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**TITLE: Grants to Voluntary Organisations**

Committee: Commercial Services Committee.

Date: Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2017.

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[R221]

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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 2017/18 financial year.

**2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i) note the latest performance information relating to Voluntary & Community Action East Cambs and the Citizens Advice organisations.
- ii) note the emerging issues identified by the voluntary organisations.
- iii) approve the annual grant contributions for the 2017-18 Service Level Agreements as set out in 6.0.

**3.0 PERFORMANCE FROM APRIL – OCTOBER 2016**

**3.1 Citizens Advice Rural Cambs (Ely Office)**

There have been a total of 5,782 issues presented by 1,296 East Cambs residents in the first 6 months of 2016-17. The top three issues were debt, benefit advice, and employment advice. There were also 374 housing issues, including Council Tax arrears (116) and rent arrears (116). The figures reported do not reflect the thousands of clients that didn't seek advice as their issues had been resolved previously by the service.

1,752 clients were supported with debt advice during April to October 2016. There has been £17,311.84 worth of housing benefit payment gains and £365,428.51 worth of debt negotiated for East Cambs residents (which can involve writing off debt or agreeing more manageable payment plans). Citizens Advice Rural Cambs runs a weekly debt advice clinic that clients can drop in to and get instant help and support with debts.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs continues to employ 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. They have increased the service this financial year from 18hrs to 25 hrs to cope with demand.

The advice service can be accessed in different ways through telephone, email, face to face and in the future Webchat and Skype type services. Citizens Advice Rural Cambs continues to act as a registered agent to authorise paper work for the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme introduced by Cambs County Council to replace the social fund and crisis loans.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs continues to act as an alternative office to the Department of Work & Pensions to verify benefit claims for clients so that pensioners who are often reluctant to apply for benefits because they do not want personal documents such as bank books, passports and marriage certificates can have them verified and returned instantly.

Using the Manchester New Economics Model approved formula; Citizens Advice Rural Cambs have calculated that for every £1 spent on the Citizens Advice Rural Cambs service, there was a fiscal benefit to clients by £26.02, this means income gained through benefits, debts written off and consumer problems resolved.

### 3.2 Citizens Advice Newmarket

There have been a total of 1,132 new issues in the first 6 months of 2016-17 that have arisen from 348 residents of East Cambridgeshire (this is an increase of 538 additional new issues compared to the same point last year).

137 clients were supported with welfare benefit loss of income and 335 clients received debt advice.

98 clients have been supported with debt advice at a specialist level, totalling £368,019. 21 clients received intensive support with Council Tax arrears.

8 clients have been supported for rent arrears and mortgage arrears that have reached re-possession stage and may otherwise lead to homelessness.

88 clients were supported with disability related issues.

A survey carried out by Citizens Advice Newmarket found that 87% of clients advised that they would not have been able to resolve their problems without the help of the service.

Using a treasury approved formula, it has been calculated that in 2014/15, for every £1 invested, £23.05 in benefits was recovered to individuals.

### 3.3 Voluntary & Community Action East Cambs (VCAEC)

VCAEC have provided training for 33 people from 12 member groups on issues including brand awareness, safeguarding adults and child protection. VCAEC has placed 26 volunteers into local projects and businesses and has itself benefited from 1,590 hours of volunteer time to help run the organisation. The total added value of volunteering hours in the VCAEC office was £19,080 up to the end of September 2016.

The Social Car scheme remains in great demand, with 28 drivers completing 1,446 journeys, travelling 43,215 miles, volunteering a total of 3,058 hours, adding £43,215 value to the service. The service enables residents without access to a vehicle and/or unable to use public transport to meet medical appointments. 70% of the journeys undertaken are health related.

The Helping Hands service is generally aimed at elderly residents and helps sustain people in their own homes as well as supporting the social housing sector. The service has seen a positive effect on volunteers who come from a variety of backgrounds including people in long term unemployment and with learning difficulties. Volunteers working on the Helping Hands gardening project between April and the end of September 2016 have given 2,290 hours of their time to complete 135 jobs for clients, who would not otherwise have been able to get the work done. This has generated added value of £35,280 to the service. Demand for the clearance service for unwanted white goods and household items is increasing with approximately 75 jobs per year.

Both the Social Car Scheme and Helping Hands projects support the work of the East Cambs Health and Well Being Partnership and demand for their services is increasing.

#### 4.0 EMERGING ISSUES

As part of the Service Level Agreements, the Citizens Advice services 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 Citizens Advice Rural Cambs

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs has seen an increased demand for all its advice services for debt. In 2015/16 at the 6 month point they dealt with 714 issues of debt, in 2016/17 it was 1,752. This has increased by 1,038 issues. The majority of cases are due to welfare reform, benefit sanctions, mandatory reconsiderations and delays in PIP (Personal Independence Payment) claims.

Payday loans are being utilised more and more as people are not able to manage their money efficiently in difficult times. As part of the registration and triage process of diagnosing how to support a client, a Common Initial Assessment process has been introduced, whereby the debt client is advised

or signposted to financial capability initiatives as part of the triage assessment. Basic financial capability has been incorporated into advice sessions. Citizens Advice Rural Cambs is currently sourcing funding for a dedicated financial capability worker based in Ely.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs' Channel Strategy has identified that 80% of clients access advice services digitally via the Internet and telephone. The service has identified that approximately 80% of East Cambs residents have access to a smart phone, tablet or laptop to access the service digitally, whilst acknowledging that broadband infrastructure is although improving, it is still poor in some areas of the district.

Clients that are digitally excluded face issues such not having the resources required to access benefits online, pay their bills online or have poor IT literacy skills. The overall effect being debt as a result of not being able to use and/or access services effectively. Citizens Advice Rural Cambs have secured four laptops in East Cambs as part of a charity project which will enable them to support clients with digital exclusion quickly.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs have been trialling a pilot project funded by small donations from clients since October 2016 called ASK in East Cambs which supports the rise in disclosures of men and women who are or have been victims of gender based abuse and violence. The initial focus is on clients with debt, benefits, housing and relationship enquiries because of the link between these enquiries and gender violence abuse. Trained advisers are able to ask questions to give clients the opportunity to disclose gender violence abuse including financial abuse, this will help them identify the problem, explore the options available, provide the appropriate information and advice; and empower the client.

Following the 'Brexit' referendum, the service reported an increase in the number of people coming to the Ely office asking for advice on their rights to live and work in the area. Those clients have included mainly migrants working in agriculture and those who had already been given notice from their employers stating 'Brexit conditions'. Since Brexit, the service has reported many more discrimination cases relating to migrant workers.

#### 4.2 Citizens Advice Newmarket

Debt and Welfare Benefits continue to be the most frequent issues raised at the Citizens Advice Newmarket.

Demand for advice and support in relation to Personal Independence Payment claims is increasing as the scheme enters its third year cycle for renewals from clients who previously claimed Disability Living Allowance.

Various local charities in Newmarket and the surrounding area have recently lost funding from other external sources and there is anxiety that additional demand for services will be placed on Citizens Advice Newmarket.

In 2016-17, there has been an increase in clients reporting issues with landlords such as forced evictions and references not being provided.

Universal Credit was introduced for new applicants aged 35 and under in East Cambs on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 which is to be extended to all claimants in November 2017. Some claimants have reported that payments are proving problematic with issues such as the receipt of late payments. There is some anxiety that similar problems may occur when the scheme is introduced to families.

The main communities of concern are Burwell, Cheveley, Soham South and Fordham. 215 of the 348 unique clients supported by Citizens Advice Newmarket came from these three areas.

#### 4.3 Voluntary & Community Action East Cambs (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.

From October 2016, VCAEC ceased receiving funding from Cambridgeshire County Council for Community and Voluntary Sector infrastructure support (£15,000) and from the Cambridgeshire Commissioning Group for promoting the health sector and consultations, and for attending health related meetings (£5,000). The loss of County funding will provide an opportunity for VCAEC to prioritise their activities within East Cambridgeshire and align their objectives with those of the District Council without reducing the existing levels of activity and social value generated back into the local community.

VCAEC is currently working on a project to provide courses for school leavers providing CV, interview and work experience to ensure their skills make them job ready and competitive when making job applications.

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. VCAEC are exploring other potential projects to provide alternative income streams to make the organisation more sustainable such as a community transport helpline in the office. VCAEC aim to set up a pool of 100 volunteers that can be available to support local events in East Cambridgeshire and potentially link into the Local Authority emergency planning process.

VCAEC supports 148 member organisations on various boards and committees to ensure that the third sector has a voice within East Cambs. They provide support to their members with regular training and support on governance, funding and fund raising. Many issues are health related as the demographic nature of the population gets older and there is pressure on funding and services.

## 5.0 ARGUMENTS/CONCLUSIONS

The District Council recognises that the voluntary and community sector 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 sector through the provision of funding linked to Service Level Agreements with Voluntary and Community Action East Cambs, and to the Citizens Advice services that support clients living within East Cambridgeshire.

The demand on Citizens Advice services 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.

The outputs of the 2016-17 Service Level Agreements will be used as the baselines for 2017-18.

## 6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

It is proposed to maintain the same level of grant funding for 2017-18 as was awarded in 2016-17. This can be funded from existing resources in the Communities & Partnerships budget:

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

Equality Impact Assessment attached at Appendix A.

## 7.0 APPENDICES

### 7.3 Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment

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**Background Documents**

Service Level Agreement 6  
month monitoring reports

**Location**

Room  
F008, The  
Grange

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