

Report to: **Executive**
Date: **22 July 2008**
Report of: **Executive Member for Social Inclusion and Culture**
Subject: **Funding - Easington and District Citizens Advice Bureau**
Ward: **All**

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to determine the Council's level of core funding for the Easington and District Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for the 2008/2009 financial year.

2. Consultation

- 2.1 In preparing this report the Senior Regeneration Officer (Finance & Management) has been consulted who has advised that a budget provision has been made to support the Council's existing commitment towards the core work of the CAB. The Housing Strategy Unit have requested the CAB to report on homelessness prevention works that they undertake and to provide advice on Choice Based Lettings and these areas of work may be the subject of a further report.

3. Background

- 3.1 The District Council has previously given a commitment to fund the activities of the CAB for periods of four years (i.e. for the term of each Council) with the existing commitment expiring in March 2008. This commitment has historically been based on the previous years' allocation plus an inflationary increase. However the following funding profile was agreed for the last four years which was subject to an annual review:

The core grant was increased by 5% for 2004/2005 and by 4% per year thereafter. This equates to:-

2004/2005 - £100,641	5% Increase (£4,792) on 2003/2004
2005/2006 - £104,667	4% Increase (£4,026) on 2004/2005
2006/2007 - £108,854	4% Increase (£4,187) on 2005/2006
2007/2008 - £113,208	4% Increase (£4,354) on 2006/2007

- 3.3 This commitment has allowed the organisation to plan ahead and gives security and stability to their operation. The Council now needs to confirm its level of funding for the 2008/2009 financial year. In light of the Local Government Review it is suggested that a single year commitment is made at this time.

4. Position Statement

The Council has previously provided substantial financial support towards the running of the CAB in the District and the current level of funding (2007/2008) is £113,208. The cost for providing the standard CAB service for 2008/2009 is estimated at £250,000. The service, both core and outreach, currently provided by the bureau is considered to be the minimum for the District and a budget provision of £117,736 has been made for 2008/2009 to support this activity.

Discussions have however taken place with CAB regarding the provision of additional services relating to Homelessness monitoring/advice and Choice Based Lettings (both priority areas in the transitional plan). CAB currently does not report on homelessness prevention outcomes the service provides now through existing funding. This could be in delivering debt or welfare rights advice which if not delivered could result in the client losing their home. If it is shown that the CAB prevent homelessness then this would provide evidence of the need to have additional resources that would be available to the homelessness and housing advice service for referrals. CAB has advised that an additional budget of £46,750 would be required to support two additional staff although it is felt that one may suffice.

Additional work is required on this area and further reports will be brought forward if required. If additional support is required the temporary virement of housing related budgets or the use of external funding will be investigated to support such activity.

Presently the Bureau provides:-

- Generalist advice and information on a wide range of subjects
- Representation at welfare benefits appeals
- Negotiation with creditors in multiple debt situations
- Assistance with disability benefits claims
- Free legal advice
- Home visits to those unable to access the service for whatever reason.

Easington and District Citizens Advice Bureau sees itself as having a wider role in the community and engages in a range of partnership working, particularly:-

- District of Easington Homelessness Steering Group
- Community Legal Services Partnership
- Consumer Support Network

- 4.4 Recently CAB have been working closely with Durham Primary Care Trust and McMillan Cancer Relief to provide an advice worker to work with the palliative care team to aid persons suffering from cancer and other life limiting illnesses and their carers.
- 4.5 The overall service relies heavily on volunteers who are supervised by permanent staff and there is an ongoing recruitment drive to ensure that the volunteer training programme can be achieved.
- 4.6 The Bureau continues to operate an outreach service in 12 community buildings throughout the District the funding for which has been secured from the Big Lottery Fund and the Northern Rock. Funding from Town and Parish Councils also supports this element of the service.
- 4.7 During 2006/2007 the bureau handled 11,186 client contacts and managed 22,480 issues on their behalf. This represents an increase of 4% on the number of clients handled. As a result of generalist and tribunal work the bureau has generated £1,023,441.92 in additional benefit income for their clients and have managed a further £2,815,289.48 in client debt related issues, an increase of £351,389.87 (14.26%) on 2005/2006 figures.
- 4.8 It is clear that the financial gains made by the bureau goes some way to alleviate the poverty experienced by some clients and also benefits the local economy. It is

also clear that the amount of debt managed by the bureau relieves some of the stress and anxiety experienced by people in debt.

- 4.9 The amount of debt in the area is increasing and the CAB is thus managing an increased amount of money advice and debt management work. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) have recognised this as a major problem with Easington being one of the worst affected areas in the country. The bureau has thus secured funding, last year, from the DTI to employ two additional debt workers for two years.

5. Implications

5.1 Policy and Local Government Review

This report seeks agreement to commit existing resources to funding of the CAB in 2008/2009. Its preparation reflects the move over 2008/2009 to the establishment of a successor single local authority for County Durham and does not commit resources beyond March 2009. CAB's throughout County Durham have set up an umbrella body to discuss future funding arrangements with the new authority.

The Council's decision will be communicated to Durham County Council and to the joint working arrangements governing the preparations for the establishment of the new authority.

5.2 Financial

A budget provision of £117,736 (4% increase on 2007/2008) has been made for the 2008/2009 financial year to support the core services. As indicated above investigations are ongoing regarding the provision of additional services, the funding implications of which will be covered in future reports as required.

5.3 Legal

There are no legal implications.

5.4 Policy

It has been Council policy to fund the CAB for the life of each Council however in light of the Local Government Review this report is recommending funding for one year only.

5.5 Risk

A risk assessment has been completed and the necessary actions required to manage the identified risks have been/will be managed.

5.6 Communications

The CAB will be advised of the Council decision and publicity will be sought regarding the Council support of the CAB.

6. Corporate Implications

Corporate Plan and Priorities

The CAB provide a quality service for the residents of the District and engages in a range of partnership working including Trading Standards, Consumer Support, Community Legal Services and the Durham On Line Initiative which aims to improve access to advice services. Less easily quantifiable is the effect of the bureau's help in issues such as homelessness, relationship or employment problems, which are often causes of stress and anxiety and subsequent ill health.

Equality and Diversity

There are no Equality and Diversity Issues.

E-Government

There are no direct E-Government issues for the Council however CAB have introduced a new IT system which provides up to date legal information and has allowed the bureau to develop a case recording system. This will allow the analysis of data thus enhancing the organisation and planning of the service.

6.4 Procurement

There are no procurement issues.

6.5 Social Inclusion

The policy rationale for assisting the operational costs is to promote greater social cohesion and inclusion through the impact on individuals and families. The continuation of the twelve outreach sessions also supports this objective as it facilitates easier access to the service.

7. Recommendations

The Executive approve a funding contribution of £117,736 to the Easington and District Citizens Advice Bureau for 2008/2009 to support their core services and await further detail on the provision of additional services relating to Homelessness and Choice Based Lettings.

Background Papers/Documents Referred to in Preparing this Report

District of Easington Risk Assessment
Letter from the Manager of the CAB (CAB/01)