

Review Committee – 11 September 2012

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **11 September 2012** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr Mrs J R Lumley
Vice-Chairman: R D Pointer

Cllr B T Hazlewood
Cllr J R F Mason

Cllr Mrs C E Roe
Cllr I H Ward

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs A V Hale and T E Mountain.

OFFICERS PRESENT

A Lowing - Community Planning Officer
P Gowers - Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power - Committee Administrator

180 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2012 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

181 ROCHFORD AND RAYLEIGH CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

The Committee received a presentation from Sue Murray, District Manager and Michael Spoor and Susan Harper, Trustees of Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau (RRCAB).

The Committee referred to the Responses to Questions document that had been sent to the RRCAB by the Committee for completion. The following responses were received from the RRCAB in response to supplementary questions from Members:-

- RRCAB is now on Twitter.
- Centrally, the CAB has taken on responsibility for Consumer Direct from the Office of Fair Trading. The CAB will be making a representation to central Government for additional funding to cover this additional consumer advice service, which will be offered by the national organisation, not locally. The Citizens Advice consumer service operates a call centre as a first point of contact for people with consumer issues. There are opportunities for the CAB to refer clients to the consumer service as well as the consumer service to refer to the CAB if face to face contact is required.
- A one-off grant of £10,000 has been used by the RRCAB to improve telephone access by replacing the old telephone systems.

Review Committee – 11 September 2012

- The RRCAB representatives advised that a 'face to face' service is a fundamental principle of the CAB and that there are no plans to operate the CAB service as a call centre. However, call centre facilities can be used in certain cases to supplement the existing service as a means of increasing access. A pilot for a national advice line to provide initial access to the CAB service has not proved successful so far.
- The average cost per client seen by the RRCAB is a little over £40.
- There was discussion about the potential for increasing CAB revenue streams, including selling CAB expertise in the marketplace. This idea has been piloted by the CAB in Calderdale, which provided a large local employer with employment advice.
- The CAB is continually looking at new ways of working; for example, holding sessions in libraries. The RRCAB is working with the other Essex Citizens Advice bureaux to explore additional funding avenues.
- Parish/Town Councils are approached each year by the RRCAB with a request for financial support; there is a regular commitment from some local Councils.
- RRCAB does not ask directly for donations from those people who make use of the service, as it is a fundamental principle of the CAB that it offers a free service. There are collection boxes in the CAB reception areas and notices reminding people that the CAB is a voluntary organisation. Last year a total of £1337 was received in donations from clients and from collections in the street.
- It may be beneficial to arrange publicity around any large donations that RRCAB has received as this may encourage people to make donations.
- The RRCAB does not know what funding will be available for any longer than the current year, as funding is decided on an annual basis. However, further opportunities can arise during the year. A sum of £59,500 has been received by the RRCAB this year from central Government, which will be used for staff training.
- The 161 residents who were targeted under the RRCAB outreach project were generally people who would have difficulty accessing the CAB service. The project was very well received by residents and the RRCAB is formulating a joint bid with Southend and Castle Point CAB's for funding to allow this outreach programme to be extended.
- Legal aid is due to be significantly reduced. CAB volunteers do not give legal advice, although the CAB is currently researching to ascertain if funding can be secured to access legal advice. The CAB is making a representation to central Government to advise of the gap that now exists between those who cannot afford legal advice and those not eligible for legal aid. Volunteers who are solicitors will be covered by the CAB's

professional indemnity insurance for any advice they give. The cost of this insurance was £1975 for 2011/12.

- Approximately 75% of the money received by the RRCAB is used to pay staff.
- Approximately 75% of the cases dealt with by the RRCAB are minor cases rather than large complex cases. In 30% of these minor cases initial advice can be provided over the phone.
- The RRCAB operates a ‘triage’ system or initial assessment, during which assessors are trained to pick up associated issues.
- As well as drop-in and pre-bookable appointments, there are specialised debt advice and employment surgeries.
- Rochford District Council provides accommodation in both Rayleigh and Rochford for the CAB free of charge. Rochford District Council has stipulated that it would like to retain a CAB office in both locations. It is appreciated that a need for the CAB service exists throughout the District and there would be a pressure on space if there were only one office. Rochford CAB accounts for approximately 40% of the calls received and clients often will need on-going support. Clients at Rayleigh will frequently need only one session and account for approximately 60% of the calls.
- Parish/Town Councils receive a break-down by ward of the different types of issues raised by residents with the RRCAB.
- The RRCAB invited Members to visit either of the RRCAB offices for a guided tour of the premises.

182 THE FORWARD PLAN

The Committee reviewed the Forward Plan and noted its contents.

183 WORK PLAN

How Voluntary and Community Groups function in the District.

The questionnaire has been sent to all voluntary groups in the District. The consultation period will finish at the end of November and feedback will be available at the December Review Committee meeting.

The meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

Chairman

Date

If you would like these minutes in large print, Braille or another language please contact 01702 318111.