

NAME OF COMMITTEE	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
DATE	18 MARCH 2014
REPORT TITLE	Review of Citizen Advice Bureau services
Report of	Sarah Brown, Community Projects and Policy Officer
WARDS AFFECTED	ALL

Summary of report:

Following a monitoring report presented to Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 29th October 2013 members requested that officers carry out some further work on the value for money that the council receives for its contribution to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) core funding. This report, complemented by a presentation from the CAB with a Question and Answer session, is to provide members with further information on the service.

Financial implications:

In setting the 2014/2015 budget members have agreed to continue the £32,900 of funding to the CAB as per the current agreement, for the delivery of services in West Devon.

Should members be minded to propose any reduction in financial provision from 2015/2016 officers would need to carry out a consultation exercise to allow for a final decision by September 2014 in order to comply with the 6 month notice period as required by the SLA.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that Members note the content of this report and the accompanying CAB presentation and consider whether any recommendations need to be made to the CAB as to service provision and Resources Committee in respect of future funding.

Sarah Brown, Community Projects & Policy Officer (sarah.brown@swdevon.gov.uk / 01822 8133624)

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Until April 2012 there was a partnership Service Level Agreement (SLA) for West Devon CAB with ourselves and Devon County Council (DCC) however County decided that they no longer wished to contract separately with each CAB and now have one SLA across Devon via an umbrella organisation and pay one CAB

office who are then responsible for distributing agreed funding to the other local offices.

- 1.2 Therefore from 1st April 2013 the Borough Council entered into a revised SLA with the local CAB. This agreement was for an initial period of one year with the ability to extend for a further two years to reflect the Council's budget position. The Council's budget for 2014/15 includes the continuance of this contribution. The funding supplied under the new agreement is to be used for the delivery of specific outcomes for the residents and communities of West Devon.
- 1.3 A report is presented to members annually on outcomes delivered. Officers meet with the CAB on a 6 monthly basis to review the SLA outcomes and on other occasions to discuss specific projects or initiatives.
- 1.4 The CAB provides a range of advice and support services to individuals, who are often vulnerable or isolated.
- 1.5 CAB reviewed its operation in 2013 to ensure it could continue to deliver a locally based sustainable service. As a result from June 2013 it amalgamated with neighbouring CAB's to cut administrative costs. This merger was approved by the Charities Commission and the merged CAB is now known as Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon CAB. The Council has stipulated that all funding provided through the SLA must be used for the benefit of the residents of West Devon to deliver the agreed outcomes.
- 1.6 Without the work of the voluntary sector in providing advice and assistance to vulnerable local residents it is felt likely that the Council would find itself in the position of having to take on some of this role which could incur additional costs over and above that of the funding contribution made; however this has been difficult to quantify and at the Overview and Scrutiny meeting in October 2013 members asked for further information and comparison with other providers of advice services.

2. CITIZEN ADVICE BUREAU SERVICE PROVISION

- 2.1 It was agreed with the Chairman that it would be beneficial for the CAB to attend this meeting to present on their work and provide members with the opportunity to ask any questions they may have. This presentation forms part of this report. Therefore we would like to introduce representatives from Torridge, North, Mid and West Devon Citizens Advice Bureau to take Members through this.
- 2.2 In addition we have met and discussed the CAB service with relevant officers, and some issues were raised which were discussed with the CAB in our meeting with them in November. At the meeting we agreed to develop a closer working relationship, review the SLA outcomes with improved reporting to be provided. We are now starting to receive quarterly reports and the next annual report to members will contain more detailed information and case studies.

- 2.3 As a result of changes to welfare districts are currently in receipt of Government Grant funding funnelled through DCC providing a local discretionary fund to replace crisis loans and community care grants. As a condition of this funding it was agreed that some form of debt advice should be provided to housing and benefits applicants applying to the fund to develop longer term solutions to the individual's debt problems. West Devon undertook a procurement exercise and the contract was awarded to Moneywise. The CAB did tender but were unsuccessful despite a strong bid. The contract has only been in operation since April so there are limited figures available, in addition this contract and its continuance are dependant upon government grant funding being maintained. The funding is time-limited and unlikely to be made available after 2014/15.
- 2.4 The community team have compared service provision, performance and outcomes between the two organisations and also two well known national providers whose offering is principally telephone/online based. A comparison table can be found at Appendix A. It should be noted that there are no other local providers directly based in West Devon; however residents can access services provided by organisations based in main population centres such as Plymouth or Exeter.
- 2.5 The CAB is a recognised brand with a local presence. Online providers do not deliver direct face to face services but can signpost to local providers and this is often the CAB.
- 2.6 The CAB don't just deal with the client's presenting issue by addressing the obvious symptoms. They explore whether there are underlying issues and provide a holistic approach to tackle the causes to agree sustainable, long-term solutions.

3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The Council has powers under the localism Act 2011 to support voluntary services in the community.
- 3.2 The Council's requirements and commitments are secured in the CAB SLA.
- 3.3 Best Value Guidance dated September 2011 setting out the Council's obligations in respect of voluntary sector funding.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council currently contributes £32,900 towards the CAB service provision in West Devon.
- 4.2 Best Value Statutory Guidance is attached at Appendix B. This document sets out expectations for the way in which local authorities will work with the Voluntary and Community Sector when making funding decisions.
- 4.3 In making a decision as to whether or not to cease or reduce funding members should be aware that the authority is under a Duty to Consult representatives of a wide range of local persons; this is not optional.

- 4.4 In setting the 2014/2015 budget members have agreed to continue the £32,900 of funding to the CAB as per the current agreement, for the delivery of services in West Devon.
- 4.5 Should members be minded to propose any reduction in financial provision from 2015/2016 officers would need to carry out a consultation exercise to allow for a final decision by September 2014 in order to comply with the 6 month notice period as required by the SLA.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT

The Risk Management implications are shown at the end of this report in the Strategic Risks Template.

Corporate priorities engaged:	Community Life; Economy; Homes
Statutory powers:	Localism Act 2011 – Section 1 – Powers of General Competence Best Value Guidance September 2011
Considerations of equality and human rights:	The services provided by the CAB promote equal opportunities and help prevent discrimination in our communities.
Biodiversity considerations:	There are no biodiversity implications as a result of this report.
Sustainability considerations:	The work of CAB provides long term sustainable solutions to individual's problems.
Crime and disorder implications:	The work of the CAB provides advice and volunteering opportunities which reduce the potential for crime and anti-social behaviour.
Background papers:	WDBC/WDCAB SLA 2013 -2014 29th OCT 2013 Overview and Scrutiny Monitoring Report
Appendices attached:	Appendix A – Advice Service Provision Comparison Table Appendix B – CLG Best Value Statutory Guidance

STRATEGIC RISKS TEMPLATE

No	Risk Title	Risk/Opportunity Description	Inherent risk status				Mitigating & Management actions	Ownership
			Impact of negative outcome	Chance of negative outcome	Risk score and direction of travel			
1	Delivery of outcomes and value for money	<p>Risk: Failure to deliver outcomes to the community and provide value for money for the Council's contributions</p> <p>Opportunity: To deliver outcomes for communities in the most effective and efficient way, enhancing the reputation of the Council</p>	3	2	6	↔	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual Monitoring report to Members 2. Regular meetings with CAB chief officer 3. Contributions reviewed at annual budget setting 4. SLAs reviewed annually 	Community Manager

Direction of travel symbols ↓ ↑ ↔