

SEVENOAKS DISTRICT CITIZENS' ADVICE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT

People & Places Advisory Committee - 2 March 2021

Report of: Chief Officer People & Places

Status: For decision

Also considered by:

- Cabinet - 18 March 2021

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary This report sets out details of the proposed Service Level Agreement for Citizens' Advice in the District and seeks approval for funding to support their work over the next three years.

This report supports the Key Aim of: the Councils Corporate Plan

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Lesley Dyball

Contact Officer(s): Jenny Godfrey x7112; Kelly Webb x 7474

Recommendation to People and Places Advisory Committee:

That Members note that report.

Recommendation to Cabinet:

That the draft Service Level Agreement for 2021/24 is agreed.

Reason for recommendation: The Service Level Agreement outlines funding for Local Citizens' Advice 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 existing three-year Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Citizens' Advice North & West Kent and Citizens' Advice Edenbridge & Westerham was approved at the Cabinet meeting on 8 March 2018.
- 2 The SLA three-year agreement started on 1 April 2018 and will finish on 31 March 2021.
- 3 Quarterly monitoring meetings are held between officers and Citizens' Advice Offices and an annual review meeting is held between the Portfolio

Holder and Deputies, Chief Officer People & Places, Citizens' Advice Trustee Chairs and Managers.

- 4 The information required from Citizens' Advice for quarterly meetings is set out in Schedule B of the Service Level Agreement 2021/24 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.

Details of Service Level Agreement (SLA) 2021-24

- 5 Discussions regarding the three year SLA to cover the period 2021-24 have taken place during 2020.
- 6 Suggested changes have been incorporated into the draft SLA set out at Appendix A. These relate to the changed way of working for the Citizens' Advice. The key changes are set out below:
 - Removal of requirement for the opening hours to be specifically for 'drop in' and 'face to face' for clients. Due to Covid-19 the Citizens' Advice have adapted their service provision and offer assistance via telephone, email, virtual 'meetings'. However, SLA 2021-24 continues (unchanged from the previous SLA) to provide for a service to be provided in the district between 09:30 to 15:30 hrs Monday to Friday. Additionally, a provision has been included for the Citizens' Advice to work towards providing some face-to-face sessions in Sevenoaks, Swanley, Edenbridge and Westerham.
 - The split of payments being made to each Citizens' Advice Office has been agreed and included. In the previous SLA the Citizens' Advice Offices were required to agree this between themselves and advise the Council so that the correct payments could be made.
 - Amendments to the reporting requirements in Schedule B to reflect the way reporting is undertaken by the Citizens' Advice. This does not impact on the effectiveness of the data being provided to the Council.
 - Some updates to the Housing Advice Service to account for changes in regulation and the fact that the Council now manages the Housing Register.

Key Implications

Financial

The level of grant for the SLA in 2021-24 in the Council's budgetary 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.

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 Citizens' Advice and the Council with a requirement for the Citizens' Advice to provide performance data on the level and nature of advice given to clients.

The SLA covers statutory obligations, including Child Safety, Equalities and Safeguarding policies.

The SLA includes a requirement on the Citizens' Advice to maintain an up-to-date risk assessment relating to the provision of the service and make this available to the Council.

Equality Assessment

Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups, and (iii) foster good relations between people from different groups. The decisions recommended through this report directly impact on end users. The impact has been analysed and does not vary between groups of people. The results of this analysis are set out immediately below.

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	The SLA includes obligations on the Citizens' Advice to comply fully with the Council's commitment to ensuring that the service is non-discriminatory and that clients can access the service taking account of any vulnerability or other specific housing needs.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	Yes	The SLA provides for the Citizens' Advice to work to reach and promote its services to those most in need. The Council will work with the Citizens' Advice to achieve this.
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?	N/A	No negative impacts identified

Conclusions

This paper asks that you approve the Citizens' Advice Service Level Agreement for 2021-24.

Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Citizens' Advice SLA 2021-24

Background Papers

None

Sarah Robson

Chief Officer People & Places