



MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING of the PLACE COMMITTEE held within the Council Chamber, Kilncraigs, Greenside Street, ALLOA, FK10 1EB, on TUESDAY 19 FEBRUARY 2019 at 4.00 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor Craig Holden (Convenor)
Councillor Donald Balsillie (Vice Convenor)
Councillor Martha Benny
Councillor Kenneth Earle
Councillor Bill Mason
Councillor Derek Stewart
Councillor Tina Murphy

IN ATTENDANCE

Stuart Crickmar, Strategic Director (Partnership and Performance)
Lindsay Thomson, Service Manager, Legal and Democracy (Clerk to the Committee)
Gillian White, Committee Services

PLC(19)07 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Les Sharp.

PLC(19)08 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

PLC(19)09 ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS

An order of proceedings was put before the Committee for information. The Convenor advised all parties present of the procedure for hearing the petitions.

PLC(19)10 PUBLIC PETITIONS

The report, submitted by the Senior Service Manager, Partnership and performance (Monitoring Officer) summarised the petition which had been received from Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Bureau following the budget consultation process in respect of matters which fall within the remit of the Place Committee.

1. CLACKMANNANSHIRE CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

Attending:

Jane Greig, Clackmannanshire CAB
Jonny Miller, Manager, Clackmannanshire CAB
Margaret Paterson, Chair of the Board

The Committee heard a presentation from Jonny Miller, Manager, Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CCAB). Mr Miller advised that he had sent the members a briefing note, which was again circulated at the meeting. He went on to highlight a number of key points as follows:-

He advised that in the last 12 months, CCAB had assisted 3495 clients on 12,090 different occasions on 19,311 issues and this was a three fold increase on previous years. They currently employ 25 staff and there are 45 volunteers.

In November 2018, CCAB were awarded a three year contract following a tender process, but advised that the contract started on 1st January 2019, the contract ends 31st December 2022 which is actually a four year period. There is a break clause inserted in the contract.

CCAB receive £117,333 for general services and £17,000 which is for specialist housing services which are aimed at the prevention of homelessness.

In addition CCAB have brought in £315,000 in additional project income in the past 12 months for issues such as: welfare rights representation; outreach and other projects. Currently there are 15 projects running. There are also additional projects coming in April for universal credit support. If the CCAB were to close, these projects would fold.

To provide just the core services, the cost sits at £221,000. The Council's contribution sits at 61% of that. The CCAB would have to raise the additional funding. Without the core funding, the CCAB wouldn't be able to access the additional funding to stay open.

80% of clients seek advice for debts or benefits related matters. They also seek advice on housing, employment, utilities and consumer advice. The CCAB brings value to the local authority. As an example, the Scottish Council for homelessness calculated that the cost of an average eviction was £23,000 to the local authority although the costs can rise to £83,000. One of the housing projects cost £17,000 and for that the CCAB dealt with 135 clients last year with 133 remained in their home due to interventions such as income maximisation, reducing outgoings and making sustainable arrangements for the tenants to pay their rents. This is done through a 17.5 hour worker. Mr Miller advised that the service had been outsourced to CCAB in 2016 through a contract previously delivered by the Council in house by 1.5 FTE and one caseworker carried a caseload of around 40.

The CCAB have brought in an additional £2.5M income to the local economy in the last 12 months the majority of which has been spent locally. For every £1 of local authority funding CCAB indicated that they were bringing in £21.37 in financial gain. Most of the staff are local and the wage bill is over £300,000 and a lot of that will go into the local economy too.

1001 council tenants (23% of their total client number) were advised on 8465 issues in the last 12 months. While local authorities do not have a statutory duty to fund the CCAB, if there is a failure to do so then the Council could not provide some statutory functions, like the pre-action requirements for eviction cases. There were no other agencies that could provide such information.

Late in 2018, the CCAB were awarded the Scottish National Standards Advice and Information Providers - Type 3 – Housing, Welfare Benefits and Money Debt accreditation.

Members of the Committee had the opportunity to put questions to the petitioners.

During questions, Mr Miller referred to the equality impact assessment that had been completed, the tender process and current service agreement. He raised an issue regarding the relationship between Council officers and CCAB specifically relating to contract monitoring. He answered a question about the continuation of match funding if the core funding was withdrawn and on the engagement with officers since the consultation proposal was published. He also highlighted that should the CCAB close, there would be a significant impact on Clackmannanshire residents as they would not be eligible to use a CAB from another area. Finally he discussed the impact of the closure proposal on staff.

Mr Miller confirmed that he felt the Clackmannanshire Citizens Advice Bureau had had a fair hearing.

The Convenor advised that the Committee's decision would be notified in writing to the Principal Petitioner, Ms Greig, within 7 working days. Ms Greig, Mr Miller and Ms Paterson from Clackmannanshire CAB withdrew from the meeting at this point in the proceedings. (4.30 pm)

Decision

Having considered the petition and the information presented by CCAB, the Committee agreed to:

1. Acknowledge the response to the budget consultation from CB and note their views in terms of the proposal to "cease funding to Citizens Advice Bureau for advice services".
2. Prepare a report to Council recommending that Council notes the evidence provided by CCAB about the impact of a decision to withdraw funding from their organisation on:
 - CCAB staff
 - CCAB clients and their families and community
 - The economy of Clackmannanshire
 - The financial impact on the Council
 - The impact on income generation
3. Instruct the Monitoring Officer to investigate the current position of the relationship between the Council and CCAB, considering any improvements to the relationship, and to include any findings in the report for Council.
4. Recommend to Council that any reduction of funding to CCAB would have a catastrophic impact.

Ends 1657 hours

