

<b>Key Decision Required:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>In the Forward Plan:</b>	<b>Yes</b>
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**CABINET**

**25 JUNE 2021**

**REPORT OF THE PARTNERSHIPS PORTFOLIO HOLDER**

**A.3. CITIZENS ADVICE TENDRING – SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT 2021/22**  
 (Report prepared by Alison Rowlands)

**PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION**

<b>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT</b>
To seek Cabinet’s agreement to an updated Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Citizens Advice Tendring (CAT) for 2021/22.

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tendring District Council has provided grant funding to CAT backed by an annually agreed SLA, for a number of years. This arrangement supports the provision of free, confidential and impartial advice to our residents across a wide range of issues. Since 2013/14, the core grant awarded each year has been £144,000, payable in two instalments of £72,000.</li> <li>• During the Covid-19 pandemic, CAT has remained a vital information and advice service to the residents of Tendring. They have helped many people navigate their way around both established and entirely new challenges such as furlough, government schemes for the self-employed, redundancy, claiming benefits, dealing with debt, accessing food and services and housing issues. The CAT team also now includes a Warm Homes Adviser. This is a 2 year funded post to assist clients with income generation, accessing energy grants, switching suppliers and insulation advice.</li> <li>• Schedule 2 (2.8) of the 2020/21 SLA provides for reductions in CAT core services beyond their control. On 31 March 2020, CAT reported that they had been operating a reduced service since 16 March 2020 due to the Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown. This involved an envisaged temporary cessation of all face-to-face advice. Advice staff were deployed to remote home working, providing advice via email, telephone and in writing. The CAT’s office closures and suspension of services at their outreach sites have remained in force since that time. CAT have seen the departure of a significant number of volunteers during the course of the pandemic but have recently recruited a number of new volunteers and are in the process of undertaking intensive training with these individuals.</li> </ul>

<b>RECOMMENDATION</b>
<p><b>That Cabinet agrees the following:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Tendring District Council continues to enter into a Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice Tendring (CAT) for a further year from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021/22 on the terms and conditions as set out in the updated agreement shown in Appendix C; and</b></li> <li>b) <b>delegated authority is given to the Assistant Director, Partnerships to sign the agreement on the Council’s behalf.</b></li> </ul>

## PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

### DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The partnership working with CAT is consistent with the Council's commitment to put Community Leadership at the heart of everything we do through delivery of high quality, affordable services and working positively with others.

### FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

As previously mentioned, the core grant paid to CAT is £144,000 per annum. The SLA provides that the grant be paid in two instalments of £72,000 in July and September 2021.

The budget for 2021/22 also makes provision for a sum of £23,000 to assist with the delivery of the Tendring Mental Health Hub, (a project initiated by CAT), for a further year.

CAT undertakes to comply with the procedures and directions contained within the Citizens' Advice Quality Assurance Standards Membership Agreement. Whilst the ongoing impact of the pandemic on CAT's ability to maintain service delivery during 2021/22 is unknown, the risk that CAT fails to provide value for money for the grant funding is mitigated by the monitoring measures set out in the SLA. These provide that CAT will supply statistical information reasonably required by the Council for monitoring purposes, subject to those requirements not being in breach of clients' confidentiality. Any such information will not be required more frequently than at quarterly intervals and the Council's designated Contact Officer will discuss any concerns about performance with the designated CAT Contact Officer. In addition, these monitoring arrangements can be amended by agreement between the Council and CAT to reflect changes in service practice, subject to Citizens Advice guidelines.

### LEGAL

The Council can rely on the General Power of Competence under the Localism Act 2011 to provide grant funding the CAT to benefit the residents of the district. The service level agreement sets out the requirements for the grant funding, is not a contract for services being commissioned on behalf of the Council.

CAT is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee.

### OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

**Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Health Inequalities /Area or Ward affected / Consultation/Public Engagement.**

CAT's aims and principles set out that they value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination and practice impartiality. The SLA continues to require that CAT have all necessary policies in place in terms of the applicable protected characteristics, as detailed in the Equality Act 2010, and equality, inclusion and diversity.

There are no direct environmental or other identified implications for TDC in paying over the grant.

## **PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2017/18, the SLA was thoroughly reviewed following substantial changes in the governance, management and service delivery of CAT. The revised SLA for 2017/18 was agreed by Cabinet at the meeting held on 17 March 2017.

All subsequent SLA's have remained largely the same as the 2017/18 SLA with minor changes only, and all have been agreed by the relevant Portfolio Holder. This being the Portfolio Holder for Health and Education in respect of the 2018/19 SLA and for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 SLA's, the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships.

CAT have produced a statistical dashboard, (the template used nationally), for 1 April 2019 to 25 March 2020 and 1 April 2020 to 25 March 2021, which are attached at Appendices A and B respectively. Each client is recorded by CAT once, irrespective of how many enquiries they raise over the reporting period. The data provided shows a 36% increase in formal client numbers from 4650 to 6333 and almost a 20% rise in the number of issues dealt with. Universal Credit remains the most prominent issue at 5022 enquiries, representing a 42% increase over the same period in 2019/20. Based on the method CAT use to calculate the value of benefits advice achieved, in 2020/21 benefit gains totalled £14,100,450, which amounts to a 20% increase on 2019/20. The figures set out in Appendix A exclude anyone who would have been recorded as a "drop in client", this being an individual who would have personally attended the CAT offices and hubs with a query or queries that did not progress further to a formal case. As a result of the pandemic and the ability of only offer advice remotely, no "drop in clients" were seen during 2020/21.

Other significant increases by enquiry type include Employment (252%), Consumer Goods & Services (62%) and Housing (62%). Conversely, debt enquiries dramatically reduced by 65% during the pandemic, a trend witnessed by Citizens Advice both countywide and nationally. Due to the associated stigma and fear, CAT recognise that there are considerable challenges going forward in terms of encouraging people to seek help with their debt problems and will be actively looking at innovative ways of reaching those affected by this issue. CAT's records also show a small increase in contacts originating from women rather than men and a slight rise in contacts from non-white ethnicity communities. Another notable difference for 2020/21 is that contacts from the over-65's constituted a lower percentage of contacts overall.

The reviewed SLA for 2021/22 is attached at Appendix C for agreement by Cabinet. Although much of the SLA remains the same as last year's version, it has been necessary to completely revise Schedule 2 (2.4) to reflect the current reduction in service channels and reference CAT's intention to undertake a phased return to the in-person service once Covid-19 restrictions are lifted. Schedule 2 (2.8) also now includes a reference to the impact of the pandemic on the service's availability.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION**

There are none.

### **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A** - Key Statistics 1/4/19 to 25/3/20

**APPENDIX B** - Key Statistics 1/4/20 to 25/03/21

**APPENDIX C** - Service Level Agreement 2021/22