

Citizens Advice South Essex Limited - Introduction and Background provided by Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice South Essex Limited (CASE) was constituted with effect from the 1st April 2019 following a merger of Citizens Advice Basildon and Thurrock Limited with Rochford and Rayleigh Citizens Advice Bureau Limited and Brentwood Citizens Advice Bureau. Without the merger, Brentwood CAB faced shorter hours of opening following the expiry of lottery funding.

The merger process was assisted by a strategic consultant from National Citizens Advice, which has seen the number of Local Citizens Advice legal entities reduce from 380 in 2011 to around 284 at present. The merger allows the local outlets to serve the public more effectively by sharing some resources, reducing duplication and developing services. CASE wants to deliver more advice while maintaining quality standards; develop delivery channels such as telephone advice and webchat alongside existing face to face services; and have the capacity to bid for, or join bidding partnerships, for collaborative projects to benefit the public we serve .

Local branding continues in all CASE outlets which together serve a current population of 607,500. Funding for commissioned services or conditional grants for defined areas are held in restricted accounts and can only be used for the permitted purposes.

CASE is a member of National Citizens Advice and subject to the terms of the Membership Agreement which requires quality auditing, financial and governance standards and adherence to policies. There are differences between Crown Street and the Town Hall:

- i) The CCTV cameras at the Town Hall. Citizens Advice accept cameras provided notices are displayed alerting members of the public to their presence;
- ii) The Town Hall is a local authority building where the safeguarding duties towards children required under S11 Children Act apply. Citizens Advice has a safeguarding policy where children accompany face to face visits, and the Citizens Advice policy must apply unless otherwise agreed at national level;
- iii) CASE will have its interests protected under a National Citizens Advice block insurance policy (details to follow).

Citizens Advice is the largest national advice charity, celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, while Brentwood Citizens Advice has operated for 60 years. The Government relies on Citizens Advice to provide a free, confidential and impartial advice service to the public on Money Advice, debts claimed by Utilities,

Pensionwise, Universal Credit and Consumer advice. Staff and trained, experienced volunteers have a fine record. Following the merger this year, CASE hopes to continue in Brentwood for as long as needed, and envisages a local increased need in the next few years at least.

At the September meeting of the Community and Health Committee we hope to develop ideas for collaborative commissioning, and measuring social impact, which are important objectives of the Government's Civil Society Strategy. One of the cardinal aims of the merger is to provide capacity for such initiatives. Indeed, while the national lottery grant to Brentwood Citizens Advice Bureau ceased in 2018 and was not renewed, it was indicated that a joint bid for a wider area had a greater chance of being awarded.

Confirmation that activities and accounts will be submitted on an annual basis or when required by the Council

CASE seeks to engage proactively with stake holding local authorities and have provisionally agreed a detailed annual report of activities and trends in all Council Wards to be developed by the Community and Health Committee.