

Wiltshire Council

Health Select Committee

16 March 2022

Rapid Scrutiny Exercise: Day care provision: Open framework tender; lunch and friendship clubs

Purpose

1. To present the rapid scrutiny (RS) findings of the transformation proposals for council grant funded luncheon and friendship clubs.

Background

2. Full Council on 15 February 2022 invited Overview and Scrutiny (OS) to consider the transformation proposals for grant funded lunch and friendship clubs.
3. As part of legacy arrangements, several friendship and luncheon clubs have received grants from the council, totalling around £0.2m per annum. The approved 2022-23 budget included a proposal to reduce these payments by 50% for 2022-23, and by the remaining 50% in 2023/24.
4. From April 2022, the clubs will have the opportunity to bid to join a list of council vetted providers of day care as members of a list known as an open framework. This is part of a wider transformation of day opportunities, to offer increased choice and control for those receiving day care. Organisations on the list would be available to provide council-funded day opportunity placements to people assessed under the Care Act, as well.
5. The 2022-23 budget for day opportunities provided through the open framework is approximately £1.5 million. The friendship and luncheon clubs to secure revenue from this budget will need to meet the council's vetting requirements and look to attract people assessed as requiring a day opportunity.
6. The council's commissioning and procurement leads are scheduled to host an engagement event with the grant funded clubs and groups on 9 March 2022. In response, it was agreed by the Chairs of the Management Committee and Health Select Committee to hold a RS exercise in advance of this date.
7. The RS took place exercise on 2 March 2022. Members were given a presentation of the proposals for clubs and groups, questions followed.

Terms of Reference (ToRs)

8.

- A) **Rationale for change** – to briefly revisit the reasons for transformation of the historic grant funding arrangements for luncheon and friendship clubs.
- B) **Communication**
 - to explore how the council intends to engage and communicate with the clubs to ensure understanding of the transformation proposals and future opportunities
 - to ensure that communication around the tender encourages geographical consistency in the future provision across the county.
- C) **Future funding criteria** – to establish what funding opportunities will be available for users with/without a formal social care assessment as part of the transformation plans.
- D) **Overview of an open framework**
 - to consider what is meant by a light-touch open framework and to seek reassurance that the process will be fully inclusive to the voluntary and community sectors
 - to consider whether the framework includes a revolving door for any new bidders or resubmissions following unsuccessful bids
- E) **Sharing best practice** – to consider any potential role the council has in facilitating the voluntary sector in this area by encouraging the sharing of best practice e.g., volunteer recruitment.

Membership

- 9. Cllr Johnny Kidney (Lead member)
 - Cllr David Bowler
 - Cllr Gordon King
 - Cllr Jerry Kunkler
 - Cllr Pip Ridout
 - Cllr Graham Wright
 - Cllr David Vigar

Witnesses

- 10. Cllr Richard Clewer (Leader)
 - Cllr Jane Davies - (Cabinet Member: Adult Social Care)
 - Cllr Mike Sankey – (observing)
 - Lucy Townsend (Corporate Director- People)
 - Helen Jones (Director Procurement & Commissioning)
 - Robert Holman – Commissioning Manager – Transformation
 - Victoria Bayley – Head of Commissioning
 - Karen Wade – Senior Commissioner
 - Nick Buchanan – Procurement lead

Summary of findings

11. The grants to the friendship groups and luncheon clubs were legacy arrangements initiated by Wiltshire's former district councils. It was understood that no new groups had joined the list since pre- May 2009.
12. The council funded 32 luncheon and friendship clubs. This had reduced from 38 because of the impacts of the pandemic. Funding arrangements with clubs varied considerably, with grants to individual groups ranging from £37,686.06 to £893.48. Five community areas did not benefit from any funding (BoA, Calne, Corsham, Tidworth, Warminster). In several areas there are luncheon clubs for elderly people and other organisations with potential to offer day care that do not receive a council grant but perform a similar function to the grant-supported clubs.
13. Data was unavailable on the number of people accessing the luncheon and friendship clubs with/without a current care assessment. Using local examples scrutiny councillors highlighted that many of the members do not currently have assessments. Concern was raised that attendance at the clubs may have masked a potential care need. In response, the organisations were being made aware of the council's Contact and Referral service, the gateway to securing a formal care assessment.
14. Members challenged whether the £1.5m budget would be sufficient, particularly if the numbers of people with a care assessment increased. Confirmation was given that adult social care (ASC) was a demand driven service and that the budget would be managed carefully, and new service users would be given open access to opportunities.
15. An engagement event had been organised with the clubs/groups on 9 March to communicate the future proposals around day opportunities. At the time of the meeting, over twenty groups had accepted the invite, with officers continuing to encourage even wider participation. Members felt it imperative that communication at this event was in 'plain-English' to avoid losing potential community providers, intimidated by technical and formal language.
16. Members were told that the process to join the list of future providers (the framework) had been made as user friendly as possible. The clubs would be required to complete a questionnaire, with many simple yes/no answers. IT Support would also be available to help use the council's preferred procurement platform, Pro-contract. The framework would remain open indefinitely for new applications or resubmissions, hence the terminology 'an open framework'. The emphasis of the transformation was to encourage a well distributed countywide offer.

17. In parallel, members were introduced to the process that customers with a care assessment would follow:

- Step 1 – individual is given an assessment where their needs and preferences are recorded.
- Step 2 - suitable services are identified, with one selected from a combination based upon customer preference and price.
- Step 3 - a formal agreement (known as a Confirmation of Service Agreement – COSA) between the council and the selected provider is agreed. This contract captures the specifics of required support and provides assurance to the provider on what funds they will receive.

18. It was emphasised to the members that joining the list of providers would not guarantee business. To secure placements the offer would need to be attractive to encourage people to want to attend. The new model also offered the opportunity to continue to cater for those without an assessment who pay their own fees for lunches and activities, including those who are carers themselves.

19. Confirmation was given to members that people with a care assessment who were happy with their current placements would be able to remain with their current group where that offer remained appropriate and was on the framework.

20. By moving to a new contract management arrangement, the intention was to ensure an acceptable quality of service, introduce a mechanism to address any issues and increase certainty for both providers and users.

21. Subject to Cabinet approval the timeline for the framework procurement was as below; previous experience from similar exercises suggested that approximately two thirds of the 32 existing grant recipients would be expected to join the framework. The 50% grant awarded for 2022-23 was intended to provide a buffer to protect these groups as they made the transition to the new arrangements, with its subsequent revenue generation potential from early July 2022.

Event	Proposed date
Cabinet	29 March 2022
Open framework open for applications	Mid-April 2022
Initial submission period	Mid-April to mid-May 2022
Open framework temporarily closed for initial evaluation of applications	Mid-May 2022
Open framework re-opens	Mid-June 2022
First direct awards are made	Late-June or early-July 2022

22. Members were initially concerned that the proposals would require all voluntary groups, including those currently not grant-funded, to join the framework to continue: for example, a luncheon club that had been operating without a council grant, supporting individuals without a care assessment. Confirmation was given that the council very much encouraged the continuation of voluntary activity. However, if a group did wish to provide an offer for care assessed residents, then they would need to be part of the framework.
23. Members were introduced to some potential funding streams that were available to voluntary groups that may not wish to be part of the framework, including the Morrison's Foundation and Asda Foundation. The community engagement managers (CEMs) were a tool available to the community groups to identify potential alternative funding sources. It was noted by some members that securing community grant funding was an extremely competitive process.
24. Health and Wellbeing Funding was also available from the area boards, although some concern was raised that this was not based upon population and was fixed at £7,700 per community.
25. Members were also concerned that the costs associated with providing a club would be prohibitive when a provider determined their rates. For example, a group using a village hall with high rental costs. It would be for the provider to determine their rates, which would have to reflect costs such as staff and buildings. Reassurance was given that people would not be asked to travel longer distances to access activities because rates were lower.
26. Members learnt that the focus going forward was not necessarily about buildings but would be increasingly community orientated. The example of [gig buddies](#) was given, where people with a learning disability are matched to a volunteer to access activities such as music concerts.

Conclusion

27. The RS exercise has established the historic funding arrangements for luncheon and friendship clubs, that are ending over two years, and the opportunities going forward. To secure ongoing funds from the council, the clubs will need to become day care providers for those assessed under the Care Act as well as community groups catering for those not so assessed. To do this, they will need to evolve to embrace the transformation taking place within day opportunities, underpinned by the new open framework. The organisations will need to be attractive to customers, competitively priced, and aspire to attract self-funders. It is anticipated that approximately two thirds will choose to bid to join the framework.

The 50% grant buffer was seen as essential to support organisations through the transition to the first direct awards in July 2022.

It was felt the use of plain English was key to maximise the numbers who saw this change as an opportunity rather than a restriction on operations.

By introducing a more rigorous contract management arrangement with a finite budget, concerns were raised that the available funds could be insufficient. Commitment was given that newly assessed customers would be given open access to opportunities, but members felt that ongoing scrutiny of this area was a necessity, and this has been addressed within the recommendations.

For the grant recipients who choose to not join the framework but wish to continue providing a community offer, the role of the council's CEMs in offering support to identify and access alternative funding streams was seen as paramount. Future communication with the clubs and groups should look to raise awareness of this support avenue.

Recommendations

28. The Health Select Committee (HSC) is asked to approve:

- a) That the luncheon and friendship clubs be given practical council support, including use of Pro-Contract, if they decide to bid to be placed on the new open framework;
- b) That all future communications with the luncheon and friendship clubs is underpinned by the use of plain English, including the 9 March engagement event;
- c) That the COSA agreements between the council and successful bidders provide certainty of funding for those individuals over a reasonable period;
- d) That the council through its commissioning and community engagement team communicate to all 32 clubs the information shared with members on alternative funding sources;

- e) That the council use all possible means of communicating the tender opportunity to clubs and organisations not currently receiving day care funding or grant funding – including community lunch clubs and innovative providers such as music clubs, book clubs and ‘gig buddies’;
- f) That the Health Select Committee invite an update on the effectiveness of the new framework at its September and November 2022 meetings, including a focus on spend to date, outcomes achieved and geographic coverage.

Cllr Johnny Kidney, lead member for the rapid scrutiny exercise

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Appendices None

Background documents None