

Funding for Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS)

Executive Portfolio Holder: Cllr Sylvia Seal, Leisure & Culture
Director: Netta Meadows, Strategy & Support Services
Service Manager: Jan Gamon, Lead Specialist, Strategic Planning
Lead Officer: David Crisfield, Specialist – Strategic Planning
Contact Details: david.crisfield@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01935 462240

Purpose of the Report

1. This report is seeking member approval for a number of one off additional financial contributions to mitigate the worst effects of the County Council cuts to the core funding of Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS).

Forward Plan

2. This report appeared on the District Executive Forward Plan with an anticipated Committee date of 7th February 2019.

Public Interest

3. SSDC supports, through regular funding, a small number of strategic district-wide organisations approved by District Executive. This financial investment in the sector not only provides direct support to groups working in the local community but also assists the council in the delivery of the council plan. Citizens Advice South Somerset is one of SSDC's regularly funded partner organisations providing services to some of the district's most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents.

Recommendations

4. That the District Executive:-
 - a. Note the report and approve an additional one-off financial contribution for the year 2019/20 of up to £32,000 to Citizens Advice South Somerset (CASS) as set out in the options at paragraph 21.
 - b. Receive a further report by, December 2019, with proposals for consolidating and securing the long-term future of CASS beyond March 31st 2020.

Background

5. South Somerset District Council supports the core advice service of CASS with a grant of £121,730 per annum. A two-year SLA was approved by District Executive Committee on the 1st February 2018 for the two year period 2018-20.
6. In September 2018 Somerset County Council approved a 100% cut to core funding totalling £419,000 to all five of Somerset's Citizens' Advice services. The cut is comprised of a 100% cut to the Adult Social Care grant and a 100% cut to the Local Assistance Scheme Administration Grant.
7. In South Somerset this cut represents a loss of £95,315 core funding for CASS to take effect from 1st April 2019.

8. There will also be a further cut to the Local Assistance Scheme assessment fee (a flexible amount dependent on number of clients assisted). 50% of this assessment fee was cut with immediate effect (from 1st October 2018) with the remaining 50% to be cut as of 1st April 2019. For CASS this represents c£25,000. The LAS grants to beneficiaries will remain.
9. In addition to our core grant we also fund the secondment of a CASS worker into the SSDC Housing Team at a cost of £22,000 via Homeless Reduction Act funding. This will continue until at least March 31st 2020.
10. Four of the five Somerset advice charities are members of National Citizens Advice (South Somerset, Taunton, Mendip and Sedgemoor) with West Somerset Advice currently in the process of applying for membership, which will be awarded if the necessary standards of practice and financial sustainability criteria are met in full. It is anticipated that a decision will be made before the end of the current financial year. For the purposes of this report however, the 5 services will be referred to as Citizens Advice (CA's)

Report

11. Following the confirmation of the County Council cuts, the Chief Executives and Leaders of the District Councils met to consider the impact of the cuts and how, if appropriate, they could assist in mitigating their worst effects, particularly in the immediate short-term.
12. Of particular note is the determination of all the CAs to continue to offer a service to the public and to remain viable organisations. However, in view of the cuts this will most likely require a reduction or reconfiguration of the service going forward, for example -
 - Reduced opening hours,
 - Closure of some outreach services,
 - Paid roles transferred to volunteers,
 - Reduction in the hours of paid staff, including the CEO's/Managers,
 - Less face to face and greater use of telephone.
13. Due to an unexpected central government fund to Citizens Advice for a Universal Credit Support Service four of the 5 Somerset services will gain some new income in 2019/20 that will help mitigate some of the core funding loss. Whilst this will be restricted to specific Universal Credit service delivery it is likely that existing staff can be redeployed who would otherwise have been at risk of redundancy.
14. To help manage the effects of the cuts the 5 Somerset CA's are also being supported by National CA, particularly exploring where there are opportunities for greater collaboration and opportunities to generate efficiencies through shared services.
15. The recommendations put forward in this report will help to secure the service in South Somerset in the short-term (one-year) whilst longer term arrangements are considered during the course of 2019.
16. Under the direction of Netta Meadows, a piece of work has been undertaken by the following District Council officers, and coordinated by SSDC, to consider impact and mitigations.

Mark Leeman - Strategy Specialist Taunton Deane Borough Council/West Somerset Council

Dave Baxter - Strategic Housing Manager, Sedgemoor District Council

Emma Plummer - Project and Improvement Officer, Mendip District Council

Dave Crisfield – Specialist - Strategic Planning, SSDC

17. This involved a meeting with the CEO's/Managers of the five Somerset Citizens Advice services and their Chairs of Trustees (and the Strategic Change Senior Consultant from National Citizens Advice), on the 26th October 2018 and further conversations and a meeting of the District Council Officers, and individual discussions between the CA Managers and their District Council officers.
18. A report, with proposals/options, was produced for consideration by the council Chief Executives and Leaders. The proposals put forward were as follows.

Proposal/Option	Deadline	Comment
1. That the District Councils agree to receive all the plans from the CA's before considering any further investment. This is to ensure the impacts and mitigations work can be appropriately considered.	Plans to be submitted by mid-January 2019	
2. That short-term transitional measures are considered, in particular:- a. Jointly investing in a resource to work with the CAs to identify efficiencies through achievable collaboration and shared back office functions. b. Individually agreeing to a package of 'no cost' or 'low cost' measures following the submission of the CA's lists of 'Quick Wins'.	Feedback from CAs to be received by 16 th November 2018 By 21 st December 2018	Investigation into the viability of a council funded resource to work with the CA's to identify efficiencies through achievable collaboration and shared back office functions is being undertaken by Strategic Change Senior Consultant from National Citizens Advice. Feedback from CA's will determine whether this is a feasible option to pursue. Whilst there may be commonality around some of the issues where a quick win is identified, in particular future management of the LAS, the solutions may be slightly different for each District. Therefore, quick wins to be presented to respective District Council Chief Executives and Leaders for local decisions.
3. That a long term support and development plan is agreed and delivered jointly by the District Councils in response to the Impacts and Mitigations report with a focus particularly on the core grant.	Work on long term will commence in January 2018 with a view to reporting	With quick wins in place to secure service for 2019/20 the District Council officers will meet , both independently and with the CA's to look at the question of 'what constitutes core offer' in order to explore opportunities for a common approach to core funding from 2020/21 onwards.

19. The issue of efficiencies generated by greater collaboration and shared back office and other functions will be looked at as part of the work in 2019 on developing long term solutions. At the current time the arrangements in each of the individual CAs is very different, in some cases particular back office functions being carried out by paid staff in some and volunteers in others, making it too complex to resolve in the short-term. However that is not to say that the CAs haven't already been looking at this with CASS having agreed a number of shared functions in partnership with Taunton CA.
20. With the findings of the work undertaken having received approval by the District Chief Executives and Leaders, this report is concerned with the 'quick win' options presented by CASS in response to Proposal 2b in the table above.

One off funding proposals

21. It is proposed therefore, that members agree to the following three one-off funding contributions for the financial year 2019/20.

1) **Outreach costs for Wincanton and Chard.**

Consider an option for the two outreach services to continue in Wincanton and Chard by either:-

- a) Hosting them free of charge within existing SSDC premises, or
- b) Through an additional one-off grant of £10,000 to enable them to remain at the Balsam and Forefront centres.

These currently include premises hire of the Balsam Centre in Wincanton and the Forefront Community Centre in Chard.

Of the two options, **Option b)** is the preferred option for the following reasons:-

- The added value derived from CASS being co-located with our own Welfare Advice Service at the Forefront Centre, along with other services such as a job club, drop-in, NHS counselling, SDAS service and the Lord's Larder food bank. This helps provide some of Chard's most vulnerable residents with a joined up and wrap around service. Similar benefits are derived by CASS being located in the Balsam Centre where both organisations are supporting particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged residents.
- Being located in neutral community venues helps retain the independent status of CASS and removes any obstacles that otherwise might prevent clients from using the service.
- By remaining at the Forefront and Balsam centres the rent payable by CASS will not be lost to these two organisations.
- In the current climate of reduced funding and services across the area, it is essential that services such as there are, are maintained. Joined up working and co-locating advice agencies and other community services is an ideal way to maintain access to vital services and mitigate dwindling resources.

Recommended Contribution: £10,000

2) **Local Assistance Scheme (LAS) Client Hardship Fund Administration Costs.**

Match funding of the County Council's reduced offer of £6,480.

Recommended Contribution: £6,500

3) **Offering a short term grant to bridge the loss of core funding for the first 3 months of the 2019/20 financial year.**

This investment would be used to research, plan and implement any uniformity that can be achieved in the medium term by covering staff costs so that officers can be released from operational duties in order to re-engineer advice services.

Recommended Contribution: £15,500

Total Contribution: £32,000

22. Impact of cut and benefits realisation of an additional one-off contribution

By agreeing to the above funding proposal the worst effects of the county cuts can be mitigated.

However, it is important first of all, to set out what the impact of the county cuts would be if no short term funding solution was available.

The SCC cut to core funding, amounting to £98,000 will cause the following detriments.

1. Lost posts

- Part time volunteer training officer (loss 21 hours)
- Part time advice session supervisor (22.5 hours)
- Digital Advice Team leader and adviser (21 hours)
- Community Outreach Supervisor and Advice (Chard, Wincanton) (37 hours)

2. Reduction in staff hours:

- CEO post to 28 hours per week (reduced by 9 hours)
- Operational Manager and Supervisor post to 28 hours per week (reduced by 9 hours)
- Finance manager to 28 hours per week (reduced by 9 hours)

3. Service reduction

- Cuts in staff posts and reduction in staff hours would result in the closure of all outreach with the exception of Chard on a Thursday.
- Reduction in opening hours of face to face service of **16.5 per week**
Face- to-face reduced from (41.5 hours per week to 25 (20 in Yeovil and 5 in Chard)
- Reduction in phone and email advice of **6 hours per week**
From 30 hours a week to 24 hours (not available on Thursday as supervisor would be re-assigned to Chard).
- Termination of room hire in Wincanton and Chard outreach resulting in loss of service

4. Reduction in number of clients seen

- Annual cut in number of clients we could help would be: **2,148**

5. Reduction in Volunteer numbers as there would be little or no provision for recruitment and new volunteer adviser training.

If the above cuts were to be implemented, with no measures put in place to help offset them, then there is a very strong likelihood that SSDC would be directly impacted as a consequence, in, for example, any of the following ways.

- Through an increased take-up of our own Welfare Advice Service
- Of increased numbers of clients contacting our Customer Focused staff in order to seek a resolution to their problems concerning council tax, benefits and housing etc.
- Increased numbers of people falling into council tax or rent arrears having a negative impact on our income
- Increased numbers of people falling into debt and at risk of poverty.

However through the one-off funding contribution that is being proposed, the following benefits can be achieved.

- i. The provision of transition funding SSDC of £15,500, and contribution of £6,500 towards delivery of the LAS £6,500
 - Maintain CEO post at 35 hours per week to enable advice service transformation and to undertake business case and due diligence in support of option for full merger with Taunton Citizens Advice.
 - Maintain Client Services Manager at 37 hours per week to enable advice service transformation and to maintain provision and clients helped at the 2018/19 levels
 - Continue to deliver the award of the Local Assistance Scheme.
- ii. The retention of the Wincanton a Chard outreach services at their current levels

The realisation of these benefits is also dependent on CASS making its own contribution to its future sustainability and to this end the trustees have agreed to an investment of Free Reserves of **£15,000** to continue the digital advice service and retention of a team leader post.

Furthermore the provision of an unexpected and unplanned for Government 'Universal Credit Help to Claim Fund' grant of £37,000 annually, means that staff who otherwise would have been made redundant can now be re-assigned to this work.

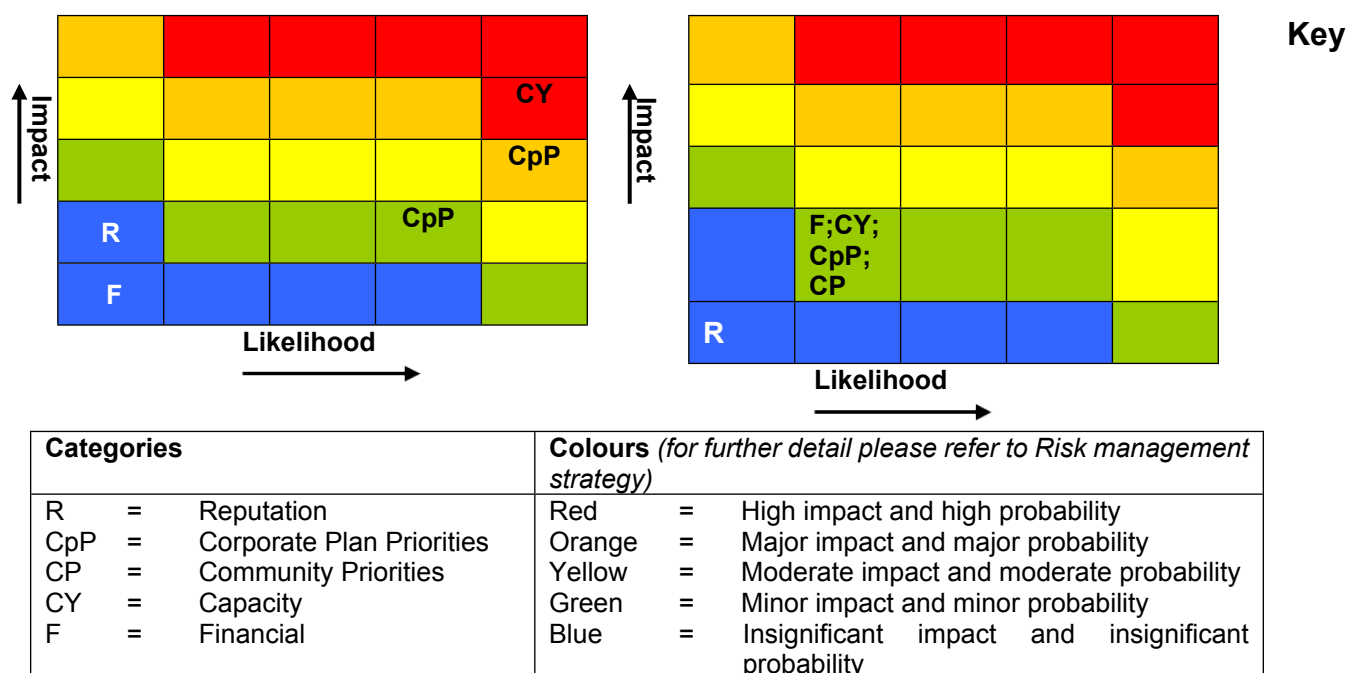
Financial Implications

23. The financial implications are set out above. The one-off budget requirement included in this report totals £32,000, and this sum is included in the proposed Draft 2019/20 Budget report to the Executive.

Risk Matrix

Risk Profile before officer recommendations

Risk Profile after officer recommendations



Council Plan Implications

24. The proposals detailed in this report help the Council deliver on the following values and priorities in the 2016/21 Council Plan:

- Working with partners to improve services, efficiencies, resilience and influence.
- To build healthy, self-reliant, active communities we will:
 - Target support to areas of need

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

25. There are no implications in relation to Carbon Emissions and Climate Change

Equality and Diversity Implications

26. If members support the report's recommendations this will have a positive impact on a number of the Protected Characteristics, as in securing the future of the Citizens Advice service it will ensure that South Somerset's most disadvantaged and vulnerable residents will still have access to a quality assured generalist advice service.

Privacy Impact Assessment

27. No implications

Background Papers

28. None