

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Leadership Team's REPORT TO CABINET

13th January 2026

Report Title: Future delivery of Financial Well-being and Debt Advice service

Submitted by: Service Director – Regulatory Services

Portfolios: Community safety and Well-being

Ward(s) affected: All

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
To gain authority to re- procure a Financial Well-being and Debt Advice Service to ensure residents have access to a knowledgeable, experienced, locally delivered service.		
<u>Recommendation</u>		
That cabinet <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approves the proposal to re-procure the Financial Well-being and Debt Advice Service. 2. Delegates to the Community Safety and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Service Director – Regulatory Services, authority to award the contract arising from the procurement. 3. Approves a six-month extension to the current contract to maintain this service during the procurement period. 		
<u>Reasons</u>		
To continue to provide Financial Well-being and Debt Advice to residents of the Borough.		

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council have funded debt/welfare/consumer advice for a number of years to ensure that the citizens of Newcastle-under-Lyme have access to personal support and advice.

- 1.2 Faced with the current economic climate with rising inflation, increased utility costs, the likelihood of an increase in the number of residents of the Borough experiencing fuel poverty, there remains the need for the delivery of this type of support service.
- 1.3 The Financial Well-being & Debt Advice service is currently delivered by the Citizens Advice Staffordshire North & Stoke on Trent (CASNS). The service offers access to self-help online support, telephone and face to face appointments in Newcastle-under-Lyme and Kidsgrove.
- 1.4 The service has an emphasis for early intervention to reach clients at a timely stage to prevent escalation of issues. The service delivery also, requires a good working relationship with Newcastle Housing Advice to make referrals if the client is threatened with homelessness or is homeless. Contacts to the service are rising and are expected to continue to do so given current economic climate.
- 1.5 Nationally there has been a fundamental review of welfare with a number of key reforms implemented over the last few years, with further reforms envisaged for the years ahead. The introduction of Universal credit and Personal Independence Payments has had, and will continue to have, an impact on claimants and recipients across the borough of Newcastle-under-Lyme.
- 1.6 The migration to Universal Credit is expected to be completed by the end of 2025. This has been a huge change for some people and lots of support will still need to be put in place for those that require it e.g. budgeting advice, IT support etc.
- 1.7 This support service remains a priority for the Council particularly in the current economic climate, and it is envisaged that the positive outcomes will contribute to priority indicators and targets of the Council.

2. Issues

- 2.1 The current service for Financial Well-being and Debt Advice provided by Citizens Advice is nearing the end of its contract and a decision is required with regard to the retendering of this service.
- 2.2 There remains a need in the borough for this service, as supported by the following data:
 - Health Observatory Statistics indicate that in 2022, 10,770 households (19.5%) within the borough live in fuel poverty – the national average being 13.1%.
 - The Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 tells us that around 13,500 (10.6%) of the population in the Borough are income deprived.
 - Data from The Money and Pension Service (MaPS) tell us that in 2023 14.2% of residents have strong indications of needing debt advice. (Currently behind on at least one priority bill, facing early or late-stage creditor action and using credit to pay for essentials).

3. Recommendation

- 3.1 To gain authority to re- procure a Financial Well-being and Debt Advice Service to ensure residents have access to a knowledgeable, experienced, locally delivered service.
- 3.2 Delegate to the Community Safety and Well-being Portfolio Holder, in consultation with the Service Director – Regulatory Services, authority to award the contract arising from the procurement.
- 3.3 To approve a six-month extension to the current contract to maintain this service during the procurement period.

4. Reasons

- 4.1 To continue to provide Financial Well-being and Debt Advice to residents of the Borough.

5. Options Considered

- 5.1 To decommission the service and review the allocation of funds. Quarterly performance indicators and review meetings are held which evidence how many people the service is supporting and the outcomes of the support.
- 5.2 Residents advised are often facing difficulties dealing with debt, not supporting them can lead to inability to pay rent or mortgages leading to risk of homelessness. In turn this would increase demand for Council and NHS services and support.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 6.1 There are no statutory requirements to deliver a Financial Well-being and Debt Advice Service.
- 6.2 The current contract arrangement ends on the 31st March 2026 and should the council decide not to fund this service, officers need to advise the service provider allowing them to review their future options and resourcing.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

- 7.1 An equalities and risk impact assessment will be produced by the service provider as part of the commissioning and procurement process.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

8.1 The allocation of funds will continue to be made as part of the council's medium term financial strategy. The current allocation being £70,000 per annum and the contract has potential to run for 3 years subject to funding.

9. Major Risks & Mitigation

9.1 The advice received by residents can form part of legal processes, there is a risk that incorrect advice can lead to further complications. This is being mitigated by researching and clearly defining in the contract specification the professional qualifications and accreditation required of the successful provider.

9.2 There is a risk that tender bids are above the allocated budget. This will be mitigated by requiring costing to be broken down so that negotiations can occur to meet the allocated budget.

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

10.1 The award of contract and successful delivery of a Financial Well-being and Debt Advice Services supports the delivery of the following Sustainable Development Goals and Climate Change Implications:



11. One Council

Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

One Commercial Council

We will make investment to diversify our income and think entrepreneurially.

One Digital Council

We will develop and implement a digital approach which makes it easy for all residents and businesses to engage with the Council, with our customers at the heart of every interaction.

One Sustainable Council

We will deliver on our commitments to a net zero future and make all decisions with sustainability as a driving principle.

12. Key Decision Information

12.1 This is a key decision as it involves an expenditure of at least £70,000 per annum for a three-year contract.

13. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

[13.1 Cabinet – 14th March 2023](#) [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 14th March, 2023, 2.00 pm – Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council](#)

14. List of Appendices

14.1 None

15. Background Papers

15.1 None