

Cabinet

16 January 2024

Macmillan Welfare Benefits Service

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Vince Maple, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Councillor Zoe Van Dyke, Portfolio Holder for Business Management

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Summary

Medway Council has operated a successful Welfare Benefits Service for those suffering with cancer in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support for over a decade. Demand for the service has continued to climb and the Council and Macmillan have agreed that the service needs additional capacity and resilience to cope with the caseload within Medway. Macmillan has also approached Medway Council to expand the service provided to support those in West and North Kent.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1. The Cabinet is asked to agree to expand the Macmillan Service to provide services to eligible residents of West and North Kent in addition to enhancing the level of service to eligible Medway residents.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

- 2.1. Agreeing to expand the Macmillan Service would enable the team to provide the service to eligible residents in North and West Kent, filling the current gap in provision in that area. The expansion would also increase resilience for the service it provides to Medway's residents.

3. Budget and policy framework

- 3.1. The delivery of the functions of the Benefits Team are the responsibility of Cabinet. The expansion of the Macmillan Welfare Benefits Service within the team will support the delivery of the Council's Council Plan priorities and values that underpin all the Council's work in the delivery of services to the people of Medway, particularly preventing homelessness and working together to empower communities.

4. Background

- 4.1. The Macmillan Welfare Benefits Team has operated within the Council for over a decade. The team are highly successful, increasing the income for the patients they supported in 2022/23 by more than £3million in total. The special rules for those with terminal illness were changed in April 2023 allowing easier and quicker access to welfare benefits. Though welcomed, this change significantly impacted and increased the workload of the team and the approach outlined in this report has been proposed to address this.
- 4.2. Macmillan have also identified a gap in provision within West and North Kent and they are unable to find a provider with the capability to operate a service in these areas. Macmillan have approached Medway Council to expand the service provided to support those in West and North Kent in addition to enhancing the level of service for Medway residents by increasing the level of staffing to create a team manager and dedicated admin support. Macmillan have confirmed that they would fully fund both the service for residents of Medway, West and North Kent. In addition to filling the gap in provision in the neighboring area, this expansion would increase resilience for the service to Medway's residents.
- 4.3. The Macmillan Service currently consists of 3 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff within the Benefits and Financial Welfare Team, with a total projected cost of £119,000 for 2024/25. Macmillan currently contribute £94,000 through the existing agreement which is in place until the end of December 2024. Annual staff pay awards made since that agreement have resulted in the service representing a cost to the Council of £24,000 to operate the service. Macmillan have confirmed that through a new agreement they will cover this shortfall and fully fund an additional 4.5FTE staff, along with contributions to cover the cost of ICT kit, software and other operating costs so that they fully fund the expanded service. Macmillan have also confirmed that a new agreement to continue the existing contribution of £94,000 beyond December 2024 can be made from February 2024. Subject to Cabinet's agreement to the recommendation in this report, the new funding would be added to the revenue base budget for the team for 2024/25.
- 4.4. Medway's Public Health Team's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (2021) concluded that Medway is one of the worst areas for survival rates for patients with cancer, particularly lung cancer. In 2021, the rate of premature mortality rate from cancer in Medway was higher than England. The Office of National Statistics rates Medway as having a Health Index Score of 92.4 and is ranked in the bottom 20% in the country. Medway has many areas of significant deprivation with 13.4% of the population being income deprived. Of the 163 neighbourhoods in Medway, 30 are amongst the most income deprived in England.
- 4.5. Local people affected by cancer consistently report that money worries are second only to the anxiety caused by their diagnosis. The benefits system is extremely complicated particularly in light of the recent changes in respect of Welfare Reform and where people are unsure or unaware of what benefits are available. This is problematic, especially when coupled with a lack of

confidence, energy or the skills among clients to apply for the benefits to which they are entitled. Guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence states that, “patients and carers should be offered assistance to obtain benefits for which they are potentially eligible by professionals who are informed and knowledgeable about the benefits system”.

- 4.6. Medway currently provides a service to patients within Medway and those receiving treatment at Maidstone Oncology Centre. Within Gravesham and Dartford, there are no provisions for this type of support for those living with cancer. 1,266 people live in the Dartford and Gravesham area with cancer according to data from Macmillan. Of this, around two thirds of the cohort may not require or choose not to access support leaving approximately 435 cancer patients needing support.
- 4.7. The provision given to those in West Kent is light touch and does not provide a full service causing geographical gaps in provision across Kent. Using internal modelling from Macmillan, it is estimated that across Maidstone, Medway, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells around 4,900 are living with cancer. Of this, Macmillan would expect roughly two-thirds of this group to already be supported or to not access support. This would leave around 1,600 people who need support from a Local Macmillan Benefits Service split between 850 in Medway and Maidstone and 770 in West Kent.
- 4.8. Medway Council’s Macmillan Team is currently resourced by 1.8FTE Welfare Benefit Advisors and 1FTE Macmillan Support Officer. During the period July to September 2023, the service supported 190 people, with an ongoing caseload of 251. There are 31 people on the waiting list because the service does not currently have enough resources to support more people. There is currently no provision for leave or sickness cover which offers little resilience.
- 4.9. It is proposed that the expanded service would have 1FTE Macmillan Manager, 2FTE Welfare Benefits Advisors and 1.5FTE Macmillan Support Officers who would work alongside our existing 1.8FTE Welfare Benefits Advisors and 1FTE Macmillan Support Officer. The new service would therefore deliver more than double the capacity of the existing team.

5. Options

- 5.1. Option 1: Do not expand the Macmillan service, continuing to provide services only to Medway residents and at a cost subsidy from the Council’s budget. It is also possible that another local authority agrees to take on the service for West and North Kent and that the service for Medway could be included within that once the current funding expires at the end of 2024, meaning Medway Council would no longer operate the service locally. This option is not recommended.
- 5.2. Option 2: Expand the service. This would make Medway Council responsible for the majority of Welfare Benefits advice within Kent for Macmillan. It would secure provision within the Medway area for at least a further two years. A larger team would provide more resilience to Medway residents as well as a

breadth of Welfare Benefits knowledge within Medway Council. Agreement to the expansion will secure further funding of £526,350 to the Council and will ensure the continuation of the existing £94,000 funding in the existing budget. Commitment to providing support to those who are affected by cancer strengthens the Council's commitment to those with health inequalities as well as a significant strategic commitment to a valuable third sector organisation. This option is recommended.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. Cabinet is recommended to agree to proceed with the expanded service. The service will provide an enhanced service for Medway's residents that will be more resilient, providing a robust service for the people of Medway who require it alongside introducing a service for patients who currently are not able to access support in neighbouring authorities. The service will be fully funded by Macmillan, removing the current budget subsidy from the Council.
- 6.2. A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been undertaken during the discussions with Macmillan which concluded that there will be no adverse impacts on those with protected characteristics; rather the service would advance equality and foster good relations for those who are disabled as cancer is classed as a disability under the Equality Act 2010. The DIA is attached at Appendix 1.

7. Risk management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Funding	The funding may not cover all of Medway's related costs.	The funding has been based on the latest projections of likely costs in consultation with the Revenue Accounts team.	CIII
Caseload	The caseload may be higher than projected.	Regular reviews, strong management information and relationships with Macmillan.	CIII
Recruitment	The Council may struggle to recruit to 24-month contracts	Recruitment is to the Council. We have the potential to demonstrate excellent service and retain extended service.	CII

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

8. Financial implications

8.1. The Macmillan Service currently consists of 3FTE staff within the Benefits and Financial Welfare Team, with a total projected cost of £119,000 for 2024/25. Macmillan currently provides funding of £94,000 through the previous agreement, however successive annual staff pay awards mean that currently represents a cost to the Council of £24,000 to operate the service. Macmillan have confirmed that they will cover this shortfall and fully fund an additional 4FTE staff, along with contributions to cover the cost of ICT kit, software and other operating costs so that they fully fund the expanded service, in the sum of £526,350 for the 24 months from April 2024 to March 2026. This is in addition to the £94,000 existing agreement, bringing the total investment from Macmillan to £620,350.

9. Legal implications

9.1. There are no direct legal implications to this report. A legal agreement setting out the funding and service requirements will be made with Macmillan if Cabinet approve the expansion.

Lead officer contact

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Diversity Impact Assessment

Background papers

None