Information and Advice

Context

This stream will provide specialist, generalist and children’s specific information and advice. It covers three services which are currently funded – adults and children’s information and advice currently funded via grants and housing information and advice which is currently funded via a contract.

The Care Act acknowledges that information and advice is fundamental to enabling people, carers and families to take control of, and make well-informed choices about, their care and support and how they fund it. It helps to promote people’s wellbeing by increasing their ability to exercise choice and control, and is a vital in preventing or delaying people’s need for care and support.

Under the Children & Families Act 2014, local authorities are required to provide information advice and support to families of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Parents and carers of children with SEN, disabilities or complex health needs require specialist additional support within the community that provides advice and guidance practically and emotionally to help come to terms with and deal with the many challenges that they face.

Accessible information, advice, signposting and customer representation service is a vital component of the Council’s Better Lives Programme and Ealing Local Offer, as it empowers people to take control of their personal situation, can lead to reduced anxiety and improved health and wellbeing; and ultimately results in less intervention and less unnecessary referrals to statutory services.

Note: Advocacy is contracted separately outside of this programme. Customer representation is a less formal support service, however is just as vital for people who find it difficult to understand or use information given; and need support communicating their views and needs; as well as help to liaise with formal services to access the best support.

Budget

The proposed budget for the provision of information and advice services is £0.515m per year for 4 years (2019/20 to 2022/23) subject to annual approval.

Proposed funding priorities

For adults, the priority is information, advice, signposting and customer representation to support people to keep independent, safe and well.

There is a Care Act requirement to meet the information, advice and customer representation needs of the following groups:-

- people with sensory impairments, such as visual impairment, deafblind and hearing impaired
- people who do not have English as a first language
- people who are socially isolated
- people whose disabilities limit their physical mobility
- people with learning disabilities
- people with mental health problems
The services will provide information and advice on adult social care and health provision, housing issues, welfare benefits, money management, debt, counselling, consumer protection, education, employment, family and domestic issues, immigration, carers’ services and benefits, accessing independent financial advice, including supporting people with the completion of appropriate forms for other national and local services.

It is proposed that funding will be via contracted services.

For children, the priority is targeted information and support services for families of children with disabilities and complex health needs. The service will target all families of children with disabilities providing proactive and preventative services such as; brief information on welfare benefits and housing, focusing on sign posting to other services. The services will also provide information and support to parents regarding their child’s diagnosis and disability via the development of peer and self-advocacy groups and training sessions.

It is proposed that funding for specialist information and advice for children will continue as a grant. The service will be required to work in partnership with the wider generalist information and advice services.

**Main changes from 2015/19 funding arrangements**

Previously funding was allocated for Information and Advice work from 3 separate sources – Adults Services, Children’s Services and Housing Services.

- Adult Services grant was offered in two separate pots to meet the duties set out in the Care Act.
- Housing Services contracts a Generalist Legal Advice Service. This service focused particularly on socially excluded and vulnerable people; and the high need and demand areas of debt, housing and welfare benefits; as well as community care, consumer protection, education, employment, domestic issues and immigration.
- The Children’s specific grant was allocated to three separate services providing; one to one support for all families of children with disabilities, a targeted programme for families of children 0-5 and an information website.
  - Grant priority will not include services such as the website due to the similarities and duplication with Ealing Local Offer website. To mitigate the closure of Ealing HELP, Ealing Council will work with Ealing MENCAP, during the final year of current grant funding to ensuring that Ealing Local Offer is developed and improved in line with the DfE SEND requirements.

The specifications for the Adults and Housing funded services overlap significantly. Therefore it is proposed to provide one single service to cover all aspects of information and advice, signposting and customer representation for all of Ealing’s communities, however still with particular reference to social care and disadvantaged people as required by the Care Act and for children and young people with disabilities and their families.

Due to the proposed monetary value of the service and the key statutory requirements it is proposed to contract this service. Although funding via a contract cannot be ring-fenced around the voluntary sector it is not anticipated that the VCS will be unfairly disadvantaged by this change especially as the current housing information and advice service is delivered by a VCS organisation. It is anticipated that service providers may wish to work as a consortium to deliver the range and depth of information and advice service required.

Due to the nature and specialist support and advice required for children and young people with disabilities it is proposed to continue to grant fund very specialist and targeted
information advice and support services supporting families across the borough, meeting the range of needs and ages.