

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL and MID SUFFOLK DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee	REPORT NUMBER: XXXX
FROM: Cllr Derek Davis- Babergh Cabinet Member for Communities Cllr Julie Flatman -Mid Suffolk Cabinet Member for Communities	DATE OF MEETING: 20 December 2021
OFFICER: Vicky Moseley Corporate Manager Communities	KEY DECISION REF NO. Item No.

REVIEW OF

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To introduce the presentation of Citizens Advise Mid Suffolk and Sudbury & District, outlining their annual performance. This will support the Committee assess whether or not the funding provided to the CAs is enabling them to achieve the outcomes set out in the revenue grant funding agreement and to establish whether the CAs are able to adequately meet the needs of residents within the districts.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 None.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee note the contents of this report and on hearing the CAs presentation may resolve to agree that sufficient assurance has been received from each CA and / or make recommendations to the Cabinet about further actions the Councils could take to support and work with the CAs.

REASON FOR DECISION

For Overview and Scrutiny Committee to satisfy itself that the Citizens Advice in receipt of revenue funding are delivering the outcomes set out in their Annual Agreements.

4. **KEY INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The Citizens Advice service offers free, confidential advice online, over the phone and in person, and those that rely on the service can be assured that the support provided is independent and impartial.
- 4.2 The Covid -19 Pandemic brought with it multiple new problems, challenges and uncertainty and despite the need to adapt and change the way in which the service is provided, the CAs with their staff and volunteers, have developed solutions to ensure that everyone who needs the service continues to be able to receive the help and advice they need.
- 4.3 Recognising the importance and value of the work delivered by CAs, B&MSDC provides a Revenue Grant to the CAs that support the districts residents. A Revenue Grant is one of the three Core Agency Support Grants B&MSDC provides to community groups and organisations and are typically awarded on an annual basis to organisations.
- 4.4 Core Agency Support Grants are the only source of funding that the District Councils provide that can be used to cover an organisation's operational costs and the majority of Revenue Grant recipients use their funding to cover core costs such as staff salaries, rent and venue hire, staff/volunteer training and development as well as general administration costs.
- 4.5 A rolling three-year funding agreement is in place with Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk and Sudbury & District CA. However, both organisations are required to submit a specific application form and provide additional documentation, on an annual basis, to extend said funding agreement for another year.
- 4.6 The rolling three year funding agreement is a reflection of the Councils ongoing commitment to support both CAs to support the Districts most vulnerable assisting with advice on benefits, debt and a range of other often interconnected and complex issues. It is also in recognition that CAs can struggle to attract sufficient long-term, 'core' funding for ongoing operations.
- 4.7 The size of the grant awarded determines how the grant is paid to the each of the CAs. For example, grants of up to and including £10,000, the applicant will receive one payment within the first quarter of the financial year. Applicants in receipt of a grant of between £10,000 and £30,000 will receive two six-monthly payments and applicants who receive a grant of more than £30,000 will receive quarterly payments upon submission of a quarterly update report.

4.8 2021/22 Revenue Grants

Babergh

Sudbury & District Citizens Advice Bureau - £53,500.00

Ipswich & District Citizens Advice Bureau - £7,673.00

Mid Suffolk

Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk - £95,500.00 (£86,700.00 plus an additional £8,800.00)

Citizens Advice West Suffolk - £5,460.00

- 4.9 The Councils continue to provide a lower level of funding to the CAs in West Suffolk and Ipswich & District in recognition that some Babergh / Mid Suffolk residents access those services. One-year agreements continue to be in place for these CAs.
- 4.10 In previous years MSDC has also supported Thetford and Diss CA, however Thetford and Diss CA decided not to apply for a Revenue Grant for 2021/22. During the pandemic/lockdowns it closed its outreach service based at the Eye Medical Centre. The CA reported that it wasn't getting the normal amount of traffic from the Suffolk villages that surround Diss.
- 4.11 In response to Diss & District CAs decision, CA Mid Suffolk extended their offer and has developed a service in Eye Library. The funding that would have been allocated to Thetford and Diss CA was redirected to CA Mid Suffolk to support their extended service.

5. **PERFORMANCE**

- 5.1 All revenue grant applications are assessed by the Communities Officer responsible for grants and funding and approved by the Corporate Manager. The Communities officer agrees outcomes for the grant and sets review meetings with the applicant.
- 5.2 Regular communication with each CA is maintained throughout the year with, in person and/or virtual meetings, to review progress made against the agreed grant funding outcomes and to discuss any issues or barriers that are or may affect the organisation in achieving those outcomes. At the end of the financial year CAs provide a monitoring report, which details how the revenue grant funding was used and what was achieved over the funding period.
- 5.3 An outline of achievements and challenges will be addressed in the CAs Powerpoint presentation however typical discussions at quarterly meetings will cover progress on a range of activities some listed below.
- 5.4 Citizens Advice Mid Suffolk activity has included:
- Telephone and email services maintained with a reported increase in telephone contacts and a reduction in e-mail contacts, when compared to the same period last year.
 - Work to improve the ventilation systems in the CA's offices has been completed and some face-to-face appointments have been offered to clients whose issues cannot be resolved by phone or e-mail.
 - From September 2021 the CA started delivering two new energy related projects – the Energy Advice Programme and the Big Energy Saving Network Project.
 - During quarter one a digital outreach service was launched at Wattisham and Needham Market Community Centre and a further service being run from Eye library. Digital exclusion remains an important issue for CA clients and Mid Suffolk CA has been allocated funding by Mid Suffolk District Council to improve provision across the district.

- The CA is working with B&MSDCs Customer Services team to develop training that gives frontline workers up-to-date information about making referrals to the CA.

5.5 Sudbury & District activity has included:

- Restart of some face-to-face appointments but has found that the telephone help service has been massively successful and some of the issues presented by clients have been resolved without the need to see the client face-to-face.
- The CA's Debt Advisor post has been given additional funding, so the post is now secure for the next three years.
- Recruitment and training of new staff and volunteers is a key priority. At the 1st December 13 new volunteers have been recruited since the beginning of the financial year.
- The CA is looking to restart outreach services in Hadleigh on the 20th January 2022 and advisors will be providing this service on the first Thursday of each month. The CA is also offering services from the Phoenix Centre in Sudbury on a monthly basis.
- The CA reports an increase in the number of 25 - 35year olds seeking advice and guidance on a range of issues. The CA has also been supporting existing clients, 50% of whom have a long-term medical condition.
- The CA are expecting to see an increase in the number of clients and issues but are confident they have the systems and equipment in place to be able to handle a large number of cases and are now able to meet face-to-face with complex cases.

6. LINKS TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

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

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Revenue/Capital/ Expenditure/Income Item	Total	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Mid Suffolk CA		95,500.00	£86,700.00 (with potential addition of £8,800.00)	£86,700.00 (with potential addition of £8,800.00)
Sudbury & District CA		£53,500.00	£53,500.00	£53,500.00
West Suffolk CA		£5,460.00	-	-

Ipswich & District		£7,673.00	-	-
--------------------	--	-----------	---	---

The above table reflects the 3 year agreements in place of Mid Suffolk & Sudbury & Districts CAs. Depending on outcomes of discussions with Thetford and Diss DA during December 2021, CA Mid Suffolk may be awarded with an additional £8,810.00 for their extended work in Eye.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 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.
- 8.2 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.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 Table 2

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.
Impact of Covid not yet fully known	Probable (3)	Serious (3)	Ongoing dialogue with CA and other funders to increase resilience and mitigate risk.

10. **CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 On-going dialogue continues with all CAs as part of the Grants Performance Framework.

11. **EQUALITY ANALYSIS**

11.1 The content of this report is such that there are no equality issues arising from this report although the review itself may consider any equality impacts.

12. **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

12.1 NONE

13. **APPENDICES**

13.1 NONE

14. **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

NONE