

Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 19 September 2024

Future funding for Citizens Advice New Forest

Purpose	For review and recommendation
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Council recognises the work Citizens Advice New Forest do to support our residents across the district and is a key partner of the Council.</p> <p>This report provides a summary of the current funding arrangement to support Citizens Advice New Forest, which is due to end on 31 March 2025, and seeks to confirm future funding arrangements.</p>
Recommendation	That the Panel make a recommendation to the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate on the future funding for Citizens Advice New Forest
Reasons for recommendation	To provide confirmation to Citizens Advice New Forest on their future funding arrangements.
Wards	All
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jeremy Heron – Finance & Corporate
Strategic Director	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Transformation
Officer Contact	<p>Ryan Stevens</p> <p>Service Manager Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services</p> <p>02380 285693</p> <p>Ryan.stevens@nfdc.gov.uk</p>

Introduction and background

1. Citizens Advice New Forest (CANF) is an independent charity run by a board of trustees, which includes representatives 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. 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, Energy Advice, and MacMillan case worker.
2. CANF receive no government funding, with income derived from the Council, Town and Parish's, project and grant applications, which can be short term, donations and fund raising.
3. During 2023/24 CANF supported over 6,500 residents.

Current funding agreement

4. To provide CANF with secure longer term funding certainty and enabling CANF to budget and plan ahead, the Council has provided three-year funding arrangements, commencing 1 April 2019. The current 3-year funding agreement is as follows:

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

Year 2 commencing 1st April 2023: £190,542 (+2.5%)

Year 3 commencing 1st April 2024: £195,306 (+2.5%)

5. The core funding provided by the Council enables CANF to bid for additional project funding. CANF Board are requesting that the Council consider a further three-year funding agreement with CANF as agreed, commencing 1 April 2025, to enable CANF to budget and plan ahead.
6. The Council meets quarterly with the Chief Officer of CANF for a report and to provide an update on project work and to discuss any issues.

Service delivery

7. CANF operate from fixed locations at Hythe, Lymington, New Milton, Ringwood and Totton and continues to review their service delivery model, including reducing costs, increasing income, and how its advice services are delivered. This has included working from community hubs to increase visible presence in communities,

operating from Ringwood library, and recently co-locating at New Milton Town Hall for face-to-face drop-ins and appointments, which the Council is providing free of charge.

Working with the Council

8. The Council and CANF work collaboratively to support our residents and teams, for example those with debt, helping with claiming Pension Credit, applying for financial support via the Household Support Fund or Discretionary Housing Payments, and supports residents in arrears with their council tax and/or rent, or who at risk of homelessness. CANF is a key member of the New Forest partnership network, working with numerous local organisations, and attends community hubs and food larders to provide outreach advice and information.

Corporate plan priorities

9. Proving funding to CANF supports the Corporate Plan priority of supporting our vulnerable residents, including the provision of advice and information to those in financial hardship, and working with our partners to provide advice and information to residents.

Options appraisal

10. The options available to consider are to increase, maintain or reduce the current level of grant funding. Any changes to the grant funding may have implications on the level of future service provision. CANF do apply for and receive income for projects, however these are usually short term with no certainty on future funding opportunities or income. CANF will provide further details during their presentation to inform the Panel regarding their financial position and longer-term budget forecast/plans.

Financial and resource implications

11. The current funding is significant but reflects the work of CANF and the work they do across the district. The are financial implications with providing ongoing funding to CANF, which are included in the Medium-Term Financial Plan. There are no additional resource requirements with existing working arrangements to continue.

Legal implications

12. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

Risk assessment

13. There are no risk assessments required.

Environmental / Climate and nature implications

14. There are no environmental or climate and nature implications arising from this report.

Equalities implications

15. The Councils funding to CANF enables them to provide advice, information, and support on a range of issues to residents, some of whom are vulnerable, for example those struggling financially, or who are elderly, disabled, or suffering with mental health. This support can be face to face and over a period of time, as many customer queries can involve multiple issues which can be complex. CANF provide additional advice, for example to maximise benefit income, and advocate for those who are unable to do so themselves.

Crime and disorder implications

16. There are no crime and disorder implications arising directly from this report.

Data protection / Information governance / ICT implications

17. There are no data protection, information governance or ICT implications arising from this report.

Conclusion

18. The Council provides significant funding to CANF for their core infrastructure costs, which supports the provision of advice and information to residents from across the district, and enables delivery of further project work through applications for additional funding, targeting specific groups or issues. CANF continues to be a key partner of the Council, supporting our corporate priorities and providing advice and information to residents.

Appendices

There are none

Background Papers:

CANF presentation to Panel