
TITLE: Grants to Voluntary Organisations

Committee: Commercial Services Committee.

Date: Tuesday 15th March 2016.

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[Q215]

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 2016/17 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 2016-17 Service Level Agreements as set out in 6.0.

3.0 PERFORMANCE FROM APRIL – OCTOBER 2015

3.1 Citizens Advice Rural Cambs (Ely Office)

There have been a total of 2,926 issues presented by 1,296 East Cambs residents in the first 6 months of 2015-16. The top three issues were debt, benefit advice, and employment advice. There were also 209 housing issues, including Council Tax arrears (64) and rent arrears (48). 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. 199 clients were supported with debt advice during April to October 2015. There has been £14,690 worth of housing benefit payment gains and £417,307.50 worth of debt negotiated for East Cambs residents (which can involve writing off debt or agreeing more manageable payment plans).

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs is entering the final year of a 3 year contract with the Money Advice Service to provide specialist debt advice to support clients with unmanageable debt that helps to prevent homelessness or non payment of priority bills such as council tax. Citizens Advice Rural Cambs runs a weekly debt advice clinic that clients can drop in to and get instant help and support with debts.

The advice service can be accessed in different ways through telephone, email, face to face and in the future Webchat and Skype type services. 80% of calls from clients based in East Cambs are resolved at first point of contact.

During 2014-15, a survey carried out by Citizens Advice Rural Cambs to determine the impacts of the service had on their lives found that 2 in every 3 clients said they had their problem solved within 6 months of contacting the service and that 78% of our clients said they would not have been able to resolve their problem without the service.

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 a treasury 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 £24.54, this means income gained through benefits, debts written off and consumer problems resolved.

3.2 Citizens Advice Newmarket (CA Newmarket)

There have been a total of 594 new issues in the first 6 months of 2015-16 that have arisen from 215 residents of East Cambridgeshire. A survey carried out by Citizens Advice Newmarket found that 78% of clients advised that they would not have been able to resolve their problems without the help of the service.

135 clients were supported with welfare benefit loss of income and 98 clients received debt advice. (see Appendix A for a breakdown of issues by geographical location).

98 clients have been supported with debt advice and 16 clients with £171,368.69 worth of debt have been managed at a specialist level.

35 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 CA Newmarket found that 1 in 4 people had a more secure housing situation, as a result of support.

19 clients received intensive support with Council Tax arrears and 135 clients were supported with welfare benefit and loss of income issues.

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 training for 32 people from 8 member groups on issues including safeguarding adults and child protection. They have organised 2 funding fairs for parish councils and voluntary groups to meet prospective funders and learn more about the funding opportunities available to member organisations and presented a workshop at the East Cambs Parish Conference in April 2015. VCAEC has placed 14 volunteers into local projects and businesses and has itself benefited from 1,535 hours of volunteer time to help run the organisation. The total added value of volunteering hours in the VCAEC office was £18,420 up to the end of Sept 2015.

The Social Car scheme remains in great demand, with 29 drivers completing 1,837 journeys, travelling 48,381 miles, volunteering a total of 3,487 hours, adding £41,844 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 (Sanctuary Housing have a service level agreement with VCAEC). 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 2015 have given 2,290 hours of their time to complete 104 jobs for clients, who would not otherwise have been able to get the work done. This has generated added value of £27,480 to the service. In the last 12 months VCAEC have had support from the Police and the Community Safety Partnership to introduce a clearance service for unwanted white goods and household items.

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 2014/15 at the 6 month point they dealt with 572 issues of debt, in 2015/16 it was 714. This has increased by 142 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 advise that current horizon scanning demonstrates that the Universal Credit roll out will hit a 'shock point' for East Cambs residents turning to Citizens Advice Rural Cambs in April 2017 due to 'managing money' issues. For long term benefits claimants the burden of managing a fund which was previously managed for them by the Department of Work and Pensions and local authority in terms of council tax and housing benefit and will take long term transition.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs also expect to see more clients who are digitally excluded, who do not have the resource to access benefits online, pay their bills online or have poor IT literacy skills. As part of our digital agenda and transformation programme Citizens Advice Rural Cambs aims to provide 'digital' support to those clients by offering a 'tablet' scheme, therefore enabling residents to 'loan' tablets and be supported in using them. Funding needs to be sourced for this.

4.2 Citizens Advice Newmarket (CA Newmarket)

Debt and Welfare Benefits continue to be the most frequent issues raised at the Citizens Advice Newmarket, representing 63% of the work carried out for East Cambridgeshire residents. The number of people contacting the service with debt issues has decreased however it is notable that notices connected with Council Tax debt are often the motivator for clients to address their overall debt issues. It is thought that this decrease is due to improved employment in the area with new rules on Job Seekers Allowances providing an incentive for people to remain in work longer.

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 create 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.

Citizens Advice Newmarket provides financial capability support to clients by helping to develop skills to prevent a similar scenario arising again, for example by providing help with budgeting, changing utility provider etc.

Specialist advice in applications and renewals of disability or ill health related benefits continues to be a main area of demand. Around one third of clients have long term ill health or disability. Citizens Advice Newmarket aims to make clients self-sufficient by familiarising them with the processes of applying/renewing benefits. If an application fails, the client immediately loses the disability benefit, but also other benefits including housing benefits and council tax reductions.

Universal Credit was introduced for new applicants under 35 in East Cambs on 1st April 2015, however to date this has had minimal impact on service.

Looking forward, there is anxiety around the changes in Working Tax Credit, which will mean a substantial reduction in income for some families. This may come alongside interest rate rises affecting working families with a mortgage.

The statistics in Appendix A show that the main communities of concern are Burwell, Cheveley and Fordham. 113 of the 215 unique clients supported by CA Newmarket came from these three areas. 57% of issues related to benefits and tax credits came from people living in 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. 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 an alternative income stream 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 has developed a voluntary out of hours discharge service from hospital which had the support and funding from UnitingCare, however due to the withdrawal of UnitingCare from the older people's contract this project has been put on hold.

VCAEC supports 145 member organisations on various boards and committees to ensure that the third sector has a voice at both County and District council level. 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 (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 services that support clients living within East Cambridgeshire.

The demand on Citizens Advices 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.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

It is proposed to maintain the same level of grant funding for 2016-17 as was awarded in 2015-16. This can be funded from existing resources in the Community & Leisure Services budget:

Citizens Advice Rural Cambs: £47,346.80

Citizens Advice Newmarket: £23,166.03

VCAEC: £19,928

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 Impact Assessment

Background Documents

Service Level Agreement 6
month monitoring reports

Location

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F008, The
Grange

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