

Management Committee

12 December 2017

Renewal of Grant Agreement with Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice

For Decision

Portfolio Holder(s)/ Briefholder

Cllr Christine James

Senior Leadership Team Contact:

S Hill, Strategic Director

Report Author:

Jane Nicklen, Community Planning & Development Manager

Statutory Authority

Section 1 of The Localism Act 2011, General power of competence

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval for renewal of the grant to Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice for a one year term with review thereafter subject to the potential formation of a Weymouth Town Council and devolution of finances as part local government re-organisation.

Officer Recommendations

2. To agree the terms of the grant for an interim period of one year with automatic extension for 12 months thereafter up to a 4 year term subject to satisfactory performance in line with the agreement and funding being available.

Reason for Decision

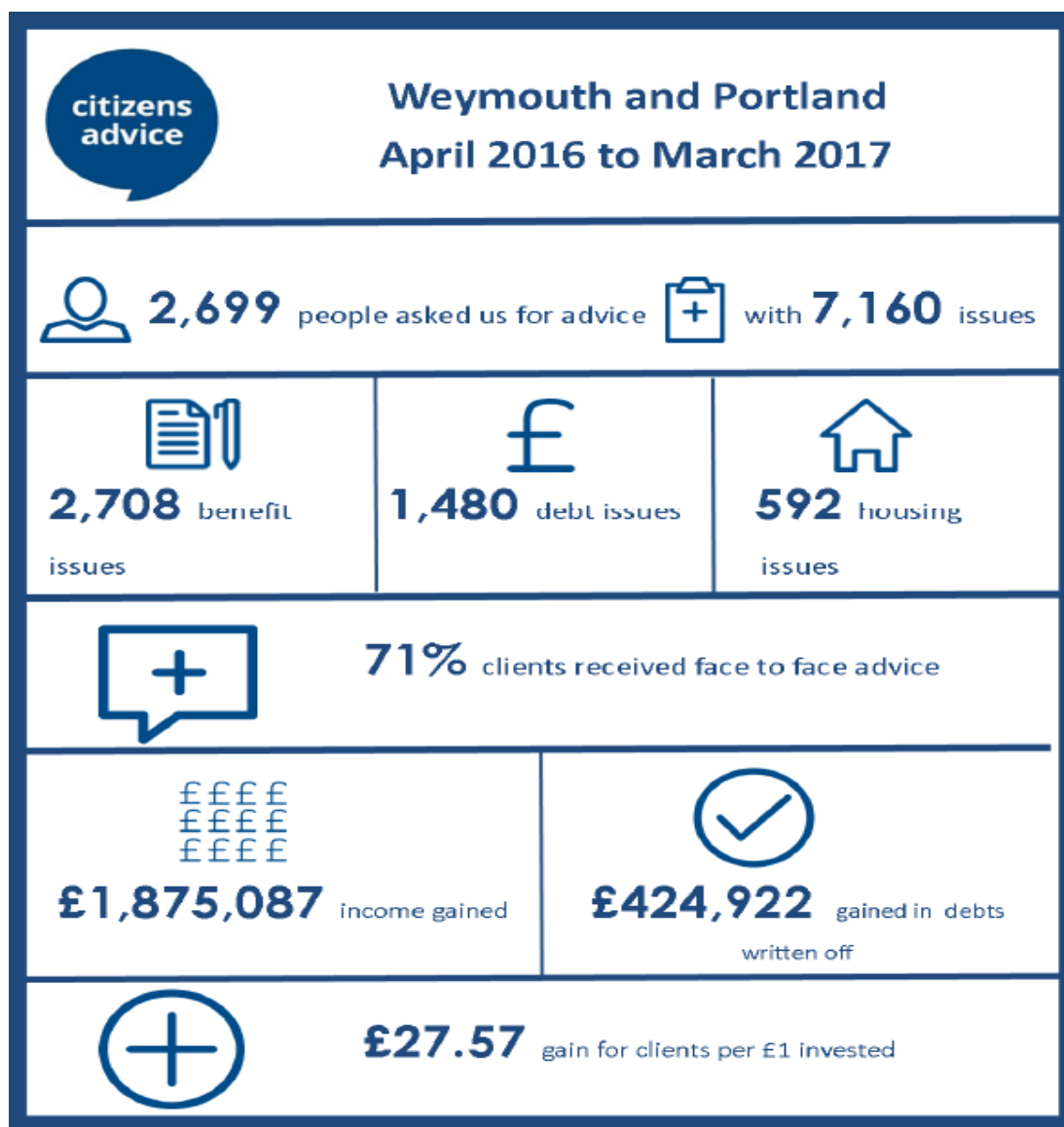
- 3 To support the continued operation of Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice and its outreach services in the Borough given the high demand for services at the current time. The one year period has been introduced to allow for developments in relation to Local Government Re-organisation

Background and Reason Decision Needed

- 4 The council has provided core financial support to Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice for many years. This support has enabled the provision of advice and counselling services to local residents in need. In 2014, the Council agreed to a four year grant agreement with Citizens Advice and this is up for renewal in April 2018. This report has been tabled at this time on the advice of the Head of Financial Services so as to inform the budget setting for the financial year 2018-19.
- 5 The new grant agreement has been drawn up in line with the Council's Grants, Loans and Subsidies Policy. The grant specifies the provision of advice and assistance to members of the public on a range of social policy issues which include:
 - Benefits
 - Consumer issues
 - Debt
 - Education
 - Employment
 - Finance
 - Health
 - Immigration
 - Legal
 - Other
 - Relationships
 - Tax
 - Travel
 - Utilities
- 6 The terms of the agreement cover the responsibilities of the council and the recipient, the grant amount, duration and payment schedule, use and payment of the grant, monitoring and reporting, publicity, data protection and confidentiality, freedom of information, anti-discrimination, human rights, insurance, liability and warranties, grant termination, waiver and variation and complaint and dispute resolution.
- 7 The grant agreement requires the Bureau to maintain and supply accounts, monitor delivery and outcomes, supply a risk register and insurance review, permit reasonable access for grant monitoring, provide an annual report, acknowledge the council as a funder, adhere to current legislative requirements and assist in freedom of information requests as required.
- 8 The annual grant payable by the council is £64,845 payable quarterly in April, July, October and January. This increases the safeguards to the council in case of any non-compliance. Three months notice of termination is required from the council before the end of each term. The grant runs for an interim period of one year with automatic extension for 12 months thereafter up to a 4 year term subject to satisfactory performance in line with the agreement. Officers of the council and the Bureau are scheduled to meet annually to review the grant.
- 9 In the past year, Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice has experienced a lack of management capacity due to illness. The trustees implemented changes to management arrangements in early September 2017. Currently the office is being run by the respective managers for Citizens Advice in

Dorchester, Sherborne and North Dorset and Purbeck. Discussions are ongoing about a potential merger with another local Citizens Advice. The trustees, office, staff and volunteers will still remain exclusively responsible for the provision of services to Weymouth & Portland residents but there will be a common management structure.

- 10 The service has continued to operate at the following locations with support from a dedicated team of volunteers:
- The main office at the rear of Weymouth Library at 1 Great George Street
 - The Portland Centre in Fortuneswell
 - GP surgeries at Lanehouse, Royal Crescent in Melcombe Regis, Portland and Wyke Regis. There are also plans to seek funding for an outreach service at Littlemoor.
 - Westham and Mulberry Childrens centres
11. In the year 2016-17, Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice saw a total of 2,699 clients. Details of their client profile by ward are shown at Appendix 1. The ward with by far the highest number of client comprising 19% of the total was Melcombe Regis. See activity summary below:



- 12 The profile of requests for help is shown at Appendix 2. The largest number of enquiries was received in relation to Benefits (38%), followed by Debt (21%) Housing (8%) and Employment (7%) shown below. Noticeable trends are the increase in welfare benefits enquiries and there are additional concerns about the potential impact of Universal Credit when introduced in December 2017.
- 13 Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice has a new Business Development Plan 2017-2020. This sets out a strategic way forward, focussing on consolidating and expanding existing outreaches, and increasing the existing volunteer team of 40 volunteers. The volunteers donated over 23,800 hours in 2016-17 with an annual value of £389,228. The office's new Universal Credit caseworker means that, for the first time, they will have a specialist welfare benefits worker to deal with the most complex cases and to use their expertise to support and extend the knowledge of the wider team.

Implications

14 Corporate Plan

This report has links to the following areas of the Corporate Plan:

- Empowering Thriving and Inclusive Communities
- Improving Quality of Life

15 Financial

The annual grant to Weymouth and Portland Citizens' Advice Bureau is £64,845 allocated through the Community Planning and Development Team budget. This is not subject to the Retail Price Index increase.

16 Equalities

The provision of council funding to Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice will enable all sections of the community to access appropriate advice services. Particular support is provided in relation to disability benefits advice.

17 Risk Management (including Health & Safety)

The grant agreement includes extensive financial and reputational safeguards to manage risks on the part of the council and also requires the completion of a risk register by the grant recipients.

18 Human Resources

Staff involvement in the negotiation and monitoring of the grant agreement is within the current role of the community planning and development and legal teams.

Consultation and Engagement

- 19 Consultation takes place with Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice as part of the current grant agreement. Engagement has also taken place with the current managers and Chair of Trustees of Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice in the preparation of this report.

Appendices

- 20 Appendix 1 - 2016-17 Clients by ward
Appendix 2 - % Clients by advice topic.

Background Papers

- 21 Grant agreement for the period 2014-2018

Footnote

Issues relating to financial, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.

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