

Extension to Advice Plymouth contract Briefing Paper – Part I



Background

'Advice Plymouth' is a health, social care, wellbeing and financial inclusion advice and information service for Plymouth residents, currently delivered in partnership by Citizen's Advice Plymouth and Improving Lives Plymouth.

In 2023/24, the Advice Plymouth service supported local residents with a total of 18,647 issues, with the most commonly occurring issues being in relation to: Benefits and Tax Credits, Housing, Employment, Charitable Support and Food Banks, Legal issues, Relationships and Family (e.g. separation, divorce etc), Debt, Utilities, Health and Social Care. The service also supports residents with 'Blue Badge' and Bus Pass applications.

The majority of core service activity is related to financial inclusion and maximising the income of Plymouth residents; for example, in 2023/24, the Advice Plymouth service supported people to successfully claim a total of £5m in previously unclaimed welfare benefits including PIP/DLA, Universal Credit, Attendance Allowance, Carers Allowance and Pension Credit.

In the context of ongoing cost of living pressures, demand for the service is growing. The volume of issues about which people sought information, advice or support in 2023/24 was 13% higher than it had been in 2022/23. In the first nine months of 2024/25 the volume had already reached 20,401 issues, which is 9.4% higher than the whole of 2023/24.

The Advice Plymouth service is principally funded by Plymouth City Council, with the NHS Devon Integrated Care Board (ICB) contributing approximately 10% of the current funding. NHS Devon ICB's contribution enables the service to undertake outreach into clinical settings such as Derriford Hospital, the Glenbourne Unit and Plym Neurological Rehabilitation Unit, so that people can benefit from information, advice and support prior to discharge.

The current Advice Plymouth contract is in place until 31 March 2025.

Future commissioning

Plymouth City Council is currently undertaking a multi-year programme of transformation in relation to social care services for adults in the city; this programme will include a review of the services available locally which aim to prevent people developing social care needs in the first place, and to offer help early on if needs do arise. The scope of this 'prevention and early help review' will be wide ranging and will include the activities currently undertaken by the Advice Plymouth service.

It is anticipated that the prevention and early help review will be completed in 2025/26 and its findings will then inform longer term commissioning intentions for, amongst other things, the provision of health, social care, wellbeing and financial inclusion advice and information in the city.

It is therefore the Council's intention to extend the current Advice Plymouth contract (reference 11134) for a period of two years from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2027, with an option for an additional extension of a further year to 31 March 2028 if required.

The two-year extension will ensure continuity of advice service provision at a time when demand is increasing, and ensure that the longer term commissioning of the service can be fully informed by the findings of the prevention and early help review. The extension will also provide the opportunity to establish the longer-term trend in demand for the Advice Plymouth service, which has seen an increase since both the lifting of Covid19 restrictions and the start of

the current cost of living 'crisis'. The option for a further one-year extension to the current contract will provide the flexibility to ensure continuity of service provision in the event that unforeseen circumstances arise which impact upon the timescale for conclusion of the prevention and early help review.

Alternative options considered and rejected

1. To decommission the Advice Plymouth service on expiry of the current contract on 31 March 2025. This option is rejected as it will not meet the advice provision needs of Plymouth residents.
2. To reprocure the Advice Plymouth contract immediately. This option is rejected as it does not allow the longer-term commissioning intentions for this service to be informed by the findings of the planned review of Plymouth's 'early help' services for adults. Furthermore, if the service was re-procured now, based on current escalating demand, this may not be reflective of the long-term volume of need for the service; the trend in longer term need will be clearer if the service is re-procured following extension of the contract as set out above.