



Report to

Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee

19th March, 2014

Report of

Councillor Ruane

Title

Report Back on the Work Of Outside Bodies – Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report sets out details of the work of Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau over the preceding twelve months and details of attendance by the City Council's representatives.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Scrutiny Co-ordination Committee recommend that the City Council continue to nominate a Member to the Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau Management Board.

3 Information on Work of Outside Body

- 3.1 2013 was a particularly strong year for Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau and the organisation managed to reach a number of strategic milestones. These are outlined as follows:

Quality of Advice

Citizens Advice completed a thorough Audit of bureau services and assessed Coventry CAB's quality of advice to be in the top 8% of bureaux nationally. This, alongside a full pass in its Management Audit was a great achievement for the organisation and should give Members assurances that Coventry CAB is one of the best bureaux in the country.

Bureau Services

With demand increasing significantly on the bureau's daily drop-in service at the back end of 2012, the trustee board and senior management team implemented a full review and remodelling of the drop-in service. The net result is that through the recruitment of new staff and increases to volunteer numbers, the bureau is able to deal with an additional 100 people per week through the drop-in. This revised model was implemented in October 2013 and already client demand has absorbed the extra capacity that was created.

In addition to the redevelopment of the drop-in service, the bureau launched a major new programme – the SORTED Project, that is designed to provide financial capability support to new tenants or people under the age of 25. This project dealt with 500 referrals in 2013 and early indications from the Housing Associations suggest that clients engaged with this service are 50% more likely to sustain their tenancies than those that are not referred. The project was launched by Martin Lewis, the Money Saving Expert in March 2013.

Welfare Reform

The bureau were one of the founding members of the city's Welfare Reform Group and have worked through the Coventry Partnership to support initiatives around pop-up shops and promotional information to citizens facing changes to their income. The Chief Executive of the bureau is also the Chair of the Coventry Partnership which identified Welfare Reform as its

major theme for 2013. This culminated in a Welfare Reform Conference in October from which a number of new initiatives were drawn.

Recognition and Profile

BBC Newsnight returned once again to Coventry CAB to make a third film; this one focussing on the impact of Bedroom Tax three months into the changes. The bureau also won 2 national awards (out of a total of 4 possible) at the Citizens Advice Annual Conference, the first for Access to Services and the second for its work carried out in partnership with Coventry City Council to implement support for vulnerable people when accessed by bailiffs.

In terms of work with Coventry City Council, the bureau continues to work very closely particularly with Children's Services and in the further development of services through schools in the city. The bureau now delivers outreach services in 44 schools and trains school staff to identify advice issues for parents to ensure that help is provided to that family as early as possible.

Unfortunately the Council has been unable to continue funding the bureau service within the Housing Options department that has been in operation for the last 3 years. However, we are jointly looking for new opportunities to develop services to prevent evictions from the private rented sector through direct work with landlords.

Funding Position

The bureau felt the impact of the Legal Aid cuts and saw a reduction in income of around £100,000 at March 2013. It has however been able to replace some of this funding through new partnerships with the private sector and particularly through new investment from Severn Trent Water, Npower, Western Power Distribution and Coventry Building Society. The work with Severn Trent Water in the delivery of the Big Difference Fund is of particular interest and Severn Trent Water are able to report that 78% of customers that are referred to the CAB are paying their water bills 6 months following the advice intervention. This is a significant service outcome, particularly as Severn Trent Water only refer clients who have not paid any water for at least 2 years prior.

Governance

The trustee board of the CAB is Chaired by Simon Brake. In April 2013, the bureau introduced a new Strategic Framework . The bureau is now reviewing its strategic priorities for 2014/15 and anticipates that it will prioritise projects around further development of volunteering, partnership working with Foodbanks and delivery of specific projects for young people. The bureau has concerns with regard to the impact of sanctions on people within the city and the further poverty that that will inevitably cause. The bureau has established a new Strategic Sub-Group in order to develop and encourage innovations within the bureau's service model and partnership working.

4 What financial contribution does the Council make to the organisation?

The bureau received a core grant from the city council of £296,000.

5 Benefits to the City Council of the Appointment

The bureau is grateful for the support of the Elected Member and particularly through holding the portfolio for housing. This enables the bureau to work closely with the Council regarding many welfare issues. The Elected Member has also supported the bureau with information regarding the City Council's view of advice services.

6 Attendance Record and Remuneration for the Appointment

6.1 Coventry City Councils representative on the CAB is Councillor Ruane. There were six Trustee Board meetings held of which Councillor Ruane attended two.

6.2 There is no remuneration associated with this appointment.

List of background papers

Proper officer:

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Papers open to Public Inspection

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Schedule of City Council Appointments to outside Bodies