

UPDATE BRIEFING NOTE

- 1.1 The recommendation to Operational Services Committee follows a full and thorough review of the services (prescribed by the Service Level Agreement (SLA)) being delivered by CARC. At the heart of the review was ensuring that the most accessible and fit-for-purpose service was being offered to the community. A key benefit identified in the review is that the Council has built a network of multi-agency community hubs that go beyond Ely and will continue to grow into the future. A range of agencies attend the community hubs and these agencies can provide advice and support to clients. This approach provides a degree of independence from the Council.
- 1.2 The decision of Operational Services Committee (20 January 2020 Agenda Item 6) does not propose that CARC withdraws from providing services to residents, this is a matter for CARC not the Council, and as such the community will still have access to CARC services, if they so wish.
- 1.3 The Council does not charge rent to CARC for its occupation of the Market Street Offices, this provides an in kind benefit to CARC of approximately £15,000 per annum. CARC also offer their services through other means; telephone and webchat. Residents can contact any CAB office throughout the UK for assistance.
- 1.4 It is the Council's understanding that CARC has 2 part-time employed staff and 12 volunteers. By contrast the Council has 3 full-time support staff and 3 full-time housing officers that have been upskilling over the last 12 months to deliver a full and effective service. In addition to this, there will be a staged recruitment of 4 new staff to deliver the service. The 4 new staff will be employed on a two-year fixed term contract. This approach has been taken to ensure that the most fit-for-purpose service is being offered to the community.
- 1.5 Through the resources identified above, the Council has a breadth of knowledge available. The existing Officers have been upskilled to respond to the evolving needs of the community. The Council's Housing team have already undergone extensive training and will undertake further training in the coming weeks. This is outlined in Section 5.10 of the report considered by the Operational Services Committee.
- 1.6 Further, the Council has established effective working relationships with a multitude of agencies providing specialist advice, support and expertise. This is delivered in the multi-agency community hubs. It is also worth noting that the Council, in its own offices, accommodates multiple agencies; Rosmini Centre, Anglia Revenues Partnership and Sanctuary Housing.
- 1.7 The decision of Operational Services Committee does not propose the cessation of occupation of CARC in the Market Street, Ely office. Therefore volunteers could continue their role within that base. In the future, if CARC cannot maintain occupation in the Market Street, Ely office, the volunteers' expertise could be deployed within the community hubs.

- 1.8 It is not possible to use the Housing Grant (referred to in the report to Operational Services Committee) to pay external organisations to deliver these services. Whilst the Council can, because it is responsible for homelessness and preventing homelessness, CARC are not in the same position.
- 1.9 At a recent meeting with DCLG, Officers outlined the current proposals and the intention of spend through the grant. DCLG is satisfied that the proposal meets the terms of the grant conditions as it is linked to preventing homelessness in East Cambridgeshire. Further, DCLG have expressed that the approach taken by the Council provides a truly holistic service to the community that seeks to ensure a one stop shop for users who could face homelessness if the correct intervention and prevention methods are not in place.
- 1.10 The current SLA between the Council and CARC expires on 31 March 2020. It is very clear in the SLA that it is for a one-year period and places no obligation on the Council to renew the SLA or to even consider a renewal of the agreement.
- 1.11 The 12-week notice period to terminate mentioned at paragraph 3.2 of the Cambridgeshire Compact is in relation to agreements which run for 3 years. In this instance, the SLA is a 1-year agreement so arguably, either a notice period is not required or a fraction of that period would be considered reasonable notice. The decision of Operational Services Committee provided 10 weeks' notice to the end of March, which is reasonable. In addition, verbal notice was given to CARC at a meeting in March 2019, where CARC were informed of the Council's intention to conduct a review and that a grant was not guaranteed in future years.
- 1.12 The Cambridgeshire Compact states at Section 3.2 'work towards a situation in which statutory contracts and service agreements are a minimum of three years duration and where a minimum of 12 weeks' notice is given in respect of decisions to change or terminate grant or contract conditions (or less by mutual agreement)'. The Council is not changing or terminating a grant or contract conditions and therefore this does not apply. The SLA will still be in effect until 31 March 2020.
- 1.13 A decision to award this grant is taken on an annual basis, the Council is not withdrawing funding, it is merely making a decision not to award a grant in 2020 and beyond in favour of delivering the same level of service by via its own service.
- 1.14 The Council's Community and Engagement Strategy states that 'As the district continue to evolve and communities change, it is fundamental that effective engagement mechanisms are in place so that all residents have the opportunity to engage with the Council and have their say regarding the services and resources that they need. The Council recognises that change is a fundamental part of growth and effective change must come from individuals and groups. It is important that our language, attitudes and views embrace the role of community engagement in response to growth and changing community

needs.’ And ‘The East Cambridgeshire Community Engagement Strategy has been developed to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to engage with the Council and have their say regarding the services and resources that they need.’

- 1.15 The decision of Operational Services Committee has considered the needs of the evolving community and the ongoing evolution of Council services. This includes engagement with users to better understand their current and emerging needs.
- 1.16 The decision also reflects evidence provided by CARC about the trend of services that they advise on; further supporting the need for a more holistic approach.