

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Corporate Scrutiny Panel
DATE: 9 April 2009

RE: Walsall Citizens Advice Bureau

Purpose of the Briefing

This briefing note outlines the current level of financial support provided by the Council to Walsall Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and the services delivered by CAB as described in the current service level agreement. This matter was referred to the Corporate Scrutiny Panel by Council at their last meeting following approval of the 2009/10 budget for "consideration as to the pressures, outcomes and amount of this funding".

Funding support to CAB

The Council current provides grant support to Walsall Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) totalling £416,320 per annum through a service level agreement. This is made up a direct grant of £287,290 and premises costs of £129,030. The grant support has been maintained at this level since 2007/08 with 2 year agreements, the current one ending on 31 March 2009.

The service level agreement specifies that funding and support will be provided by the Council for an advice and information service to be delivered by CAB to individuals in the borough. The service is a free, independent, impartial and confidential generalist advice and information service offered at locations in the town centre and at outreach facilities in other parts of the borough.

The CAB deals with over 80,000 issues each year from around 35,000 client contacts on matters such as awareness of statutory rights, benefit take up, debt and money advice, employment advice, and housing and tenancy rights. There has been a noticeable increase in money and debt advice during the recent economic downturn, placing increased pressure on existing staff resources.

Recommendations to the Scrutiny

Corporate Scrutiny may wish to consider undertaking a joint piece of work with other Scrutiny Panels in looking at the wider advice services needed in Walsall as part of the Council's response to the credit crunch.

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