

**CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL
COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES**

COMMITTEE:	Community & Environment		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	26 May 2022 7.00pm	LOCATION	Town Hall
REPORT FROM	J MacArthur - Communities and Marketing Manager and Deputy Chief Officer		
AGENDA ITEM	8.		
REPORT TITLE	Congleton Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)		
Background	<p>Citizens Advice has delivered a service in Congleton for many years, initially as an outreach of the Biddulph service. In 2001 Congleton Borough got its own Bureau, delivering services in all 5 towns, with Congleton being at the centre of its operations. To better align itself with the new Local Government Reorganisation and to improve its options for sustaining the service for the future, in 2009 the decision was taken to merge Congleton and Crewe and Nantwich Borough CABs and Congleton Town remained one of the two main centres. Initially, the service rented offices on Chapel Street but moved to a purpose-built office on the opposite side of the car park. For the past nine years the service was located in 35-37 Lawton Street.</p> <p>Congleton Town Council has been a key supporter of the CAB since 2001 and today is the only town council still supporting the service. As a registered local charity, the past two years have been difficult for the organisation. Raising funds and recruiting volunteers has become more difficult, but the pandemic enabled the organisation to explore new ways of working whilst retaining the ability to still support our community during a very challenging period. In 2021/22 we dealt with 1,641 Congleton cases, presenting 2,642 problems.</p> <p>Due to falling income, and in an effort to cut costs whilst still being able to deliver an efficient and effective service, the Board of Trustees had to make difficult decisions, one of which was to not renew the lease on the Lawton Street premises.</p> <p>After some discussion, it was agreed that the CAB would use one of the rooms in the Town Hall for two days a week to carry out back-office support work and appointment-only meetings with clients. This arrangement is due to start on week commencing 23 May 2022.</p> <p>To help members to understand the operations of the CAB and its current issues, Liz Shaw, the Chief Officer will give a short presentation at the meeting.</p>		

<p>Further information</p>	<p>During COVID, CAB centres across the UK needed to work remotely, offering telephone support, email advice and/or virtual meetings. As society has opened up, many of these practices have remained with many people happy to get help via the phone or computer, but other people need a face-to-face meeting.</p> <p>As budgets get tighter and more people face financial hardship, the demands on the CAB service grow. In many cases CAB are seen as the 4th emergency service and many other agencies and organisations direct people to their local CAB for help.</p> <p>The service is reliant on volunteers and training to be a CAB volunteer takes a long time and requires commitment. There is a lot of knowledge, safeguarding and technical skills to learn before being able to help the public. The new way of working does not suit many of the volunteers who were with the service pre-COVID. The pressure on volunteers is considerable as they are dealing with members of the public who are stressed, worried and struggling to cope.</p> <p>However, the rewards are also good, as well as gaining new skills, they make new friends and, in some cases, gain new employment. Many volunteers join the service to 'give back' to their community and knowing that they make a difference to people's lives on a daily basis is all the reward they need. This is an example of recent feedback from a client:</p> <p><i>"I would really like to thank the CAB, particularly a lady that saved my life that day, as I was suicidal, ready and prepared to end my life. She was absolutely brilliant and I owe my life to her.....you were my guardian angel that day, I'm not out of the woods yet but I have moved on and a lot more forward now, thanks to you, the main thing is I'm still alive and slowly progressing. Thank you from me and my grandchildren x"</i></p>
<p>Financial Considerations</p>	<p>There is no financial consideration for this committee. The Town Council is continuing to support the service, but the £15k grant given to the service annually is being redistributed so that the service receives £5k and the Town Council provides a free room two days a week, a reception and sign-posting service via the Congleton Information Centre.</p>
<p>Environmental Considerations</p>	<p>The CAB has already moved to a paperless office service and is likely to have minimal impact on the Town Hall's carbon footprint as they will be occupying a room in the building that is already heated and lit.</p>
<p>Equality and Inclusivity considerations</p>	<p>The CAB is available to all members of the community, but usually supports those most in need. It is an important element of the services inclusivity to be able to offer face-to-face appointments and also a place where people who can't scan and email documents can use CAB services to do so.</p>
<p>PROPOSALS</p>	<p>To receive the presentation and to pledge to actively support the CAB in its drive to support more residents and recruit more volunteers.</p>