

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Report to the Executive for Decision 06 March 2023

<b>Portfolio:</b>	Leisure and Community
<b>Subject:</b>	Citizens Advice Fareham - Service Level Agreement
<b>Report of:</b>	Director of Leisure and Community
<b>Corporate Priorities:</b>	Strong, safe, inclusive and healthy communities

**Purpose:**

To review the existing Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Fareham Borough Council and Citizens Advice Fareham, and to propose a new 3-year SLA and funding arrangements commencing on 1 April 2023.

**Executive summary:**

Fareham Borough Council provides funding to Citizens Advice Fareham who help to provide free, impartial, and independent advice, information and guidance to Fareham residents.

This report reviews the work carried out by Citizens Advice Fareham and proposes the Council enters into a new 3-year Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice Fareham.

**Recommendation/Recommended Option:**

The Executive is recommended to approve a new 3-year Service Level Agreement and funding arrangements with Citizen Advice Fareham commencing on 1 April 2023.

**Reason:**

To enable residents of the Borough to access free, impartial, independent advice, guidance and information on a range of issues.

**Cost of proposals:**

The cost of this proposal is £135,000 per year.

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## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Executive Briefing Paper

<b>Date:</b>	06 March 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Citizens Advice Fareham – Service Level Agreement
<b>Briefing by:</b>	Director of Leisure and Community
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Leisure and Community

#### INTRODUCTION

1. This report reviews the current 1-year Service Level Agreement between Fareham Borough Council and Citizens Advice Fareham.
2. This report also proposes continued support for a further 3 years with an increase in the grant funding the Council provides to help towards the rise in core service costs and, to enable Citizens Advice Fareham to continue to help meet the needs of Fareham residents.

#### BACKGROUND

3. Citizens Advice Fareham is an independent charity which offers free, impartial and independent advice, information and guidance to Fareham residents.
4. The core service is provided from the Citizens Advice offices located on the first floor of Fareham Library and is currently open 4 days a week, with some outreach sessions being provided across the Borough, as well as home-visit appointments.
5. The organisation has a Board of Trustees responsible for its own overall policy and decision making. The Fareham service is delivered by four paid members of staff and a team of fifty volunteers.
6. The current 1-year Service Level Agreement ends on 31 March 2023. During this period, Citizens Advice Fareham have received a grant allocation of £120,000 from the Council.

#### CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES

7. The quarterly strategic monitoring meetings between the Executive Member for Leisure and Community, the Director of Leisure and Community and Citizen Advice Fareham enable a productive on-going dialogue regarding the issues facing Fareham Borough residents.

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8. Issues in the categories of benefits and tax credits, housing and debt continue to remain the most frequently requested advice and assistance.
9. Since 1 April 2022, 27% of clients are new to the service with a further 48% being existing clients but with new issues, leaving 25% of clients who are returning with the same issue which often takes several months to resolve due to many stages being involved. This is a rise in new clients from the previous year, which saw 23% of clients who were new to the service, 37% existing clients with new issues and 40% returning with the same issue.

### **LOCAL NEEDS AND DEMAND**

10. Citizens Advice Fareham has helped more than 2,801 residents with over 8,982 issues during the period of 3 January to 31 December 2022.
11. These figures have increased since 2021/22, in which they helped 1,727 residents with over 4,900 issues.
  - On average 60 residents are seen each week by an advisor
  - To date, advice provided regarding money issues is by far the highest with 22.7% of advice provided in relation to benefits and tax credits
  - 12% of advice given is debt advice
  - 10.5% is regarding housing matters
  - Closely followed by 5.2% of residents needing assistance with accessing charitable support and food banks.
  - 80 home visits and 848 outreach contacts have taken place between January 2022 and December 2022. The outreach locations are linked to the community food pantries which are Hampshire Food Revolution (Fareham North-West), Woody's Food Pantry (Portchester), Waypoint Hub (Western Wards) and Fareham Food Bank as well as an outreach session located at Stubbington Library.
12. The service has witnessed a significant increase in demand in the aftermath of Covid-19 and in response to the current Cost of Living crisis. The inability to address this rise in demand means that clients will be waiting longer before they are able to see an advisor to help resolve their issues. This is already apparent post Covid.

### **COUNCIL SUPPORT**

13. Citizen Advice Fareham has held a Service Level Agreement with the Council since 1987. The current 1-year agreement is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Executive Member for Leisure and Community and the Director of Leisure and Community with representatives from Citizen Advice Fareham present. This monitoring ensures that this charitable organisation is challenged to keep its service as cost-effective as possible and encouraged to identify external funding opportunities to increase the support it is able to offer to Fareham's residents.
14. The funding that the Council provides is used to fund the 'core elements' of providing the service - salaries and infrastructure i.e. rent, office costs and governance to

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provide an impartial and independent service of generalist advice, information, support and representation to an accredited level and to Citizens Advice standards. Any project funding that Citizen Advice Fareham secures, they use to fund specific projects that bolster and complement the core service.

### **SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT GOING FORWARD**

15. In light of the current inflation figures and the cost-of-living crisis. Citizens Advice Fareham has reviewed its financial position and has advised officers that they can no longer continue to deliver a service in 2023/24 that opens 4 days a week, as is currently the position under the grant agreement with the same grant allocation of £120,000.
16. Citizens Advice have set out options for the service that they could deliver if the grant funding was to remain the same and if it were to increase. These options and the proposal presented by the Council are set out in the table marked Confidential Appendix A.

### **PROPOSED FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

17. To enable Citizens Advice Fareham to continue to respond to the increase in demand for local help and support from Fareham residents and to manage the requests for support during these difficult financial times, the Executive is asked to consider increasing the grant that it provides to Citizens Advice Fareham.
18. The request for an increase is for a 3-year period only, to enable Citizens Advice Fareham to provide support for residents in the aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic and during the current Cost of Living Crisis. Following this 3-year period, the increased level of Core Grant will not be available or offered as part of any subsequent Service Level Agreement.

The table below sets out the proposed increase -

<b>Grant year</b>	<b>Core Grant Allocation</b>	<b>Proposed increase</b>	<b>Total grant award</b>
2023/2024	£120,000	£15,000	£135,000
2024/2025	£120,000	£15,000	£135,000
2025/2026	£120,000	£15,000	£135,000

19. The funding of the increased amount for the 3 year period can be met from grant that is being held by the council to support Fareham residents so there will be no impact on the overall cost to the council. The use of the grant will be reviewed during each year of the 3-year Service Level Agreement.

### **CONCLUSION**

20. Citizens Advice Fareham continues to offer an accessible, well-used, professional and independent service to Fareham residents.
21. This report recommends that a new Service Level Agreement is approved for a further

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3 years and the grant funding allocation is increased to £135,000 per annum for the duration of the new Service level Agreement from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026. This increase is to help the service meet the increase in demand it faces in the current Cost of Living crisis and following the aftermath of Covid-19.

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Emma Watts, Leisure and Community Manager. Ext. 4440 or Claire Benfield, Leisure and Community Officer.