

Report to the Communities Select Committee

Date of meeting: 17 January 2017

Portfolio: Housing – Councillor Syd Stavrou

Subject: Extension of the funding of 2 Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau Debt Advisors



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Committee Secretary: A Hendry, ext. 4246

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

That the Communities Select Committee recommends to the Finance Cabinet Committee at its meeting on 19 January 2017, that the funding of the Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) two existing Debt Advisors is extended for a further year from 1 April 2017.

Report:

1. At its meeting on 17 September 2015 (Minute 19 refers) the Finance and Performance Management Cabinet Committee agreed that, £42,000 (£37,800 funded from the HRA and £4,200 from the General Fund) be used in 2016/2017 to extend the funding of the Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) two existing Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2016. This was agreed subject to the CAB Manager attending an appropriate meeting of the Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Panel.
2. The CAB made a presentation to the Grant Aid Review Task and Finish Panel at its meeting on 29 October 2015. It was reported at that time that, during the first 6 months of 2015/2016 the Advisors managed debts of around £713,000 and assisted 304 clients. Around 97 (32%) of these clients were Council tenants. The CAB is required under the Agreement to have one Debt Advisor based at the Limes Centre, Chigwell for one half day each week. The CAB extended this service to 2 half days each week in 2015. The CAB has reported that in the first 6 months of 2015/2016, around 120 (40%) of the clients assisted were first seen at the Limes Centre. Many of these clients make repeat visits and become regular visitors with each appointment lasting for up to an hour. There are also other drop-in clients who cannot be predicted or controlled but are seen for a much lesser period of time.
3. The Communities Select Committee under the previous Item on the Agenda received a presentation from the Epping Forest Citizens Advice Bureau and would therefore have been made aware of the standard of service being provided this year by the Debt Advisors which will inform its decision on the whether to agree the above Recommendation .
4. Bearing in mind the expected 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.

5. The Communities Select Committee is therefore asked to recommend (orally) to the Finance Cabinet Committee at its meeting on 19 January 2017 that the funding of the CAB's two existing Debt Advisors is extended for a further year from 1 April 2017.

Reason for decision:

For the Committee to consider recommending to the Finance Cabinet Committee the extension of the funding of the CAB's two existing Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2017, in order to provide support to residents with personal budgeting and debt advice, which could reduce homelessness and rent arrears.

Options considered and rejected:

1. Not to recommend to the Finance Cabinet Committee extending the funding of the CAB's two existing Debt Advisors for a further year from 1 April 2017.
2. To recommend to the Finance Cabinet Committee only extend the funding for one CAB Debt Advisor.
3. To recommend to the Finance Cabinet Committee provide funding for more than two CAB Debt Advisors.

Consultation undertaken:

No consultation necessary.