

## COUNCIL MEETING – 20<sup>th</sup> JULY 2010

### REPORT OF THE PARTNERSHIPS REVIEW COMMITTEE

28<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Present: Councillor Allebone (Chairman), Councillor Pursglove (Vice-Chairman),  
Councillors R Bell and G Lawman

C Pittman (Head of Policy, Partnerships and Property) (Committee Manager).

#### 1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

**RESOLVED** to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Blackwell, Graves, Hawkes, Shram and J Raymond.

#### 2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

**RESOLVED** to note that in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000, the Code of Local Government Conduct and the Council's Constitution, the under-mentioned Councillor declared an interest in the following items:

Councillor	Minute	Subject	Reason
G Lawman	5	Annual Report 2009/10	Personal – County Councillor – NCC Highways presentation

#### 3. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 10/5/2010 be confirmed and signed.

#### 4. NENE VALLEY CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

The Chairman welcomed Lynn Lavender, Chief Executive, Nene Valley Citizens Advice Bureau who gave a presentation on the work done by NVCAB in the Borough and how it linked nationally.

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination. Its aims are to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

There are 416 Citizens Advice Bureaux across England and Wales, all of which are independent registered charities. Citizens Advice itself is also an independent registered charity, as well as being the membership organisation for the bureaux; together they make up the Citizens Advice service. Through the training, information systems and support it provides, Citizens Advice equips the bureaux to deliver the highest quality advice to their local residents.

In turn, client evidence submitted by the bureaux alerts Citizens Advice to widespread problems that require action at a national level.

Lynn Lavender reported that NNCAB initiatives included:

- Face to face drop ins, appointment service and telephone advice line.
- Bridge prevention of homelessness project supported by the Borough Council, Wellingborough Homes and the Probation Service.
- Face-to-face and telephone advice as part of the Additional Hours project supported by The Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) now known as The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)
- Increased access to telephone advice as part of the Advice+ Lottery project.
- Self help debt management pilot programme - Cashflow.
- Debt advice in Wellingborough prison.
- Debt advice as part of the mortgage rescue scheme in conjunction with the Borough Council.
- Repossession awareness raising campaign commissioned by the Department of Communities and Local Government.
- Active social policy evidence gathering.

There had been a 42% increase in workload since 2009, mainly as a result of the recession.

Lynn Lavender responded to questions and comments raised by the Committee, which included the following:

- Q.** How successful has the introduction of kiosks been, which was part funded by the Borough Council?
- A.** The introduction of kiosks has not been as successful as we would have hoped, which may be due to people preferring to receive face to face advice. One kiosk is located in the bureau reception; this is better used as its use can be supported by bureau staff. NVCAB was proposing to work closer with the library service by placing one of the four kiosks available across the region into the Raunds library.
- Q.** Whether NVCAB has been affected by organisations offering debt management advice, e.g. DAN (Debt Advice Network)
- A.** DAN is a member of advice uk and as such gives free advice. NVCAB is trying to discourage people from using debt management advice services that require a payment because of the costs involved and concerns over the quality of advice available.
- Q.** What is the position regarding the contract that NVCAB was awarded for providing legal advice through Law for All?
- A.** NVCAB has a very successful partnership with Law for All, who are not for profit community solicitors; they are a charity which exists to provide high quality and cost effective social welfare law services to clients of limited means. NVCAB offers initial advice and people are then referred to Law for All for broader legal advice/casework; this arrangement is ongoing.

- Q.** Whether the self help debt management pilot programme Cashflow is generally available or can it only be accessed through NVCAB?
- A.** The project is now available through licensed advice providers in order that their clients can agree an online financial statement which can be used by the client to draw up manageable repayment proposals.
- Q.** Is NVCAB experiencing difficulty in recruiting volunteers?
- A.** There was no problem in recruiting volunteers, who receive group training sessions on the general aspects of CAB followed by more in-depth training as required. Currently we have a lot of short term volunteers who train with us while looking for paid employment.
- Q.** How close is NVCAB's relationship with the local MPs and whether the relationship could be strengthened?
- A.** NVCAB attempt to keep the local MPs informed of relevant policy issues and provide statistical information on a quarterly basis. NVCAB agreed that this relationship should be strengthened.
- Q.** Whether NVCAB's initiatives as described for the Wellingborough constituency took into account the changes to the constituency boundaries?
- A.** The information provided predates the boundary changes. It was agreed that future updates would be provided on a Borough rather than a constituency basis.
- Q.** What are the hot issues that account for the 42% increase of people coming through NVCAB door?
- A.** People ask for advice on more than one topic but the hot issue is debt advice, where income maximisation is tackled. Debt issues are often as a result of unemployment.
- Q.** Whether NVCAB's relationship with the Borough Council could be strengthened?
- A.** It is important to keep the lines of communication between NVCAB and the Borough Council open. NVCAB already liaises with the Borough Council on housing needs and community issues. Discussions were being held regarding the proposed One Stop Shop that the Borough Council was planning to establish with potential partners and NVCAB is keen to be involved in this. NVCAB needs to be involved in any accommodation review plans that were being proposed as part of the High street development plans.
- Q.** Whether one case worker was sufficient? It was noted that NVCAB had received an adverse audit report last year.
- A.** NVCAB had been successfully re-audited in April 2009, achieving a marked improvement. People need to receive extensive training to become case workers. The one case worker is employed by NVCAB but supervision and coaching is undertaken by another bureau in the county as part of a reciprocal arrangement regarding training. It is hoped to recruit additional caseworkers as funding permits.
- Q.** A lot of work is done on a triage basis; NVCAB provides initial advice and clients are then signposted as necessary to other agencies. Does NVCAB keep a track of progress on the referrals and whether positive outcomes have been achieved?
- A.** All enquiries are recorded and feedback is received from the relevant agencies on any referrals to them. Follow up calls are made to clients

who receive generalist advice from NVCAB. However, it is difficult to always ascertain whether clients have heeded the advice given.

- Q.** What resource does the Community Law Service (CLS) deploy in Wellingborough?
- A.** As part of the financial inclusive funding, NVCAB hosts a CLS worker two days a week and CLS housing needs caseworker one afternoon a week. All advice agencies in the county are part of the Advice Northants Partnership.

The Chairman thanked Lynn Lavender for the informative presentation.

**RESOLVED** that the presentation be noted.

## **5. ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10**

The annexed circulated report of the Head of Partnerships, Policy and Property was received on the Committee's work in 2009/10.

Appended to the report was the draft Annual report, which summarised the overview and scrutiny work carried out by the Committee in 2009/10 in relation to the Council's overarching PRIDE priorities and identified the wide range and variety of organisations and bodies scrutinised by the Committee and the proposed actions arising from that scrutiny.

The annual report also described the follow-up to the review work initiated by the Committee in relation to the relatively low levels of educational achievement in the Borough.

It was proposed that the report would form part of an overarching report on the work of the Council's overview and scrutiny function.

The former Vice Chairman expressed thanks on behalf of the Committee to the Committee Manager and Committee Clerk for arranging and minute taking the work of the wide range of organisations that were scrutinised by the Committee during 2009/10.

It was noted that the Committee Manager would follow up the actions/recommendations referred to in the 2009/10 Annual report and prepare a briefing note on progress prior to the next Committee meeting.

The Committee agreed that Northamptonshire Sport, Wellingborough Prison Service and BCW/ENC IT partnership should be included in the Committee's work programme for 2010/11.

It was noted that crime statistics produced by the police may not necessarily reflect the true picture as the public did not report all incidents of crime. The Committee agreed that the Council, as a partner organisation, may be able to assist by publicising via the Link that all crime should be reported.

**RESOLVED** that the Annual Report for 2009/10 be approved and published.

The meeting concluded at 8.10pm.

Chairman