

SUBJECT:	<i>Service Level Agreement with Chiltern Citizens Advice Bureau</i>
REPORT OF:	<i>Cabinet Portfolio: Healthy Communities</i>
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER	<i>Head of Healthy Communities</i>
REPORT AUTHOR	<i>Martin Holt 01494732055 mholt@chiltern.gov.uk</i>
WARD/S AFFECTED	<i>(All Wards);</i>

1. Purpose of Report

To agree the award of funding to the Chiltern Citizens Advice Service (CAB) for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. That Cabinet agrees to grant aid the Chiltern Citizens Advice Service with funding of £135,000/annum for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2022**
- 2. That authority be delegated to the Head of Healthy Communities to agree the terms of the Service Level Agreement with the Chilterns Citizens Advice Service, in consultation with the portfolio holder.**

2. Reasons for Recommendations

2.1 The work of the CAB contributes directly to the delivery of the Council's Housing and Homelessness duties strategies. As a key partner in reducing the risk of homelessness, CAB dealt with nearly 300 enquiries during 2017/18 from clients who were specifically facing homelessness or the threat of it. CAB also provided wider advice and support to other clients on a range of other issues that impacted on housing. This included mediation with landlords, support in dealing with disrepair and help with benefits that helped clients to claim a total of approximately £600,000 of additional benefits in 2017/18 to help meet their day to day living and housing costs. This underpinned the specialist targeted money advice work that directly prevented at least 41 clients from being made homeless due to rent or mortgage arrears in 2017/18. These homelessness preventions saved an estimated minimum cost to the Council of approximately £122,000 if those clients had instead been made homeless and been placed in temporary accommodation (based on the average cost and length of time for clients in bed and breakfast in 2017/18). However, without CAB's wider interventions the temporary accommodation costs to the Council in 2017/18 would probably have been even higher than this as it is likely that other clients would also have become homeless without the mediation, benefits advice and other services delivered by CAB.

2.2 The CAB assists the Council's excellent delivery of council tax collection through the support and debt advice it provides to residents on council tax and housing benefit issues. Should the council tax collection performance fall below 98.5% there would be an adverse impact on the proposed council budget for 2019/2020, with a potential for deficit on the collection fund, which would require a negative adjustment in our overall budget. At Chiltern there is usually a surplus in the collection fund; for example in 2017/18 we had a positive adjustment of £195k

3. Content of Report

3.1 Citizens Advice Chiltern (CAC) is a local charity providing free, confidential, independent and high quality advice to anyone who lives or works in the community. It provides; a free, independent, confidential and impartial service to everyone, on their rights and responsibilities, and has developed a range of generalist and specialist services meeting the changing needs of the local community.

3.2 The advice is provided by 70+ trained volunteers and paid staff (including 13 specialist caseworkers) through offices in Amersham & Chesham as well as outreach services at Chalfont St Peter, and Prestwood. Clients are supported via drop-in and scheduled face to face appointments as well as telephone advice on a range of issues including employment, debt, housing, benefits and relationships. Most advice is given at the general level with specialist services in benefits, debt and employment.

3.3 Chiltern CAB is a valued partner and the SLA grant of £125,000 during 2017-18 financial year represented approx. one third of their total income with the remainder coming from donations, grants and specific project work.

3.4 The CDC grant enables the CAB to provide a quality, holistic advice service resulting in the Quality of Advice Assessment (QAA) rating for the quality of advice and customer experience for 2017/2018 being maintained at a high level.

3.5 The top four advice issues for 2017/18 were benefits and tax credits (31%), debt (28%), housing (17%) and employment (9%). The majority of clients - 64% - reported having a disability or a long term health condition.

3.6 The service in 20 17/18 supported 4,645 clients with 16,272 issues and provided £975,600 financial benefits to customers. This included supporting clients to access benefits and tax credits and other financial resolutions to a value of £687,742 which averaged £148 benefit per client. The value of Debts written off for clients with the support of the CAB was £287,858.

3.7 During 2017/18 the CAB's expended its energy advice project with the worker delivering group sessions in the community and individuals advising clients on minimizing their energy consumption and energy bills, directly supporting actions in the Councils Home Energy Conservation Act and Fuel Poverty action plans.

3.8 The Council also contracted the Chiltern CAB in partnership with South Bucks to support the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller outreach project address the impact of benefit changes following the sale of the County owned traveller sites to a private landlord.

3.8 Chiltern District Council also supported the development of a Consumer Empowerment Project funded by National Citizens Advice researching the mobile phone repair market locally and producing a Service Charter, endorsed by Trading Standards, Citizens Advice and the local councils, for shops to sign up to, giving customers confidence and best service.

3.10 Through partnership working with the other Buckinghamshire CAB's the Chiltern CAB supports the delivery of the Money Advice Service and Pensionwise services as well as working closely with Food Banks, Credit Union and other charitable organisations.

3.11 Future challenges include;

- Increased demand for advice services – whilst more clients are accessing self-service support via the website, similar to the experience of housing more complex enquiries are being undertaken on a face to face basis. The changes to benefits may increase demand for CAB services.
- Challenging funding environment – The Council has traditionally encouraged the CAB to diversify its funding stream and the CAB has successfully accessed alternative funding. With the potential for continued cuts in public funding over the next three years, and potentially rising demand, any change to the service delivery can have significant negative consequences for homeless prevention and council tax collection, both of which could be a negative impact on the Council.
- Citizens Advice Chiltern continues to face funding challenges and during 2017/18 a number of projects finished due to end of funding. The trustee board is fully committed to providing a quality service in a cost effective manner and some of the actions include training of new volunteers, upgrade of IT infrastructure, improved internal communications and the recruitment of a fundraiser to assist in developing new funding opportunities as detailed in its Business Plan

3.12 To support the delivery of the business plan the Council is continuing to explore the opportunity to relocate the CAB office from the Barn Hall Annex in to the Council offices enabling improved customer service. Many of our customers are also customers of the CAB and a joint approach would assist to resolving complex issues swiftly and avoid additional costs incurred by the public sector as a whole.

3.13 Relocating to the Council offices could save the CAB approximately £10,000 in operating costs. The CAB is considering what data protection requirements would be required to enable co-location. In the meantime they are to continue to operate out of Barn Hall Annex on a rolling lease.

3.14. At the Cabinet 29TH September 2015 it was agreed to fund the CAB £125,000/annum with an additional £10,000 available for specific projects. This additional funding was used to support the gypsy and traveller project. With the costs arising from the CAB remaining in the Barn Hall Annex for the foreseeable future it is proposed that the Council increases its grant by the £10,000 to reduce the impact on the CAB. It is therefore proposed to award a grant of £135,000 for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2022 in return for a service level agreement.

4 Consultation

Not Applicable

5 Options (if any)

- *To award funding for the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2022 in line with the Buckinghamshire Compact or award funding on an annual basis.*

- *To continue to fund CAB with and award of £125,000/annum*
- *To increase funding to the CAB to £135,000*

7. Corporate Implications

Reports must include specific comments addressing the following implications;

7.1 Finance: the provisional budget anticipates an award of £135,000; it is recommended that the agreement with the CAB should be subject to annual review and 6 month notification of any change in funding. Thus should this area of work be the subject of further savings or the demand for the service is not as great as current predictions indicate the council could renegotiate the funding agreement. Any change would take effect after 6 months and for the following year.

7.2 Legal: The support to the CAB assists the Council in ensuring that those with protected characteristics under the Equalities Act are supported with advice and assistance to access services

8. Links to Council Policy Objectives

This links to the 'We will work towards safe and healthier local communities' aim of the CDC Aims and Objectives 2017-20.

9. Next Step

Officers will agree the Service Level Agreement with the Chiltern CAB in consultation with the Head of Healthy Communities and the Portfolio Holder. Any changes to the lease arrangements for Barn Hall Annexe and the proposed occupation at King George V House will be dealt with under the Head of Environment's estate management powers under the Scheme of Delegation.

Background Papers:	Chiltern CAB Annual Review 2017/18 Report Appendix 1
---------------------------	--