

THE USEFUL WOOD COMPANY – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Executive Summary

The Useful Wood Company seeks to address social exclusion and unemployment by providing training and volunteering opportunities through wood work. The Charity supports long-term unemployed, people with mental health problems, the homeless and ex-offenders. The Company collects unwanted wood from local contractors for the project, with the majority of the wood collected turned into items for sale. Unusable wood would become firewood or be pulped for biomass.

The initiative is aimed at vulnerable members of the local society, seeking to give them confidence through a workplace setting where they can gain reliability in attending, develop relationships within a team and learn practical skills. This will provide them with a strong platform to gain employment and become self-sufficient with life and work skills.

The Group has this year applied for capital funding of £8,448.96 to purchase specialist equipment which would benefit the users by enabling the Charity to provide training over a wider range of advanced equipment. The equipment would also allow the Charity to produce a wider range of products for sale, thereby increasing revenue and making use of more of the wood collected.

In considering the application it should be noted that, as a capital request, the Council would normally only consider awarded a maximum of 50% of the costs, unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. It should also be noted that the Council awarded a substantial one-off capital grant of £13,000 for the current year to enable the Charity to purchase a van.

Following consideration of the application, it is recommended that a grant of 50% of the costs up to a maximum of £4,250 should be awarded towards the purchase of equipment as set out in the application. It is not felt that the application justifies awarding a capital grant of 100%.

In addition, it should be noted that officers are working with the Useful Wood Company at the moment to secure a new location for the Group to be based from.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:	RESOLVE That , subject to the outcome of the Council’s budgetary process, a grant of 50% of the costs up to a maximum of £4,250 be awarded from the Community Fund towards the purchase of specialist equipment.
Reason for Decision	To support the Charity in its ambitions to widen the scope of the training available and increase the range of products produced.
Legal Authority	S19 (Misc. Provisions) Local Government Act 1976
Confirmation of funding	This award is provisionally made on the expectation that the Council’s budgets for revenue and capital projects remain at the same level allocated for the current financial year. The Council’s overall budget, including the sums allocated for community grants, will be determined

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	<p>by Council at its meeting on 11 February 2021. In the event the grant budgets are set at the anticipated levels, confirmation of the Council's support will be sent to successful applicants. Groups should not plan for the 2021/22 funding until this confirmation has been received.</p> <p>Should the budgets be reduced as part of the Council's efforts to achieve savings to offset the impact of Covid on the Council's financial position, a special meeting of the Executive will be held to review the provisional awards and allocate the funds available on a priority basis.</p>
<p>Conditions</p>	<p>Accounts. The Organisation must submit 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>Monitoring Information. 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> <p>Publicity. Where possible, the Organisation is required to publicise the support received from Woking Borough Council, including on websites and literature / leaflets produced.</p> <p>Payment Period. Final quarter claims must be made by the second week in April. 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>Joint Working. 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>Invoices / Receipts. In order to claim an element of the funding, the Organisation must submit paid invoices or receipts relating to equipment purchased or services provided.</p> <p>Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. Following the introduction of new legislation from April 2018, the Council expects 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 are 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>Performance Indicators</p>	<p>Users. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the users.</p> <p>Publicity. The Organisation to advise how the Council's support has been publicised.</p> <p>Statement of Use. The Organisation to provide a statement stating the use to which the grant money has been put.</p>
<p>Future Support</p>	<p>The recommended funding is based on a one-off award and accordingly carries no implications in terms of future support.</p>

The Executive has authority to determine the above recommendations.

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Background Papers:

2021/22 Application Form.

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1.0 Summary of Application	
1.1 Status and Aims	<p>The Useful Wood Company is a charitable organisation which registered as a CIO in 2019. Its main activities are to offer those on the margins of society the opportunity to restart their lives by providing a work type environment where they will be supported by volunteers who provide encouragement and support in gaining workplace skills over periods of between 8 weeks and six months. The volunteers are predominately retirees with good people skills and in some cases woodworking skills.</p> <p>The Group collects wood from building and construction sites to be reused wherever possible, thereby reducing the amount of wood going to landfill.</p> <p>The main aims are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. develop the capacity and skills of the members of the socially and economically disadvantaged community of Woking and the surrounding area, in such a way that they are better able to identify, and help meet, their needs and to participate more fully in society. ii. provide support and training which develop their skills, capacities and capabilities. iii. relieve unemployment through training and assistance to find employment. iv. promote social inclusion. v. promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment by the use of timber much of which would otherwise be sent to landfill. <p>As one of more than 30 National Community Wood Recycling Project franchises across the Country, the Charity benefits from the advice, guidance and training offered, and has the option of consulting with other franchise members.</p>
1.2 Employees	<p>One. The Workshop and Retail Manager who is responsible for attracting, training and overseeing the volunteers, health and safety, and maintaining relations with customers, clients and relevant bodies.</p> <p>In September 2020 the Group engaged its first paid member of staff to oversee the retail operation and the training and production in the workshop. The position will enable the Group to receive a higher number of the people who need help rebuilding their lives and fully re-entering society to a potential capacity of between 12-15 in a day.</p>
1.3 Volunteers	<p>23, whose activities include collecting wood from building/construction sites, sorting the wood into different categories, denailing the wood, stocking the sales area and taking unusable wood to bio mass.</p> <p>Trained volunteers work and engage those supported by the Group as they rebuild their lives from lack of confidence, personal trauma, addiction, and mental health issues.</p> <p>At the time of the application, 344 volunteer days had been achieved</p>

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	<p>in 2020, affected by Covid 19 lockdown restrictions.</p> <p>All volunteers receive basic Health & Safety training, and DBS checks will be undertaken, a number will attend First Aid courses.</p>
1.4 Clients/Users	<p>12, comprising:</p> <p>10 male</p> <p>2 female</p> <p>0 disabled</p> <p>0 ethnic minority</p> <p>12 aged 65+</p> <p>Referrals have come from a number of organisations, including the York Road Project, Woking Job Centre, the Welcome Church and Community Payback. It is anticipated that during 2021/22 referrals will also be received from Woking Besom, Lighthouse, Christians Against Poverty, Surrey Probation Service, and the Police Commissioner's Scheme.</p> <p>The Group is also in discussion to offer places to refugees placed by Woking Borough Council.</p>
1.5 Members	None
1.6 Sum Requested	£8,448.96 (Capital)
1.7 Project	<p>The capital funding will be used by the Useful Wood Company to purchase additional machinery. The machinery will enable the beneficiaries to be trained on a wider range of advanced equipment, giving them more confidence and improving their employability. The equipment will also enable the Group to create a wider range of products that can be produced in the workshop.</p>
1.8 Cost breakdown:	<p>The equipment sought by the Charity through the funding is set out below.</p> <p>Plunge saw – £284.95</p> <p>2x plunge saw track – £59.95 x 2</p> <p>Track connector - £22.95</p> <p>Track clamps – £39.95</p> <p>Cordless skill saw – £284.95</p> <p>Table saw – £3,379.38</p> <p>Overhead crown guard for saw – £439.98</p> <p>Planar Thicknesser – £1,396.98</p> <p>Drum sander – £869.98</p> <p>Sanding brush for drum sanding – £775.68</p> <p>Router table with fence – £487.28</p> <p>Router elevator – £346.98</p> <p>Total – £8,448.96</p>

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1.9 Community Benefit	<p>The Group hopes to achieve somewhere between 12 and 15 beneficiary placements per day when at full capacity. The Charity was launched in September 2019 and has since shown good progress, though this has been impacted by the Covid 19 situation. The social action part of the enterprise has been well received by the local support agencies such as the Job Centre, Probation Service, the police Commissioner. The Charity has entered into discussions about the possibility of supporting refugees based in Woking.</p>
1.10 Covid-19 Impact	<p>The applicant has advised that the lockdown effect has been dramatic in its effect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No commercially activity such as wood collections could be done during that period and thus little income or any training could be generated. • The Charity was unable to provide any placements to beneficiaries. • Covid safety guidelines affect tasks that beneficiaries can undertake.

2.0 Financial Background	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £30,803 in the bank. The sum of £10,078 was reserved as restricted funds from the Surrey Police & Crime Commissioner and part grant towards salary.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a budget for 2021/22 which shows an anticipated income of £154,042 against an anticipated expenditure of £153,958, resulting in an anticipated surplus of £84.</p> <p>Anticipated income includes income from collections (£103,097) and sales (£50,946). Items of expenditure include rent (£27,500), utilities (£9,000), wages (£43,878), wood disposal (£16,496), vehicle costs (£22,075), volunteer costs (£5,076), and tools (£600).</p> <p>The Group has applied for funding from the following bodies for the current year:</p> <p>Community Foundation for Surrey (£5,362 towards manager's salary), the Shanly Foundation (outcome awaited), Clothmakers Company (outcome awaited) and the Lottery (unsuccessful).</p> <p>Fundraising activities continue to be undertaken during the year by the trustees through their various local contacts and by ongoing search for other sources, seeking a sponsor(s), and approaching local businesses as well as local churches.</p>
2.2 Accounts	<p>The Group has submitted accounts for the period 8 May 2019 to 31 March 2020 which show an income of £37,013 against expenditure of £19,923, resulting in a surplus of £17,090. The sum of £17,090 was carried forward at the end of the 2019/20 year.</p> <p>During the period September 2019 to March 2020 the Charity achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 18 beneficiaries with a total of 109 days between them

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	<p>(approximately 6 days each).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 long term unemployed beneficiary progressing to paid employment. ○ 12 supervisor volunteers who provided 310 volunteer days in total.
2.3 Support over the past five years	2020/21 – £13,000 one-off award to cover the costs of purchasing a van.

3.0 Assessment of Application		
3.1 Key Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Constitution ○ Registered Charity ○ VAT Registered ○ Equal Opportunities Policy ○ Safeguarding Policy ○ Reserves Policy ○ Quality Mark ○ Other funding sources pursued ○ Other support by the Council ○ Fundraising ○ Two quotes ○ Regular monitoring provided previously 	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes – Discretionary rate relief.</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>
3.2 Consultee Comments	None.	
3.3 Assessment	<p>The Useful Wood Company provides a venue through which those facing social exclusion and unemployment are provided with training and volunteering opportunities through wood work. The Charity supports long-term unemployed, people with mental health problems, the homeless and ex-offenders. The Company collects unwanted wood from local contractors for the project, with the majority of the wood collected turned into items for sale.</p> <p>Through its activities, the Charity seeks to provide a safe, secure environment for vulnerable people in the local community so that they can regain confidence and benefit from a workplace setting where they can gain reliability in attending, learning relationships within a team and learning practical skills. This provides them with a strong platform to gain employment and become self-sufficient with life and work skills. The work is supported by volunteers who benefit themselves by seeing the impact their work has.</p> <p>The applicant has also advised that the work will make a significant contribution to reducing harmful emissions and therefore benefit the environment.</p>	

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The Charity's aim was to take on 12-15 individuals at any one-time, however these ambitions were impacted by the Covid 19 restrictions. In its first year of operation, the Charity supported 18 individuals who completed a total of 109 days between them. One of the individuals supported progressed to paid employment. The individuals were supported by 12 supervisor volunteers who provided 310 volunteer days in total. The periods of engagement ranged from between two weeks and six months dependent on the individual's circumstances and needs.

At the time of the application, the Charity had collected 1,128 cubic yards of wood (approx. 113 tonnes) and had reused 499 cubic yards (approx. 50 tonnes). The Group hopes to build on this work and secure new premises in light of the proposed development in Goldsworth Road.

The Group has worked with a number of organisations, including Woking Job Centre, Community Payback Scheme, Police Commissioner for Surrey, Probation Service, York Road Project for the homeless, Welcome Church Woking, Churches Together in Woking, Woking Community Mental Health (NHS) and Woking Borough Council.

The Group has this year applied for capital funding of £8,448.96 to purchase a list of additional specialist equipment including a plunge saw, a skill saw, a table saw and a planar thicknesser. The applicant has advised that the equipment will benefit the users by enabling the Charity to provide training over a wider range of advanced equipment. The equipment would also allow the Charity to produce a wider range of products for sale, thereby increasing revenue and making use of more of the wood collected.

In considering the application it should be noted that, as a capital request, the Council would normally only consider awarding a maximum of 50% of the costs, unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated. It should also be noted that the Council awarded a substantial one-off capital grant for the current year to enable the Charity to purchase a van. The Council awarded the full costs of the van (£13,000), on the basis of the importance of the vehicle to the operation of the charity and its financial position.

It is not considered that the application before the Council demonstrates a significant exception to justify awarding a capital grant of 100%. However, it is felt that there would be merit in supporting the ambition of the Charity to purchase specialist equipment which would allow a greater proportion of the wood collected to be re-used and provide valuable experience for those individuals supported by the service. It is therefore recommended that a grant of 50% of the costs up to a maximum of £4,250 should be awarded towards the purchase of equipment as set out in the application.

REPORT ENDS