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**TITLE: Grants to Voluntary Organisations**

Committee: Community Services Committee.

Date: Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

Author: Lewis Bage, Communities and Partnerships Manager

[S259]

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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 Cambridgeshire District Council, and to agree their funding allocations for the 2018/19 financial year.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i) Note the latest performance information relating to Voluntary & Community Action East Cambridgeshire and the Citizens Advice organisations.
- ii) Note the emerging issues identified by the voluntary organisations.
- iii) Approve the annual grant contributions for the 2018-19 Service Level Agreements as set out in 6.0.

3.0 PERFORMANCE FROM APRIL – OCTOBER 2017

3.1 Citizens Advice Newmarket

There have been a total of 244 new issues in the first 6 months of 2017-18 that have arisen from 189 residents of East Cambridgeshire.

126 clients were supported with some element of welfare benefit issues and 80 clients received debt advice.

30 clients have been supported with debt advice at a specialist level, totalling £58,149. 7 clients received intensive support with Council Tax arrears.

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

Using a treasury approved formula, it has been calculated that in 2016/17, for every £1 invested, £19.15 in benefits was recovered to individuals.

The main communities of concern are Burwell, Cheveley, Soham South and Fordham. 117 of the 189 unique clients supported by Citizens Advice

Newmarket came from these three areas.

### 3.2 Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire

There have been a total of 5,644 issues presented by 1,216 East Cambridgeshire residents in the first 6 months of 2017-18. The top issues were debt, benefit advice, relationships and families; and employment advice.

There were also 405 housing issues, including Council Tax arrears (143) and rent arrears (132). These figures are related to clients accessing the service for the first time in 12 months, however the service has hundreds of clients returning in the same time period for advice on further issues.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire has seen an increased demand for all its advice services as they are dealing with many more vulnerable clients with increased demands and more complex needs. Figures show that the number of issues per client is increasing compared to five years ago when clients were averaging 2.5 issues, to nearly 5 issues per client. Volunteers and staff have received further training on dealing with challenging behaviour as clients become more demanding and aggressive due to the significant frustrations in their life.

There were 1,496 issues of debt dealt with during April to October 2017. There has been £3,511.56 worth of housing benefit payment gains and £476,087.00 worth of debt negotiated for East Cambridgeshire residents (which can involve writing off debt or agreeing more manageable payment plans). Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire runs a weekly debt advice clinic that clients can drop in to and get instant help and support with debts which is funded by the Money Advice Service.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire continues to employ a specialist debt adviser for 29 hours funded by the Money Advice Service per week to support clients with unmanageable debt that helps to prevent homelessness or non-payment of priority bills such as council tax.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire launched its Transformation Strategy in September 2017 which saw the introduction of webchat and a new website. The service can also be accessed via telephone, email and face to face.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire acts as a registered agent and one is one the partners providing access to advice for the Cambridgeshire Local Assistance Scheme introduced by Cambridgeshire County Council to replace the social fund and crisis loans.

Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire 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 Cambridgeshire have calculated that for every £1 spent on the Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire service, there was a fiscal benefit to clients by £22.28, this means income gained through benefits, debts written off and consumer problems resolved.

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

VCAEC have provided training for 20 people on issues including brand awareness, safeguarding adults and child protection. VCAEC has placed 30 volunteers into local projects and businesses and has itself benefited from 1,780 hours of volunteer time to help run the organisation. The total added value of volunteering hours in the VCAEC office was £19,812 up to the end of September 2017.

The Social Car scheme remains in great demand, with 30 drivers completing 1,769 journeys, travelling 56,699 miles, volunteering a total of 3,781 hours, adding £45,372 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 2017 have given 3,300 hours of their time to complete 303 jobs for clients, who would not otherwise have been able to get the work done. This has generated added value of £39,600 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 Cambridgeshire Health and Well Being Partnership and demand for their services is increasing.

VCAEC is a member of the East Cambridgeshire Health and Well Being Partnership and Community Safety Partnership. VCAEC has set up the Volunteering Cambridgeshire and Peterborough CIC with other volunteer centre colleagues to launch Motivating Cambridgeshire to promote volunteering in East Cambridgeshire. VCAEC is inputting into the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Life Chances Fund application for social prescribing in Cambridgeshire.

#### 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 Newmarket

Debt and 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.

Universal Credit was introduced for new applicants aged 35 and under in East Cambridgeshire on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015 which is to be extended to all claimants in September 2018. 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.

##### 4.2 Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire

The Council has been working closely with Citizens Advice Rural Cambs and has reviewed the Service Level Agreement so that services are aligned to ensure that the needs of clients continue to be met with consideration of emerging issues, such as the unknown impacts of when Universal Credit is extended to all claimants in September 2018.

The ECDC Housing team has ensured that it is well positioned to respond to the impacts of the full Universal Credit roll out as well as the Homelessness Act by recruiting to new posts and providing accommodation for the Rosmini Centre at the Council offices to provide advice and support on immigration problems, social issues, employment issues and legal aid, and growing the number of community hubs around the district. In addition to the work of the Housing team, the Council's Anglia Revenues Partnership team provides a range of help and support to people regarding Council Tax matters, such as face-to-face assistance two days a week at the Council offices for more complex enquiries, Discretionary Housing Payments to people where Universal Credit or Housing Benefit does not cover the cost of their

accommodation, Council Tax enquiries and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.

The reviewed Service Level Agreement will ensure that the services of both the Council and Citizens Advice Rural Cambs complement one another, with Citizens Advice Rural Cambs providing both general and more focused, specialist advice including debt advice, welfare and benefits, bankruptcy, debt relief orders, consumer advice, immigration advice, pension advice and education related advice. This approach will ensure that there will be no detriment to service users. A reviewed Service Level Agreement will also mean that any duplication of services such as housing advice, is minimised and better value for money achieved.

During 2018/19, the Council will continue to work closely with Citizens Advice Rural Cambs to monitor the impacts of Universal Credit as they become apparent and will review the Service Level Agreement accordingly to ensure that clients are receiving the support and advice that they require.

#### 4.3 Voluntary & Community Action East Cambridgeshire (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 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 141 member organisations on various boards and committees to ensure that the third sector has a voice within East Cambridgeshire. 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.

During 2018/19, the Council will work closely with VCAEC to review the Service Level Agreement so that services align with and complement emerging Council strategies and contribute to emerging action plans such as the Draft Emerging Vulnerable Community Strategy and Action Plan.

## 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 Cambridgeshire, 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.

During 2018/19, the Council will continue to work closely with the three funded voluntary organisations to monitor the impacts of the emerging issues identified at 4.0, to ensure that clients are receiving the support and advice that they require through the Service Level Agreements

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 2018-19.

## 6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

It is proposed to maintain the same level of grant funding for 2018-19 as was awarded in 2017-18. This can be funded from existing resources in the Communities & Partnerships budget:

Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire: £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 - EIA - Grants to Vol Orgs 2018-19
- Appendix B - Full EIA Form - Grants to Vol Orgs 2018-19

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**Background Documents**

Service Level Agreement  
6 month monitoring  
reports

**Location**

Room  
F008, The  
Grange

**Contact Officer**

Lewis Bage  
Communities and Partnerships Manager  
(01353) 665555  
E-mail:  
[lewis.bage@eastCambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:lewis.bage@eastCambridgeshire.gov.uk)