

CITIZENS ADVICE NEW FOREST – REVIEW OF GRANT

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to convey the recommendations of the Citizens Advice New Forest Task and Finish Group on a review of the grant given to Citizens Advice New Forest, which in 2017/18 was £255,000. The Group has met three times, in July, September and November 2017 and on the last two occasions invited the Chief Executive of Citizens Advice New Forest (CANF) and his colleagues for discussions at those meetings. The membership of the Task and Finish Group is shown at the end of the report.

2. FINDINGS OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

- 2.1 Over the course of its meetings, the Task and Finish Group had received from CANF their business plans, annual report, and financial statements. They also received presentations from CANF on their future vision for rationalising the organisation, with five year projections on finance, reorganisation of delivery, new technology, fund raising, income generation and future challenges. The Working Group noted the additional pressures on CANF arising from Universal Credit and homelessness and mental health issues.
- 2.2 The Task and Finish Group have advised CANF representatives that, with the financial pressures on the District Council, it would need to consider if it could continue to fund CANF at the same levels in future years. As the District Council had experienced a reduction in funding of around one third, which all Council services have had to address, the Council had little option but to consider a similar reduction to CANF grant. One of CANF's main costs was office accommodation rents, which was the key to reducing costs and in turn, the reduction of Council's grant. CANF had provided the Council with details of their current properties and lease expiry dates. It was clear that there was insufficient time for CANF to adjust accommodation arrangements and achieve savings to reduce the grant for 2018/19.
- 2.4 Accordingly, the Task and Finish Group have asked CANF to come back to the Task and Finish Group with their future preferred office locations, with a view to NFDC assisting where it can in provision of office space within the District in order to reduce CANF costs. It is hoped that this exercise will facilitate funding reductions from 2019/20 onwards. The rate at which the reduction can be achieved will depend on CANF's progress, the impact on their organisation as the Universal Credit system is rolled out, as well as the progress with finding alternative accommodation.
- 2.5 CANF have also been requested to produce a three year plan by October 2018 to achieve cost reductions over three years from 2019/20, with a view to signing a rolling 3 year Service Level Agreement with the Council which would give the CAB some financial security going forward and enable longer term financial planning.
- 2.6 In reaching their conclusions, the Task and Finish Group wished to place on record the high esteem in which they hold the Citizens Advice New Forest organisation and the undoubted value they bring to the local community. The Task and Finish Group will continue to meet regularly with CANF representatives working in partnership to achieve the required changes and meet future challenges.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That it be a recommendation to the Cabinet that the Council grant to Citizens Advice New Forest for 2018/19 be set at the same level as £2017/18, £255,000.
- 3.2 That the Panel are asked to note the work of the task and finish group.

MEMBERS OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Cllrs P Armstrong, Ms K Crisell, S Davies (Chairman), L Harris, J Heron, A O'Sullivan, Ms A Sevier and M White

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Background Papers:

None