

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Head of Employee and Customer Services
to Leadership Panel
of 31 October 2017**

Subject: Staffing Changes within the Information and Advice Hub

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on progress to establish an Information and Advice Hub and to seek approval to change staffing arrangements to provide an enhanced, comprehensive and holistic information and advice service for customers.

2. Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that the Panel:

- 2.1.1 notes the transfer of 1 FTE post of Income Maximiser (graded Level 7) and 1 FTE post of Information and Advice Assistant (graded Level 8) from the Health and Social Care Partnership to the Information and Advice Hub;**
- 2.1.2 approves the proposed staffing arrangements as outlined at Section 4; and**
- 2.1.3 agrees that staffing levels should be reviewed in December 2018 to reflect the volume and complexity of service demand following the introduction of Universal Credit.**

3. Background

- 3.1 On 23 September 2015, the Leadership Panel decided that the work of the North Ayr Resource Centre (NARC) should be integrated within mainstream Council services and to establish an Information and Advice Hub (the Hub).
- 3.2 At a subsequent meeting on 16 February 2016, the Leadership Panel, amongst other things, noted the arrangements being made to transfer NARC employees into the Council in accordance with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 (known as TUPE). and the integration of Money Advice and Welfare Rights services into the advice operation undertaken from the Hub building in North Ayr.

3.3 At its meeting on 14 March 2017, the Leadership Panel agreed that further work should be undertaken to review all Council information and advice services and develop a future delivery model to be progressed and reported through the Executive Officer Group in its governance role within the Transform South Ayrshire programme and reported back to Leadership Panel.

3.4 The initial findings were considered by the Executive Officer Group in September 2017 and recommended that an additional 2 FTE posts, currently based within the Health and Social Care Partnership, should be transferred to the Information and Advice Hub and included in the longer-term future delivery model. These were:

3.4.1 1 FTE Income Maximiser post, graded Level 7, which is currently based in the Mental Health team. This post provides initial income maximisation assistance and advice to clients with a mental health diagnosis, however, does not deal with cases at more complex levels; at that stage, all cases received by this post are referred to the Hub. Separately, the Hub currently provides information and advice to individuals who have mental health problems but who are not clients of the Health and Social Care Partnership. The proposals will ensure a one-stop service to clients, as opposed to initial advice from within the Mental Health team with a requirement for subsequent transfer to the Hub, as well as access to the other information and advice services that will be available within the Hub.

3.4.2 1 FTE Information and Advice Assistant graded Level 8, which is based within Ayr Hospital providing money advice to cancer patients. This post was established to provide information and advice on benefits which patients with a cancer diagnosis can access. However, the post has not been filled over the last 12 months and the service has been provided by the Hub, which has meant clients have had access to the other information and advice services available within the Hub. In addition, the Hub currently provides information and advice to cancer patients who do not register with the Health and Social Care Partnership service at Ayr Hospital. The proposals will ensure a one-stop service to clients as well as access to the other information and advice services that will be available within the Hub. The proposal will improve access to the service by offering a wider range of locations from which customers can seek assistance. This will include telephone support and, where required, home visits.

By establishing a more holistic service with multi-skilled Advisors, we are able to provide better resilience and customers will be able to access services quickly.

3.5 Since the creation of the Information and Advice Hub in April 2016, a range of work has taken place to review previous service delivery models, systems, processes and customer demand and a number of service improvements have been introduced, including:

- the introduction of a range of customer management and reporting systems to enable better tracking of, and reporting on, customer trends, volume and demand;
- the introduction of ICT systems such as Signpost and Advice-Pro, which removed more basic clerical duties;

- revised opening hours to improve service availability to customers;
- the introduction of an appointments system to reduce customer waiting times;
- a more targeted approach to outreach provision, with delivery reduced in some areas to reflect demand, but introduced or expanded in other areas where gaps in provision were identified;
- the refurbishment of the Hub building in Mainholm Road, Ayr to ensure that it is fit for purpose, safe for employees and customers, and suitable for disabled customers and employees; and
- the transfer of Crisis Grant applications to the Hub to offer more holistic advice and guidance to customers in crisis.

3.6 From an external, national, perspective the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) have developed Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice providers. These standards recommend a ‘tiered’ approach to the delivery of information and advice which reflect the differing degrees of complexity. These are referred to as Type 1, being the most simple, through to Types 2 and 3, which are more complex. The high-level definitions of each Type, including the corresponding activities within the Hub, are attached at [Appendix 1](#). An analysis of customer data shows that the majority of enquiries dealt with through the Hub are Type 1.

3.7 The Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) has advised that the further roll out of Universal Credit (UC) in South Ayrshire in February 2018 is likely to further significantly increase the volume of Type 1 enquiries, particularly those relating to assisted digital and personal budgeting support. Based on information received from Councils where Universal Credit has already been rolled out, it is anticipated that that Crisis Grant Applications, which are also Type 1, will also increase.

3.8 A key role traditionally for the Hub (and NARC before that) was for an Advisor to prepare the written appeal against any benefits decision and accompany the customer to the Tribunal hearing. In February 2017 the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service wrote to Information and Advice Providers (including Councils) to advise that, due to an increase in the number of appeals, in future, other than in exceptional circumstances, only written appeals should be submitted. This change has significantly impacted on the Hub, with Advisors being able to dedicate considerably more time to preparing the Tribunal appeal submission, rather than attending the Tribunal hearing – other than in exceptional circumstances, the Advisor was not required, or indeed, allowed to speak on behalf of the customer and rather attended as a companion. It should be noted that Advisors continue to accompany customers who are particularly vulnerable or who require more specific assistance.

4. Proposals

4.1 As previously noted, the services that are now incorporated into the Hub will provide a comprehensive and holistic advisory and information service for customers in relation to welfare rights, money advice, debt and income maximisation, which will become increasingly essential within our communities as Universal Credit is rolled out.

- 4.2 However, the existing staffing structure reflects previous operating arrangements and service demarcations that existed, with some posts undertaking only one function (for example Money Advice) and others (such as former NARC employees and Welfare Rights Officers) undertaking similar work but with different clients, job remits, and grades.
- 4.3 Accordingly, to better reflect the operational requirements and technological capacity, it is proposed to create a staffing structure which reflects the differential workloads (from Type 1 to Types 2 and 3); generic customer requirements; and geographic service demand. The current and proposed structure charts are attached at [Appendix 2](#) and the savings generated as a result of the proposed changes are attached at [Appendix 3](#).
- 4.4 It is proposed that a differential grading structure is introduced, with the higher graded posts (Level 9 and Level 8) dealing predominantly with complex (Type 2 and 3) cases and the lower graded post (Level 5) with high volume, less complex (Type 1) enquiries.
- 4.5 The proposed staffing arrangements reflect advice from national agencies (such as the Scottish Legal Aid Board), an analysis of customer data, and the anticipated impact of Universal Credit.
- 4.6 Reflecting the anticipated customer requirements, it is proposed that all Information and Advice staff will be required to work from a range of locations across South Ayrshire to provide an outreach service based on demand.
- 4.7 There is no longer a requirement for dedicated clerical support and, therefore, it is proposed that the 0.57 FTE post of Clerical Assistant is transferred to fill a current gap covering reception in the John Pollock Centre, pending a longer-term decision on that facility through the office rationalisation programme.
- 4.8 Reflecting the challenge of moving to multi-skilled, generic roles, and the anticipated changes arising from the introduction of Universal Credit, a comprehensive training programme is planned for Hub staff, with relevant aspects extended to other Council staff as appropriate. This training programme will be funded from the year-1 savings arising from the proposed changes and a proportion of this may be required in future year, on an ongoing basis to ensure staff are able to adequately meet the SLAB criteria referred to at 4.5 above. The remainder of the savings will be used to fund increased service demand within the Emergency Response Team based at the John Pollock Centre, to deal with increased roll out of Community Alarms for vulnerable adults through the Health and Social Care Partnership.
- 4.9 The proposed grades and levels within the staffing structure reflect the anticipated service demand and workloads. However, it is recognised that the actual requirements, including the balance between basic (Type 1) and more complex (Types 2 and 3) workload, will not be confirmed until the impact of the changes are known. Accordingly, it is recommended that staffing arrangements are reviewed and, if necessary, further refined in December 2018.

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 The recommendations in this report are consistent with legal requirements and reflect appropriate advice.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 The proposals will realise savings of £53,000. As indicated at 4.7 above, these savings will be used to fund an extensive staff training programme in year-1 and any subsequent training required as a result of the implementation of Universal Credit, and to fund staffing to address increased service demand within the Emergency Response Team arising from the increased roll out of Community Alarms for vulnerable adults through the Health and Social Care Partnership.

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 The proposed changes, necessary for organisational and technical reasons, will reduce Advice and Information posts from 10.64 FTE (2.64 FTE of which are currently vacant) to 10 FTE.

7.2 The proposed changes will be implemented in accordance with the Council's Managing Workforce Change Framework.

8. Risk

8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

8.1.1 By implementing the Council's Managing Workforce Change processes, there will be a job for all employees who wish to remain in the Council's employment. However, the available jobs may be different to current ones, in terms of remit, or grade and this may be deemed by employees and trade unions to be detrimental.

8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

8.2.1 If the recommendations are not adopted, there is a risk that the service is not designed to meet the changing needs of vulnerable customers who are impacted by welfare reform, poverty and debt. It is widely recognised that effective delivery of the type of advice and assistance provided by the Hub impacts on financial capability, health and wellbeing, community safety, income maximisation, prevention of homelessness, mitigation of poverty, hardship and over indebtedness.

9. Equalities

9.1 The proposals in this report have been assessed through the Equality Impact Assessment Scoping process and a copy of the Equalities Impact Assessment is attached as [Appendix 4](#), which identifies the potential for positive impact across all the protected characteristics.

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** - This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

11. Options Appraisal

- 11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

12. Link to Council Plan

- 12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to the Council strategic objective of 'Working in partnership to maximise the potential of our communities' and within that to the outcome 'Minimise the impact of inequalities'.

13. Results of Consultation

- 13.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.
- 13.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Philip Saxton, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Customer Services, and Councillor Peter Henderson, Portfolio Holder for Resources and Performance, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.
- 13.3 Consultation has taken place with Trade Union representatives and with all staff within the affected service areas. The trade unions have raised no issues of concern regarding the proposals outlined above, and have requested that the proposed changes are implemented as soon as possible.

14. Next Steps for Decision Tracking Purposes

- 14.1 If the recommendations above are approved by Members, the Head of Employee and Customer Services will ensure that all necessary steps are taken to ensure full implementation of the decision within the following timescales, with the completion status reported to the Leadership Panel in the 'Council and Leadership Panel Decision Log' at each of its meetings until such time as the decision is fully implemented:

<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Due date</i>	<i>Managed by</i>
Implement the revised structural arrangements	March 2018	Head of Employee and Customer Services
Review customer trends and data to make recommendations on the number of posts required following UC implementation	December 2018	Head of Employee and Customer Services

Background Papers **Report to Leadership Panel of 23 September 2015 – [Previous Community Planning Funded Projects – North Ayr Resource Centre](#)**

Report to Leadership Panel of 16 February 2016 – [Integration of the Former North Ayr Resource Centre \(NARC\) and Formation of a South Ayrshire Information and Advice Hub](#)

Report to Leadership Panel of 14 March 2017 – [South Ayrshire Information and Advice Hub](#)

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