

## **CENTRAL SWINDON NORTH PARISH COUNCIL**

### **Citizens Advice Bureau Funding**

**Report Prepared by: Andy Reeves**

**12<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

#### **1. Introduction**

1.1 Central Swindon North Parish Council were informed by the Chief Executive of Swindons Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) network in November 2018 that CAB funding in the Pinetrees Community Centre would be further reduced in the next financial year. It was intending to provide one half day a week from the current two half days a week.

1.2 The Swindon CAB is one of over 700 independent advice centres that are members of the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB). In order to belong to the National Association each bureau must meet specified quality standards and work within the Aims and Principles of the service. Each CAB is run as a separate Charity in the form of a 'franchise'.

1.3 The Pinehurst CAB runs from bespoke built offices in the Pinetrees Community Centre. The offices offer residents advice on a range of issues; whilst not an exhaustive list, this includes employment, housing, HMRC income tax queries, immigration/nationality, consumer & civil debts, family law, DWP (Universal Credit). They can also represent people in Court, at benefit tribunals & Child Support Tribunals. Advice offered is independent, confidential and free at the point of service.

1.4 Currently, core CAB services are run from Sanford House with two satellite functions in Park South & Pinehurst, both identified due to being areas of high demand for CAB services. In the last financial year CAB Pinehurst saw more than 400 'unique visitors', this doesn't consider repeat visits and the wider 'family impact influence'.

#### **2. Report Details**

2.1 Opening hours have been on a reducing sliding scale since 2014. Currently the facility operates for six hours per week. Every Monday & Wednesday 10.00-13.00 with a remote 'advice line' operated every weekday between 10.00-12.00 on a first come first serve basis.

2.2 Swindon CAB currently pay CSNPC £5,000 per annum for the rental of the downstairs offices. The CAB advise that the cost of operating for each day is £10,000 per annum which covers the paid members of staff to complement the volunteers, admin and training.

2.3 Swindon CAB have advised the satellite site at Pinehurst is funded by a grant from Thames Water. The grant is due to expire in June 2019. CAB advise they intend to remain with one day of funding from another source until 2020.

2.4 In December 2018 the CSNPC Grants Manager made an application with CAB for funding with the Nationwide Building Society to cover the cost of rent and staff. This applicant was unsuccessful. The Parish Grants Manager continues to source alternate external funding

opportunities.

2.5 Swindon CAB have subsequently made enquires as to whether CSNPC could provide support for the continuation of services at the Pinetrees Community Centre to ensure the continuation of the CAB service for two days per week at the Pinetrees Community Centre.

2.6 Swindon CAB are seeking from CSNPC financial support on an ongoing annual basis in two parts.

- i. Turnaround rental cover of £5,000 per annum which would be paid to the CAB and then returned to CSNPC to cover the use of the rooms. This practice is colloquially referred to as issuing 'wooden dollars' to provide an audit trail of tangible subsidies.
- ii. Direct revenue support for the paid staff function for £10,000 per annum.

The total funds requested by the CAB is **£15,000** per annum to be agreed on a year on year basis with no minimum fixed term agreement.

### **Recommendation**

Councillors are asked to consider the following points:

#### **In support of the application**

- i. The existing provision is highly used with a likely increased trajectory as the impending impact of Honda redundancies and it's support companies takes shape.
- ii. Evidence exists that a visit to the CAB Central Office in Sanford House would be one hurdle too many for residents; leading them to not access the service they need.
- iii. CAB footfall helps promote other services and facilities offered by the Parish Council.
- iv. There are no local alternative options which ensure individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities.
- v. The CAB shares a similar ethos to that of CSNPC in that it wishes to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both within the Parish and across Swindon.
- vi. Commitment is no longer than 12 months.
- vii. The current usage of the offices is around 5% of facility opening time or 2.5% without the committed support. There would be greater leverage for CSNPC to exploit this space more effectively for the use of residents in already oversubscribed times.

#### **Associated Risks**

- i. Without a sustainable third-party funding source, there is a risk CSNPC could become the default for ongoing support indefinitely. Should future Councils be required to reduce/remove funding to mitigate other cost pressures this could provide unintended reputational risk.
- ii. CSNPC remains in its infancy and again is being asked to consider providing a 'non-statutory' service without having time to fully understand the impact of costs on the Councils core offer, inevitable further devolution from Swindon Borough Council and our wider financial relationship with the CSNL&LT starting its first year.
- iii. There is no SLA agreement in place to ensure due diligence on spend is appropriate and provides the Council with value for money

## **Recommendation:**

It is recommended that overall Councillors consider the wider Social Capital output from the Citizens Advice Bureau and the well documented, evidenced background that its service provides residents which is unavailable elsewhere.

That the Clerk is instructed to:

1. Provide the Swindon CAB with £15,000 in the two-part tranche identified pursuant to 2.6 i/ii.
2. That an evidence-based 2019/20 SLA is drafted to the CAB CEO Clare Newport outlining a bi-annual report to identify CAB users, types of enquires, and whether the user was a Parish resident. The results to be reviewed at the December 2019 F&S budget setting meeting.
3. That the agreement is for 12 months from April 2019-March 2020 with no holdover commitment.
4. That the Parish Grants Manager continues to seek full or partial external funding.
5. That in conjunction with the CAB the existing CAB offices are marketed as available on the CSNPC online booking portal to hire outside of the core CAB offer.
6. That consideration is given for 2020/21 that the Clerk investigates:
  - i. Directly employing/commissioning DWP support in lieu of future CAB funding.
  - ii. Options with the CSNL&LT of delivering bespoke DWP support directly from the libraries.
  - iii. Financial/Social impact of retaining the 2019/20 status quo.