

**COMMUNITY ADVICE FORUM – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

**Executive Summary**

The Community Advice Forum (formerly the Neighbourhood Advice Centre) has applied for funding of £5,000 during the 2018/19 financial year to assist with revenue costs, in particular the rent of the office at the Maybury Centre, and incidental costs such as training, telephone and insurance. The funding will ensure the continuation of the service and enable the Forum to explore the possibility of increasing the number of hours it can be accessed to deal with the numbers of clients.

At its meeting on 15 December 2016, the Executive resolved that no grant would be awarded to the Forum at that time, with officers to work with the Forum with a view to supporting its services for the wider community and identifying its long term financial needs. A meeting was subsequently held with the Forum to discuss the services provided, shortly after which a visit took place, with no advance notice, by the Leader of the Council (Cllr John Kingsbury) and the Portfolio Holder for Grants to Voluntary Organisations (Cllr Melanie Whitehand) to view the work taking place and discuss the operation of the Forum with the representatives present. Following the meeting and the visit, a grant of £5,000 was agreed for the Community Advice Forum during the 2017/18 financial year under Ostensible Authority.

Since the grant award of £5,000 for the 2017/18 financial year, the Forum has submitted quarterly monitoring for the period from January to April 2017. The monitoring reported that during its one day per week operation, the Forum received 127 visitors. Advice was provided free of charge on issues including debt, housing, welfare benefits, employment and community care. The Forum has confirmed that it holds Public Liability insurance and that, since September 2017, its support to the community has increased from one to two days per week.

It is proposed that a grant of £5,000 be awarded during the 2018/19 financial year for the Community Advice Forum towards the costs of operating the drop-in service at the Maybury Centre. The Group has also supplied the Council with its Safeguarding Policy and Equalities Policy since the application was originally submitted.

**Recommendations**

Reasons for Decision	To enable the Group to continue to provide its services in the community.
Legal Authority	S142 Local Government Act 1972
The Executive is requested to:	<b>RESOLVE That</b> funding of £5,000 be awarded towards the costs of operating the drop-in service.
Conditions	<p><b>Accounts.</b> The Organisation must submit audited accounts for the year in which the grant is awarded, including an income and expenditure account and balance sheet. Please note that accounts for other years may also be required.</p> <p><b>Monitoring Information.</b> The Organisation must submit quarterly monitoring information as a measure of its achievements. Failure to provide details will jeopardise the award. E-mail requests will be sent to the applicant on a quarterly basis.</p>

## Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

	<p><b>Publicity.</b> Where possible, the Organisation is required to publicise the support received from Woking Borough Council, including on all literature and leaflets produced.</p> <p><b>Payments.</b> Unless exceptional circumstances exist all invoices must be received quarterly with details of the costs incurred and monitoring information for the previous quarter.</p> <p><b>Payment Period.</b> Final quarter claims must be made by the second week in March. Unclaimed awards will not be available at a later date unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated to the Council before the end of the award year.</p> <p><b>Joint Working.</b> WBC expects the Organisation to engage positively on health and wellbeing multi-agency joint work affecting Woking. Groups which refuse may place their Council support at risk, e.g. grant, concessionary rent and other assistance.</p> <p><b>Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.</b> With the introduction of new legislation from April 2018, the council will expect the support of partner agencies in identifying people at risk of homelessness as early as possible to maximise the opportunities to prevent such. Partner agencies / organisations will be expected to be engaged in joint working arrangements to assist in finding suitable housing and support solutions, and where appropriate to undertake and respond to the new 'duty to refer'. Groups which do not support this new legislation and way of working positively, may put their Council support at risk.</p> <p><b>Venue Hire.</b> Woking Borough Council has a duty to ensure that publicly-owned venues and resources do not provide a platform for extremists and are not used to disseminate extremist views. This duty extends to organisations that work with the local authority so this includes recipients of any grants from Woking Borough Council. If you hire out your venue/s you should ensure you have good processes in place for record keeping and checking if they are an appropriate group to be making the hire arrangements. The following are some of what should be considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Basic details should be recorded to include speakers address, mobile phone number &amp; organisation details.</li><li>• Has the identity of the speaker been confirmed &amp; is their organisation bona fide? Are they known to you?</li><li>• Is the speaker from the area? Are they UK citizens or from overseas &amp; will they travel specifically for this event?</li><li>• Consider checks on the internet to confirm the status of speaker to include website, YouTube or social media sites.</li><li>• How many people are likely to attend (check previous or similar events either locally or online).</li></ul>
Performance Indicators	<p><b>Users.</b> The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the users in the past quarter.</p> <p><b>Enquiries.</b> The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the enquiries received during the last quarter.</p> <p><b>Publicity.</b> The Organisation to advise how the Council's support has been publicised over the last quarter.</p> <p><b>Statement of Use.</b> The Organisation to provide a statement stating</p>

## Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

	the use to which the grant money has been put.
Future Support	<p>The financial pressure on the Council's budgets is expected to continue in the coming years and accordingly the overall level of support available in future years may be reduced. The applicant is therefore to be advised that the award of funding for 2018/19 does not imply that a similar application in 2019/20 would be supported. In particular, it is emphasised that the Council is unlikely to be in a position to award any sums above the 2018/19 levels.</p> <p>In view of this, the applicant is to be advised to ensure that contingency plans for the Group's operations for 2019/20 have been drawn up in the event that the Council is unable to continue its support beyond April 2019. All applicants are strongly recommended to pursue alternative sources of funding and are encouraged to approach Woking Borough Council's Community Support Team for advice and support.</p>

**The Executive has authority to determine the above recommendations.**

### Background Papers:

2018/19 Application Form.

### Reporting Person:

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### Contact Person:

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### Date Published:

6 December 2017

**Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance**

## Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

<b>1.0 Summary of Application</b>	
1.1 Status and Aims	<p>The Group renamed itself from the Neighbourhood Advice Centre to the Community Advice Forum in January 2017. As the former it was a registered charity (number 1145158) and the Forum has registered its new name with the Charities Commission.</p> <p>The aims of the Forum are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To promote the individual and collective well being, health and happiness of local people, particularly those suffering from social exclusion, poverty and the associated low levels of well-being.</li> <li>• To raise awareness of healthy and sustainable living practices and thereby empower people to adopt healthier, happier lifestyles.</li> <li>• To assist other bodies with tackling worklessness and social exclusion in the community by providing people with the necessary support, inspiration to become more economically, socially, culturally and active citizens.</li> </ul> <p>The objectives of the Forum are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To provide advice, information, and to signpost to other services.</li> <li>• To provide information on other innovative services to facilitate the reintegration of socially and economically excluded people.</li> </ul>
1.2 Employees	None.
1.3 Volunteers	2, whose activities include providing information and advice, making referrals, undertaking mediation, representing clients and carrying out outreach work and administration. The outreach work is a new activity for the Forum and varies from making home visits to assisting with doctor's appointments.
1.4 Clients/Users	From January to July 2017 the Community Advice Forum was open for one day each week from 11am to 6pm and received 220 visitors to the Centre.
1.5 Members	None.
1.6 Sum Requested	£5,000 (Revenue)
1.7 Project	The funding is being requested to pay the rent at the Maybury Centre along with the photocopying, telephone and internet costs.
1.8 Cost breakdown:	The cost breakdown is set out in the budget supplied by the Group in section 2.1 below.
1.9 Community Benefit	The Forum recognises that information and advice are seen as a fundamental area of activity for individuals, their families and carers who may need, now or in the future, services and support to lead their lives. The applicant has advised that the Forum will continue to play a crucial role in supporting the local community and providing face to

## Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

	face advice, outreach and personalised information about local services. Like other Advice Centres, the Forum finds it difficult to obtain secure funding, partly due to the difficulty of demonstrating the value of such need when competing for scarce resources.
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<b>2.0 Financial Background</b>	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £2,404 in the bank, including the amount of £2,000 transferred from the closed bank account of the Neighbourhood Advice Centre.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a break-even budget for 2018/19 which shows an anticipated income and expenditure of £5,000. No fundraising has been included.</p> <p>Items of expenditure include office rent (£3,020), telephone and internet (£600), postage/photocopying/stationery (£480), insurance (£400), subscriptions/membership (£250) and training (£250).</p>
2.2 Accounts	The Group has submitted accounts for 2016/17 which show an expenditure of £452 with no income received. The sum of £2,000 was carried forward at the end of the 2016/17 year.
2.3 Support over the past five years	<p>2017/18 – £5,000.</p> <p>At its meeting on 15 December 2016, the Executive received an application for assistance from the Community Advice Forum and resolved that no grant would be awarded at that time, with officers to work with the Forum with a view to supporting its services for the wider community and identifying its long term financial needs.</p> <p>A meeting was subsequently arranged to discuss the services provided by the Forum, attended by representatives from the Forum, the Leader of the Council, the Portfolio Holder for Grants to Voluntary Organisations, the Chief Executive and the Democratic Services Manager. It was noted that the Forum operated for one day each week (Tuesdays) and aspired to increase its provision to two days each week.</p> <p>Shortly after the meeting, the Leader of the Council (Cllr John Kingsbury) and the Portfolio Holder for Grants to Voluntary Organisations (Cllr Melanie Whitehand) visited the Forum following the meeting, with no advance notice, and were able to view the work taking place and discuss the operation of the Forum with the representatives present.</p> <p>Following the visit, a grant of £5,000 was agreed for the Community Advice Forum during the 2017/18 financial year, agreed under Ostensible Authority in May 2017.</p>

<b>3.0 Assessment of Application</b>							
3.1 Key Information	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; border-right: 1px dashed black;">○ Constitution</td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: right;">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px dashed black;">○ Registered Charity</td> <td style="text-align: right;">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border-right: 1px dashed black;">○ VAT Registered</td> <td style="text-align: right;">No</td> </tr> </table>	○ Constitution	Yes	○ Registered Charity	Yes	○ VAT Registered	No
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## Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Equal Opportunities Policy</li> <li>○ Safeguarding Policy</li> <li>○ Reserves Policy</li> <li>○ Quality Mark</li> <li>○ Other funding sources pursued</li> <li>○ Other support by the Council</li> <li>○ Fundraising</li> <li>○ Two quotes</li> <li>○ Regular monitoring provided previously</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes</li> <li>Yes</li> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> <li>No</li> <li>N/A</li> <li>Yes</li> </ul>
<p>3.2 Consultee Comments</p>	<p><u>Officer Comment</u></p> <p>It would appear that the Applicant is seeking funding towards the delivery of this outreach drop-in service which has been accessed by 290 visitors over a 9 month period. Run by volunteers, the funding sought is to meet the rental cost of their use of the Maybury Centre for one session a week. I would be supportive of this application bearing in mind the range of advice which is being given free of charge to clients.</p> <p>However any such grant must be conditional on the satisfactory receipt prior to grant award of a Safeguarding Policy and Equalities Policy.</p>	
<p>3.3 Assessment</p>	<p>The application before the Executive has been submitted by the Community Advice Forum, formerly known as the Neighbourhood Advice Centre based at the Maybury Centre in Board School Road.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood Advice Centre was forced to close down in April 2016, due to funding issues. The volunteer advisor was asked by the Maybury Centre Manager in May 2016 to return and provide help to people who were continuing to request it. In January 2017 the Group re-opened under the name of the Community Advice Forum and updated its aims and objectives. The principle is to serve everyone and provide the free advice and support to minority ethnic communities in their own language.</p> <p>The Forum provides information on a wide range of issues including education, employment, welfare rights and information regarding services provided by other organisations and bodies.</p> <p>The volunteer advisor provides free, impartial and confidential advice and information on a wide range of issues from education to benefits to tax. There are usually no restrictions on people who can use the service, and it is often approached by those in special need, such as refugees or people from low income backgrounds with minimal English. The service is currently available at the Maybury Centre in a small office rented by the Forum.</p> <p>The activities involved will depend on the kind of advice provided but usually involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ providing information to clients in person, on the phone and by email;</li> <li>○ researching individual cases, assessing problems and identifying</li> </ul>	

## Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

possible courses of action;

- guiding clients to decide on the best course of action based on the information available;
- promoting the services on offer and distributing publicity materials by local organisations mediating on a client's behalf;
- referring clients to other sources of help; liaising with other local and external organisations;
- keeping up to date with appropriate legislation and policies;
- interpreting and content of letters to clients;
- compiling statistics on cases covered and services provided;
- providing talks to external organisations;
- ensuring impartiality and confidentiality when dealing with clients;
- maintaining confidential case records and administrative systems.

The applicant stresses the importance of the service in supporting people with the most complex problems who are the least able to resolve the issue themselves. Many clients do not speak English and have used the centre to help them write letters and fill in forms, deal with phone calls and communicate with other services.

Since the grant award of £5,000 for the 2017/18 financial year, the Forum has submitted quarterly monitoring for the period from January to April 2017. The monitoring reported that the Forum received the following visitors as set out below:

January 2017 – 42

February 2017 – 31

March 2017 – 28

April 2017 – 26

May 2017 – 39

June 2017 – 30

July 2017 – 28

August 2017 – 40

September 2017 – 26

Total (January to September 2017) – 290 visitors.

Advice was provided free of charge on the following issues: debt, housing, welfare benefits, employment, community care, family, immigration (low level), form filling, passport renewals, divorce proceedings, legal aid, and tenancy issues. Additionally, two outreach cases were undertaken during this time.

Through its support of the Forum, the Council would help many who are in urgent need of these services. Unexpected events, such as illness, redundancy, low income, can place people in situations where they need advice and without access to timely information, advice and guidance many people are unable to manage their situation successfully. This can create problems and pressures, which impact on Council and other public services.

The Forum can play a key role in tackling poverty and increasing



## Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

social justice by assisting local people on a low income to claim their full benefit entitlements and manage their debts. The local knowledge of the Forum is invaluable in assisting all elements of the community.

The Forum has confirmed that it holds Public Liability insurance, providing the Council with the Certificate, and that since September 2017 its support to the community has increased from one to two days per week.

It is proposed that a grant of £5,000 be awarded during the 2018/19 financial year for the Community Advice Forum towards the costs of operating the drop-in service at the Maybury Centre.

REPORT ENDS