

# WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

## STATEMENT OF DECISION

**SUBJECT: WESTMINSTER ADVICE PARTNERSHIP - CONTRACT EXTENSION**

Notice is hereby given that **Councillor Aicha Less, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Public Protection** has made the following executive decision on the above-mentioned subject for the reasons set out below.

### Summary of Decision

This report sets out the rationale for continuing this contract by directly awarding a new contract to Westminster CAB for the Westminster Advice service without competition. There will be no material changes to the existing contract services or to the terms and conditions of contract.

The contract is planned to commence on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 2023 for a period of up to 24 months. The contract value will be £2,568,000 over the 24-month period. This equates to the same value as the old contract, plus an agreed 7% inflationary uplift funded from existing sources of funding within the council.

### Reasons for Decision

While undertaking a review of the current Advice Services contract to inform the recommissioning and re-procurement of this service, numerous gaps in legal services support were highlighted as was significant need from residents in the borough to access better advice services. It is therefore necessary to further review the legal services available in the borough with all existing contracts providing legal aid being appropriately reviewed to either be included in the next specification of this service or to provide a rationale for being out of scope.

The Fairness and Equality Review Group, formed as part of the Future of Westminster Commission made a number of recommendations on advice services which will be reflected in the new model and re-procurement of these services.

The cost-of-living crisis has had a significant impact on the current advice contract to date. There has been rapidly changing demand for provision, with additional investment made to this contract from the Cost-of-Living budget during 2022. With the continuing uncertain economic climate and unclear support from central government, it is difficult to assess the rate and duration of changes to demand, and whether additional funding support may be needed for this service. In addition, the specification now could well be different in two years' time, as the economy changes and there is the potential for central government change as well.

A number of same language advice services have recently been commissioned through a Cost-of-Living grants programme. There is merit in letting these services develop and to ascertain whether they sit more meaningfully in this main advice services contract or separately with specific VCS organisations.

All of these external factors, coupled with the fact the current contract is performing well, adds to the rationale to not re-procure these services until 2024.

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**Implementation Date:** 09 August 2023

**Reference:** CPP23-01