

Citizens Advice Bureau Grant

To: Communities, Social Mobility and Inclusion Committee

Meeting Date: 5 December 2024

From: Executive Director of Strategy and Partnerships

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: Yes

Forward Plan ref: 2024/023

Executive Summary: This report sets out proposals to fund support for Cambridgeshire residents experiencing financial hardship, via a two-year grant to the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:

Approve a grant of £800,000 to the Citizens Advice Bureau to deliver income maximisation across Cambridgeshire for the period April 2025 to March 2027.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

1.1 This work has been evaluated against the seven ambitions set out in the Council's [Strategic Framework](#).

1.2 This report specifically relates to ambitions five and three.

People are helped out of poverty and income inequality.

1.3 Income maximisation provides support to residents to ensure they are in receipt of all financial assistance they are eligible for, helping people out of poverty across Cambridgeshire by providing a long-term solution to financial hardship.

Health Inequalities are reduced

1.4 The current cost of living crisis has worsened health inequalities. Supporting vulnerable individuals and households by providing a sustainable solution to financial hardship is key to improving health outcomes.

2. Background

2.1 Since October 2021, the Council has received financial resources from the national Household Support Fund (HSF). The current round of HSF runs until 31 March 2025, and a further one-year extension was announced by the Government on 30 October 2024. The HSF funds a direct award scheme to residents and has also funded key partner organisations to deliver specialist preventative services across the county for people experiencing financial hardship.

2.2 In February 2024, Full Council set a budget to include a £2.2m investment to deliver anti-poverty work across the county.

2.3 In October 2024 the countywide Anti-Poverty Commission was launched. The commission is due to make its initial recommendations in February 2025, followed by its final report in April 2025. Recommendations from the Commission will help to inform the Council's future investments.

2.4 Since 2023/24 Cambridgeshire's two Citizens Advice Bureaus (CAB), Rural CAB and Cambridge and District CAB, have received funding from the Council to deliver an income maximisation service to support residents experiencing financial hardship.

2.5 In 2023/24 the Cambridgeshire CABs received Public Health funding of £300,000 to deliver income maximisation work. This current year, the CABs will receive a total of £400,000 funded by the Household Support Fund to deliver this preventative service.

2.6 Income maximisation is step one of any CAB intervention, and it addresses the immediate and presenting needs of someone seeking support. The offer includes:

- Tailored advice, including support with budgeting.

- Practical income maximisation, including benefit checks and advice on other opportunities for increasing income and/or reducing expenditure, either by making an application on clients' behalf or by providing resources for the client to do it themselves.

2.7 Since the Income Maximisation work began in 2023, the CABs report that 5455 Cambridgeshire residents have accessed the service, resulting in an income gain of £3,887,844.

2.8 These figures include the first six months of the 2024/25 financial year (April 2024 to September 2024), during which period the CABs have supported 1994 people, against a half-year target of 1500. To date, this has resulted in an additional total income gain of £1,334,666.

3. Main Issues

3.1 The Income Maximisation work is evidencing significant results for residents accessing the service. The CABs both have a dedicated team of trained staff delivering this bespoke intervention and can call on the expertise of others within the CAB, as well as the expertise from the national CAB and wider network.

3.2 The recommendation to offer the security of a further two-year grant to start on 1 April 2025 would ensure that the service can continue without interruption, supporting the CABs to retain highly trained and experienced staff to deliver this much needed support to Cambridgeshire residents.

3.3 The HSF allocation for 2025/6 can be used to fund the £400,000 grant in 2025/6. The recommendation for 2026/7 will be to fund the grant from the £2.2m Anti-Poverty budget.

3.4 The grant funds a holistic package of support which enables an in-depth review of the root causes of financial vulnerability and the full CAB offer. It is expected that an estimated 2500-3000 people could be supported throughout each financial year.

3.5 Each CAB will work with partners to design the application of the project locally.

3.6 Advice was sought from Pathfinder Legal in relation to the recommendation to issue a grant. Pathfinder Legal considered the grant against the Subsidy Control Act 2022, which came into force on 4 January 2023, applying a four-limb test to ensure that the grant is not a subsidy.

3.7 Pathfinder Legal concluded that the proposed grant is not a subsidy and that there is no subsidy control issue. Therefore, it should continue as a grant.

3.8 Advice was sought from the Council's Procurement service in relation to the issue of a grant. The Procurement service reviewed the current grant arrangement with the CABs and it supports the recommendation to issue a further grant for the proposed period.

4. Alternative Options Considered

4.1 Alternative options that have been considered in formulating the recommendations contained in the report:

- (a) do nothing – this was considered but dismissed. Income maximisation work across Cambridgeshire has delivered significant outcomes for residents and is a key element of the council's approach to reducing poverty and addressing income inequality.
- (b) go out to tender – advice was sought from Pathfinder Legal and the Procurement service regarding the recommendation to issue a grant rather than complete a full procurement, as set out in section 3 of this report.

5. Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 Since 2023, the CABs across Cambridgeshire have delivered income maximisation work to support people across the county who are experiencing financial hardship.

5.2 Income maximisation work has had a significant impact upon Cambridgeshire residents, as detailed in section 2 of this report.

5.2 The committee is recommended to approve the proposed grant of £800,000 to the Citizens Advice Bureau to deliver income maximisation across Cambridgeshire for the period April 2025 to March 2027.

6. Significant Implications

6.1 Finance Implications

Commitments in this paper would result in £400,000 of spend from the 2025/26 HSF budget and £400,000 of spend from the £2.2m anti-poverty budget.

As shown in section 2.7, income maximisation support has a significant positive impact on residents across Cambridgeshire.

6.2 Legal Implications

Please see sections 3.6 to 3.8 for advice received from Pathfinder Legal in October 2024.

6.3 Risk Implications

If the committee does not approve the recommendation, residents would not be able to access income maximisation support and would be likely to miss out on additional financial help which may lead to further financial hardship.

6.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

An Equality Impact Assessment is attached at Appendix 1.

7. Source Documents

7.1 None