

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>14<sup>th</sup> December 2006</b>
<b>Title of Report</b>	<b>Evaluation of the Councils Partnership the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau</b>
<b>Portfolio</b>	<b>Partnership Working</b>
Link to Corporate Priorities	Partnership Working
Key Decision	No
Executive Workplan Ref	B309
Public Report	Yes

**Summary of Report**

This report provides Members with the outcomes of the partnership evaluation of the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau.

The evaluation of partners and the use of the Partnership Evaluation Tool forms part of a new approach the Council is taking to monitor its partnership arrangements. It was agreed that the Partnership Development Officer would undertake a review of the Council’s partnerships with both Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) during 2006.

Following an earlier CPA inspection the Council was recognised as being a “good partner to work with,” but also highlighted areas for improvement. Better management of Service Level Agreements, and developing a more corporate approach were needed to ensure that the Council is able to demonstrate good value for money from the organisations it funds.

The evaluation has examined the different issues facing the partnership, and using the Partnership Evaluation Tool has identified areas for development that will aim to strengthen partnership working and the subsequent outcomes delivered.

**Officer Recommendations**

**Members note the outcomes and recommendations of the evaluation of the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau as attached in Appendix 1, in line with Option 1 and support officers to implement the evaluation recommendations.**

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
YES	NONE	YES	NONE	YES

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This report provides Members with the outcomes of the partnership evaluation of the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB).
- 1.2 The evaluation of partners and the use of the Partnership Evaluation Tool forms part of a new approach the Council is taking to monitoring its partnership arrangements. It was agreed that the Partnership Development Officer would undertake a review of the Council's partnership with the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau during 2006.

## **2. Options and Options Appraisal**

### **2.1 Option 1: Members note the outcomes and recommendations of the evaluation of the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau as attached in Appendix 1, and support officers to implement the evaluation recommendations.**

- 2.1.1 This programme of work forms part of the response to the Audit Commission review on the Councils approach to partnership working, and is also identified within the key actions of the Corporate Plan 2006/07 under "Partnership Working."
- 2.1.2 The Partnership Development Officer has been tasked to evaluate the Councils key partnerships and to subsequently work with officers and partners in implementing the evaluation recommendations. This work is ongoing and will enable the Council to develop a more corporate approach with its main partners.
- 2.1.3 Implementation of the recommendations outlined in Appendix 1 will ensure that the partnership is strengthened further, and builds upon the already strong foundations that exist to ensure that an efficient and effective needs led service in the district continues to be delivered.

### **2.2 Option 2: Members note the outcomes and recommendations of the evaluation of the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau as attached in Appendix 1, and consider making changes to the current partnership arrangements with CAB.**

- 2.2.1 This would enable Members to identify where changes might be made to the current partnership arrangements. This must be done in line with the Wiltshire Compact and will need to be done in partnership with the North Wiltshire CAB and Wiltshire County Council.
- 2.2.2 To implement this recommendation will require a new package of work to be developed by officers as further research into potential options will need to be undertaken. The current funding arrangement is jointly managed with Wiltshire County Council and any subsequent changes will need to be developed in consultation with the main partners of the agreement.
- 2.2.3 This option presents a risk to the Council both in its ongoing relationship with the North Wiltshire CAB and the resulting impact any changes will have on the service provided to the residents of North Wiltshire.
- 2.2.4 Members agreed that the Partnership Evaluation Tool was the mechanism in which to evaluate the Councils key partnerships. This tool is based on best practice and to detract from it would result in the Councils approach to partnership working becoming inconsistent.

- 2.2.5 The funding provided to the CAB is managed through a Service Level Agreement. The current Service Level Agreement is due to run until the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008. Best practice indicates that major changes to an agreement are normally only acceptable where a partner is faced with major issues that are likely to affect the service being delivered.

### **3. Background Information**

- 3.1 A significant amount of funding is committed from the Council's budget through Service Level and Partnership Agreements. Building on the recommendations outlined by the Audit Commissions Review on the Councils approach to partnership working, it was agreed that the Councils key partnerships should be evaluated to ensure that they provide value for money and are robustly managed.
- 3.2 The Audit Commission Review focussed on two existing partnerships that were managed through Service Level Agreements. The two chosen were Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau as they encompass a wide range of diverse services. Following this, Members agreed that in order to move forward from the review and to address some of the recommendations, it would be appropriate to evaluate the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust and the Citizens Advice Bureau first.
- 3.3 A Partnership Evaluation Tool was subsequently developed by Officers to support the evaluation process. It has been developed to ensure that partnerships are evaluated in a structured and fair manner. This is the second time the tool has been used to evaluate a key partner.

### **4. Current Partnership Arrangements**

- 4.1 The grant awarded by the Council in 2006/07 to the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau for core services was £122,400.
- 4.2 A three-year joint Service Level Agreement between the main partners is in place. The partners of this agreement are Citizens Advice Bureau, North Wiltshire District Council and Wiltshire County Council. The current Service Level Agreement will run until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008.
- 4.3 A joint approach to funding was undertaken to ensure that the partnership was operating in a Compact compliant manner. Where multiple public sector partners are funding the same aspect of a voluntary sector service, the Compact promotes a joint approach as a more efficient and effective way to managing partnership funding agreements.
- 4.4 In the past the Council has provided funding to the CAB for other aspects of the service. Until October 2006 the Council previously held a contract with the CAB to provide specialist homelessness advice. Following the Homelessness Advice and Prevention Services review, the Council decided to bring this aspect of the service back in house and the contract with CAB has ceased.
- 4.5 In recent years CAB have received additional funding for support towards the Calne rent. This was a five-year arrangement, which came to an end in January 2005. In 2006 CAB were informed that in future years additional core support could not be requested over and above the core services Service Level Agreement, as this was not in line in with the Wiltshire Compact and did not provide a sustainable solution for the organisation.

## **5. Main Findings of the Evaluation**

- 5.1 The Evaluation outlined three areas to address, these were:
- To identify that a clear need exists for the Council to provide funding to the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau
  - To identify that the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau is best placed to deliver the service and that the outcomes of the service are relevant to current Council priorities or mandatory responsibilities
  - To consider the overall position of the partnership and recommend where improvements or changes should be made
- 5.1 The evidence identified through the evaluation provides a strong basis for why the Council works in partnership with the Citizens Advice Bureau and subsequently provides core funding to the organisation.
- 5.2 There is a need for local people to be able to access advice in a holistic manner, which is impartial, of high quality and provides practical support to help people resolve their issue. Whilst the Council can provide advice on its individual services, it is not able to provide the unique service offered by CAB.
- 5.3 In 2005/06 CAB dealt with 13,470 client contacts, they dealt with 15,424 problems, with the key issues being benefits, debt and housing. There has been a 29% increase in debt problems and this has resulted in CAB providing 8,902 hours of debt advice. The CAB has undertaken a needs analysis of the district and as a result has shaped the service appropriately in order to respond effectively to their clients needs.
- 5.4 A number of teams across the Council work closely with the CAB. In particular the Housing team and the CAB have developed a strong working relationship, which ensures that there is good liaison between officers and results in client's receiving a more joined up approach. CAB are often able to provide a sustainable solution to clients problems given their holistic approach to advice, whereas the Council can only focus on the issues relating to a particular service.
- 5.5 CAB provides an important and valuable service to the residents of North Wiltshire. The evaluation has identified that CAB has the expertise and infrastructure and brand in place to deliver a comprehensive advice service that is responsive to the needs of the district.
- 5.6 CAB provides a high quality service to the residents of North Wiltshire. North Wiltshire CAB are independently audited every 3 years and in June 2006 they passed the audit outright and exceeded standards in social policy and training. Their Quality of Advice score was 90%, only 2 CAB nationally has scored as high as this in the last 2 years. Coupled with this is also the high level of satisfaction recorded by service users.
- 5.7 Based on the information gathered by the evaluation, officers are of the opinion that North Wiltshire CAB is best placed to deliver the holistic advice service that residents of the district require.
- 5.8 A robust Service Level Agreement is in place to manage the grant, which is in line with the Wiltshire Compact. The evaluation has concluded that an appropriate framework to manage the partnership exists with review schedules, link officers and disputes processes all detailed in the agreement.

- 5.9 In contrast to the framework being in place to manage the partnership, the evaluation has identified that at present the partnership is not being effectively managed. Clearly the foundations are in place, but at present reviews are behind schedule and an improvement in monitoring arrangements is required.
- 5.10 The partnership with CAB is based on a joint agreement with Wiltshire County Council (WCC). Ongoing resource constraints at WCC have led to a reduction in communication between the partners, which has had a negative impact on the effective management of the partnership. It is important that this area is addressed within 6 months as it places the effectiveness of the partnership at risk.
- 5.11 The evaluation has highlighted that more development is required in order to better capture the impact CAB has on the district. This will be achieved through the development of an outcome-focussed approach to monitoring.
- 5.12 In summary, the evaluation has found that there is a clear and tangible need for the CAB and that they are best placed to deliver a holistic advice service. Overall an appropriate framework to manage the partnership exists, but the evaluation has identified that the key area where improvement must be made is the ongoing effective management of the partnership. This will require the development of more effective monitoring processes and the participation of WCC in managing the agreement with the other partners.
- 5.13 After considering the outcomes of the evaluation, officers are satisfied that the North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau provides a service which demonstrates good value for money.
- 5.14 This evaluation is recommending that there should be no change in the current level of funding. If any changes were to be proposed in future years, consideration must be given to the impact this would have on the services delivered and the ultimate quality of the service.

## **6. Discussion**

- 6.1 The Council currently invests £122,400 into the North Wiltshire CAB core service. As a result of the CAB operating in North Wiltshire, £1 million has been achieved for clients and is subsequently brought into the district. This demonstrates that the Council plays a pivotal role through its funding, as the amount levered into the district undoubtedly has a significant impact on the economic activity of local people.
- 6.2 The Council is signed up to the Wiltshire Compact. The Compact promotes how the Statutory Sector, Voluntary and Community Sector should work together and outlines key duties for how such relationships are managed. As a signed up member of the Compact, the Council has a responsibility to ensure that any decisions made which impact on a Voluntary and Community Sector organisation, are Compact compliant.
- 6.3 If Members are minded to make changes to the current partnership arrangements the following considerations apply:
- A three-year Service Level Agreement to manage the funding is in place. The current agreement ends on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008 with a further option for another three years built in if the partners wish to continue.
  - Under the Compact Code of Practice for Funding and Procurement, the Council is required to notify the partner of any changes to their funding by giving at least 3 months notice.

- Officers are of the opinion that any fundamental changes to the current level of funding provided by the Council to the CAB will significantly impact upon the core service that is delivered. This could include a reduction in the number of clients able to be seen, a change in the nature and locations of the service being delivered, and the level of support able to be provided to individual clients cases.
- The need for the general service to exist will not diminish and the Council is neither best placed nor has the capacity to deal with the problems dealt with by the CAB. The Council provides core funding, this is the most difficult form of funding to achieve and without it would mean that CAB could only focus on the specialist areas of advice which relate to contacts that they are awarded.

6.4 If Members wish to make any reduction in the current level of funding, given the negative impact this will have on the CAB and its service to the North Wilts community, a sustainable solution such as a tapered approach will need to be implemented

## **7. Moving the Evaluation forward**

7.1 The Partnership Development Officer will work with the partners over the coming months in implementing the recommendations detailed in Appendix 1.

7.2 To ensure that the partnership operates in the most efficient and effective manner, officers will assess progress against the key areas for improvement in 6 months time. Principally this will look to see if there has been an improvement in the ongoing management of the partnership with the full participation of all partners, whether the monitoring process is on schedule and that an outcome focused approach has been developed.

## **8. Community & Environment Implications**

8.1 Partnership working offers opportunities for the Council to strengthen communities and service delivery. This in turn can help to ensure that community needs and priorities are addressed in a way that maximises the use of available resources for local people.

8.2 Working in partnership brings many benefits such as volunteering opportunities for the local community, added value to Council services and enables the Council to meet its responsibilities under the Wiltshire Compact.

## **9. Equality & Diversity Implications**

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment for the Community Planning, Community Area Awards and Partnership Working service area has been completed. The Community Partnership Team holds a copy of the assessment.

## **10. Financial Implications**

10.1 The amount awarded by the Council in 2006/07 to the North Wiltshire CAB is £122,400. Under the current SLA, the Council is committed to funding the CAB in 2007/08, and it is to the discretion of the Council whether it wishes to award an inflationary increase on the current level of funding. To do this would be in line with the guidance outlined in the Wiltshire Compact.

10.2 The funding given by the Council forms part of a joint approach with Wiltshire County Council. Together this makes up the core service budget of the CAB. Supporting the core service enables CAB to lever in other money to the district. Last year this equated to £1 million.

## 11. Risk Analysis

11.1 Officers are of the opinion that there are no significant risks to the Council resulting from the recommendations of this report.

11.2 The evaluation has identified that more effective management of the partnership is required. Should this not be addressed over the coming six months then officers are of the opinion this may start to present a risk to the Councils approach to partnership working. If officers are concerned that progress has been limited in six months time, then the Lead member for Partnerships will be advised and steps will need to be taken to address the issue.

11.3 It is essential for this work to continue as it contributes to a wider area of work to improve the Councils approach to partnership working. This in turn will reduce the risk of not achieving good value for money from the partnerships the Council invests in.

<b>Appendices:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Appendix 1: Evaluation of North Wiltshire District Councils partnership with North Wiltshire Citizens Advice Bureau</b></li> </ul>
<b>Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The Partnership Evaluation Tool</b></li> </ul>

### Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

<b>Report</b>	<b>Committee &amp; Date</b>	<b>Minute Reference</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>None</b></li> </ul>		