

## LEISURE, ENVIRONMENT AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE - 27 NOVEMBER 2019

### PART I - DELEGATED

#### 6. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE CITIZENS ADVICE SERVICE IN THREE RIVERS 2019-2022 (CED)

##### 1 Summary

- 1.1 The Committee is asked to review and approve the draft Service Level Agreement for April 2019–2022 for the Citizens Advice Service in Three Rivers.

##### 2 Details

- 2.1 Three Rivers District Council currently has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in place with the Citizens Advice Service (CAS) in Three Rivers for the period of 2013-2016.
- 2.2 The terms of SLA stipulate that it will continue on an annual basis unless terminated by either party with six months' notice.
- 2.3 The amount of funding for the SLA is fixed subject to further developments affecting the core funding of the services being considered by the Council without any commitment. To date there has been no further change to the Council's budget for the CAS other than for a small additional amount of funding allocated by the Housing Service for fast track referrals for homelessness applications.
- 2.4 The annual grant funding amount currently awarded to the CAS is £257,430. Further money is allocated within the Council's budget towards the lease costs, and service charges, for the space occupied and car park use at Three Rivers House. This additional internally charged budget is £46,000. In addition a further £1,950 is funded from the Homelessness Prevention Budget to provide a priority client referral service to customers approaching the Council's Housing Services for assistance. This has now been incorporated into the SLA.
- 2.5 As part of the review of the SLA the CAS has submitted a new Business and Development Plan for 2019-22. This can be seen in Appendix 1. Appendices 3 and 4 of the Business and Development Plan have been replaced with one summary page in order to protect the personal data of staff and volunteers.
- 2.6 The aims of the CAS are:
- 2.6.1 To provide the advice people need for the problems they face, and
- 2.6.2 To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.
- 2.7 The CAS provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. In addition the service provides debt and budgeting advice, court desk representation at possession hearings, and advice support services for clients of the local Women's Refuge. It also provides energy savings talks and advice and financial literacy sessions in schools.
- 2.8 The priority referral service for Housing Services Customers forms part of the customers housing plan. The CAS contacts each client at least 3 times to book an appointment for them to attend to address the issues leading to their threat of homelessness. This includes:

- 2.8.1 Income maximisation e.g. through benefit checks, securing backdated amounts due.
- 2.8.2 Reviewing debt options e.g. priority payments, debt relief orders, individual voluntary arrangements, negotiating with creditors to arrange debt repayment plan, debt write offs as appropriate, gaining charitable grants to cover rent arrears, and representation at Watford County Court for repossession hearings.
- 2.8.3 Providing preventative budgeting advice in one to one sessions.
- 2.8.4 Resolving wider issues indirectly contributing to the client's threat of homelessness e.g. relationship breakdown and its links to levels of stress, mental health and debt.
- 2.9 The Business Plan identifies 3 strategic priorities of:
  - 2.9.1 Improving access to their advice service
  - 2.9.2 Increasing their influence with policy makers both locally and nationally
  - 2.9.3 Strengthening their equalities provision.
- 2.10 The Business and Development plan includes an action plan to support the operation of the CAS and its aims
- 2.11 In addition to the core services funded by Three Rivers District Council the Business and Development Plan outlines the range of additional income generated by the CAS to deliver additional services.
- 2.12 The budget projections for the CAS for its Core Services show a net (profit)/deficit position after other additional income as follows:

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
General Income	(£284,840)	(£286,140)	(£286,140)
Restricted Grants	(£35,250)	(£37,250)	(£37,250)
Management fees	(£45,740)	(£40,650)	(£50,180)
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>(£365,830)</b>	<b>(£364,040)</b>	<b>(£373,570)</b>
Direct Expenses	£241,985	£251,400	£262,000
Overheads	£124,450	£123,250	£125,400
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>£366,435</b>	<b>£374,650</b>	<b>£387,400</b>
Net (Profit) Deficit	(£395)	£10,610	£13,830

- 2.13 Whilst showing a net deficit in 2020-21 and 2021-22 the CAS have advised that they can meet this cost from reserves. They have also advised that they are likely to generate additional income from other sources that will reduce this deficit. The main pressure on the budget is from anticipated increases in direct expenses that is linked to staff costs.
- 2.14 The Business and Development Plan provides for Monday to Friday services at each office in Abbots Langley, Rickmansworth and South Oxhey with a total opening time

for drop-in advice of 67.5 hours per week and a further 9 hrs of appointments in South Oxhey per week. In addition outreach sessions are provided on a weekly basis at Mill End Foodbank, fortnightly at South Oxhey Foodbank and once a month at Chorleywood Library.

- 2.15 In addition to the drop-in face to face service, a telephone advice line is provided Monday-Friday from 10am – 4pm. Advice is also available by email and through webchat. The service also provides advice through its website. Home visits are also available to the elderly, vulnerable or housebound, through external funding from Hertfordshire County Council.
- 2.16 The Business and Development Plan includes a staffing and volunteer structure showing there to be 281.5 hrs of paid staff time per week and 655 hours of volunteer time per week, as well as a further 12 trainee advisers.
- 2.17 The total number of clients and issues dealt with in each of the CAS main offices during 2018/19 is shown in the table below:

	Abbots Langley	Oxhey	Rickmansworth	TOTAL
Clients	1,756	3,266	2,679	7,701
Issues	5,043	7,738	6,470	19,251

- 2.18 The top three benefit issues dealt with by the CAS during 2018-19 were Personal Independence Payments, Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance. Within Abbots Langley and South Oxhey the top 3 debt issues dealt with were rent arrears (Housing Associations), Council tax arrears and debt relief orders. Within Rickmansworth the top 3 debt issues were Council tax arrears, credit & store card debts and rent arrears (Housing Associations).
- 2.19 Appendix 2 contains the risk register of the CAS. The areas of highest risk relate to loss or prolonged absence of staff/volunteers, and the compromise of their casework database. Monitoring systems are in place for both of these. The other risks have residual risk ratings of low or medium low.
- 2.20 Appendix 3 contains the draft SLA for 2019-22. This includes new clauses related to data protection, and additional monitoring requirements for the service. This later requirement is reflective of the monitoring provided by CAS services in other Districts in Hertfordshire.
- 2.21 The Council's grant budget for the CAS for the period 2019-2022 remains the same.

### **3 Options and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 To provide some medium term financial certainty to the Citizens Advice Service which provides an important contribution to the welfare of the community across the whole District, through its advice and guidance providing residents the opportunity to deal with problems relating to their personal finance, housing and general wellbeing.

### **4 Policy/Budget Reference and Implications**

- 4.1 The recommendations in this report are within the Council's agreed policy and budgets. The relevant policy is entitled the Strategic Plan 2019-22 and was agreed on 21 May 2019.

4.2 The recommendations in this report relate to the achievement of the following performance indicators:

4.2.1 CP27 – Number of clients supported by the Citizens Advice Service (CAS).

4.2.2 CP28 – Clients that now receive full benefits they are entitled to following CAS intervention.

4.2.3 CP29 – No of clients onto a Debt Relief Order.

4.2.4 CP30 – Number of clients no longer at threat of eviction that were at threat of eviction.

4.2.5 CP31 – Number of clients still at threat of eviction that were at threat of eviction.

4.3 The impact of the recommendations on this/these performance indicators is to provide the core funding contribution from the Council to enable their achievement.

## **5 Legal, Staffing, Environmental, Community Safety, Public Health, Customer Services Centre, and Communications & Website Implications**

5.1 None specific.

## **6 Financial Implications**

6.1 There is no change to the proposed budget for the Citizens Advice Service.

## **7 Equal Opportunities Implications**

7.1 Relevance Test

Has a relevance test been completed for Equality Impact?	Yes
Did the relevance test conclude a full impact assessment was required?  From the data provided in the Business and Development Plan there is a demonstration that 42% of clients are male, 58% female and 1% identified as trans*. 43% of clients are non white.19% of clients are over 65 years of age and 41% have a physical or mental disability.  Whilst not directly reflecting the profile of the district there is clear evidence that vulnerable groups have accessed the services.  Appendix 5 of the Business and Development Plan contains the business planning tool for the CAS for equality.	No

## **8 Risk and Health & Safety Implications**

8.1 The Council has agreed its risk management strategy which can be found on the website at <http://www.threerivers.gov.uk>. In addition, the risks of the proposals in the report have also been assessed against the Council's duties under Health and Safety legislation relating to employees, visitors and persons affected by our operations. The risk management implications of this report are detailed below.

8.2 The subject of this report is covered by the Community Partnerships service plan. Any risks resulting from this report will be included in the risk register and, if necessary, managed within this plan.

<b>Nature of Risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Suggested Control Measures</b>	<b>Response</b> <i>(tolerate, treat, terminate, transfer)</i>	<b>Risk Rating</b> <i>(combination of likelihood and impact)</i>
The demands on the CAS exceed its capacity	There is a longer waiting time for people to access the service – and people fall into greater debt.	Quarterly monitoring data provided by the CAB.  PIs reported to members.	Treat	6

8.3 The above risks are scored using the matrix below. The Council has determined its aversion to risk and is prepared to tolerate risks where the combination of impact and likelihood scores 6 or less.

<b>Very Likely</b> ----- <b>Likelihood</b> ----- ▼ <b>Remote</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
	4	8	12	16
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Very High</b>
	3	6	9	12
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>
	2	4	6	8
	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Low</b>
	1	2	3	4
	<b>Impact</b>			
	Low -----▶ Unacceptable			

**Impact Score**

4 (Catastrophic)

3 (Critical)

2 (Significant)

**Likelihood Score**

4 (Very Likely (≥80%))

3 (Likely (21-79%))

2 (Unlikely (6-20%))

1 (Marginal)

1 (Remote (≤5%))

8.4 In the officers' opinion none of the new risks above, were they to come about, would seriously prejudice the achievement of the Strategic Plan and are therefore operational risks. The effectiveness of the management of operational risks is reviewed by the Audit Committee annually.

## 9 Recommendation

9.1 That the Committee agrees the draft Service Level Agreement 2019-22 for the Citizens Advice Service in Three Rivers.

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### Data Quality

Data sources: Citizens Advice Service

Data checked by:

Andy Stovold, Head of Partnerships, Rebecca Young Strategic Policy & Partnerships Manager.

Data rating: Tick

1	Poor	
2	Sufficient	X
3	High	

### APPENDICES / ATTACHMENTS

1(A & B) CAS Business & Development Plan 2019-22

2. CAS Risk Register 2019

3. Draft Service Level Agreement – Citizens' Advice Service 2019-22