

BRIEFING NOTE PREPARED BY CITIZENS ADVICE NEW FOREST

Key Messages for NFDC

The Task & Finish group set a challenge to CANF to modernise its' service delivery and reduce its' costs by £70k, or 35% in real terms, over the three years from the year ending 31st March 2020 to 31st March 2022. NFDC's grant is currently 90% of CANF's core unrestricted funding. To assist with this reduction in grant NFDC agreed to a three year rolling grant commitment such that CANF can plan the changes over the three-year period and beyond. This has been extremely helpful to the Board of CANF in developing the new working model, business plan and strategy. CANF's recent Board approved Strategy update and Budget for 2020/21 and 2021/22 and historic comparables are appended to this report. CANF established a Strategy working group during the past year and is making significant changes to its' service delivery model and core costs in order to achieve a breakeven budget whilst still delivering its core service across the New Forest and maintaining the minimum reserves level of six months' costs mandated by CA national.

Based on CA Nationals impact methodology CANF saved government and public services £1.9m last year and the wider economic and social benefit of £11.1m. We advised 7,000 people in the New Forest with 16,000 problems. The top issues that we deal with remain *help with benefits (including Universal Credit), debt, employment, relationships and housing (including Homesearch applications)*, although we provide help on any matter for example helping people with Settled Status applications. We also bring National projects into the New Forest such as Pensionwise (236 clients), the Witness Service and the MacMillan project (275 clients).

We have over 120 local volunteers who give up their time to help those in need, the value of this is estimated at £625k per annum. CANF is an independent charity, we do not receive any funding from CA National but rather pay a membership contribution or circa £12k per annum currently and are subject to national audit and quality standards. A core tenet of CA National is that CA provides services free to all and therefore we are unable to charge clients for our services.

Financials

Core Service Unrestricted Income

Our total unrestricted income which funds our core services for 2017/18 was £276k, this is expected to fall to £219k by 2021/22.

NFDC remains over 90% of our unrestricted funding and is reducing from £256k in 2017/18 to £186k in 2021/22 - a fall of 35% in real terms.

Parish and Town Councils have remained fairly consistent at just over £20k historically and we continue to investigate significant time to ensure we maintain this income as it remains an important source of unrestricted funding, although we do not see an opportunity to increase it.

Donations from people using our services (vulnerable clients with often complex issues) have remained fairly static historically at £5-7k. During 2019/20 we have reviewed our approach and priorities and are focusing on increasing this by improving access to online giving, refreshing our donate to us messages, investigating how to identify and approach high net worth individuals and targeting fund-raising events with sympathetic audiences. We have appointed a fundraising consultant and hope to increase this source of income over time recognizing that it is a challenging 'sell' in a competitive market.

Service Delivery

60% of our core costs are staff and volunteer related. In 2017/18 our staff costs were £165k, this has fallen to £157k for the current year and will be reduced to £131k in the 2020/21 year and further to £119k in 2021/22. A total reduction of 28%. The impact of this is a loss of capacity across our service along with invaluable knowledge and expertise. We already run a very tight ship.

Our service was delivered by 5.5 full time equivalent (FTE) members of staff in 2017/18, this has been reduced to 4.5 FTEs in the current year with the loss of the Operations Manager. The restructuring does not allow for an operations post due to changes in premises and IT.

The 4.5 paid staff include the Chief Officer, a part time Finance Manager and 3 FTE Advice Service Managers. Between them they run the charity in 5 locations across the forest. They assist delivery of the face to face service and Advice line, deliver training and manage and the 120 volunteers delivering our core service and projects. All to the high quality standards demanded by our AQS accreditation.

In order to deliver our core service within the unrestricted income we expect we will need to reduce the headcount to 3.5 FTEs (i.e. by a further FTE) by 2021/22. We aim to do this through more flexible working which will mean that there will be less onsite Service Manager cover in each location and more use of technology to allow remote supervision and working.

Access to Services

CANF continues to work hard to make our services as accessible as possible across the large rural area of the New Forest. We deliver 50% of services face to face, this is important element of our service as it allows us to work with the most vulnerable clients on complex issues. The need to have locations across the Forest is evidenced by high demand for face to face appointments in all 5 of our service locations; Hythe, Lymington, New Milton Totton and Ringwood. We have therefore looked to restructure our premises over the last year to create an Advicehub and 4 community venues at a lower cost than previously leased offices spaces whilst not withdrawing from being able to provide face to face services in market towns across the forest which is what our customers want. We also run outreach services when these can be covered by grants.

We have now moved out of privately rented leased premises and/or into shared office space in libraries or council properties in four out of five locations, the fifth, a partnership project in Totton with It's Your Choice and Totton Town council is due be completed by the summer of 2020. All of these moves have cut costs, created community hubs and involved joint working with key partners.

Our premises & service costs will have reduced from £70k in 2017/18 to £54k for 2020/21, a 23% reduction in costs. The inclusion of VAT on our rent and service charge at Lymington Town Hall has meant that savings have been less than anticipated but please note we now pay our rent and service charges back to NFDC rather than a private landlord in Lymington.

Core service costs

We anticipate with the cuts identified above that our core service will cost £232k in 2021/22. Based on the NFDC grant for that year, the parish council grants and an increase in public fund raising we expect to make a loss of £13k for that year. For the 2022/23 year we will be looking to project contributions and an increase in our fund raising to cover this ongoing short fall, if we are unsuccessful in this we will need to reduce our service and withdraw face to face services for one location in the Forest. If NFDC were to further cut our grant for 22/23 we will need to cut our services to clients by withdrawing face to face services from at least one, possible two locations in the Forest.

Restricted Income and Contribution to Core Costs

One off grant applications to various corporates and foundations have been successful raising £38k in the past eighteen months when associated with a project such as the office moves and IT streamlining and refreshing projects and we will continue to pursue these with targeted asks where possible.

Our restricted income from projects has increased significantly over the past two years from £53k for 2017/18 to £136k for 2019/20. This increase in income is due to the introduction of larger projects such as Help to Claim and Money & Pensions Service. The financial contribution (i.e. income less direct costs of delivery) from Projects to our total surplus/deficit has varied from £13k for 2017/18 to £6k the following year and is likely to be in the region of £37k for 2019/20. The budget for 2020/21 is a contribution of £15k and for 2021/22 - £8k. The variation in project contributions is due to funders renewal of projects, our ability to deliver projects to the standard required, our capability to hire quality staff at short notice, train staff, cover project work from existing staff and with volunteer time and the varying willingness of funders to pay for any overheads. All our projects are on 12 month contracts, they incur significant time and expenditure to deliver and are therefore uncertain sources of income. We continue to be committed to pursuing projects that complement our core service, make a contribution to core costs and are deliverable within our management and team capacity. Whilst projects complement the services we deliver they are not a replacement for our core service in that they are typically limited to single issue advice where most of our clients have complex multiple problems all of which we are able to assist with as part of our core service offering, we need therefore to be careful to balance projects with core service income and delivery.

Conclusion

The 35% real cut in our grant from NFDC has been, and continues to be, a challenge which we have worked hard to meet whilst maintaining our service quality and reach and the moral and goodwill of our extensive volunteer community.

We feel strongly that we are at a limit and any further reduction will inevitably lead to a loss of our service in parts of the Forest and be detrimental to its residents and therefore is likely to impact demand for NFDC services. We offer significant value for money and if we didn't offer our service someone else will pick up the problems when things have most likely escalated and become more serious and costly to resolve. We will also lose our expert advice manager expertise which will reduce quality and breadth of advice and lessen our ability to bid for project work and other grant funding.

We would like to do more not less, more outreach, more debt advice, more partnership working to identify issues and share best practice and knowledge to better serve our community. More support from NFDC would make this possible.

If the NFDC continues down the trajectory of cutting our core 'unrestricted grant' by a further 10% we will have no option but to close one or two offices and make redundancies.

To maintain our service, we ask that the NFDC maintain the grant at the 2021/22 amount of £186,000

To improve our service, we ask that NFDC consider a grant of £200,000 for 2022/23.

Citizens Advice New Forest

Strategy 2018-2023 – Summary Achievements & Priorities

Strategic Objectives	What we achieved in 2019	Our priorities for 2020	Our ambitions for 2021-2023
<p>Service delivery: Centralise management, information, communication & technology.</p> <p>Divest leasehold premises and secure community supported facilities at locations where the service is needed on an outreach basis to meet a growing demand.</p>	<p>We opened our new Advicehub in Lymington Town Hall on the 1st Oct 2019. The hub provides a base for Adviceline and webchat services as well as being our management, training and project base.</p> <p>We introduced GSuite and moved our data to a Cloud based system.</p> <p>In Dec 2019 we moved out of our last privately rented office and into New Milton library, developing our ‘office in a cupboard’ model.</p> <p>We set up two outreach models in Fordingbridge and Ashley Hub.</p>	<p>To complete our restructure to deliver our services via a central Advicehub, 4 Community venues and 2 pilot weekly outreach advice sessions.</p> <p>To sign a renegotiated lease for our office in Hythe at ‘The Grove’.</p> <p>To develop our office in Totton into a community venue co-locating with It’s Your Choice (an advice organisation for young people).</p> <p>To introduce new working practices (making use of technology) that make our service more efficient and effective.</p>	<p>By 2021 we will have a more flexible, agile service delivery model that will be able to deliver advice services to more people in more different ways.</p> <p>We will have reduced our premises and core staffing costs by 35% to create a more sustainable long-term future for the organisation in order that our core services reflect the NFDC grant.</p>

<p>Finance: Secure long-term grantaid arrangements, increasing funded project activities and local fund-raising, to sustain and develop the service to meet client needs.</p>	<p>In March 2019 we signed a 3-year funding agreement with NFDC.</p> <p>We have raised our profile with local parish & town councils and maintained our funding stream from this source to £20,000.</p> <p>We have secured one off grants to set against incurred additional project expenditure, office moves and IT.</p>	<p>To negotiate a Year 4 funding agreement with NFDC which covers the core costs of running our service (revised premises costs, national membership of CA and core staff costs).</p> <p>To secure ongoing support from New Forest Town and Parish Councils (and move their support from annual grants to main spending programmes).</p>	<p>By 2021 CANF will have a secure funding base to cover all of its core operations.</p> <p>We will have other supporters and partners who trust us to deliver projects to meet specific needs across the forest.</p> <p>We will remain a free service to clients who need our help.</p>
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	<p>We have introduced new project income streams into our service delivery model:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help to Claim Money & Pensions service Energy Advice Programme Sovereign Housing. 	<p>To attract funding from high net worth individuals by setting up a supporters group who commit to ongoing support of CANF. To introduce working practices across the service to make 'donating to CANF' an easy, comfortable and seamless process.</p>	

<p>People: Recruit and retain volunteers and provide them with high quality training and supervision for delivering the service. Employ skilled staff and develop them for the roles required to manage a high-quality service.</p>	<p>In September 2019 we celebrated 80 years of Citizens Advice with an event at Palace House, Beaulieu hosted by our patron.</p> <p>We held a series of events for volunteers and staff to have an input into developing the strategic direction of CANF.</p> <p>We introduced monthly subject based training at our Advicehub.</p> <p>Four of our volunteers have progressed to paid employment with CA.</p>	<p>To develop a set of working values to embed across the teams to develop a New Forest focus.</p> <p>To set up a centralised recruitment and training programme for new volunteers based at the Advicehub.</p> <p>To create a forest wide forum for ASSs and experienced volunteers to support and develop their roles.</p> <p>To work with ASM team to introduce new working practices and specialisms to develop the team to work across the forest to support the volunteers.</p>	<p>By 2021 CANF will have an experienced team of staff and volunteers who are able to work flexibly to deliver high quality advice across the New Forest.</p>
<p>Research & Campaigns: Expand research and campaigning activities to identify and address social and economic issues impacting upon the lives of New Forest residents.</p>	<p>We recruited our first dedicated R&C volunteer based in our Hythe office.</p> <p>We ran 4 campaigns which increased our profile around R&C work (Scams, Energy, Get Online, Cut costs at Christmas).</p> <p>We ran a local survey on local post office closures and got local press coverage.</p>	<p>To recruit 1 additional R&C volunteer to create forest wide coverage.</p> <p>To run 2 campaigns in 2020 linked to locally relevant issues.</p> <p>To build links with local media outlets to get regular coverage on R&C issues.</p>	<p>By 2021 CANF will have a confident voice in the local community to highlight issues and concerns that face our clients across the New Forest.</p>

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	<p>We gathered evidence around digital exclusion and use of foodbanks in the New Forest.</p>	<p>To use our tableau reporting and casebook data to highlight local issues.</p> <p>To develop a team of local champions who will help to highlight issues of concern to CANF and let people know how we can help.</p>	
<p>Partnership: Work collaboratively with others to improve the client experience and their access to the best advice and support outcomes</p>	<p>In 2019 we developed a number of new partnerships to deliver key projects.</p> <p>We were awarded funding via national CA from the Money and Pensions Service to develop our debt advice service. We now work collaboratively with the debt quality team at CA and have a local partnership with Portsmouth CA</p> <p>We deliver 2 projects under the national Help to Claim project. We work closely with the DWP Partnership manager and have close links with the New Forest job centres.</p> <p>In March we organised a stakeholder event for over 50 local organisations on Universal Credit.</p> <p>We work in partnership with Rushmore CA to deliver Pensionwise services in the New Forest.</p> <p>We set up a Money Partners initiative with Sovereign Housing.</p>	<p>To maintain and further develop existing partnership arrangements and ensure we are delivering projects to a high standard meeting funder requirements.</p> <p>To further develop our debt advice work to expand the activities of specialist debt case workers across the New Forest.</p> <p>To explore opportunities for further partnership work with NFAN partners, local health services, foodbanks and neighbouring CAs.</p>	<p>By 2021 we will have established key partnerships with a broad range of agencies who are concerned about the wellbeing of New Forest residents.</p>
Strategic Objectives	What we achieved in 2019	Our priorities for 2020	Our ambitions for 2021-2023

<p>Publicity: Increase the awareness of our services in the New Forest through improvements to public information resources, and use of social media.</p>	<p>In 2019 we have done the following to improve our marketing and communications: We linked with the national 80th birthday to raise our profile in the local community.</p> <p>We now have an active Twitter profile broadcasting topical weekly news and updates.</p> <p>We have set up a Facebook page.</p> <p>We have developed good relations with local media and get regular coverage of news stories.</p> <p>We have a bi-monthly newsletter sent out via mail chimp to our mail distribution list.</p> <p>The CO produces monthly newsletters and we have a weekly brief to all volunteers.</p>	<p>We will refresh our website to focus on people being able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donate to us Volunteer with us or Get in contact for advice. <p>It will be streamlined and simplified.</p> <p>We will run monthly advice columns for local media and our Facebook page.</p> <p>We will recruit a PR and fundraising volunteer.</p>	<p>By 2021 people across the New Forest will be aware that we are a local charity, the key services we offer and the projects we run.</p>