

ITEM 7

MINUTE EXTRACT

Time began 6.00pm

Time ended 6.38pm

COUNCIL CABINET 15 DECEMBER 2009

Present: Councillor Jones (Chair)
Councillors Allen, Carr, Naitta and Troup

In attendance Councillors Holmes and Williamson

This record of decisions was published on 17 December 2009. The key decisions set out in this record will come into force and may be implemented on the expiry of five clear days unless a key decision is called in.

143/09 Demand for Community Legal Advice Services in the City

The Council Cabinet considered a report on Demand for Community Legal Action Services in the City. The report was presented with the aim of providing Cabinet an evidence base from which to consider a request from the Community Commission to increase the Council's investment to the Community Legal Advice Centre (CLAC) for triage staff during 2010/11. Advice services were provided on a range of subjects including, employment, debt and welfare benefits. This advice was available to all citizens of Derby although priority was given to people from certain wards and people who could be categorised as disadvantaged. The supporting information section showed a forecasted increase in demand for generalist advice services through the CLAC of 22% in 2009/10 relative to 2008/9. In absolute terms the service was likely to see an additional 1683 people in 2009/10 relative to 2008/9. Derby Advice had also experienced an increase in demand for its services, working in conjunction with the CLAC to meet the advice needs of the city. The triage system in operation at the CLAC could potentially be a bottleneck in the smooth and timely running of the service. However, the CLAC had adequate "overflow" measures in place for this not to be the case. There had been no case presented for investing further resource in the triage system. The Legal Service Commission had invested an additional £89k in 2009/10 and would do so again in 2010/11 for the specialist advice service. In order to support the CLAC with additional demand, the generalist service capacity could be boosted through the use of trained volunteers to deal with peaks in demand. The advice services in Derby were performing particularly well at present. We should continue to monitor the CLAC advice service closely to ensure that if demand was forecast to continue to increase to saturation levels we could respond to this in a timely manner. Working closely together the CLAC and the Council could time any intervention in a manner that avoided service deficits for the public. The demand for advice services nationally and regionally was in line with the Derby experience.

Options Considered

There were no options.

Decision

1. To note the level of demand for advice services in Derby and that the current level of demand was expected to be sustained over the next 16 months to the end of the current term of the CLAC contract at the end of March 2011.
2. To note the excellent work of the CLAC and Derby Advice in supporting the people of Derby with their advice needs and to commend the CLAC for over achieving their target figures and proactive management of the advice service.
3. To acknowledge the Community Commission for their support of advice services and highlighting the excellent work of the CLAC.
4. To agree to keep the situation at the CLAC under review and Commission an update report on the whole service in six months time.

Reasons

1. On 16 September the Community Commission considered a report on the Derby Community Legal Advice Centre and Derby Advice. Subsequently Council Cabinet then considered a report from the Community Commission regarding the Derby CLAC and Derby Advice on the 27 October. The Community Commission asked Council Cabinet to increase the Council's financial support for the Derby CLAC, to enable the employment of two additional Triage workers during 2010/11, at a cost of £40,000.
2. There was clear evidence that demand for advice services in Derby was higher than last year and significantly higher than where it had been historically.
3. The current performance information showed that advice services were performing extremely well even at the current high levels of demand.
4. There was a need to keep the situation under review to ensure there was not an unmanageable continued increase in demand for the whole system.
5. One year, additional investment in the triage element of the CLAC system at this point in time was not merited as there were management measures in place to deal with irregular peaks in demand at the front end of the service, which operate effectively. There may be potential for further streamlining the automated queuing system.

(Having declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the above item Councillor Troup left the meeting during the discussion and voting thereon.)

- Extract ends -