

MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Mid Suffolk Cabinet	REPORT NUMBER: MCa/19/31
FROM: Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing	DATE OF MEETING: 6 January 2020
OFFICER: Tom Barker, Assistant Director, Planning and Communities	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB165

THREE YEAR FUNDING FOR MID SUFFOLK CITIZENS ADVICE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To request that Cabinet Members endorse the granting of a three-year funding agreement for Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice (CA) commencing 2020/2021.
- 1.2 To confirm that the authority for signing of the funding agreement sits with the Assistant Director, Planning and Communities.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The following options have been considered:
 1. Cease revenue funding the Mid Suffolk CA
 2. Continue with an annual revenue funding agreement
 3. Commence a three-year funding agreement.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That a three-year funding agreement for the Mid Suffolk CA be approved.
- 3.2 That authority be delegated to the Assistant Director, Planning and Communities sign off the agreement following discussion with the Cabinet Member for Communities.

REASON FOR DECISION

To provide the Mid Suffolk CA with greater certainty about three-year funding from Mid Suffolk District Council, consistent with the Council's support for the value and impact that it achieves.

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 In April 2019 the Grant Offer letter offering Mid Suffolk CA £86,700 revenue funding for 2019/20 the Council noted that a request for three-year funding had been received. The letter further noted that it was anticipated that further talks would take place regarding this request and the possible implementation of 3-year funding agreements from 2020/21 and beyond.

4.2 In early 2019 it was confirmed that Suffolk County Council (SCC) was cutting grants to CA services across Suffolk by 50% for 2019/20 as part of a programme of budget savings. This resulted in a reduction in SCC funding for Mid Suffolk CA from £40,500 in 2018/19 to £20,000 in 2019/20. This left the CAs with a consequential funding gap which was partly recovered with funds provided by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), who agreed to fund 50% of SCC's original funds for both 2019/20 and 2020/21. It was anticipated that SCC funding would be completely withdrawn from 2020/21 however talks between the CAs and SCC have been ongoing to try and avoid that position.

4.3 On 19 August 2019 the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked the Mid Suffolk CA and Sudbury and District CAs to appear before the committee and give a presentation on their work to inform the scrutiny process. The presentation provided evidence of the significant contribution made by the CAs including social and economic impact and value for money. The committee was especially keen to understand the funding position and made a resolution as below.

1.1 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommends to both Cabinets that the current minimum funding for the Citizens Advice be maintained for the next three years.

1.2 That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee approach the Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees and Scrutiny Governance Officers of East Suffolk Council, West Suffolk Council, Ipswich Borough Council and Suffolk County Council, with a view of setting up a county-wide scrutiny process to examine funding and the impact on Citizens Advice and the services of Citizens Advice.

1.3 That the Chairs of the said Scrutiny Committees be supplied with a report from Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the topic of Citizens Advice based on this Committee meeting as a basis for the scrutiny process.

4.4 Some other local authorities have indicated that they are interested in taking part in a countywide scrutiny process so this will be moving forwards. The County Council has not indicated that it will participate but it is hoped that this position could be open to change. However, both Babergh and Mid Suffolk Portfolio Holders have indicated that they are keen to show leadership in this area and confirm a commitment to three-year funding agreements.

4.5 The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Grants programme is currently under review in order to achieve alignment to the Communities Strategy and enable the new Grants Team to identify any service improvements in order to improve efficiency and maximise funding. The Communities Strategy and its emerging action plan emphasise the importance of focusing on evidenced need.

4.6 The case for funding the CA is supported by evidence of its impact and value and the organisation works with some of the most vulnerable people in the district, assisting with advice on benefits, debt and a range of other often interconnected and complex issues. The grants review will identify any other grant recipients which warrant three-year funding agreements and will seek to enable the Council to maximise its role as an active and engaged funder.

4.7 There is therefore a strong case for offering a three-year funding agreement to the Mid Suffolk CA in order to:

- confirm our ongoing commitment to the organisation which provides significant and evidenced contribution consistent with the outcomes sought in our Communities Strategy
- show leadership as part of further ongoing dialogue regarding a more sustainable funding approach for CAs across the county.

4.8 The exact amount of the funding agreement will be confirmed in the early part of 2020 alongside other funding offers and will be informed by the application process and broader grants review. However, the funding per annum will be at least at the funding level for 2019/20 (£86,700).

4.9 The Council also currently provides a significantly lower level of funding to the Suffolk West (£5,200 in 2019/20) and Diss (£8,810 in 2019/20) CAs in recognition that some residents access those services. These are currently one year agreements and any change to three year agreements will be addressed as part of the Council's grants review and informed by the work of the countywide scrutiny group. It is however expected that annual funding will continue for these CAs for 2020/21, subject to the usual application process.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

5.1 The work of the CA is strongly linked to the Communities strategic priority within the recently adopted Corporate Plan (2019-27) and the delivery of the Communities Strategy which underpins it.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Revenue/Capital/ Expenditure/Income Item	Total	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Indicative revenue grant funding	£260,100	£86,700	£86,700	£86,700
Net Effect				

6.1 The above figures are indicative, see comments at 4.7. These figures are within existing budgets.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The Council has power to award funding under Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011, which allows the Council to do anything that individuals generally may do, in particular if it is carried out for the benefit of the Council, its areas or persons, resident or present in the area.

7.2 Legal advice will be taken in respect of the final wording of the agreement to ensure that necessary legal safeguards are in place and that payments will depend on satisfactory performance against stated outputs and submission of required documents.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 This report is relevant to the following risk on the Significant Risk Register; 3a) We may not be able to help communities become more sustainable. The recommended approach will help to mitigate that risk. Other risks are outlined below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
Council requirements not fully satisfied over the three-year period	Unlikely (2)	Serious (3)	Contract to specify performance required and documentary evidence, annual.
Other funders reduce or withdraw funding	Probable (3)	Serious (3)	Ongoing dialogue with CA and other funders to increase resilience and mitigate risk.

9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 The Mid Suffolk CA has been consulted and is keen to move to a three-year funding agreement.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 10.1 The support of the CA is available to all and can be especially valuable to vulnerable groups or those in vulnerable circumstances. A screening EQIA has been carried out indicating that a full EQIA is not required.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None

12. APPENDICES

None

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice Annual Report