
TITLE: GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Committee: Commercial Services Committee.

Date: Tuesday 13th January 2015.

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1.0 ISSUE

1.1 To note the performance and emerging issues identified by three of the voluntary organisations funded by East Cambs District Council, and to agree their funding allocations for the 2015/16 financial year.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 Members are asked to:

i) note the latest performance information relating to VCAEC and the Citizens Advice Bureaus.

ii) note the emerging issues identified by the Citizens Advice Bureaus.

iii) approve the annual grant contributions for the 2015-16 Service Level Agreements as set out in 6.0.

3.0 PERFORMANCE FROM APRIL – OCTOBER 2014

3.1 Newmarket CAB

There have been a total of 786 new client issues in the first 6 months of 2014-15 that have arisen from residents of East Cambridgeshire. 278 clients received benefit advice and a further 218 clients received debt advice in the period (see Appendix A for a breakdown of issues by geographical location). 15 clients received intensive support with rent or mortgage arrears at repossession stage. 17 clients received intensive support with council tax arrears. 111 clients were supported with welfare benefit loss of income, with £7,603 gained for clients as a result.

3.2 The Newmarket CAB has recently been awarded a grant of £137,261 from the Big Lottery 'Reaching Communities' Fund for four years of funding for a Welfare Benefit and Money Advice project.

3.3 Earlier this year the Newmarket CAB was part of a national "Mystery Shopper" pilot which looked at the client experience and as a consequence, the CAB has been identified as a model of good practice.

3.4 Rural Cambs CAB (Ely Office)

There have been a total of 2152 issues presented by East Cambs residents in the first 6 months of 2014-15 (see Appendix B for full breakdown). The top three issues were debt, benefits and tax credits advice, and employment advice. There were also 196 housing issues, including Council Tax arrears (55) and rent arrears (58). There has been £28,496 worth of benefit payment gains and £513,156.16 worth of debt negotiated for East Cambs residents (which can involve writing off debt or agreeing more manageable payment plans).

3.5 The bureau has secured a new contract from the Money Advice Service from 1st October 2014 for 3 years to provide a specialist debt adviser to support clients with unmanageable debt that helps to prevent homelessness or non payment of priority bills such as council tax. Rural Cambs CAB, Ely and District runs a weekly debt advice clinic that clients can drop in to and get instant help and support with debts.

3.6 Voluntary And Community Action East Cambs (VCAEC)

VCAEC offers training for 147 voluntary member groups on issues including safeguarding adults and child protection. They have also run a funding fair for parish councils and voluntary groups to meet prospective funders and learn more about the funding opportunities available to their organisation. VCAEC has placed 34 volunteers into local projects and businesses and has itself benefited from 1370 hours of volunteer time to help run the organisation. The total added value of volunteering opportunities handled by VCAEC within East Cambs was £20,184 up to the end of Sept 2014.

3.7 The Social Car scheme is in great demand, with 27 drivers completing 1,459 journeys, travelling 43,853 miles, volunteering a total of 3,197 hours, adding £38,364 value to the service, up to the end of September 14.

3.8 Volunteers working on the Helping Hands gardening project between April and the end of September 2014 have given 2,130 hours of their time to complete 96 jobs for 76 clients, who would not otherwise have been able to get the work done. This has generated added value of £25,560 to the service.

4.0 EMERGING ISSUES

As part of the Service Level Agreements, the CABs and VCAEC are required to provide 6 monthly 'State of the Community' reports, highlighting emerging areas of concern. In addition to providing a feel for the direction of travel for the organisation, the reports identify community issues that the Council could help address through partnership working or by changing the way we deliver council services.

4.1 Newmarket CAB

Debt and Welfare Benefits continue to be the most frequent issues raised at the Newmarket CAB, representing 63% of the work carried out for East Cambridgeshire residents. Further, the link between ill health and debt issues is becoming more prevalent. Around one third of the client group have long

term physical or mental health difficulties which creates additional challenges in accessing correct benefit support. One in four people with mental health problems report debt or arrears on priority debts which have the most severe legal consequences; conversely, an uncertain income can lead to problem debt which results in depression, which escalates if not addressed.

- 4.2 The statistics in Appendix A show that the main communities of concern are Burwell, Cheveley and Fordham. It is interesting to note that while Welfare Benefit and Debt issue enquiries are usually similar, the Fordham figures for debt are much higher (the reasons for this are currently being investigated). Also the proportion of Welfare Benefit enquiries from The Swaffhams are twice those of debt enquiries. The numbers for Soham have increased, largely because of the telephone gateway service advertised through the Foodbank in Soham.
- 4.3 The impact of under-occupancy charges has softened because of the imaginative use of discretionary housing budgets by the District Council, to pay off arrears and provide moving expenses. However, there is still a shortage of one bedroom properties, so the issue of rent arrears may still arise.
- 4.4 Newmarket CAB has reported that there has been a dramatic reduction in those coming to the Newmarket CAB for advice on how to make a claim in an employment tribunal. This follows the changes in the law relating to the handling of claims in employment tribunals. As from 29 July 2013 those wishing to lodge a claim in an employment tribunal have to pay Court fees. Claims to employment tribunals have reduced by 80%. Newmarket CAB feels that the reduction in those coming to the CAB for advice is due to word getting around that for those with limited means no effective redress is available to progress a dispute with an employer. This will affect the lowest paid, unskilled workers, and there is a possibility of knock on increases in debt, benefit and housing issues arising from this issue.
- 4.5 Rural Cambs CAB
Rural Cambs CAB, Ely and District has seen an increased demand for all its advice services for debt; (this being qualitatively researched) because of recent welfare reform benefit sanctions. Payday loans are being utilised more and more as people are not able to cover their living costs in difficult times. The CAB has started to introduce financial capability into their advice sessions and run debt clinics which not only deal with the debt but how to manage money going forward.
- 4.6 The rise in debt has in turn resulted in an increase of the CAB issuing food vouchers to clients, the Rural Cambs CAB has issued 131 food bank vouchers in the first six months of 2014-15, with demand increasing week on week.
- 4.7 Rural Cambs CAB, Ely and District are continuing to see clients who are being assessed as fit for work for the Employment Support Allowance. The

CAB has found that these clients are those who find it hard to attend due to poor mobility, being unable to travel independently or because they miss deadlines. The questionnaire (ESA50) is 20 pages long and due to a number of factors such as poor literacy, not understanding the form, so focussing on the illness not how it affects their lives. Those clients who do not attend appointments cannot get the basic ESA payment while they are appealing, they do not apply for JSA because they cannot attend work interviews and so face immediate hardship and fall deeper in to debt.

4.8 Most of the clients being found fit for work have mental health issues, they are anxious and phobic, having difficulty dealing with people and paperwork. The work capability descriptors do not cover the issues of motivation, lethargy, fear of social interaction and ability to assess urgency. These are all factors which affect your ability to work.

4.9 VCAEC

The challenge for VCAEC is in improving the sustainability of the organisation as securing grant funding becomes more challenging, so that they are able to plan more effectively in the medium to long term. VCAEC has been successful in securing consultant advice from 'The Big Assist' – a programme designed to support the work of infrastructure organisations whose main or only purpose is to support the work of other organisations in the voluntary and community sector. This piece of work will identify opportunities to increase VCAECs sustainability and to improve their marketing strategy. The priority for VCAEC continues to be ensuring that voluntary groups and volunteers are supported within the community and that in turn communities are helped to become more resilient.

5.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

5.1 The District Council recognises that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) plays a crucial role in meeting a wide variety of community needs, including supporting the vulnerable and improving community cohesion. The Council has historically supported the VCS through the provision of funding linked to service level agreements with Voluntary and Community Action East Cambs, and to the Citizens Advice Bureaus that support clients living within East Cambridgeshire.

5.2 The demand on the CABs has increased in recent years and is continuing to rise as the impact of welfare reform becomes evident. The District Council financial contribution to these community support organisations is essential to their sustainability and ability to deliver the services that support the most vulnerable.

5.3 The core funding provided to VCAEC is critical in helping to build capacity in communities. As public services retreat, communities are under increasing pressure to meet their own needs. The focus of this work is likely to be on supporting an aging population and reducing rural isolation through initiatives such as the Helping Hands and Social Car Schemes.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 It is proposed to maintain the same level of grant funding for 2015-16 as was awarded in 2014-15. This can be funded from existing resources in the Community & Leisure Services budget:

Rural Cambs CAB:£47,346.80
Newmarket CAB: £23,166.03
VCAEC: £19,928

6.2 Equality Impact Assessment attached at Appendix C.

7.0 APPENDICES

- 7.1 Appendix A - Table to show Newmarket CAB clients issues per ward
- 7.2 Appendix B - Table to show Rural Cambs CAB clients & issues
- 7.3 Appendix C – Equality Impacts Assessment

<u>Background Documents</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Contact Officer</u>
Service Level Agreement 6 month monitoring reports	Room FF115, The Grange	Julie Cornwell Partnerships Officer (01353) 616352 E-mail: julie.cornwell@eastcambs.gov.uk

Appendix A - Table to show Newmarket CAB clients issues per ward

East Cambs District Council
Issues by Ward

April to September 2014

Issue	Benefit	Debt	Employment	Housing	Immigration	Relationships	Total Client Issues	Total Client Contacts
LA Ward								
Bottisham	10	3	5	2	0	6	38	99
Burwell	66	37	15	8	2	12	173	345
Cheveley	42	45	7	10	0	9	135	198
Dullingham Villages	26	22	2	4	2	2	67	104
Ely West	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2
Fordham Villages	39	61	5	11	0	5	141	181
Haddenham	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	4
Isleham	4	0	7	0	0	6	21	44
Littleport East	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	4
Littleport West	0	0	2	0	0	0	2	2
Soham North	30	8	5	2	3	2	56	86
Soham South	28	27	7	3	0	10	85	121
Stretham	0	0	0	1	0	1	2	4
The Swaffhams	33	15	4	3	0	2	60	67
Total Client Issues	278	218	62	45	7	55	786	1312

Appendix B - Table to show Rural Cambs CAB clients & issues

Types of issues:

Benefits & Tax Credits	572
Consumer goods & Services	91
Debt	596
Discrimination	6
Education	13
Employment	291
Financial Services & Capability	20
Health & Community Care	18
Housing	196
Immigration & asylum	18
Legal	63
Other	35
Relationships & family	185
Tax	22
Travel & transport	15
Utilities & communication	11
TOTAL NUMBER OF ISSUES	2152

Local Authority Ward (total clients):

Bottisham	3
Burwell	8
Downham Villages	57
Ely East	90
Ely North	137
Ely South	62
Ely West	111
Fordham Villages	18
Haddenham	79
Isleham	10
Littleport East	86
Littleport West	90
Soham North	98
Soham South	104
Stretham	65
Sutton	52
The Swaffhams	0
Not recorded	378
Total	1448

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA) FORM

Name of Policy:	Grants to Voluntary Organisations
Lead Officer (responsible for assessment):	Julie Cornwell, Partnerships Officer
Department:	Community & Leisure Services
Others Involved in the Assessment (i.e. peer review, external challenge):	
Date EIA Completed:	18/12/14

What is an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)?

As part of any effective policy development process, it is important to consider any potential risks to those who will be affected by the policy's aims or by its implementation. The Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process helps us to assess the implications of our decisions on the whole community, to eliminate discrimination, tackle inequality, develop a better understanding of the community we serve, target resources efficiently, and adhere to the transparency and accountability element of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The word 'policy', in this context, includes the different things that the Council does. It includes any policy, procedure or practice - both in employment and service delivery. It also includes proposals for restructuring, redundancies and changes to service provision.

(a) **What is the policy trying to achieve?** i.e. What is the aim/purpose of the policy? Is it affected by external drivers for change? What outcomes do we want to achieve from the policy? How will the policy be put into practice?

The paper seeks approval for an annual grant contribution as part of the 2015-16 Service Level Agreements with the Rural Cambs Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), The Newmarket & District Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Voluntary and Community Action East Cambs (VCAEC).

The District Council recognises that the voluntary and community sector (VCS) plays a crucial role in meeting a wide variety of community needs, including supporting the vulnerable and improving community cohesion. The Council has historically supported the VCS through the provision of funding linked to service level agreements with Voluntary and Community Action East Cambs, and to the Citizens Advice Bureaus that support clients living within East Cambridgeshire.

(b) **Who are its main beneficiaries?** i.e. who will be affected by the policy?

The main beneficiaries are the residents, community and voluntary groups who access the services provided by the three organisations. Typically those accessing the CABs are some of the most vulnerable in the community – those in debt, often with mental health issues.

VCAEC provides support to 147 voluntary groups and also runs two of its own discrete projects which support older people, those without their own transport, people with disabilities and with mental health issues.

(c) Is the EIA informed by any information or background data (quantitative or qualitative)? i.e. consultations, complaints, applications received, allocations/take-up, satisfaction rates, performance indicators, access audits, census data, benchmarking, workforce profile etc.

The demand on the CABs has increased in recent years and is continuing to rise as the impact of welfare reform becomes evident. The District Council financial contribution to these community support organisations is essential to their sustainability and ability to deliver the services that support the most vulnerable.

The core funding provided to VCAEC is critical in helping to build capacity in communities. As public services retreat, communities are under increasing pressure to meet their own needs. The focus of this work is likely to be on supporting an aging population and reducing rural isolation through initiatives such as the Helping Hands and Social Car Schemes.

(d) Does this policy have the potential to cause a positive or negative impact on different groups in the community, on the grounds of any of the protected characteristics? (please tick all that apply)

Ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/>	Age	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	Religion and Belief	<input type="checkbox"/>
Disability	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sexual Orientation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender Reassignment	<input type="checkbox"/>	Marriage & Civil Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pregnancy & Maternity	<input type="checkbox"/>	Caring Responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please explain any impact identified: i.e. What do you already know about equality impact or need? Is there any evidence that there is a higher or lower take-up by particular groups? Have there been any demographic changes or trends locally? Are there any barriers to accessing the policy or service?

The CABs and VCAEC rely on core funding from the District Council (and other local authority partners) to continue to operate. If the grant was not awarded there is a high probability that some - if not all - of the services would cease to exist in East Cambs.

(e) Does the policy have a differential impact on different groups?	YES/NO/Na
(f) Is the impact <i>adverse</i> (i.e. less favourable)?	YES/NO/Na
(g) Does it have the potential to disadvantage or discriminate unfairly against any of the groups in a way that is unlawful?	YES/NO/Na

(h) How have you engaged stakeholders in gathering evidence or testing the policy proposals? Who was involved, how and when where they engaged? Does the evidence show potential for differential impact? How will you mitigate any negative impacts? Where there is the potential for an adverse impact that cannot be addressed immediately, these should be highlighted in your recommendations and objectives at the end of the EIA.

As part of the Service Level Agreements, the CABs and VCAEC are required to provide 6 monthly 'State of the Community' reports, highlighting emerging areas of concern. In addition to providing a feel for the direction of travel for the organisation, the reports identify community issues that the Council could help address through partnership working or by changing the way we deliver council services.

The performance monitoring data supplied by the three organisations also provides evidence of the high level of demand for the services they provide.

* The Consultation Register is available to assist staff in consulting with the Council's stakeholders.

(i) Summarise the findings of your research and/or consultation (please use a separate sheet if necessary).

If the SLAs are renewed for a further year with the associated grant funding, there will be no negative impact on the three organisations, and thus no negative impact on the communities or individuals that would be affected if their services were withdrawn.

(j) What are the risks associated with the policy in relation to differential impact and unmet needs/requirements? i.e. reputation, financial, breach of legislation, service exclusion, lack of resources, lack of cooperation, insufficient budget etc.

If the SLAs were not renewed and support was no longer provided by the CABs and VCAEC to residents and communities in East Cambs, there would be a significant impact on community resilience and an increased reliance on the public sector to provide solutions (and funding) to address a wide variety of social issues. The District Council does not have the resource to meet this potential gap.

(k) Use the information gathered in the earlier stages of your EIA to make a judgement on whether there is the potential for the policy to result in unlawful discrimination or a less favourable impact on any group in the community, and what changes (if any) need to be made to the policy.

Option 1:	No major change - the evidence shows that the policy is robust and no potential for discrimination.	
Option 2:	Adjust the policy - to remove barriers or to better promote equality.	
Option 3:	Continue the policy - despite potential for adverse impact or missed opportunity to promote equality, provided you have satisfied yourself that it does not unlawfully discriminate.	
Option 4:	Stop and remove the policy – if the policy shows adverse effects that cannot be justified.	

(l) Where you have identified the potential for adverse impact, what action can be taken to remove or mitigate against the potential for the policy to unlawfully discriminate or impact less favourably on one or more communities in a way that cannot be justified? Include key activities that are likely to have the greatest impact (max. 6). Identified actions should be specified in detail for the first year but there may be further longer term actions which need to be considered. To ensure that your actions are more than just a list of good intentions, include for each: the person responsible for its completion, a timescale for completion, any cost implications and how these will be addressed. It is essential that you incorporate these actions into your service plans.

If the SLAs are renewed for a further year with the associated grant funding, there will be no negative impact on the three organisations, and thus no negative impact on the communities or individuals that would be affected if their services were withdrawn.

If the recommendation is approved, new SLAs will be drawn up by the Partnerships Officer ready to take effect from 1st April 2015.

This completed EIA will need to be countersigned by your Head of Service. **Please forward completed and signed forms to the Principal HR Officer.**

All completed EIAs will need to be scrutinised and verified by the Council's Equal Opportunities Working Group (EOWG) and published on the Council's Intranet to demonstrate to local people that the Council is actively engaged in tackling potential discrimination and improving its practices in relation to equalities. Please be aware that you may be asked to attend a half-an-hour session to summarise the findings of the EIA to the Scrutiny and Verification panel.

Signatures:

Completing Officer: _____ **Date:** _____

Head of Service: _____ **Date:** _____