

CABINET

20 MAY 2022

REPORT OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR PARTNERSHIPS

A.3 CITIZENS ADVICE TENDRING – SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT 2022/23

PART 1 – KEY INFORMATION

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To agree an updated Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Citizens Advice Tendring (CAT) for 2022/23

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 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.
- The SLA was thoroughly reviewed in 2017/18 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 the Portfolio Holder for Partnerships for the SLA's of 2019/20 to 2021/22.
- Schedule 2 (2.8) of the 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 a temporary cessation of all face-to-face 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 had remained in force until recently. A number of key paid employees and volunteer staff were lost during the pandemic but numbers are nearly back to pre-Covid levels, however some are still undertaking the intensive training that they need before they are able to give advice. A new, streamlined, training programme has been introduced so that new officers can be fast-tracked. A hybrid service will be in operation where there is a choice for residents; they can either drop-in to surgeries as per pre-Covid and/or can also get advice over the telephone or by email. Eventually a community team will also be created this year (CAT are seeking funding) as the Families Advisor has proven very successful and there is a real need.
- To ensure efficiencies and improve on last year's performance there is a review of the telephone service offered. One solution is to implement a triage team which frees up

advisers and supervisors who can better use their skills for the entire shift.

- 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. Adapting their offer as necessary, the pandemic has seen CAT move their support from mostly in person drop-in during 2019/20, to mostly via email during 2020/21, and for 2021/22 have delivered most support via the telephone. The local telephone number for CAT has been publicised more widely rather than the Essex-wide contact number. 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 which will end October 2022. CAT expect this post to be re-funded at the end of the current contract.
- CAT has produced a statistical dashboard, (the template used nationally), for activity during the years 2020/21 and 2021/22, 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 shows that during the past year CAT have migrated their service delivery from the mix of contact via email and telephone to the majority of contact being made over the telephone. This is considered a more personal service; conversations are more in depth, and contacts take longer. This, combined with the loss of volunteers, resulted in the reduction in clients aided from 3900 to 2277 during the year. Universal Credit is no longer the single biggest issue facing clients, this having been joined by other benefits and tax credits as a worry for Tendring residents. CAT have now also started offering a drop-in service again at various sites as detailed in the SLA and it is expected that as the year progresses, and clients are more readily able to leave their homes, that the importance of this service will be shown. No drop-in clients were seen during 2020/21 and only 270 during 2021/22.
- In 2020/21 the value applied to the benefits advice given totalled £14,100,450 based on the CAT calculation method. We await the total for 2021/22. In addition to the general advice statistics shown in Appendix B, specialist service statistics for 2021/22 include:

Debt Managed - £820,238

Debt Written Off - £724,175

Benefits Gained £4,124,047

- It is notable that less people have been having employment issues over the past twelve months due to clearer government guidance around Covid and the ending of furlough. Current trends have seen an increase in debt clients over the past twelve months. This has included an increase in clients with rent and council tax arrears. 30.4% of households in Tendring are fuel poor now new electricity price cap has been implemented, equivalent to 67,144 households in the area. (Source: End Fuel Poverty Coalition 21.3.22). The cost of a standard bill will rise by 50%. (A household is in fuel poverty if more than 10% of its income is spent on energy bills. Average fuel bills are set to reach almost £2000 per year. Source: Ofgem). It has also been noticeable that more section 21s are being issued by landlords but not for rent arrears. (A section 21 is the notice which a landlord must give to their tenant to begin the process to take possession of a property let on an assured shorthold tenancy without providing a reason for wishing to take possession).

- CAT will be providing interpreters to help Ukrainian refugees relocated to Tendring district. The following services have also been developed during the last twelve months:

	Families Adviser
Mon	Barnardos @ Sydney House
Tue	Jaywick Sands Community Forum
Wed	Mental Health Hub Clacton
Thur	Walton Community Forum
	Domestic Abuse Adviser
Tue	Carnarvon Road / Mental Health Hub
Wed	Outreach venues
Thur	Carnarvon Road / Mental Health Hub
	Warm Homes Adviser
Mon - Wed	Remote appointments, support and advice

- In terms of assurance, CAT are audited quarterly for advice given by Citizens Advice National on a RAYG rating. CAT have scored green every quarter which is classed as excellent at 75% or higher. CAT are also audited yearly on 9 areas of the organisation again on a RAYG rating, achieving green overall and scoring excellent for 7 of the 9 areas. This represents the best score the organisation has ever had which and shows continuous improving during difficult times.
- The reviewed SLA for 2022/23 is attached at Appendix C for agreement by the Portfolio Holder and is largely similar to that of last year. Schedule 2 (2.4) reflect the current reduction in drop-in services and reference CAT's intention increase these as staffing allows. Schedule 2 (2.8) retains a reference to the impact of the pandemic on the service's availability.
- A number of case studies are available in Appendix D. These show the range of advice available to Tendring residents and the results that can be had.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that:

- Tendring District Council continues to enter into a Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice Tendring (CAT) for a further year from 1st April 2022 on the terms and conditions, as set out in the updated agreement shown in Appendix C; and
- delegated authority is given to the Assistant Director (Partnerships) to sign the agreement on the Council's behalf.

REASON(S) FOR THE RECOMMENDATION(S)

CAT continues to support Tendring residents and offers value for money. The funding from TDC has not increased for nine years.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The duties performed by CAT could potentially be offered in-house by TDC employees however the full funding, including management time, would need to be agreed by other co-funders. It is unlikely that TDC could offer the same level of service for less costs.

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.

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

None

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (including legislation & constitutional powers)

Is the recommendation a Key Decision (see the criteria stated here)	YES	If Yes, indicate which by which criteria it is a Key Decision	X Significant effect on two or more wards X Involves £100,000 expenditure/income <input type="checkbox"/> Is otherwise significant for the service budget
		And when was the proposed decision published in the Notice of forthcoming decisions for the Council (must be 28 days at the latest prior to the meeting date)	25 March 2022

X The Monitoring Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:

None

FINANCE AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

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.

The budget for 2022/23 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.

X The Section 151 Officer confirms they have been made aware of the above and any additional comments from them are below:

None	
USE OF RESOURCES AND VALUE FOR MONEY	
The following are submitted in respect of the indicated use of resources and value for money indicators:	
A) Financial sustainability: how the body plans and manages its resources to ensure it can continue to deliver its services;	CAT Strategic Business and Development Plan 2021-2024 (submitted as appendix 1 of the SLA)
B) Governance: how the body ensures that it makes informed decisions and properly manages its risks, including; and	CAT Strategic Business and Development Plan 2021-2024 (submitted as appendix 1 of the SLA)
C) Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness: how the body uses information about its costs and performance to improve the way it manages and delivers its services.	CAT Strategic Business and Development Plan 2021-2024 (submitted as appendix 1 of the SLA)
MILESTONES AND DELIVERY	
CAT performance against the SLA will be monitored at their quarterly audits.	
ASSOCIATED RISKS AND MITIGATION	
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 and the quarterly audit by Citizens Advice National. The impact of the pandemic is better known now. The employment of more telephone advisors and the re-opening of their drop-in services will allow CAT to deal with more issues. However, it should be noted that issues are also becoming more complex and are taking more resource to deal with. It is also noted that CAT are seeing more people that are already in crisis rather than previously when clients would approach CAT earlier with their problems.	
EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS	
There are no other identified implications for TDC in paying over the grant. 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.	
SOCIAL VALUE CONSIDERATIONS	
CAT employs staff from Tendring district, adding money back into the local economy. Volunteers are also used where possible. For those that are retired from their careers and want to give something back this allows previous knowledge to be harnessed. For those that are unemployed this improves their mental health, raises self-esteem, and gives the chance for them to broaden their work skills and make themselves more employable.	
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S AIM TO BE NET ZERO BY 2030	
None	
OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS OR 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	None

Health Inequalities	None
Area or Ward affected	None

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND
<p>Tendring District Council has provided grant funding to CAT backed by an annually agreed SLA, for a number of years. Since 2013/14, the core grant awarded each year has been £144,000, payable in two instalments of £72,000. The SLA was thoroughly reviewed in 2017/18 following substantial changes in the governance, management and service delivery of CAT.</p> <p>In 2020/21 the value of benefits advice achieved by CAT totalled in excess of £14,000,000 with the organisation consistently improving its score and its annual audits.</p>
PREVIOUS RELEVANT DECISIONS
The CAT SLA has been agreed by the relevant Portfolio Holder for the past ten years.
BACKGROUND PAPERS AND PUBLISHED REFERENCE MATERIAL
There are none.

APPENDICES
<p>APPENDIX A – Key Statistics Dashboard 01/04/20 to 25/03/21</p> <p>APPENDIX B – Key Statistics Dashboard 01/04/21 to 31/03/22</p> <p>APPENDIX C - Service Level Agreement 2022/23</p> <p>APPENDIX D – Case Studies</p>

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