

CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAUX SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

Cabinet – 5 March 2015

Report of	Chief Officer Communities & Business
Status:	For Decision
Also considered by:	Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee – 12 February 2015
Key Decision:	Yes

Executive Summary: This report outlines progress on the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau during the current year and seeks approval for the Service Level Agreement for the next three financial years.

This report supports the Key Aim of: Caring Communities – Providing the right support at the right time and reduce poverty and social exclusion.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Roddy Hogarth

Contact Officer(s) Lesley Bowles Ext. 7335

Recommendation to Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee:

That Cabinet be recommended to agree the draft Service Level Agreement for 2015/18.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

It be RESOLVED that the draft Service Level Agreement for 2015/18 is agreed subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 12 of this report and the Leader of the Council satisfied with the proposed merger arrangements.

Reason for recommendation: The Service Level Agreement outlines funding for the Citizens' Advice Bureau to provide a General Advice Service and a Housing Advice Service in the Sevenoaks District and sets out Service Standards for the delivery of these services.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The three year Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Sevenoaks & Swanley and Edenbridge & Westerham Citizens' Advice Bureaux was approved at the Cabinet Meeting of 12 January 2012.

- 2 The SLA three year agreement started on 1 April 2012 and will finish on 31 March 2015.
- 3 Quarterly monitoring meetings are held between Officers and CABx Managers and an annual review meeting is held between the Portfolio Holder, Chief Officers for Communities & Business and Housing, CABx Chairs and Managers.
- 4 The information required from the Bureaux for quarterly meetings is set out at in Schedule B of the Service Level Agreement 2015/18 and that required for the Annual Review meeting is set out in Schedule C. The annual review period is from October to September each year.

SLA 2015-18

- 5 Discussions regarding the 3 year SLA to cover the period 2015/18 have taken place during 2014/15.
- 6 During the year, both CABx have had the opportunity to make suggestions on changes to the 2015/18 SLA to be taken forward.
- 7 Suggested changes have been incorporated into the draft SLA set out at Appendix A. These relate to the monitoring information that CABx are required to provide, taking account of changes to the way CABx nationally record and report data and do not reduce the effectiveness of the information in any way.
- 8 The payment for the General Advice Service for 2015/16 and each subsequent year is £ 98,540, unchanged from 2014/15. Payment for the Housing Advice Service continues at £ 18,000 per year, unchanged from 2014/15. Payment of the funding annually in advance enables the CABx to plan their services over the year
- 9 The hours of opening and access to the public also remain unchanged.
- 10 The Bureaux are required to agree between themselves how the funding is to be apportioned to each Bureau. They will then let the Council know so that payment can be made.
- 11 The Sevenoaks and Swanley CAB is likely to merge with Gravesham and Tonbridge CABx during the next financial year. Safeguards to ensure that Sevenoaks residents and volunteers are not disadvantaged by this arrangement are included in the revised SLA at paragraphs 1.7 and 3.6. Whilst the name of the organisation will change, it is proposed that the individual bureaux will be known by the name of the towns in which they are based, eg Swanley CAB and Sevenoaks CAB.
- 12 The new Service Level Agreement will be conditional upon any merger between CABx undertaking the following :
 - a) The level of service provided to Clients will remain as set out in paragraph 2.2 for the term of this Service Level Agreement.
 - b) The new merged Sevenoaks/Swanley/Tonbridge & Malling/Gravesham Citizens' Advice Bureau will include a proportionate or better geographic representation from the Sevenoaks & Swanley area, including at least one

- (and no fewer than other local authority's) representative, who should be nominated by Sevenoaks District Council.
- c) SDC's funding will be ring-fenced for the benefit of clients in the Sevenoaks District and the annual accounts will show spend in the Sevenoaks District separately from spend elsewhere.
 - d) The pool of volunteers supporting Sevenoaks and Swanley Bureaux will include a proportionate or better percentage of volunteers from the Sevenoaks District.

Key Implications

Financial

- 13 The level of grant in the Council's ten year financial plan is £98,540 per year for the General Advice Service and £18,000 per year for the Housing Advice Service and these sums are included in the draft SLA.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 14 This is a Service Level Agreement as opposed to a contract that has contractual liabilities. Accordingly, this is a statement of what is expected from CABx and the Council, with a requirement for the CABx to provide performance data on the level and nature of advice given to clients.
- 15 The Service Level Agreement covers statutory obligations, including Child Safety Equalities and Safeguarding Policies.

RISK	IMPACT	CONTROL
Failure of the Bureaux to decide how to apportion the General Advice Service SLA between the CABx	This could result in delayed payment to the Bureaux and consequent threat to the service.	If agreement has not been reached between the two Bureaux by 31 March 2015, the Council will apportion it.

Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	CABx provide assistance to those most in need in the District. They assist residents on issues around benefits, debt, education, employment, financial services & capability, health & community care, housing, immigration & asylum, legal, relationships, tax and discrimination. The service is available to all residents in the Sevenoaks District.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	Yes	The Council makes referrals or signposts customers to CABx relating to high

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
		hedges, debt and benefits, council tax, social housing, building control, land charges and nuisance.
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		There are no adverse impacts.

Conclusions

- 16 The Service Level Agreement outlines funding for the Citizens' Advice Bureau to provide a General Advice Service and a Housing Advice Service in the Sevenoaks District and sets out Service Standards for the delivery of these services. It is recommended that the draft SLA for 2015/18 be agreed.

Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Service Level Agreement 2015/18

Background Papers:

Draft Service Level Agreement 2015/18

Lesley Bowles
Chief Officer Communities & Business