



CASE STUDY

A New Commissioning Model for Advice and Information Services in North Lanarkshire



This case study provides an update on the outcomes of the new commissioning approach undertaken by North Lanarkshire Council following the publication, [Moving Towards a New North Lanarkshire Advice Network](#).

Following a review of advice services (for internal and external services), North Lanarkshire Council has moved to a new grant-based commissioning approach for funding advice and information services from 1 April 2018.

This model was approved at the [Infrastructure Committee meeting](#) on 8 November 2017.

Partnership awards were made to support organisations that contribute to or compliment the work of the council in achieving its key priorities:

- Improve economic opportunities and outcomes
- Support all children to realise their full potential
- Improve health and care of our communities
- Improve relationships with communities and third sector
- Improve the council's resource base

The services to be delivered will be under the Partnership Grant Scheme and will include:

SNSIAP

(in line with [Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers](#))

Welfare Rights

Delivering advice and information to SNSIAP Type II across all areas of law, and referring to [North Lanarkshire Advice Network](#) all Type III work in welfare rights.

Money Advice

Delivering advice and information to SNSIAP Type I across all areas of law, and referring to North Lanarkshire Advice Network all Type II and III work in money advice.

Housing Advice

Delivering advice and information to SNSIAP Type I across all areas



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of law, and referring to North Lanarkshire Advice Network all Type II and III work in housing advice.

Organisations who have received funding from other bodies for work of the types mentioned above would continue to deliver this in terms of their funding agreement.

The Challenge

The council had to deliver budget efficiency savings and, as a result, the advice service budgets reduced significantly in 2017/18.

View the [committee report](#) which was the driver for change.

Partners had to act and consider how services across the local area would work in partnership to address local need.

The review sought the views of all internal benefit and advice providers as well as all ten externally funded third sector services on the following three options:

- Outsourcing all advice services to the third sector
- A mixed economy of both internal council services and third sector alternatives
- A wholly 'in-house' service provided by the council

The mixed economy option was supported by the majority of all respondents to the review as the best option for future service delivery.

In addition, the review recommended that external advice and information services adopt a commissioning model that would provide a standardised service to all North Lanarkshire Council residents who may choose not to use council services.

The review also recommended the re-branding and design of North Lanarkshire Information and Advice Forum (NLIAF) to form a new North Lanarkshire Advice Network (NLAN).

Intended Outcomes

The purpose of the new scoring process from the application was to:

- Ensure that funding was directed toward activities that contribute to or enhance the councils key priorities as identified within the council's [business plan](#)
- Ensure that all applicants were treated fairly and undergo the same processes in determining whether or not they are funded
- That any inherent "risks" involved in providing such funding is

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taken into consideration and appropriate measures to limit those “risks” are put in place.

Aaliya Seyal, Airdrie Bureau Manager says: “I found the Q & A group session with the funder helpful as well as the offer of a one-to-one meeting. I also welcomed the support from the council and opportunity to give feedback on any challenges with the new monitoring and reporting requirements.”

Action/Approach Taken

The Application and Assessment Stage

- Guidance notes were developed and issued to all interested applicants.
- Closing date for applications was 19 September 2017.
- Applicants had to state which of the six localities they were applying for the grant funding: Airdrie, Bellshill, Coatbridge, Cumbernauld, Motherwell, Wishaw.
- The partnership awards were assessed through a scoring system with each section within the application form indicating a weighting apportioned to it.

Scoring Panel

The Scoring Panel was chaired by the Financial Inclusion Manager and includes two internal assessors and one external assessor.

Assessors scored the assessments in accordance with the evidence produced and the matrix grid form was sent to all to complete.

Following the individual scoring, the Scoring Panel met to have an open discussion; the key elements of this discussion along with the agreed score form the official record of their decision.

At the end of each discussion, panel members took part in a general debate on the suggested score before a final score was agreed on. The key elements of this debate were recorded for future reference.

Matrix Scoring Assessment

Guidance was developed for the purposes of the advice and information services partnership agreements.

The scoring process used a standard format to prioritise applications to influence funding levels.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The funding provided is subject to the provider complying with agreed outcomes and performances measures as detailed in the Locality Profile and Service Specification.

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The provider shall provide all requested information in a form agreed with North Lanarkshire Council that shall contribute to quality assurance as detailed within the Locality Profile and Service Specification.

Where the funding is for more than one year, the locality profile and service specification is subject to a review of its fit within the priorities identified in North Lanarkshire Council business plan.

A Service Level Agreement will be provided for each locality.

The monitoring returns will be submitted quarterly.

Each organisation will have a link officer who will be a senior officer of the financial inclusion team at North Lanarkshire Council. The link officer will attend one board meeting per year and they will also carry out two monitoring visits, one planned and one unplanned.

Successful applicants to the Partnership Award must be a voluntary organisation, registered charity or a community group operating in North Lanarkshire, and run democratically.

Obstacles and Issues

This new process has meant that not all previous providers and applicants have been successful in their assessment for funding under this new approach.

The council has had to carefully manage this process, maintaining relationships and identifying any potential risks for the organisation, staff and service users and offer appropriate forms of support.

The local authority external funding officer has been out to visit and engage with the unsuccessful applicants and offer hands-on support to help build capacity and explore potential external sources funding. Ellen Archibald, Funding Officer, says “I prepared funding reports for three of the unsuccessful applicants which was followed up by a full discussion on the their unique selling point (USP) and the most appropriate funders or them to apply to given their projects and plans going forward”.

Results

No further savings need to be made from the 2018/19 council budget, which will allow this new commissioning model to bed in.

Funding agreements have now been awarded for a longer term of three years with the new model taking effect from 1 April 2018.

A debt pack has been introduced to be completed as part of the new advice-giving process across all providers.



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This approach is about ensuring a consistent assessment is carried out across all providers to identify people who require generalist help whilst ensuring the referral pathways are made for specialist levels of support. This should enable a more seamless and co-ordinated approach to identifying and assessing need and improving access to advice and information services across North Lanarkshire.

Lessons Learned

The review of the partnership working of the members of North Lanarkshire Advice Network has proved beneficial and worked well. Partners bought in to the new model and agreed to sign up to the new partnership agreements.

It's provided a good platform for involving partners at every stage of the process from early communications at the start of the advice review right through to implementation of the new commissioning model.

It has allowed for a more open and transparent process, allowing members a safe space to ask questions and answers and draw down support.

It's about working together, maintaining the relationships to see things through in a supportive and constructive manner whilst recognising that change needs to take effect. Engaging with the right stakeholders at the right time and what they need to know.

Preparing exit strategies for unsuccessful applicants and to ensure continuity of service for their users and that the organisation can meet its financial liabilities.

Next Steps

The new commissioning process and model will be subject to an internal audit review.

The link officers will build relationships with the providers and discuss the new monitoring arrangements whilst providing support.

The network will continue to work with elected members, reporting on the progress of the new commissioning model, and receive input and raise discussions towards any future reviews of the advice and information services.

The roll-out of the new advice network and this new model will include workshops to help build trust and embed the referral protocols whilst supporting partners in this process.

Additional Information

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The council's internal [Financial Inclusion Team](#), continues to review its new staffing structure and service redesign (integrated money and welfare rights advice service), providing continuous improvement areas and streamlining processes where possible to create a more efficient service delivery model working across health and social care settings in all its six localities.

The council now has agreement to develop its anti-poverty strategy and thought has been given for what the governance arrangements will look like. A new champion will be created to chair the Tackling Poverty Action Group.

The Welfare Reform Officer Group will continue and there will now be a new Tackling Poverty Officers Group. Both groups will be chaired by John Campbell, Financial Inclusion Manager. A presentation will be made to the corporate management team at the end of March 2018.

Useful Links

[North Lanarkshire Partnership – Local Outcomes Improvement Plan](#)

[Your Money Information Line](#)

[Your Money - Coping with the recession and welfare reform](#)

[North Lanarkshire Council Food Poverty and Insecurity](#)

[Council Budget Consultation 2018/19](#)

The savings proposals for 2018/19 budget for advice and information services were rejected however, elected members request a further review, the details of which have yet to be discussed.



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(to discuss and support the embedding of the key principles of the Framework for Public Funding of Advice across Scotland's Local Authorities)