

Resources and Transformation Overview and Scrutiny Panel – 22 January 2026

Annual Update from Citizens Advice New Forest

Purpose	For Review
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	<p>The Council recognises the work Citizens Advice New Forest do to support our residents across the district on a variety of matters, many of whom are vulnerable, and that they are a key partner of the Council.</p> <p>This report provides a summary of the current funding arrangement to support Citizens Advice New Forest.</p>
Recommendation	1. That the Panel note the contents of this report and the presentation from Citizens Advice New Forest.
Reasons for recommendation	To fulfil the funding agreement that Citizens Advice New Forest provide an annual update to the Panel of their work and activities to support our residents.
Wards	All
Portfolio Holder	Councillor Jeremy Heron – Finance & Corporate
Strategic Director	Alan Bethune – Strategic Director Corporate Resources and Section 151 Officer
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 2024/25 CANF supported over 6,800 residents on a variety of issues, with many residents seeking support with more than one issue.

Current funding agreement

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

Year 1 commencing 1st April 2025: £195,306
Year 2 commencing 1st April 2026: £195,306
Year 3 commencing 1st April 2027: £195,306
5. The core funding provided by the Council enables CANF to bid for additional project funding to support and benefit our residents, which is predominantly short-term and ring-fenced for targeted projects with specified outcomes.
6. Service Managers meet quarterly with the Chief Officer of CANF for a report and to provide an update on caseload, project work and to discuss any issues. There is also Officer and Member attendance at CANF Board meetings.

Service delivery

7. CANF continues to review their service delivery model, including reducing costs, increasing income, and how its advice services are delivered. This includes working from community hubs and providing outreach support to increase visible presence in communities, operating from Ringwood library, co-locating at New Milton Town Hall for face-to-face drop-ins and appointments, which the Council is providing free of charge, and more recently outreach work in Fordingbridge, with other locations being considered.

Working with the Council

8. The Council and CANF work collaboratively to support our residents and teams, for example those with debt, where we are signposting to their Financial Capability Officer work, helping with claiming Pension Credit and Universal Credit, applying for financial support via the Household Support Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments, and energy vouchers, 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. There are no options appraisals arising directly from this report.

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.

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 across the district, 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, signpost to other forms of support, 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. Where CANF contacts the Council about a resident, for example to ascertain their current council tax account balance, consent from the resident is always provided.

Appendices

There are none

Background Papers:

CANF presentation to Panel