

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-019-2018/19
Date of meeting: 8 November 2018



Portfolio: Housing – Councillor S. Stavrou
Subject: Extending the funding of 2 Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau Debt Advisors
Responsible Officer: Paul Pledger – Service Director (Housing & Property) (01992 564248)
Democratic Services: Adrian Hendry (01992 564246)

Recommendations:

(1) That the Cabinet seek a bid from the 2019/20 budget for the funding of the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) two existing full-time Debt Advisors for a further year to be agreed from 1 April 2019 and funded as follows:

(a) £8,400 from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); and

(b) £33,600 from the General Fund District Development Fund (DDF).

Executive Summary:

At its meeting on 12 October 2017 (Minute 55 refers) the Cabinet agreed a further extension of the funding of the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) two Debt Advisors for 2018/2019. The CAB made a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 July 2018 (Minute 23 refers) on the use and outcomes of all the Council's grant funding they receive.

Bearing in mind the reductions in the overall national Welfare Budget there is an increased need for residents to receive continued support around personal budgeting and debt advice. Such advice is very valuable to the Council in both keeping rent arrears low and preventing homelessness. It is therefore recommended that the CAB's Debt Advisors service is extended for a further year from 1 April 2019.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To agree to extend the funding of the CAB's two existing Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2019, in order to provide support to residents with personal budgeting and debt advice which will assist the Council in controlling rent arrears and preventing homelessness.

Other Options for Action:

The main alternative options appear to be:

1. Not to agree to extend the funding of the CAB's two existing Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2019.
2. To only extend the funding for one CAB Debt Advisor.
3. To provide funding for more than two CAB Debt Advisors.

Report

1. At its meeting on 12 October 2017 (Minute 55 refers) the Cabinet agreed a further extension of the funding of the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) two Debt Advisors for a further year in 2018/2019. The CAB made a presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 July 2018 (Minute 23 refers) on the use and outcomes of all the Council's grant funding they receive.

2. Between 1 April and 31 August this year, the CAB Advisors managed debts of around £444,000 and assisted 286 clients. In addition, there were 246 drop-in clients who had face-to-face interviews with the Debt Advisors. Around 41% of the clients were Council or Housing Association tenants and 18% of all clients were either threatened with homelessness or homeless. The CAB has reported that 308 debt issues were addressed with a total of 1,340 activities being conducted on behalf of clients.

3. The CAB is required under their Agreement with the Council to have one Debt Advisor based at the Limes Centre, Chigwell for one half day each week. The CAB have extended this service to 2 half days each week. The CAB has reported that around 37% of the clients assisted were first seen at the Limes Centre during the 5 month period referred to. Many of these clients make repeat visits and become regular visitors with each appointment lasting for up to an hour.

4. Bearing in mind the reductions in the overall national Welfare Budget, there will be an increased need for residents to receive continued support around personal budgeting and debt advice. Such advice may reduce the risk of some households presenting to the Council as homeless, resulting in savings in costly bed and breakfast, hostel or even temporary/interim accommodation in the Council's own stock and assist the Council in controlling rent arrears. It is therefore recommended that the funding of the Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) two existing Debt Advisors for a further year be agreed from 1 April 2019 and funded as follows:

(a) £8,400 from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA); and

(b) £33,600 from the General Fund District Development Fund (DDF).

5. Due to the ring-fence around the HRA, the split between the HRA and DDF reflects the approximate ratio between the service users i.e. Council tenants or non-Council tenants.

Resource Implications

To set some context, for every person that is prevented from becoming homeless as a result of this debt advice, the charge made to single homeless people accommodated in B&B hotels, that is eligible for housing benefit, is equivalent to around £15,920 per annum. Although the charge is self-funded (i.e. is equivalent to the charge made to the Council by the hotels) the Council's Housing Benefit Service is only able to recover the equivalent of around £7,640 (48%) per person per annum from the Government. This is because the Government wants to penalise local authorities to accommodate homeless households B&B. Therefore, the resultant

average cost to the General Fund, through the loss of B&B subsidy, is around £8,280 per person per annum.

The exact percentage split between the HRA and the General Fund cannot be accurately predicted as it is based on the circumstances of those that come forward for advice. The HRA contribution would reflect the proportion of the total number seeking advice that are Council tenants, with everyone else in the Private Sector taking up the General Fund contribution.

Legal and Governance Implications

None

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications

None

Consultation Undertaken

None

Background Papers

CAB Service Agreement

Risk Management

If funding the extension of the CAB 2 Debt Advisors was not agreed this could increase the risk of more households presenting to the Council as homeless resulting in additional costs. It may also result in rent arrears increasing.

Equality Analysis

The Equality Act 2010 requires that the Public-Sector Equality Duty is actively applied in decision-making. This means that the equality information provided to accompany this report is essential reading for all members involved in the consideration of this report. The equality information is provided as an appendix to the report.

Equality Impact Assessment

Section 1: Identifying details

Your function, service area and team: Homelessness and Housing Management

If you are submitting this EqlA on behalf of another function, service area or team, specify the originating function, service area or team: N/A

Title of policy or decision: Extension of the 2 Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) Debt Advisors Service

Officer completing the EqlA: Roger Wilson Tel: 01992 564419

Date of completing the assessment: 18 September 2018

Section 2: Policy to be analysed

| | |
|-----|--|
| 2.1 | <p>Is this a new policy (or decision) or a change to an existing policy, practice or procedure?</p> <p>No</p> |
| 2.2 | <p>Describe the main aims, objectives and purpose of the policy (or decision):</p> <p>To continue to provide a debt advice service through the CAB in order to assist the Council in preventing homelessness and keeping rent arrears under control.</p> <p>What outcome(s) are you hoping to achieve (i.e. decommissioning or commissioning a service)?</p> <p>To supplement services already provided by the Council with expert debt advice to local residents.</p> |
| 2.3 | <p>Does or will the policy or decision affect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • service users • employees • the wider community or groups of people, particularly where there are areas of known inequalities? <p>Yes, service users will benefit from the extension, it will also assist the Council's busy Homelessness Team as they will be able to refer cases and the service will assist vulnerable groups of people threatened with homelessness.</p> <p>Will the policy or decision influence how organisations operate?</p> <p>Yes, the service will assist the Council but also other agencies who may not need to provide support to vulnerable groups if their debts are managed and controlled at an early stage.</p> |
| 2.4 | <p>Will the policy or decision involve substantial changes in resources?</p> <p>The 2 posts have been funded for the last four years with no increased funding being requested.</p> |
| 2.5 | <p>Is this policy or decision associated with any of the Council's other policies and how, if applicable, does the proposed policy support corporate outcomes?</p> <p>The 2 Advisors play an important role in the Council delivering the services set out in its Homelessness Strategy which is a document required by statute.</p> |

Section 3: Evidence/data about the user population and consultation¹

As a minimum you must consider what is known about the population likely to be affected which will support your understanding of the impact of the policy, e.g. service uptake/usage, customer satisfaction surveys, staffing data, performance data, research information (national, regional and local data sources).

3.0

Reference Material



ONS Data for Epping.xlsx

Age / Dependents / Disability

Homeless (Statutory) 2018

- Total as of 31 March 2018 (all age ranges) 116 –
- Temporary accommodation 21 - B&B 45 – Hostel 40 – Other

Population Density

- Essex No. of persons per hectare 3.7% (124,659) East of England - 3.1% (5,846,965.)
- England – 4.1 % (53,012,456.)

[EFDC Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 - progress report 2017](#)

Age / Dependents / Disability

Number of fuel poor households and residents in Essex

| County / LA | Est no. of households | Est no. of fuel poor | % |
|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Essex | 597510 | 44726 | 7.5 |
| Epping Forest | 53459 | 4185 | 7.8 |

Epping Forest District residents are experiencing more fuel poverty than across Essex

CAB statistics

Race

The CAB compiled the following statistics of the 112 clients that attended their service in relation to debt advice: -

| <u>Ethnicity</u> | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Asian or Asian British – Indian | 0% |
| Asian or Asian British – Chinese | 0% |
| Asian or Asian British – Other | 0% |
| Asian or Asian British – Pakistani | 2% |
| Black or Black British – African | 2% |
| Black or Black British - Caribbean | 2% |
| Mixed – Other | 1% |
| Mixed White & Black African | 1% |
| Mixed White & Black Caribbean | 2% |
| Other – any other | 2% |
| White – British | 77% |
| White – English | 3% |
| White – Gypsy or Irish Traveller | 0% |
| White – Irish | 2% |
| White – Scottish | 0% |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <p>White – Welsh 0%</p> <p>White – Other 6%</p> |
| <p>Local Authority District - Indices of Deprivation via www.gov.uk Mental Health JSNA</p> | <p>Mental Health JSNA Page 29</p> <p><u>Deprivation and Poverty</u></p> <p>Deprivation can often be an indicator of mental health need as it is related to many associated risks (housing, employment, poverty). Some of the most deprived and affluent areas of England are located in Essex.</p> <p><u>Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essex 2015 IMD is 17.2 compared to 21.8 nationally. • Epping Forest – 15.263 • Harlow – 23.558 • Tendring – 28.445 • Brentwood – 9.881 <p><u>Mental Health JSNA Page 31</u></p> <p>“...70% of people accessing homelessness services have a mental health problem. Many of these people do not receive the support they need to overcome their mental health and substance misuse problems.”</p> <p>Within this document it states:-</p> <p><i>“a survey of 152 homeless people in Essex..” “..the majority suffered from stress, anxiety or depressions. 84% of participants experienced at least 1 of these and 63% experienced all three.”</i></p> <p>Nearly half reported using drugs and alcohol as coping mechanisms. Approx. 41% had been diagnosed with a mental health condition (0.7% of the Essex population is on a GP Mental Health Conditions Register). Approx. 1 third with mental health issues are currently receiving support.</p> |

| | |
|-----|--|
| 3.1 | <p>What does the information tell you about those groups identified?</p> <p>Additional support provided to clients in relation to the management of their financial affairs especially preventing and managing debt can help to reduce homelessness in the area.</p> |
| 3.2 | <p>Have you consulted or involved those groups that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision you want to implement? If so, what were their views and how have their views influenced your decision?</p> <p>No</p> |
| 3.3 | <p>If you have not consulted or engaged with communities that are likely to be affected by the policy or decision, give details about when you intend to carry out consultation or provide reasons for why you feel this is not necessary:</p> <p>No consultation necessary, cannot identify groups as unable to anticipate homelessness occurring.</p> |

Section 4: Impact of policy or decision

Use this section to assess any potential impact on equality groups based on what you now know.

| Description of impact | Nature of impact Positive, neutral, adverse (explain why) | Extent of impact Low, medium, high (use L, M or H) |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Age | Positive Providing additional resources to the CAB can help to prevent and reduce debt which can result in homelessness | H |
| Disability | | H |
| Pregnancy/maternity/dependents | | H |
| Race | | n/a |
| Marriage/civil partnership | | H |
| Gender | No data located | n/a |
| Gender reassignment | | n/a |
| Religion/belief | | n/a |
| Sexual orientation | | n/a |

Section 5: Conclusion

| | | Tick Yes/No as appropriate | |
|-----|--|--|---|
| 5.1 | Does the EqIA in Section 4 indicate that the policy or decision would have a medium or high adverse impact on one or more equality groups? | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | |
| | | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | If 'YES', use the action plan at Section 6 to describe the adverse impacts and what mitigating actions you could put in place. |

Section 6: Action plan to address and monitor adverse impacts

| What are the potential adverse impacts? | What are the mitigating actions? | Date they will be achieved. |
|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| None | N/A | N/A |

Section 7: Sign off

I confirm that this initial analysis has been completed appropriately. (A typed signature is sufficient.)

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Signature of Service Director (Housing & Development): Paul Pledger | Date: 18 September 2018 |
| Signature of person completing the EqIA: Roger Wilson | Date: 18 September 2018 |

Advice

Keep your director informed of all equality & diversity issues. We recommend that you forward a copy of every EqIA you undertake to the director responsible for the service area. Retain a copy of this EqIA for your records. If this EqIA relates to a continuing project, ensure this document is kept under review and updated, e.g. after a consultation has been undertaken.