

**Open Report on behalf of Richard Wills,
Executive Director for Environment and Economy**

Report to:	Executive
Date:	04 January 2017
Subject:	Citizens Advice Lincolnshire
Decision Reference:	I012665
Key decision?	Yes

Summary:

Historically, Citizens Advice Services in Lincolnshire have been supported through a Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) which enables Citizens Advice Lincolnshire to deliver free, confidential and impartial advice and assistance through the network of local Citizens Advice Offices in the county. This includes a 'core service' across a broad range of advice areas including debt & money, benefits, housing & employment, consumer, relationships & family, discrimination, law & rights, tax & education and an 'Income Maximisation Service' providing intensive support to enable people to claim all of the benefits they are entitled to.

The current two year Grant Funding Agreement has provided funding of £684,594 per annum to enable delivery of such support Although the existing Agreement expires in March 2017, funding has been identified from within the service area to enable the continuation of grant funding at the same level for a further two years – i.e. for the financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Executive approval is therefore sought to approve in principle the continued award of grant funding to Citizens Advice Lincolnshire and to delegate the conclusion of legal documentation and the decision to enter into the Grant Agreement to the relevant Chief Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor for NHS Liaison, Community Engagement.

Recommendation(s):

That the Executive:

- 1) approve the award of grant funding to Citizens Advice Lincolnshire in the amount of
- 2) delegate to the Executive Director for Environment and Economy in consultation with the Executive Councillor for NHS Liaison, Community

Engagement the approval of all necessary legal documentation and the entering into of the grant agreement

Alternatives Considered:

The alternatives would be:

- To cease funding the service with potential impacts upon vulnerable citizens within the county
- To offer the service to alternative providers who do not have the ability to provide the same range of advice and support across the county

Reasons for Recommendation:

The giving of approval to the continuation of the grant will enable continued delivery of free, confidential and impartial advice and support services across the county over two years.

1. Background

Historically, Citizens Advice Services in Lincolnshire have been supported through a Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) which enables Citizens Advice Lincolnshire to deliver free, confidential and impartial advice and assistance through the network of local Citizens Advice Offices in the county. This includes a 'core service' across a broad range of advice areas including debt & money, benefits, housing & employment, consumer, relationships & family, discrimination, law & rights, tax & education and an 'Income Maximisation Service' providing intensive support to enable people to claim all of the benefits they are entitled to.

In addition, through their networks, Citizens Advice provide valuable connections and insight into the problems faced by people and communities in Lincolnshire with analysis of the wider social and economic trends through policy research. Their delivery of free, holistic advice and countywide coverage places them in the unique position of providing a comprehensive advice service across the whole of Lincolnshire. These factors make Citizens Advice Lincolnshire the only organisation of choice for grant funding a county wide advice service by Lincolnshire County Council. Furthermore, the local, regional and national partnerships they participate in and the infrastructure provided through the national Citizens Advice organisation add value to the services that are delivered.

The Citizens Advice organisations in Lincolnshire are non-profit making registered charities funded by grants secured from numerous sources. They are also financially supported by their local District Councils. Lincolnshire County Council core service funding enables the sustainability of the service and enables Citizens Advice to secure other local and national funding for projects and services to further support residents in the county, bringing additional value.

The services provided by Citizens Advice in Lincolnshire contribute to outcomes sought by Lincolnshire County Council. For example, enabling communities to have easier access to services and information, supporting individuals to care for themselves and develop a stronger sense of self, built on improved self-efficacy, confidence and self-esteem.

The current two year Grant Funding Agreement has provided funding of £684,594 per annum for 'core service' and 'Income Maximisation' with the aim of:

- Providing information and advice to the people of Lincolnshire in a timely manner and as efficiently as possible
- Raising awareness of support services which may be accessible to recipients
- Ensuring the service is accessible to all
- Ensuring advice given is quality assured, in accordance with the requirements of the national Citizens Advice organisation
- Ensuring advice is based on need and provided by telephone, email, webchat and, where necessary or appropriate, on a face to face basis
- Supporting clients to maximise their income by ensuring they claim all the benefits to which they are entitled (under the Income Maximisation Service)
- Providing an inclusive and accessible service offering home visits to clients, where appropriate, to ensure that no one is unable to receive the help they require due to their inability to travel or access services (under the Income Maximisation Service)
- Relieving the anxiety and financial distress associated with severe debt problems through support by specialised debt caseworkers.

That funding agreement expires at the end of March 2017 and cannot be extended within its terms. A decision is therefore required whether to continue the funding in which case a new grant agreement will need to be entered into.

A Grant Agreement can legitimately be used in these circumstances as the Council is not procuring a service. The services that Citizens Advice Lincolnshire deliver are delivered under Citizens Advice Lincolnshire's own objects as an organisation. The grant enables the Council to ensure that the organisation is funded to carry on delivering those services and to do so on a scale which supports the Council's own objectives.

Equality Act 2010

The Council needs to make sure that it complies with the public sector equality duty set out in S149 Equality Act 2010 when coming to a decision on the proposals. In doing so, the Executive Councillor as decision-maker must have due regard to the needs to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it: Equality Act 2010 section

149(1). The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation: section 149(7).

Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

The steps involved in meeting the needs of disabled persons that are different from the needs of persons who are not disabled include, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities.

Having due regard to the need to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to tackle prejudice, and promote understanding.

Compliance with the duties in this section may involve treating some persons more favourably than others.

A reference to conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act includes a reference to:

- (a) A breach of an equality clause or rule
- (b) A breach of a non-discrimination rule

It is important that the Executive Councillor is aware of the special duties the Council owes to persons who have a protected characteristic as the duty cannot be delegated and must be discharged by the Executive. The duty applies to all decisions taken by public bodies including policy decisions and decisions on individual cases and includes this decision.

To discharge the statutory duty the Executive Councillor must analyse all the relevant material with the specific statutory obligations in mind. If a risk of adverse impact is identified consideration must be given to measures to avoid that impact as part of the decision making process.

The free, confidential and impartial advice and assistance delivered by Citizens Advice across the county is available to all. Due to the broad range of the support provided, Citizens Advice clients include some of the most vulnerable members of society including those with protected characteristics. Continuation of funding through a new grant agreement will enable continuation of Citizens Advice services.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS)

The Council in exercising its functions must have regard to both the JSNA and the JHWS.

Consideration has been given to the JSNA and the JHWS and it is noted that the services provided by Citizens Advice contribute to the outcomes sought by the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS) through the delivery of information, advice and assistance that reflects the key themes of the JHWS. Regarding the JSNA, insight into issues and problems in Lincolnshire gained by Citizens Advice together with policy research has the potential to support the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment process.

Crime and Disorder

Under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Council must exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent crime and disorder in its area (including anti-social and other behaviour adversely affecting the local environment), the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in its area and re-offending in its area.

This has been taken into account in this instance and the role of Citizens Advice considered. Citizens Advice remit includes advice on neighbourhood disputes, anti-social behaviour in housing and problems with local environment. Citizens Advice works in partnership with some providers of drug and alcohol support services in Lincolnshire and has a role in combating hate crime. Continuation of funding will enable this to carry on.

2. Conclusion

In recognition of the expiration of the existing Agreement in March 2017, funding has been identified from within the service area to enable the continuation of grant funding for two years.

Executive approval is therefore sought to approve in principle the continued award of grant funding to Citizens Advice Lincolnshire and to delegate the conclusion of legal documentation and the decision to enter into the Grant Agreement to the relevant Chief Officer, in consultation with the Executive Councillor.

3. Legal Comments:

The Council has the power to make the proposed grant. The relevant considerations in reaching a decision are set out in the Report.

The recommendation is consistent with the Policy Framework and within the remit of the Executive if it is within the budget.

4. Resource Comments:

Funding for the granting of this contract as set out in the recommendation has been identified from within the Council's earmarked reserves. This will cover the maximum period of the financial years 2017/18 and 2018/19.

5. Consultation

a) Has Local Member Been Consulted?

Yes

b) Has Executive Councillor Been Consulted?

Yes

c) Scrutiny Comments

On 14 December 2016, the Community and Public Safety Scrutiny Committee considered a report concerning Citizens Advice Lincolnshire. The Committee unanimously supported the recommendations contained in the report and agreed that the following comments would be passed to the Executive: -

- The Committee expressed support for the Citizens Advice Bureaux service, included the financial advice available and the help to aid individuals in claiming funds they are entitled to as part of the income maximisation project.
- The Committee highlighted the need to ensure that office space or access points for Citizens Advice are available in the community library hubs, to better support local communities.
- The Committee highlighted concern relating to the proposed channel shift to an increased number of online services and stressed the need for face to face services wherever possible. It was highlighted that in many circumstances the vulnerable residents, including older people or those on low incomes are often those who may not have computer access. The Committee stressed the importance for the need to ensure that the widest range of access to the service as possible.
- The Committee expressed a desire for the Citizens Advice Service to offer meetings with County Councillors in order to discuss local issues and promote wider engagement with local communities.
- The Committee enquired about the level of demand on the Citizens Advice Bureaux service and whether the level of grant funding was sufficient to provide an effective service given the increasing demand on Citizens Advice Lincolnshire.
- The Committee agreed to stress the importance of the continued need for effective face to face services to the Executive.

d) Policy Proofing Actions Required

n/a

6. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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