

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 20 April 2015

Portfolio:	Leisure and Community
Subject:	Proposed Funding Arrangements for Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Fareham 2015-2018
Report of:	Director of Community
Strategy/Policy:	
Corporate Objective:	Strong and inclusive communities Maintaining and extending prosperity

Purpose:

To review the existing Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Fareham Borough Council and Fareham Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) and to propose a further three- year SLA, for 2015-2018.

Executive summary:

This report reviews the work done by Fareham CAB throughout the duration of their previous three-year Service Level Agreement (SLA), which concluded on 31 March 2015. In recognition of their consistent and balanced performance, this report proposes the Council enters into a new, three year funding agreement with CAB. The new agreement, which would cover the period from April 2015 – March 2018, would continue to provide much needed support to Fareham residents, who are seeking independent advice, help and guidance across a range of issues.

Recommendation:

That the Executive:

- (a) notes that Fareham CAB has continued to provide regular and robust performance figures for the period 2012-2015, showing further increases in demand for their support and services;
- (b) supports the recommendation to fund CAB for their core work for a period of three years. If agreed, financial support will result in a payment of **£110,000** for 2015/16 ; **£115,000** for 2016/17 and **£120,000** for 2017/18;
- (c) agrees that in addition to the SLA payment for core support, the Council makes an additional grant of **£35,000** per annum (for 2015-2016 initially), to fund the provision of combined, full time equivalent post, for Housing Debt Advice and Budgeting and Council Tax advice; and
- (d) agrees that the Council's Community Development Manager continues to support Fareham CAB to identify potential external funding streams which may assist with their plans to extend their operation and outreach services within the local community, in line with their Business Plan 2015-2018.

Reason:

To enable residents of the Borough to access impartial, independent advice, guidance and information on a range of issues. During the last year, the demand for the CAB service has once again increased, with assistance in connection with financial matters and debt, as well as help with managing benefit changes, being the most requested areas for support.

Cost of proposals:

Continued financial support for CAB (core services) would result in a total payment of £345,000 for the period covered by the new SLA (2015-2018).

The additional grant for the provision of housing debt and budgeting advice will cost £35,000 for 2015-2016

The future of this additional grant can be reviewed for the 2016/17 budgets, depending on demand and the availability of relevant grants.

Appendices: **A:**
 B:

Background papers:

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Executive Briefing Paper

Date: 20 April 2015

Subject: Proposed Funding Arrangements for Citizens Advice Bureau Fareham 2015-2018

Briefing by: Director of Community

Portfolio: Leisure and Community

INTRODUCTION

1. This report reviews the existing three-year Service Level Agreement (2012- 2015) as held between Fareham Borough Council and Fareham Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). The report proposes continued support from the Council in respect of the bureau's core service, proposing that the Executive agrees to fund a further three year agreement with the organisation. This is to maintain the independent advice, information and guidance service that is offered and valued by Fareham residents.

BACKGROUND TO CAB IN FAREHAM

2. Established in Fareham in 1942, Fareham CAB is an independent charity which offers free, impartial and independent advice, information and guidance to Fareham residents. The service is provided from CAB offices on the first floor of the Fareham Library building, Osborn Road. The last year has seen them relocate from their previous site on the second floor of the Library, to newly refurbished, much larger accommodation, now situated the first floor within the same building.
3. The service is delivered by trained volunteers and the equivalent of two paid full time staff. The organisation has a robust and pro-active Board of Trustees responsible for the organisation, the majority of which have come with substantial experience gained from senior positions within industry, business or the public sector. The Bureau has consistently held various Quality Marks for their work and has been both locally and nationally recognised for their Social Policy work and research.

COUNCIL SUPPORT

4. Fareham CAB has held a Service Level Agreement with funding attached, with the Council since 1987. The agreement is regularly monitored, on a quarterly basis by the Executive Member for Community, supported by the Community Development Manager. The service is carefully reviewed so that any local trends or issues arising are monitored and addressed proactively.
5. The bureau also has negotiated two further grants with the Council to support specific

areas of work. These provide £20,000 for the provision of specific advice in relation to avoiding and reducing homelessness and during the last year, the sum of £30,000 to support residents with advice and support in relation to the changes in the way Council Tax is now charged and collected.

6. In addition to the financial contribution for core work and the two grants detailed above, the Council also enables the volunteers giving their time to Fareham CAB, to access free parking in the town centre on the days which they are volunteering at the Bureau. This is facilitated through the provision of six car parking passes which are provided to the bureau free of charge, for use in the Osborn Road Multi Storey Car Park. These have an approximate value of £4,000 per annum.

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS

7. It is recognised that the volunteers' contribution to the Bureau in terms of time and commitment is significant; their combined commitment in hours has been estimated to be worth in the region of £300,000 per year (an increase of approximately £60,000 from 2012) and represents a valuable and crucial service to the local community, reflecting the continued commitment of local people to helping others.

CURRENT TRENDS AND ISSUES

8. The quarterly monitoring meetings between representatives from the Council and Fareham CAB enable a positive, productive on-going dialogue about the issues facing Fareham Borough residents. Issues in the categories of debt and money advice remain the most frequently requested advice and assistance. However the last 18 months has seen a marked increase in requests for support about the changes to Disability Living Allowances (to the new Personal Independence Payment process), the implications and effects of wider benefit changes and more recently, benefit sanctions.
9. During the last year the bureau has continued to see a high level of demand for services. The complexity of the issues people take to the bureau has also increased. It has met this need with an increase in volunteer contribution (and expanded office space to accommodate them).

LOCAL DEMAND

10. The commitment and resulting time is estimated to be worth £300,000 a year (an increase of approximately £60,000 from 2012). The strong team of professional volunteers has enabled CAB to help more than 3,500 residents in the past year. Notable illustrations of their efforts include:
 - Over 1,200 local people were assisted with their problems with debt (estimated to be in the region of £2 million)
 - 1000 local residents were assisted and helped to work through benefit issues
 - At local and upwards to national level, poor trading practices have been highlighted, particularly in relation to utility companies and the selling practices that are employed and which mislead people into parting with their money.
11. In addition and in respect of the supplementary grants provided by the Council to assist specifically with **Homelessness and debt advice**, during 2014;
 - 54 vulnerable families were assisted with housing matters, helping 21 of those to

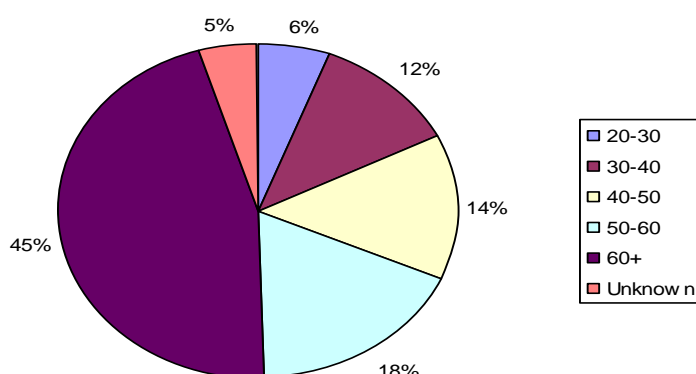
avoid eviction and homelessness

- Residents were advised in relation to Council Tax, their combined debt totalling more than £70, 689;
- Mortgage arrears and mortgage shortfalls (equating to £164,098) and rent or tenancy arrears totalling £93,380
- the largest area of debt still appears to be that to credit card companies, in 2014, in Fareham, amongst those seeking help (and so obviously not the total figure) the reported combined debt was estimated to be in the region of £523,513

MEETING THE DEMANDS OF USERS

12. Fareham CAB has worked hard to raise funds externally, especially to assist with their relocation and related building works. Additionally they have used available reserves to assist with increased hours of opening.
13. During the last year they have also embarked upon a new outreach service in Portchester, to help increase people's access to their services. This is especially aimed at those who are elderly or who may have accessibility problems (either through limited finances, mobility or support) and who are less likely to come into the centre of the town to access the bureau's central office above the Library.
14. Over the past year the Portchester Outreach has been open for 49 sessions (Thursdays 10-3pm) and seen nearly 100 clients for advice. The main issues raised were debt and benefit closely followed by consumer, debt and legal advice.
15. Of the clients seen, the service appears to have reached the targeted profile with the majority of clients aged over 50.

Age Range of clients seen at Portchester Outreach.



16. The volunteers, staff and trustees have given their commitment to maintaining and improving core services and to implement additional services outlined in their Business Review, which was informed by a comprehensive Strategic Review which took place during the summer and autumn of 2014.
17. However, given the continuing economic situation, it is recognised that their projected ability to undertake on-going fund-raising may be difficult. Consequently the Trustees were keen that the strategic review focussed on identifying efficiency measures, such as exploring the possibility of a combined Chief Executive Officer with the neighbouring

bureau at Gosport.

18. This was agreed in March 2015 and a recruitment campaign followed, adverts appearing in various publications including the Guardian, Third Sector and Charity Jobs. The closing date for applications is 16th April and final interviews are scheduled to take place on 5th May.
19. With the continued changes in Welfare Reform over the coming year, particularly with the imminent roll out of Universal credit, the bureau is expecting the demand for their services to increase. With this in mind, CAB is preparing to extend their telephone advice service from 1st May by opening their telephone lines daily, Monday to Friday from 9am – 5pm.
20. On 6 April, the Government's pension reforms came into force giving people approaching retirement, the freedom to choose how they will use their defined contribution pension pots. To help people understand their options, the Government has introduced 'Pension Wise', which will give people free, impartial guidance either online, via telephone or face to face. The Fareham bureau will be one of 500 sites, tasked with delivering Pension Wise appointments. To facilitate this advice, a Pensions Guidance Caseworker will be located in Fareham bureau every Friday from 10th April.
21. Following on from the success at the Portchester outreach Service, CAB is continuing to seek funding for the continuation of this for another year and potentially, beyond. In addition, they are looking to expand their outreach services into the Western Wards of Sarisbury Green, Locksheath and Park Gate. Subsequently they are currently working with the library and other community groups to identify and train up Information Assistants. Additionally work is also being undertaken to investigate funding opportunities to provide 'touch screen' Information Kiosks in these areas, this is intended to help increase people's awareness and access to the Citizens Advice Bureau and their services.

SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT GOING FORWARD: 2015-2018.

22. It is recognised that the CAB assists the Council in building the resilience of the local community. Understandably the Council is sympathetic to funding issues experienced by CAB and especially because of the increased demand for services from local residents.
23. Consequently although several organisations are seeing their funding from the Council being compressed, the Council is keen to maintain the current funding level for CAB, particularly in recognition of the essential service that the Bureau provides to local residents and those in need of accurate information and guidance, which is easily accessible, impartial and independent.
24. On-going demand and a year on year increase for support suggests that CAB is likely to see requests for support continue to steadily increase again in 2015 and beyond. Going forward, the impact of welfare reform, the proposed introduction of Universal Credit and continuing issues with unaffordable credit are expected to adversely affect a considerable number of local residents.
25. Just as the number of contacts with clients has increased over the duration of the previous SLA, it is anticipated that by the end of the year 2014/15, the number of clients will have increased in excess of the 3500 new clients seen in 2014.

PROPOSED FINANCIAL SUPPORT

26. To enable the bureau to respond to the demand for local help and manage the requests for assistance, the Council's Executive is asked to consider an incremental funding arrangement to support the volunteers and trustees. As such the following funding is suggested:

Year	Proposed level of Core funding	Additional Grant funding	
		Homelessness Prevention and Advice	Council Tax Advice
<i>Existing</i>			
2014/15	£101,000	£20,000	£30,000
<i>Proposed</i>		Combined grant :	
2015/ 16	£110,000	£35,000	
2016/17	£115, 000	To be determined	
2017/18	£120, 000	To be determined	

27. It is recognised that the proposed arrangement, along with CAB utilising some of their Reserves, will enable the core services to be available by opening for five days a week, including one later evening.
28. In addition to the SLA for core work, it is proposed that the Council continues to support the work of the part time Housing Debt Advisor post and the work of the Budgeting Advisor post. However, rather than two separate grants, it is proposed that one, combined grant will be offered, for a full time equivalent post, which will equate to £35,000 for the financial year 2015-2016. This will represent a £6,000 saving to the Council in 2015-2016.
29. Although the additional grant will be offered for one year initially, it will be subject to renew, once the Council is clear about the level of support available from national government and housing support, for the following year.
30. The supplementary grant will also ensure that work continues with the Housing Options staff at the Council and that specialist debt advice can be provided to anyone under threat of homelessness or to those experiencing issues with Council Tax and budgeting to repay debt and which is independent of the Council.

CONCLUSION

31. Fareham CAB continues to offer a well-used, professional and independent service to Fareham residents. This report recommends that a new Service Level Agreement for their core service is established, giving the organisation and service users a guaranteed minimum service. It is proposed that this will enable them to review and develop the

service with some on-going stability for the next three years.

32. Fareham CAB has made a request for additional funding. In light of continuous financial pressures facing the Council, the recommendation is that the two separate awards previously provided, be combined into one award of £35,000. This will be provided to deliver a specific advice service in connection with Housing and Council Tax debt, avoiding homelessness and making budgeting arrangements.

For further information, please contact Janie Millerchip, Community Development Manager, on extension 4597.