

THE DRAFT MINUTE RELATING TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET FROM THE JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 15 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 1:00PM

JOS/20/12 REVIEW OF LOCAL CITIZENS ADVICE

- 32.1 The Chair invited the Corporate Manager for Communities, Vicky Mosley, to introduce Paper JOS/20/12.
- 32.2 The Corporate Manager provided a brief introduction including that Cabinets had approved funding for Local Citizens Advice (LCA) on a three-year rolling funding basis and that the Chief Officers from Local Citizens Advice would be providing a presentation during the meeting.
- 32.3 Councillor Muller asked that as the Diss, Thetford and District Citizens Advice no longer provided a service to Mid Suffolk residents living to the north of the District and would no longer received any funding from Mid Suffolk District Council what would happen to this funding.
- 32.4 The Corporate Manager – Communities responded that the Council would have to have a conversation around this issue with Mid Suffolk LCA for how to provide a LCA service to residents living north in the District.
- 32.5 Councillor Ekpenyong referred to page 53 section 5 and 6 and that the LCA had to apply each year for funding despite the funding being provided on a 3 Year rolling basis, he thought this was a heavy burden for the LCAs to have to undertake each year.
- 32.6 The Corporate Manager – Communities responded that this was a way to apply checks and balances, but that officers and the LCAs were working together to reduce administration. The three-year rolling funding meant that the LCA had a continued funding for the next three years and that each year they applied ensured funding for three years' time.
- 32.7 Councillor McCraw believed that this it was a statutory requirement for organisations to apply for grants funding on an annual basis.
- 32.8 The Assistant Director – Planning for Growth, added that if the rolling grant was not applied to every year, it would be a three-year grant.
- 32.9 The Babergh Cabinet Member for Communities, Councillor Davis, advised Members that this had been discussed at lengths at Cabinet and it had been agreed that the three-year rolling process had an annual process to ensure the best solution.
- 32.10 Councillor Welham referred to the high risk included in the report and ask if the Council would be able to provide further funding if other funders withdrew their support of if Covid-19 pandemic continued for much longer.
- 32.11 The Corporate Manager – Communities responded if that should be the case then the Council would do everything to support the LCAs, taking the Council's budget constraints into account.

- 32.12 The Chair introduce the Chief Officers from the LCAs and invited them to present their presentation:

Nicky Willshere, Chief Officer – Citizens Advice Ipswich
Simon Clifton, Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice
Colleen Sweeney, Chief Officer – Sudbury and District Citizens Advice

- 32.13 The Chair invited questions from Members after the presentation.

- 32.14 Councillor Scarff enquired if Mid Suffolk LCA had picked up work from Diss, Thetford and District LCA, to which the Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk LCA responded that previously Diss LCA had provided an out-reach service but due to Covid-19 and an already decrease in footfall that service was no longer viable for Diss LCA. Mid Suffolk LCA was working to cover this area to the north of the District and would be the sole Citizens Advice provider in the District

- 32.15 Councillor Carter thanked the Chief Officers for the presentation. He referred to the increasing requirement to have access to computers, especially for education and whether funding would be available to support this. He also queried if internet providers were being approached to support this.

- 32.16 The Chief Officer – Citizens Advice Ipswich responded that there were a number of services across the District which provided devices for schooling, however this problem was two-fold, as it was not only a matter of having access to equipment and providers but also knowing how to use it and having access to the internet.

- 32.17 The Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk Citizens Advice had been successful in a bid to access funding from the Government Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) Fund to transform virtual access. Suffolk County Council (SCC) was also running a digital working group and the LCA was part of this. However, Mid Suffolk LCA was working to deliver their own service including a room in a Bank in Eye ad at Wattisham flying station. He believed it would be possible to deliver a service to allow access to a device as an outreach project.

- 32.18 In response to Councillor Adrian Osborne's question regarding a LCA presence in Hadleigh, the Chief Officer – Sudbury and District LCA responded that initially a project had been instigated via a local funding opportunity and training of three part-time specialised debt advisors to cover the District had begun. However, as a result of Covid-19 the funding had been withdrawn. However, she would take this project back to be covered by the core-funding budget, as it was important to both Hadleigh and the wider District.

- 32.19 Councillor Ekpenyong queried how the LCAs would address recruitment of volunteers, which he thought might have been an issue during the pandemic.

- 32.20 The three LCA had different experience with regards to volunteers, but all would be commencing a recruitment drive backed up a volunteer training programme.

- 32.21 Councillor Welham asked if the LCAs had been able to produce a balanced budget for the anticipated increased workload, as a result the Covid-19 pandemic and ensuing lockdowns, and whether there were enough options for recruiting extra staff.

- 32.22 The Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk LCA explained that Stowmarket Relief Trust had reduced their funding and that other funders were no longer able to support the LCA. There had been a high demand for funding due to Covid-19 and this had an impact on the options for applying for funding for the LCA. The three-year rolling funding from the Council had made a big difference. The LCA in Stowmarket had a small number of paid staff and were supported by volunteers. It was a challenge to get specialist advisors, as they required specific training and required a lead period.
- 32.23 The Chief Officer – Sudbury and District LCA advise Members that they received some funding from SCC. She had worked hard to diversify funding streams during the last three to four years, which had enabled projects to go ahead. However, the three-year rolling funding as core-funding had made a tremendous difference to the organisation.
- 32.24 Councillor McLaren was impressed for the consideration of the Shotley Peninsula and that access to LCA would make a difference to residents there. She recommended that social prescribing would be the best service to provide for the peninsula and asked if the Chief Officer would be able to provide an idea of how much this would cost. To which the Chief Officer explained that this would be difficult to cost out right now, but she was keen to get services extended to the peninsula.
- 32.25 Councillor McLaren asked if the Chief Officer would keep her update on this project.
- 32.26 Councillor Morley, the Leader referred to page 4 and asked to what extend West Suffolk Council (WSC) and Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) contributed to the LCAs services.
- 32.27 The Chief Officer – Sudbury and District LCA responded that this option had not been considered.
- 32.28 The Chief Officer – Ipswich LCA responded that IBC had been very supportive and as the MSDC and BDC expanded due to developments, resident from these areas accessed the services of LCA in Ipswich. East Suffolk Council did not provide any funding to the Ipswich LCA, due to the community chest funding process they used.
- 32.29 The Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk LCA advised Members that WSC did not provide any funding for Stowmarket LCA, however the LCA was a nationwide network helping residents irrespectively of where they lived.
- 32.30 The Assistant Director – Planning for Growth considered the options for Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils funding LCA outside the Districts and the reverse. He asked if the Chief Officers had made funding applications to neighbouring Councils and if not, perhaps officers should have a conversation with IBS and ESC to explore options further.
- 32.31 Councillor Ayres thanked the Chief Officers for the presentation and asked when they would be able to have face to face support again for the elderly and disadvantaged residents.
- 32.32 The Chief Officers – Sudbury and District LCA responded that currently they conducted virtual meeting in the offices and that volunteers were able to help client to use the equipment. However, this was limited due to the social distancing measures, which had to be applied on the already limited and restricted office space.

- 32.33 Members debated the issues and Councillor McCraw informed Members that it had been the intention that the three-year rolling funding should be index linked. He suggested that 1% might be applied for this year's funding, which would be a small amount for each Council.
- 32.34 Councillor Scarff thought that 1% was a little bit parsimonious and that he would support an increase of 2%.
- 32.35 The Assistant Director – Planning for Growth queried this recommendation and whether this would include all grants applications, as all grant recipients were important to the Councils. There was an ongoing dialogue with grants recipients and there was also a Review of Grants Funding Member Working Group, who were working on a review of the grants funding process.
- 32.36 The Chair responded that he was keen to be consistent with the Committee's previous recommendations for the LCAs.
- 32.37 Councillor McLaren would be supporting any increase on a regular basis for the LCAs.
- 32.38 Councillor Welham was unsure whether a link to CPI was the best inflation measure to use. In difficult times CPI may be low but the workload of LCAs was likely to be high.
- 32.39 The Chair clarified the previous discussion around the Committee's recommendations to Cabinet and the Babergh Cabinet's subsequently expectation that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the LCA and the funding on an annual basis.
- 32.40 Councillor McCraw proposed that the recommendations made at the previous three-year rolling funding review be subject to indexation on an annual review basis, finances permitting, as measures of importance we attach to ongoing LCA funding.
- 32.41 Councillor Welham asked for the Chief Officers opinion regarding a Councillor appointed as an observer at the meeting for the trustees, in line with the arrangements for Babergh District Council.
- 32.42 The Chair advised Members that this formed part of a previous items discussed at Committee, but he would allow a brief response out of general interest.
- 32.43 The Chief Officer – Sudbury and District LCA responded that having a representative from the District Council was useful and that engagement was beneficial for both the LCA and or the Council.
- 32.44 The Chief Officer – Mid Suffolk LCA said that an observer would be helpful to have at meetings of the Trustees.
- 32.45 Councillor Scarff and Councillor McCraw considered recommendation 3.1 in the report and they suggested: *that the Committee was satisfied and noted the content of the report and commend the work of the LCA.*
- 32.46 Councillor McCraw proposed the two recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Scarff.

- 32.47 Councillor Scarff said he would like to move a motion for Mid Suffolk only for reallocating funding from Diss, Thetford and District LCA to Mid Suffolk LCA for this year only. The reason being that Mid Suffolk LCA would be supporting the north of the District which had previously been covered the outreach service provided by Diss, Thetford and District LCA.
- 32.48 The Assistant Director – Planning for Growth suggested that this could be dealt with at officer level and that officer could have a conversation with Diss, Thetford and District LCA to withdraw their application for funding and with Mid Suffolk LCA on how to proceed to get this funding reallocated to them.
- 32.49 The Chair asked Councillor Scarff if this was acceptable and Councillor Scarff agreed that this was a sensible solution, as long as the understanding was that any unallocated funding was reallocated to the LCA in Mid Suffolk. This would allow for a degree of flexibility for all partners involved, and he withdrew the Motion.
- 32.50 The Chair put the two recommendation to Members for voting.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED: -

- 1.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is satisfied and notes the content of the Report and commend the work as of the Mid Suffolk Local Citizens Advice, Ipswich Citizens Advice and Sudbury and District Local Citizens Advice**
- 1.2 **That the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee confirm the previous resolution made at the last review that the three-year rolling funding arrangements review be subject to indexation on an annual review basis, finances permitting, as a measure of importance we attach to ongoing LCA funding.**