
Report to: Clackmannanshire Council

Date of Meeting: 8th September 2016

Subject: Advice Services

Report by: Head of Housing & Community Safety

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1. The report recommends supporting the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) to provide additional money advice services whilst reconfiguring the services provided by the Council to concentrate on early preventative work.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that Council approves
 - 2.1.1. the transfer of £17K from the Housing Revenue Account staffing budget to the CAB grant budget to enable CAB to further develop its money advice services.
 - 2.1.2. Reconfiguring council services to focus on early intervention and prevention activities.

3.0 Discussion

- 3.1. This is little doubt that the ongoing welfare reforms are leaving many residents struggling not just financially but with the ability to understand the benefits system to maximise the support available to them.
- 3.2. The Council operates an in-house Money Advice service and also funds CAB to carry out similar work. Two and a half full time equivalent (FTE) council staff are funded from a money advice budget, but in effect only 1.5 (FTE) are currently deployed on this full-time. Other front line staff have also been trained to provide basic advice.
- 3.3. It is believed that CAB is now in a strong position to provide a comprehensive money advice service to all residents in Clackmannanshire, allowing the Council to concentrate on core functions and prevention activities.
- 3.4. As well as its professional staffing complement, CAB maximises the impact of grant funding by utilising the services of highly trained and motivated volunteers. CAB Alloa currently has 31 volunteers. This results in

considerable 'leverage' for public money. It is part of a national network, its services are independent and the CAB "brand" is trusted by the public. Having all advice services under one roof means that the public will also be clear on where to go to receive advice to suit their circumstances.

- 3.5. In the last financial year the Council staff dealt with 106 new advice cases, with combined debts of over £1M. 71% of these cases had household incomes of less than £15,000. 89% had council tax arrears, with the average figure of £2550, and 45% had rent arrears with an average figure of £979. It can be seen from these figures that as well as dealing with the consequences of such high levels of debt, more needs to be done to prevent residents getting into this amount of debt, given the detrimental impact on them and the Council's finances.
- 3.6. It is proposed that the Council fund CAB to take on all money advice work. CAB advises that its case workers are expected to take on 160-200 cases per year. The types of cases cover all complex debts including debt arrangement and bankruptcy cases including any court representation. To transfer the current workload one part-time worker will be required.
- 3.7. It is recommended that £17K from the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) staffing budget be used to enable CAB to provide an expanded service. CAB would reorganise its work so that this new worker would deal predominantly with council tenants, whilst its other staff would provide similar services for tenants of other landlords and owners, through its existing grant funding.
- 3.8. The proposal was fully discussed with CAB's management at a recent meeting and they are very supportive of this expanded service. In addition to the ongoing review of the existing service level agreement, this new service will be regularly evaluated to ensure that it provides value for money and that CAB's costs are being met. The ongoing funding will be built into the annual HRA budget.
- 3.9. The proposal has also been discussed with the Trade Unions. It was agreed that staff concerned would be fully consulted on the required amendments to their current job profile to reflect these changes. Initial positive discussions have now been held but at the time of writing this process had not concluded due to holidays. An update will be provided at the meeting.
- 3.10. The current Council staff would, in addition to working closely with CAB initially to build the service, focus their activities on preventative work, including training more front line staff in basic debt and budgeting advice. They will also help to improve housing benefit processing, and Scottish Welfare Fund processes, so that customers quickly get the help they need at source, rather than dealing with the consequences of debt.

4.0 Sustainability Implications

- 4.1. Advisers often provide information on better use of utilities.

5.0 Resource Implications

Financial Details

5.1. The full financial implications of the recommendations are set out in the report. This includes a reference to full life cycle costs where appropriate.

Yes

5.2. Finance has been consulted and has agreed the financial implications as set out in the report.

Yes

Staffing

5.3. There are no staffing implications arising from this report

6.0. Exempt Reports

6.1. Is this report exempt? Yes (please detail the reasons for exemption below) No

7.0. Declarations

The recommendations contained within this report support or implement our Corporate Priorities and Council Policies.

(1) **Our Priorities** (Please double click on the check box)

The area has a positive image and attracts people and businesses

Our communities are more cohesive and inclusive

People are better skilled, trained and ready for learning and employment

Our communities are safer

Vulnerable people and families are supported

Substance misuse and its effects are reduced

Health is improving and health inequalities are reducing

The environment is protected and enhanced for all

The Council is effective, efficient and recognised for excellence

(2) **Council Policies** (Please detail)

8.0. Equalities Impact

8.1. Have you undertaken the required equalities impact assessment to ensure that no groups are adversely affected by the recommendations? No

9.0. Legality

9.1. It has been confirmed that in adopting the recommendations contained in this report, the Council is acting within its legal powers. Yes

10.0. Appendices

10.1. None.

11.0. Background Papers

11.1. Have you used other documents to compile your report? (All documents must be kept available by the author for public inspection for four years from the date of meeting at which the report is considered). No

Author(s)

NAME	DESIGNATION	TEL NO / EXTENSION
Ahsan KHAN	Head of Housing	2473

Approved by

NAME	DESIGNATION	SIGNATURE
Ahsan Khan	Head of Housing & Community Safety	Signed: A Khan
Nikki Bridle	Deputy Chief Executive	Signed: N Bridle