

AGENDA ITEM 13

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

20 MARCH 2012

CITIZEN ADVICE BUREAU

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOODS

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Head of Communities and Neighbourhoods to submit a report outlining the current CAB service in Melton and seeking Members approval to continue with the current arrangements until 30th September 2012

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Members note the current CAB service in Melton and approve to extend the current service until 30th September 2012, when a further report outlining a longer term proposal will be presented to this committee.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Up until the closure of the Melton CAB in November 2011, the Council had a long standing history of supporting the provision of independent advice through the Citizens Advice Bureau. This assistance has been in the form of significant funding as well as making rooms available at the Children's Centres.
- 3.2 The Citizens Advice Bureau works closely within the local community to meet local people's needs, offering free and impartial advice on financial or legal problems, including debt and money advice, working out benefit entitlements, employment issues such as minimum wage and unfair dismissal, consumer advice, housing, homelessness, mortgage arrears, immigration and seeking asylum in the UK.
- 3.4 Members of the Policy, Finance & Administrative Committee at their meeting of 7 December 2011, approved the introduction of a short term service until the end of April 2012, and then to develop the medium and longer term proposals. Approval is requested from members to continue with this current service, whilst officers develop a longer term solution by September 2012, in line with the recommendations approved on the 7 December 2011.
- 3.5 Melton Borough Council have been working closely with the LeicesterShire CAB (formerly known as South and West Leicestershire CAB) to develop a range of services to help the citizens of Melton. They provide a general advice service and sign post where appropriate.
- 3.6 A new CAB service based at Parkside on Mondays & Thursdays was launched on the 16th February 2012. Sessions are a mixture of drop in & bookable sessions. The advisors use the customer service desk to see clients and confidential rooms where available.

- 3.7 As part of the wider advice service provision the CAB committed to providing a “local” telephone number to allow customers to access advice over the telephone. Whilst the CAB has now purchased the 01664 numbers this system has not been set up and therefore there is no booking system in place. There is also a commitment to provide an advice service from the Children’s Centres. The Council has made rooms available at the COVE and have been block booked for 3 months, however the CAB have not been able to provide this service yet.
- 3.8 Whilst Melton Borough Council have provided space at Parkside & the Children Centres there was also a commitment to use the Melton Library on a Tuesday, this day being seen as the busiest day of the week in Melton and therefore a good opportunity for people to see the CAB. LeicesterShire CAB has been in discussions with the Library service but little progress has been made after initial meetings 6 weeks ago.
- 3.9 To date the CAB has seen approximately 25 people with the vast majority seeking Financial, Debt & Benefit advice. One of the areas officers hope to develop is provide an understanding the ethos of the co-location office and an address an expectation that there would be a separate area in reception and rooms available all of the time. Despite these initial concerns the CAB continue to have a brand and are trusted as being impartial, irrelevant of the limited service they currently offer
- 3.10 Ensuring advice and support is provided in the best possible way and delivering effective outcomes through multi-agency work are key components of our Corporate Plan. As part of our approach to promoting advice & support we are working with a number of agencies including Clockwise Credit Union & the Money Advice Service to deliver free face to face support & advice. We have also been approached by a number of agencies that can offer a range of advice services including debt, employment law, legal, & welfare advice. Further discussions will take place around the possible opportunities of commissioning specific services.

3.11 Voluntary Sector Annual report

Members are asked to note that it was planned to bring an annual report on the voluntary sector to this committee, which summarised the progress and performance against their service level agreements. However, as the Melton CAB closed in November and the uncertainty surrounding Voluntary Action Melton form the majority of the voluntary activity, a report will be presented to members in September. This will provide members with the details of what is being proposed to sustain these type of services.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 By continuing to support the presence of the Citizens Advice Bureau in Melton, the Council is facilitating access to an important source of independent advice to potentially vulnerable members of the public.

- 4.2 There are clear links with the CAB and some of the Council's priorities within the Corporate Plan:
- Improving the Well-being of vulnerable people
 - Improve access to money, debt, redundancy, housing and mortgage advice.
 - Encourage people to claim the benefits they are entitled to

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Members approved the financial contribution at their meeting of 7 December 2011 and resolved that the residual amount of the Councils CAB 'grant' for 2011/12 (£16,667) be allocated on a 50/50 basis to support the short term service and capital investment. This arrangement, however, will be reviewed and discussed with LeicesterShire CAB, in light of the delay in introducing the short term service.
- 5.2 Within the Council's budget for 2012/13 there is an amount of £50,000 for this service and included within the report presented to members later this year will be proposals of how this money is being allocated.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

- 6.1 No direct legal implications have been identified with the recommendations contained in this report
- 6.2 A Service Level Agreement will be developed.

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

- 7.1 There are no direct links to community safety arising from this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES

- 8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment will be developed when details of the sustainable service are agreed, however, at this stage, as the report seeks to introduce services for vulnerable people as soon as possible any equality issues are seen as being positive.

9.0 **RISKS**

9.1 .

Probability

Very High A					Risk No.	Description
High B					1	Members do not approve proposals
Significant C					2	LeicesterShire CAB unable to deliver the [longer term] services
Low D			2		3	
Very Low E			1,			
Almost Impossible F						
	IV Negligible	III Marginal	II Critical	I Catastrophic		

↓

→ **Impact**

10.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE**

10.1 There are no specific implications arising from this report.

11.0 **CONSULTATION**

11.1 Meetings with the National CAB contact and Leicestershire CAB have led to the recommendations identified in this report

12.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

12.1 All

Contact Officers M Shields/H Rai, Head of Communities & Neighbourhoods

Date: 08 March 2012
 Appendices: None
 Background Papers: None
 Reference: X/CSA/2011.12/080312/HR- CAB