

Appendix 1:

Questions and concerns raised by Members of the Task and Finish Overview and Scrutiny Working Group and responses from colleagues from the County Council delivering the Public Sector Commissioning in Partnerships Project (PSCiP):

Members in the main are seeking re-assurances that where possible, if NULBC join the above commissioning process for both 'Infrastructure Support' and 'Information & Advice Services', the Council's requirements are met, in that:

- As part of any service outline the requirements of both the council and residents are met,

The service specification will reflect the service that Newcastle wants to commission. It will be based upon the outcomes/delivery specifics that you determine so therefore should meet your requirements.

- That outcomes and deliverables identified as part of NULBC service outlines are not impaired by overall service expectations of an over-arching specification of the combined partners to the programme,

The specification needs to reflect the requirements of all funding partners. If there are areas where partners requirements do not align we have options available to determine separate schedules that make clear the different delivery requirements so again this will not be an issue.

- Whilst committing monies these are expended on a quarterly basis on receipt of quarterly returns,

The payment model and frequency has yet to be agreed so it is not possible to give a definitive answer to this at the moment however it is the expectation that quarterly performance reports will be required. The payment model will be agreed by all funding partners through the Working Group prior to going out to tender so this information will be available before you need to formally commit to the shared commissioning approach.

It is expected that funding will be transferred to the County Council annually in advance. This is standard procedure where the Staffordshire County Council (SCC) acts as Lead Commissioner. If there are issues with performance/breach of contract and the contract is terminated then unspent monies would be returned to the funder. If this presents a problem please let me know and I will see if there is any scope for flexibility but I can not guarantee this.

- Officers retain the opportunity for continued ongoing (direct) engagement as part of any contract monitoring process with the provider and that should any issues or shortfalls arise in contract delivery, officers have the opportunity to resolve these directly with the provider,

Staffordshire County Council will receive the performance returns at the frequency determined by the working group. These will be reviewed by SCC and circulated to funding partners. If partners have any issues with the reports then they can raise them with SCC to jointly be raised with the provider. It is proposed that there will be six monthly contract/performance review meetings with the Provider. As a funding partner Newcastle will be invited to participate in these reviews where any issues can be addressed. This provides the means for continued direct engagement with the provider, co-ordinated by SCC.

- Members have a concern around the length of time it may take to respond to issues/shortfalls in service provision if (albeit we have not yet decided the performance return frequency). Any issues we currently have with service providers or reports are normally quickly resolved, as there would be a likely impact on the next payment. Will we be looking to put in place some form of procedure linked to responsive timescales in which to resolve issues identified by clients/partners? Members are concerned that queries may get lost in the system, or never responded to. Could NULBC receive a timely electronic copy of the performance return i.e. being included in the email circulation from the service provider at the date of despatch?

SCC would look to resolve any issues with the provider in a timely manner as it impacts on the whole of provision and please be assured that queries will not get lost in the system as they will be picked up by the lead commissioner, who will be the main contact, and addressed according to the contract. The contract will set out the procedure and timescales for responding to issues (Default & Conflict Resolution) and you will have a copy of this. To ensure that NULBC receive a timely copy of the electronic performance returns we can build in an acceptable timescale in which it should be circulated into the SLA between the partners. We are open to your suggestion for what you think is an acceptable timescale. If you feel that it is necessary to be directly mailed by the provider then we can look at this however I think agreeing within the SLA the time period returns should be circulated within would address this concern and as we have access to staff in the Observatory who sometimes manipulate the data further (e.g. Debt/Benefits Advice stats) to produce a report in a more readable format this could also be sent out to you.

- That Member representation (from NULBC) forms part of either a PSCiP 'Commissioning Board' and/or Tender Evaluation & Award Panel.

Each funding partner will be asked to nominate a representative to evaluate the tender submissions. If Newcastle wish to nominate an elected member that is absolutely fine. They will need to complete a Confidentiality Agreement and a Conflict of Interest Declaration.

- Members of the group thought that a Member should form part of the group; I explained that, there would not be a commissioning board, but a tender evaluation and award panel and that training would be given around the role of each participant. Members asked if they could be supported by an officer as part of this work.

If Members would like officer support (presumably from NULBC?) that is absolutely fine. I will have to ask procurement about training for the role of participants as I'm not sure what is in place. Members will need to be made aware that tender evaluation panels can take five or more days, depending upon the response, to work through the different stages and presentations for each service and anyone on the tender evaluation panel must commit to attend every panel meeting.