

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MEETING WITH CABINET MEMBER, HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES

03 March 2015

Report of the Director of Public Health

**WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE AND
DERBYSHIRE UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' CENTRE - GRANTS**

1. Purpose of the Report:

To consider requests to provide grant funding to support the appeals work of the County Council's in-house Welfare Rights Service (WRS) and the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre (DUWC).

2. Information and Analysis:

In July 2013, Derbyshire County Council approved the continuation of the weekly Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) service in 98/102 of its GP surgeries. On 13 October 2013, Cabinet approved the extension of its weekly CAB service to all its 54 children's centres. These services help some of our most vulnerable families and individuals to increase their incomes, manage debt, avoid homelessness and evictions and manage their money. This work is central to the delivery of the Council's anti-poverty strategy, the recommendations contained in the Council's Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2014 and the Council's Health and Wellbeing strategy.

As a result of this increase in advice across the County, our Citizens Advice Bureaux are referring increasing numbers of clients to the Council's in-house Welfare Rights Service and the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre for specialist help with benefit appeals. This was anticipated and in the same report of 13 October 2013 the Council approved a grant of £50,000 each to WRS and DUWC to help them to deal with an increasing numbers of appeals.

Appeals are made by clients who are in receipt of or have applied for a range of welfare benefits and have had their benefits 'sanctioned' (stopped or reduced) or had claims rejected. Benefits include Employment and Support Allowance, Tax Credits, Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Jobseekers' Allowance.

Most benefits that are appealed are means tested (although PIP is not) indicating that most claimants are living on, near or below the poverty line. Figures from February 2014 show that in the previous year in England nearly 900,000 people had their benefits stopped, the highest

figure for any 12-month period since jobseeker's allowance was introduced in 1996. This is reflected in the numbers of people resorting to food banks for emergency food parcels. Meanwhile, 58% of those who appeal the DWP sanctions in independent tribunals are successful. This demonstrates the effectiveness and necessity of having a good appeals system in place for vulnerable people. It also represents good value for money. For example, the average cost of an appeal is £200 and the average benefit gain from an appeal represented by the Welfare Rights Service in 2012/13 was £4306.63 – a return rate of over 2000%.

A nine month (April-November 2014) interim evaluation of the appeals work has shown that:

- 1,184 cases were dealt with by WRS and DUWC
- 991 appeals were made
- **£3,047,892** in annualised ongoing weekly benefits has been secured for Derbyshire residents.

Given the increased pressure on communities and the increasing demand for advice and appeals services, particularly as further cuts bite, it is recommended that the County Council continues to provide grant funding towards the appeals service of both organisations. The proposed grant for 2015/16 is the same as last year, £50,000 each for WRS and DUWC.

In line with other grants to Voluntary and Community Sector organisations it is recommended that the grant is subject to a Service Level Agreement (SLA) which will set out expectations and requirements on DUWC and the WRS and the county council in relation to the grant award. Six monthly monitoring will ensure both the quality of the service and accountability for the funding.

At the meeting on 16 July 2013, Cabinet was made aware that DUWC had taken the decision to concentrate on advice and representation services. Any campaigning in relation to political policies, and the organisation of protest, was being taken on by a new body. Assurance has been given to the council that any grant funding provided will be used solely for the purposes of supporting the advice function of the centre and not for political activities. This will be reflected in the Service Level Agreement.

3. Financial considerations:

It is proposed that the cost of these grants will be met from the Public Health budget.

4. Other considerations:

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

5. Key Decision:

No

6. Call-in:

Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No

7. Background Papers:

- Public health commissioned services in 2013 – 15: Cabinet report of 16 July 2013
- Expansion of an Advice Service in Children's Centres: 22 October 2013
- Interim evaluation of appeals services April-November 2014.

8. Officer's Recommendation:

That grant funding of £50,000 a year be provided to the Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centre and £50,000 vired to Council's in-house Welfare Rights Service towards the costs associated with the delivery of appeals services for 2015-18, subject to evaluation and budgets.

Elaine Michel
Director of Public Health