Chair), Mrs Driver and Mrs Franklin.
- 1.3. The following terms of reference were agreed by the working party and envisaged a two stage process:

“The review group to have an initial meeting on Monday 22nd January 2007 with subsequent meetings as and when required and will make a final report back to O&S by 2 April 2007 and then possibly to Cabinet or full Council. (the words full Council’ were the subject of disagreement and were subject to legal advice being sought – which was duly done)

Stage 1

To review the:

- *concept and justification for a single advice contract in Cheltenham*
- *facts and figures supporting the concept*
- *time scales and impact on current offers of grant*

After Stage 1 the group would report back to O&S to decide whether or not to move to Stage 2, or any other course of action.

Stage 2

This will involve working with the Procurement Team to review the development of a draft outline contract, its specification and measurement and then to report back to O&S.

The review group will make recommendations to the Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee as to the way in which the contract should be constructed and financed and, at a later stage, how the contract should be specified and performance managed.

1.4. The full report and an executive summary are attached, and were produced following an analysis of the data and interviews of the 4 organisations affected.

1.5. The final report concluded that:

“The justification for the report to Cabinet relating to a ‘Single Housing and Benefits Advice Contract for Cheltenham’ is open to debate. Unless money is the dominant factor a better approach would be to enhance Partnership working between the existing agencies clearly indicating who does what and when.

If a contract is opted for, then it needs to be very careful what it includes because if it gets it wrong, organisations that currently make a substantial contribution to the town will disappear and the people of Cheltenham will suffer.”

1.6. All members of the working party agreed with the options looked at and the conclusions drawn, but Cllr. Driver disagreed with some of the content of the report and (ii) of the recommendations below.

1.7. **I therefore recommend that Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny**

(i) agree the conclusions in the report

(ii) recommend to the Cabinet that it withdraws its original proposals and invites the voluntary sector organisations concerned to make proposals as to how the benefits of closer partnership working can deliver improved advisory services for the town.

Background Papers

Single Housing and Benefits Advice Contract for Cheltenham: Cabinet 12th December 2006

Executive and Full reports of Working Group entitled ‘Single Advice Agency’ March 2007.

Contact

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Scrutiny Function

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny