

**Item 4 - To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.**

1. "I recognise the hard choices that you are having to make in the current financial climate. However, the Council's grant support for the Citizens Advice general advice service is critical in equipping, training, supporting and covering the expenses of a volunteer plus maintaining our two office locations.

For volunteers, the office is where we meet, access technology and work stations, and receive support from supervisors and colleagues that is essential for training and guidance. This is a vital part of the volunteering experience, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely damaged.

My question is whether Council Members understand the impact on its most vulnerable residents and Citizens Advice volunteers that will result from the substantial reduction proposed to the level of grant?"

Sue Caskey

2. "Do Members appreciate the depth of advice and assistance that is provided by Citizens Advice volunteers?"

Volunteers are required to train to a high level relating to each area of advice. For example, volunteers have extensive training on the full range of benefits and other support that may be available to clients.

In a case I was heavily involved with last year we helped a Sevenoaks resident through numerous interactions over a 6-month period through two stages of appeal on a PIP claim. This resulted in a backdated payment of over £6,000 and an ongoing award of nearly £5,000 p.a.

We provide essential advice and practical help not otherwise available to clients – not just sign posting - often representing those with a range of educational, medical, social or age-related challenges."

Anthony Judge

3. "The presence Citizen's Advice maintains in both Swanley and Sevenoaks is critical for service delivery. For residents and those with greatest needs our local offices provide a place for appointments, reviewing and scanning their documents, and help with online applications. For volunteers, it is where we access technology, work stations and the support that trains, supports, mentors and guides us. This is a critical part of the volunteering experience and service delivery, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely impaired. Do Members appreciate the impact of the proposed grant

cut will have on a service which has been calculated to delivery more than £9 in hard benefit secured for residents for every £1 of support invested?”

Kevin O'Brien-Wheeler