

Outside Body Review - Survey Response from Citizens Advice Bureau

- ***Briefly describe the purpose of your organisation***

Our principles

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.

Our aims

- Provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- Improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Our Mission

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.

The service aims:

- § to provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- § to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Our Vision

Citizens Advice Maidstone aims to create an effective and dynamic advice service, which responds to the ever-changing needs of the Community. The Bureau will work in partnership with stakeholders to enhance the availability and accessibility of its service within the Borough of Maidstone and its surrounding areas, both urban and rural

In order to deliver this service to the community the Board of Trustees has agreed to 5 high level strategic values. These are

- to provide high-quality advice to our clients
 - to ensure that all who need advice know about us and can access our services conveniently
 - to carry out whatever projects we undertake economically, efficiently and effectively
 - to use our experience to offer advice on social policy and problems to central and local government
 - to promote equality and diversity
- ***What are your organisation's current objectives – what do you want to achieve in the next two to three years?***

As provided in the earlier question the Bureau has five high level strategic objectives and the Trustee Board continues to support the Bureau Management towards the delivery of these objectives. It is acknowledged that over the next few years the Bureau faces a significant reduction in its income, especially because of the prospective reduction in

funding of work under various contracts/grants. The Budget for the year 2015/16 is based on an annual income of £675,000. An important consequence of this is that there will have to be some reduction in the hours worked by specialists and other paid staff under the core Grant but increase in staff contracted under various projects.

The Board of Trustees has agreed that the Bureau's priority should be to maintain a core service of generalist advice. This means a service:

- at the Bureau's two sites in Maidstone;
- from 10 am until 4 pm (Bower Terrace) and from 9.30 am until 4 pm (Maidstone Gateway) on every weekday;
- that covers the full range of advice subjects;
- that this is not merely a sign-posting or referral service, but includes substantive advice and (in appropriate cases) action.

The Board has also agreed that the Chief Executive should continue to explore opportunities for additional funding that would enable additional services to be provided. However, an essential condition of accepting such opportunities will be that the related funding must not only cover in full all direct and indirect costs attributable to the service provided, but also must make a significant contribution to defraying central overheads.

In the light of the funding likely to be available, the Board believes that it should also be possible to provide:

- some home visiting and outreach work;
- some input from specialist staff in more complex cases.

However, it is clear that by comparison with the recent past a substantially higher proportion of the Bureau's advice will be provided by volunteer rather than paid staff. This will need to be reflected in working methods and in training. The Trustee Board is determined to ensure that the advice service continues to be provided to a high level of quality, and that the services are readily accessible to all who need to use them.

Citizens Advice Maidstone aspires to continue the present Service Level Agreement (SLA) funding relationship with Maidstone Borough Council and to develop it to reflect the move towards an outcome driven and focused approach for the SLA renewal. The Bureau intends to be an active partner with Maidstone Borough Council in developing the necessary services generated by the planned growth in housing and population within the Borough. The Bureau works closely with Citizens Advice and identifies with its strategies to expand the scope of its work within the county. Citizens Advice is currently working on an access strategy that will enable clients to access services from bureaux outside the normally established working hours, through, among other means, extended telephone and e-mail advice and interactive advice through touch screen technology. It is acknowledged that all clients do not require a holistic service and therefore the Service is attempting to establish innovative ways of providing advice. This would entail creating partnerships and collaborations with advice giving organisations with similar objectives.

The Bureau has a successful history of working for and with the community it serves. Advice and assistance has been provided to the community through innovative projects and the Bureau continues to investigate further possibilities and ways of providing its help to the people in need. The Bureau has successfully delivered various contracts funded by a wide variety of external organisations. There are positive indicators which motivate and enable staff to continue enthusiastically with their work of taking advice into the community. The

Bureau continues to work with all other voluntary and statutory organisations in the Borough to ensure that it is able to meet the needs of the community. By raising its profile through community work and advertising, the Bureau manages to attract new and diverse volunteers to enhance its successful and committed team. The Bureau works closely with the local newspaper and writes articles on local interest for publication.

- ***What are your expectations of your MBC councillor representatives/s?***

The representative from the Council usually joins the Organisation as a Trustee on the Board. All Trustees are members of the Community the Bureau serves. The MBC Councillor on the Board must take on all the responsibilities of a Trustee of an Organisation. They must conduct themselves within the Nolan principles of public life. As a Trustee they must demonstrate the seven principles of Leadership, Honesty, Openness, Accountability, Objectivity, Integrity and Selflessness.

The Organisation expects its Trustees to provide support to all the staff. Involve themselves in setting the strategic direction of the Bureau. Manage the expectations of the Organisation's Stakeholders, set strategic objectives for the Organisation and manage Risks through regular support and supervision meetings of its senior staff.

- ***How do your expectations compare with what you received from your MBC Councillor representative/s?***

From the early days prior to 1990 there were always 2 Councillors who represented Maidstone Borough Council on the Board of Trustees. In 2013 the Bureau's Constitution was changed to the one recommended by the Charity's Commission and Citizens Advice. As per the new Constitution there are fewer members on the Trustee Board and as such only one Councillor is required. All Councillors who have been Trustees have always given a 100% support for the Organisation. They have ensured that the Bureau keeps its independence and integrity even though the Council is its core funder. No Councillor/Trustee has ever had to exert any undue pressure on the Bureau to follow Council's wishes and equally vice versa. We have always received good guidance and support from our Councillor/Trustees.

- ***What specific knowledge, skills and experience do you need your MBC Councillor representative/s to have?***

Bureau Trustees need to have a number of skills and these are produced below in no order of importance. There no requirement for any Trustee to have all the required skills and each one may bring expertise in one or more area of work. This list is not exhaustive.

- Administration
- Governance
- Strategic and Business planning
- Chairing and running meetings
- Financial & Banking
- Fundraising
- Information Technology
- Marketing, Media & PR
- Networking
- Human Resources
- Management support & Supervision