


Decision Maker	Leadership Team	 THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA
Date of Report	17 January 2024	
Forward Plan ref:	KD06529	
Report title	Award of Borough-wide Information, Advice and Guidance Contract April 2024	
Reporting officer	Moira Ugoji, Director of Communities	
Key decision	Yes	
Access to information classification	Public – Part A <i>Part B: Confidential/exempt</i> <i>The Part B of this report is currently exempt from disclosure on the grounds that (i) it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority holding that information) under paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, (ii) it contains information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings under paragraph of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; (iii) and in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.</i>	
Wards	All	

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. This Key Decision responds directly to the Council's efforts in the Council Plan (2023-2027) to transform how people can access advice across the borough and continue to support our community centres, faith centres, charities, and voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners.
- 1.2. External engagement with residents commenced in June 2023 and closed on 30 July 2023 and included a borough-wide survey and two separate workshops with residents to ascertain their Information, Advice and Guidance experience, needs and requirements.
- 1.3. Residents worked with Council officers to co-design the Tender Specification and procurement process; however, this did not have an influence on the method for procurement of the service.

- 1.4. This report marks the end of a competitive process to identify a suitable provider of the borough-wide Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) service. The open market procurement process led to IAG suppliers (including the currently grant-funded IAG providers) to a competitive tender for a 7-year IAG contract arrangement up to £1,016,000. This process was endorsed by the Council's Commercial Assurance Panel (CAP) – outlined in the appended Sourcing Strategy, which is considered exempt from publication.
- 1.5. In July 2023, the Lead Member for Communities agreed to extend the Council's IAG contract with Citizens Advice Kensington and Chelsea (CAKC) and IAG grants under the Voluntary Sector Support Fund (VSSF) for a maximum period of 6-months at a total value of £452,998 within Key Decision [06491](#). This extension from 1 October 2023 to 31 March 2024 was awarded to enable the continued supply of IAG support to residents during the open market procurement timeframe.
- 1.6. Prior to this, in January 2023, the Council agreed to award VSSF grants to Nucleus Legal Advice and North Kensington Law Centre for 6-months at a grant value of £129,541 from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2023. In Key Decision [06357](#) the Council also ringfenced an additional sum of £48,457 for IAG services in the Chelsea Riverside Ward and surrounding area, subsequently awarded to a partnership between Nucleus Legal Advice and CAKC.
- 1.7. In December 2022, the Council agreed to extend the IAG contract with CAKC for 12 months from 1 October 2022 to 30 September 2023 at a contract value of £550,000 under the Key Decision 06313.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. The Leadership Team is recommended to:
 - (i) Agree the award of the Information Advice and Guidance contract to the preferred provider following the procurement process. The preferred provider is the Kensington and Chelsea Advice Partnership (KCAP). The award is for £1,016,000 per annum, inclusive of VAT, for a maximum term of seven years.
 - (ii) Delegate to the Strategic Director of Grenfell Partnerships & Corporate Transformation following consultation with the Lead Member for Communities & Community Safety authority to enter the contract and to exercise any extensions to the contract in due course.

3. REASONS FOR DECISION

- 3.1. In December 2022, Key Decision [06313](#) outlined the Council's intention to procure a borough-wide IAG service that could be delivered through a single contract.

- 3.2. During May and June 2023, the Council facilitated Market Engagement Sessions with 8 IAG providers (including currently funded IAG providers). The feedback from providers confirmed that an open procurement approach was a viable option for the Council to procure a coordinated borough wide IAG service supplied by a single provider and/or consortium of providers.
- 3.3. In July 2023, the Invitation to Tender for the provision of a borough wide IAG service either as a single provider or a consortium of providers was sent to the eight IAG providers (including currently funded IAG providers).
- 3.4. The procurement of a borough wide IAG service delivered through a single provider and/or consortium of providers will enable the Council to join up the existing IAG arrangements so that the IAG offer is more accessible and coordinated for residents. See paragraphs 4.5 and 4.6 for further benefits.
- 3.5. During June-July 2023, the Council facilitated a consultation exercise with residents to understand their IAG needs. These findings informed the IAG Tender Specification and procurement approach.
- 3.6. The Council has awarded short term extensions on its IAG contract and grants since December 2022. Existing arrangements will expire on 31 March 2024 and the Council will not have any contractual arrangements with any provider.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1. Between April 2021 and July 2023, the Council has made six Key Decisions on the contract and grant agreements with providers of Information, Advice and Guidance provision. These agreements cover the delivery period between 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2024. The Key Decisions 05878 Launch of the Voluntary Sector Support Fund in October 2021; 05933 Voluntary Sector Support Fund: Funding and Next Steps; [06313](#) Contract Extension: Citizen's Advice Bureau Kensington and Chelsea; [06357](#) Voluntary Sector Support Fund 2023-24: Funding and Next Steps; and [06491](#) Extension of Contract and Grants Arrangements for Information, Legal Advice and Guidance Services were made to enable the continuity of IAG supply to residents and in parallel partnership to mature so that a borough-wide, coordinated IAG service could be procured. Copies of all Key Decision reports are available on request from governance@rbkc.gov.uk.
- 4.2. Between January 2023 and April 2023, the Council facilitated “soft market” engagement sessions with currently funded IAG providers. These initial enquiries revealed that the IAG market required more time than the projected 6-month timeframe to explore the development of consortia arrangements.
- 4.3. In July 2023, the Lead Member for Communities agreed to extend the contract with CAKC and the grant funding for Nucleus Legal Advice, Kensington Law Centre and the partnership between CAKC / Nucleus Legal Advice for a maximum period of 6

months to allow for the maturation of IAG partnership arrangements and to enable a continued supply of IAG services to residents during the open market procurement timeframe.

- 4.4. Given that a range of providers were already providing IAG services from various locations across the borough, the Council saw the value to residents of a service that is led by a single (lead) supplier under a consortium. Furthermore, the Council spends approximately 45% of its discretionary VCS grant making budget (c£1m per year) on IAG services. It is therefore crucially important that this investment brings about the best value possible for our residents.
- 4.5. The Council wanted to see IAG services being delivered seamlessly, reducing the number of times people are referred between different providers. Our residents do not need to see the myriad back-office arrangements but a single-entry point from which they can access the range of services they need. The Council believes there would be better data sharing, coordination, sharing resources, reduction in duplication, and overall better experience for our residents if there is a single provider leading a partnership approach to providing IAG services.
- 4.6. The single provider model will mean residents can be seen by any one of a number of community-based advice agencies often in their area and in most cases their main point of contact throughout their case. In nearly all cases, the advice provider will know the local area and neighbourhood they are providing advice services in. This will allow a better understanding of need and a tailored approach to resolving cases.

The IAG Service

- 4.7. The IAG Service which will be open to all residents of the borough, will include but not be limited to the provision of:
 - Debt advice (debt written off) and increased income to the value of £3.5 million each year through benefit entitlements including in-work benefits with those who are currently under-claiming.
 - Welfare benefits advice such as Universal Credit, Housing Benefit, Job Seekers Allowance, Discretionary Housing Payment, Winter Fuel Payments, Personal Independence Payments, Childcare Grants, etc.
 - Housing advice on rent arrears, threat of repossessions and court orders, repairs, private sector renting, different types of tenancies, etc.
 - Employment related advice including Employment and Support Allowance, redundancy, discrimination, contractual issues, etc.
 - Other types of support and advice, for example referrals for Adult Social Care Assessment, accessing community-based care including for mental health services, support and advice for parents and carers of children and young people, etc.

Monitoring the IAG Service

- 4.8. A robust contract performance monitoring regime will be put in place to ensure that residents receive a high-quality service that meets their needs. As part of the monitoring regime, service users will be asked to provide their feedback on their experience and whether there are improvements that need to be implemented.
- 4.9. A strong set of key performance indicators (KPIs) will form part of the contract to ensure compliance with the contract. The service provider will make this KPI data available to the Council on a quarterly basis, which will be considered alongside user feedback. Officers hope the services will be well received but understand there have been issues in the past with providers. Officers have included robust KPIs and clauses in the contract to enable the Council to make changes to the provision if necessary and officers will be monitoring complaints closely.

The KPIs will include:

- Number of service users who have had an initial assessment response from the IAG service within 72 hours
 - Number of service users who have received support
 - Number of service users who report easy access to the IAG service
 - Number of service users who report improved problem solving and the ability to navigate different systems which lead to overall improved wellbeing, housing health and financial stability
 - Service users report they are aware of the wide range services available and can make informed personal choices on how to gain help
 - Number of complaints resolved to the satisfaction of the client
- 4.10. The current providers of IAG for the borough have delivered to the following number of people between October 2022 and March 2023 and the Council expects similar uptake of services as a basic target for the 2024 7-year IAG contract arrangement.

Description	Total No. of Service Users	Total No. of Service Users from RBKC	Housing	Employment	Immigration
Nucleus Legal Advice Centre	5,352	5,352	813	265	117
North Kensington Law Centre	1,510	837	45	20	73
Citizens Advice Kensington	2,411	2,411	217	1,140	229

Description	Total No. of Service Users	Total No. of Service Users from RBKC	Housing	Employment	Immigration
and Chelsea					
Total	9,273	8,600	1,075	1,425	419

5. OPTIONS, ANALYSIS AND PROPOSALS

5.1. Following the Invitation to Tender, there was interest from three potential suppliers. Following which, the Council received two consortia bids: one from We Are Digital (WAD); and a bid from Kensington & Chelsea Advice Partnership (KCAP).

The Kensington and Chelsea Advice Partnership

The Kensington and Chelsea Advice Partnership (KCAP) brings together three established legal advice agencies with over 170 years of combined experience of helping residents of Kensington and Chelsea.

Citizens Advice Kensington and Chelsea ([03174842](tel:03174842)), Nucleus Community Action (trading as Nucleus Legal Advice) ([01202541](tel:01202541)) and the North Kensington Law Centre ([01480110](tel:01480110)) are proposing an information, advice and guidance (IAG) offer that brings together the existing knowledge, relationships, experience and the trust that has built up over many decades of support in the borough.

Between partners residents have access to 14 different outreach locations. Since April 2023 the partners have been piloting Help and Support Hubs, at the Chelsea Theatre and Kensington Leisure Centre. These hubs are operated by experienced advisors providing a ‘triage’ to identify issues; are in community settings; and are seeing that some 60% of residents attending have never sought advice before.

We are Digital

We Are Group Holdings (trading as We Ae Group and previously known as We are Digital (WAD)) ([15159009](tel:15159009)) is a social impact organisation with a mission to “drive social value and improve people’s lives through tackling the barriers of exclusion through access to skills, information and advice.”

The group interacts with c25,000 disadvantaged and vulnerable people across the UK to support skills development, increase financial independence and confidence to improve lives. In 2022, WAD delivered an estimated £8.28m in social return on investment across its five main contracts; and 100% of its funding is invested into social welfare projects in the communities it works in.

- 5.2. Assessment of the bids were undertaken in accordance with standard procurement practice guided by a sourcing strategy. A key feature of the strategy was a focus on assessing the bids against Quality of the offer (80%) and Price of the offer (20%).
- 5.3. The assessment included scoring each bid according to criteria that was published as part of the Invitation to Tender (ITT). Officers independently assessed bids and put forward their individual views about their analysis of answers from bidders. This led to a consensus meeting where officers scrutinised individual scores from each of the evaluators and agreed a final score for each bidder.
- 5.4. The service which will start from 1 April 2024 will be subject to a robust performance monitoring regime that includes feedback from users of the service, where the service provider will report progress against key service expectations as set out in the Service Specification advertised at the ITT stage.
- 5.5. Comparisons with other Local Authority IAG contracts have been taken and as an example in Haringey - the contract is awarded for a period of four (4) years commencing from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2026 with an option to extend for a further period or periods of up to a total of three (3) years and the contract sum for the initial period of 4 years will be £3,059,100 inclusive of London Living Wage (LLW). In a favourable comparison, RBKC have allocated £2,196,996 for provision of borough-wide Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) services during 2022 to March 2025 and £1,016,000 per annum from April 2025 to March 2031.

6. CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 6.1. Engagement among Council officers across departments confirms the need for adequate IAG service provision to mitigate against the cost-of-living crisis. Support for IAG provision further complements the other measures the Council is leading on e.g. the Cost of Living Support Hub

Engagement with Residents in Procurement Design and Assessment of Tenders

- 6.2. The Council has and will engage and collaborate with residents through the three stages of the letting of the contract
 - Tender specification design (June and July 2023)
 - Technical assessment of procurement bids (October to November 2023)
 - Mobilisation of IAG contract (January to March 2024)
- 6.3. A panel of residents from the north, middle and south of the borough joined officers to undertake the technical assessment of the IAG bids. However, due to residents' illness and the application of procurement regulation principles rules that led to the exclusion of some members of the panel, the Council was unable to continue with resident involvement in this particular part of the procurement process. We have

received constructive feedback from the residents who were involved on how the process can be improved for the future and this is being taken into account as part of a review of the technical process.

- 6.4. The Council will collaborate with residents during the mobilisation of the contract to ensure contracted delivery of the IAG provision across the borough is tailored to and meets the needs of residents at a neighbourhood level.

Engagement with the VCS

- 6.5. The Council has maintained ongoing engagement with Citizens Advice Kensington & Chelsea, Nucleus Legal Advice and North Kensington Law Centre making all organisations aware of the contract. This engagement has contributed to the Council's position that there is ongoing need in the borough for IAG services.
- 6.6. During the period of May and June 2023 the Council facilitated formal and informal market engagement meetings with IAG suppliers, including currently funded IAG providers. The findings from these meetings have been used to inform the procurement approach, Tender Specification and resident engagement process.
- 6.7. Engagement and publicity activity was undertaken to provide equal opportunity of access to IAG providers during the procurement process, ahead of the borough-wide contract starting 1 April 2024.
- 6.8. The Council and partners heard from over 30 VCS organisations at last year's Cost of Living Summit. This IAG contract secures support for the borough's vulnerable residents impacted by the Cost-of-Living crisis for up to seven years with free independent advice on areas such welfare benefits, debt relief and recovery, etc. as detailed in paragraph 4.7.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The recommendation under this report is to approve the selection of Kensington and Chelsea Advice Partnership, led by Citizens Advice Kensington and Chelsea for a borough wide single IAG service for a term of five years with an option to extend for a maximum of an additional two years. The proposed contract is a contract for Services as defined under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (PCR) which fall under the Light Touch Regime of the PCR.
- 7.2. The procurement has been run as an open tender as set out in the Sourcing Strategy. In addition to the requirements of the PCR, the Council is required to comply with its own contract regulations including the recommendation to award being endorsed by the Commercial Assurance Panel and the Executive Director.
- 7.3. Legal Services will support the preparation and execution of the contract based on the Council's standard terms and conditions.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. The annual budget of up to £1,016,000 for the IAG service is made up of £906,000 from the Communities Department (VCS and Community Partnerships base budget) and £110,000 from Adult Social Care.

9. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. The Communities Directorate will allocate staff time to monitor the contract arrangement(s) and report into the Council's management processes. This will be under review during the lifetime of the contract (7 years).
- 9.2. Any changes to the above or changes in the contract will be reviewed at the time of the change and relevant human resources implications considered.

10. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. A full Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken as part of the Key Decision 05878 to launch the VSSF also covering the initial direct award to CAKC in 2021-22. The EqIA was updated for Key Decision [06313](#) to extend the contract to CAKC and Key Decision [06357](#) awarding grants und the VSSF in 2023-24.
- 10.2. An initial screening has been undertaken for the recommendations in this report followed by a full EqIA as appended in **Appendix A**.
- 10.3. The EqIA has not identified any negative impacts of the award on the nine protected characteristics as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. There are two broader positive effects identified for (i) people on low incomes or living in poverty; and (ii) people living in the most deprived areas of Kensington and Chelsea.

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