

**COMMUNITY, PARTNERSHIP AND WELBEING OERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL – 14
September 2021**

CITIZEN'S ADVICE NEW FOREST – FUNDING FOR 2022 to 2025

1. RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That the Panel consider CANF request for a three-year funding agreement for the years 2023/24 and 2024/25 as follows and make a recommendation to the Cabinet:

Year 1 commencing 1st April 2022: £185,895

Year 2 commencing 1st April 2023: £190,542

Year 3 commencing 1st April 2024: £195,306

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Citizens Advice New Forest (CANF) is an independent charity run by a board of trustees, which includes representative from the District Council. It provides free, independent confidential and impartial advice to residents on a range of matters from debt, benefits, housing and employment as part of its core work, which support many of the Council functions.
- 2.2 During the pandemic the service continued providing vital support to New Forest residents helping 5,600 people with over 14,000 issues. The core service (funded by an NFDC grant and contributions from parish and town councils) provides for a core team of 1 full time and 6-part time staff and office accommodation in shared locations in Hythe, Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood and Totton.
- 2.3 Additional support and advice is undertaken through specific funded projects which usually target vulnerable groups or specific issues, such as the Money and Pensions Service funded debt advisers, the Help to Claim project and MacMillan case worker. Whilst their offices were closed CANF greatly expanded their outreach activity and helped to set up and support the 10 Food Larder projects across the district.

3. FUNDING AGREEMENT

- 3.1 New Forest District Council is the principal financial supporter to CANF, previously awarding an annual grant of £255,000. A Task and Finish Group was set-up to work with CANF and review the funding arrangements and their service delivery. In 2019 the Council agreed a rolling three-year funding agreement with CANF, commencing 1 April 2019, with the funding of the third year to be considered annually. The purpose of this agreement is to provide CANF with secure long term future funding amounts to enable CANF to budget and plan ahead.
- 3.2 The funding agreement with CANF reflected the 30% reduction in council funding by reducing the grant by 10% each year over the three-year period, as follows:

Year 1 commencing 1st April 2019: £229,500

Year 2 commencing 1st April 2020: £206,550

Year 3 commencing 1st April 2021: £185,895

3.3 Funding for 2022/23 was agreed to remain at £185,895 by the Community and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel in March 2020.

3.4 The CANF Board are requesting that the Council consider a further three-year funding agreement with CANF as agreed, commencing 1 April 2022, to enable CANF to budget and plan ahead.

4. SERVICE DELIVERY

4.1 CANF have reviewed their service, reducing accommodation and staffing expenditure, and continue to review their service delivery model, income and fund-raising streams, which Members encouraged. CANF continue to promote the awareness of their service as an independent charity which receives no Central Government funding.

4.2 CANF report that demand continues to increase, as does the complexity and variety of problems they help residents with. CANF have been instrumental in bringing together organisations across the district to form a New Forest partnership to ensure support for the most vulnerable members of our society is more coordinated and streamlined, and information and good practices are shared. The council has been active in this partnership. A number of projects have evolved from this partnership including:

- The setting up of advice services alongside the Food Larders in 10 outreach locations across the New Forest, supporting over 660 households since January 2021.
- The commissioning of a Cost of Living project with Southampton University to look at the causes and effects of poverty on low income households in the New Forest.
- The Reaching More People Together project with Refernet (inter-agency referral platform) and Advice First Aid training
- The delivery of support to over 125 households with people who are struggling with energy bills.

4.3 In addition CANF support vulnerable clients through a variety of externally funded projects which they would not be able to deliver without the core infrastructure and funding in place. These projects include supporting households affected by cancer through the Hampshire MacMillan service, the dedicated MAPS funded debt caseworkers who help 30 clients a month, and our trained benefits advisers funded through the Help to Claim project who have helped over 1,000 clients claim Universal Credit.

- 4.4 With the core funding of £185,895 for 2021/22 current core budget projections are for a deficit. Core funding is essential for the organisation to bid successfully for additional project funding. Further reductions in funding may have an impact on service delivery as any further reductions in costs could result in potentially reducing service delivery or closing offices.
- 4.5 NFDC receive information on CANF's Business Plan and Financial summary and are represented on the CANF Board. Members are kept up to date with CANF activities with quarterly newsletters that are circulated to members along with their Annual Report. See <https://newforestcab.org.uk/2021-summer-newsletter/> for the Summer newsletter and <https://newforestcab.org.uk/about-us/citizens-advice-new-forest-annual-report-2019-20/> for their annual report for 2019/20.
- 4.6 Officers work with CANF to agree Target Outcomes and monitor and review these on a quarterly basis. The current target outcomes are all being met.

5. FUNDING AGREEMENT FROM 1 APRIL 2022

- 5.1 The workload of CANF and the valuable service it provides to residents has never been more evident. The effective service delivery changes that were made to modernise the service enabled the service to run via different channels throughout the pandemic and the organisation is currently building capacity to offer a multi-channelled service across the forest.
- 5.2 The 3 year funding agreement request from CANF maintains the level of funding awarded to support existing service provisions but is increased by inflation each year to reflect and account for increases in wages, utilities, over the three-year period, starting from 1 April 2022, which has already been agreed, as follows:

Year 1 commencing 1st April 2022: £185,895
Year 2 commencing 1st April 2023: £190,542
Year 3 commencing 1st April 2024: £195,306

- 5.3 The figure used by CANF for inflation is 2.5%.

For further information, contact:

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Background Papers:

CANF Annual Report 2019/20