

THE WOKING COMMUNITY FURNITURE PROJECT – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Executive Summary

The Woking Community Furniture Project is a local, registered charity that provides donated furniture, household goods, and electrical items at low cost to people in Woking and the surrounding area, with a special focus on discounted prices for those in the community needing help.

Last year the Project took on three existing volunteers with mental health issues into part-time roles, with grant funding received towards two of them from the Community Foundation of Surrey and the remaining post being funded by the Group. Due to the lockdown period and the ensuing reductions in revenue income, which were only partly offset by receipt of Government funding of £25,000, the Group does not anticipate being able to continue funding these roles into the 2021/22 financial year and has submitted a grant application to the Council. The Group expects that, with a gradual resumption of normal trading along with the re-starting of the additional services currently suspended during the current pandemic (the Micro Moves and Medical Moves services), the roles will become self-financing from April 2022.

Due to Covid-19, the Project's shops were required to close for three months from March 2020. Additional PPE, signage and sanitizing equipment had to be purchased and so there was a shortfall incurred during the lockdown period. After re-opening, there was a general downturn in revenue due to a reduced footfall in the Town, alongside more specific impacts as services had been adapted, for example limiting the number of staff in a van for collections and deliveries and reducing the amount which could be collected. The shop closed for the second lockdown in November 2020.

In a typical year, the Project has supported around 2,400 households of which 85% are resident to the Borough, collecting items from over 800 households and supplying items to over 1,500 households.

It is clear that providing support to the Charity in its endeavour to assist three people with mental health issues by providing employment opportunities would be beneficial to those people and also the wider population they would serve. In addition, the Group has advised that a further grant of £5,000 has been applied for from the Community Foundation of Surrey which would, if successful, reduce the level of grant award from the Council. It is recommended therefore that a one-off grant of up to £15,417 be awarded for the 2021/22 financial year, on a one-off basis noting the Group expects the roles to be self-financing from beyond the end of the grant year.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That, subject to the outcome of the Council's budgetary process, a one-off grant of up to £15,417 be awarded from the Community Fund towards the salary costs of the three part-time roles applied for during the 2021/22 financial year.

Reason for Decision

To assist the group continue to provide part-time employment opportunities to three people with mental health issues who had previously acted as volunteers.

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Legal Authority	S19 (Misc. Provisions) Local Government Act 1976
Confirmation of funding	<p>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 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>
Conditions	<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>Payments. Unless exceptional circumstances exist all invoices must be received quarterly with monitoring information for the previous quarter.</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>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>
Performance Indicators	<p>Users. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the users.</p> <p>Activities. The Organisation to provide details of activities and events held.</p>

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Publicity. The Organisation to advise how the Council's support has been publicised.

Statement of Use. The Organisation to provide a statement stating the use to which the grant money has been put.

The Executive has authority to determine the above recommendations.

Background Papers:

2021/22 Application Form.

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1.0 Summary of Application	
1.1 Status and Aims	<p>The Woking Community Furniture Project (WCFP) was formed in September 1996. Its aim is to relieve poverty and provide employment opportunities via the collection and provision of furniture, electrical items and housewares for those living in the community on low incomes.</p> <p>WCFP collects items that would otherwise go to landfill, thus providing an immediate environmental benefit. It supplies these items to those in need, providing an economic & social benefit. The service is largely provided by volunteers (frequently the long term unemployed, or those with mental health / addiction issues, and those on community service) thus providing an additional social benefit and a pathway to full time employment.</p>
1.2 Employees	<p>8.</p> <p>Project Director (40 hours per week), Administrator (32 hours per week), 2 x Drivers (16 hours per week each), PAT Tester / Electrical Repairer (16 hours per week), 2 x Shop Workers (16 hours and 8 hours per week) and Shop Manager (32 hours per week).</p>
1.3 Volunteers	<p>20, whose activities include administration, customer service, stock control (including labelling, pricing and display), warehouse assistance, on vehicle delivery and collection assistance, cleaning, and building maintenance. Refurbishments and repairs take place in the Group's workshop.</p> <p>In addition to the above volunteers, there were 44 Community Service placements who performed 4,876 hours of unpaid work.</p> <p>Several of the staff have ongoing mental health issues and employment was a route of recovery for them, as well as putting them in a position to provide empathetic support to volunteers and customers.</p> <p>The Group has also taken on two refugees who have recently arrived from Syria and Egypt in skilled roles as upholsterers, which has significantly helped with their integration into the community and their English language skills.</p>
1.4 Clients/Users	<p>Over the past year, the Group has supported around 2,400 households of which 85% are resident to the Borough, collecting items from over 800 households and supplying items to over 1,500 households.</p> <p>The prices charged vary from item to item (for example, sofa £40, wardrobe £30, washing machine £70, microwave £15, chest of drawers £30 and bed £25). Clients referred to the Group by local agencies as being on low incomes receive a 50% discount. Examples of referral agencies include Woking Borough Council, Citizens Advice Woking, Woking Age Concern, several local Housing Association and NHS related agencies. Referrals are made by completing a short e-form on the Group's website and are valid for a year.</p> <p>Collections are made from donor's homes, making the service an</p>

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	<p>attractive alternative to paid options and helping to avoid fly tipping.</p> <p>The items provided to users tend to be of a far better quality than those they could normally obtain, providing a safe and comfortable home environment.</p>
1.5 Members	N/A
1.6 Sum Requested	£15,417 (Revenue)
1.7 Project	<p>At the beginning of this year the Group employed three volunteers into additional part-time paid roles who had issues with mental health and financial stability. Two of the volunteering roles are currently in receipt of a grant of £8,000 from the Community Foundation of Surrey, which will expire at the end of the financial year. One of the roles is paid for the Group itself. Due to the downturn caused by Covid-19 and the fall in revenue for the Chapel Street store, due to a lower footfall, it would be unable to fund these roles going into next year. Therefore the grant request is to provide temporary support for these roles next year, by the end of which they should be self-financing.</p> <p>The Group notes that the provision of these three roles not only benefits the people concerned but will in turn benefit the community, as they provide a good level of service working with the Group.</p>
1.8 Cost breakdown:	<p>Workshop / customer service assistant (16 hours per week) - £7,255</p> <p>Van assistant (12 hours per week) - £5,441</p> <p>Van assistant (6 hours per week) - £2,721</p>
1.9 Community Benefit	<p>The immediate beneficiaries would be the three retained staff members, in addition indirectly to over 1,500 households they would be expected to assist with quality re-used furniture and electrical items next year, alongside over 800 households from whom the furniture and /electrical items would be collected.</p> <p>The provision of these items lessens the likelihood of vulnerable people encountering a financial crisis, and the re-use collection service helps reduce the burden on Council services.</p>
1.10 Covid-19 Impact	<p>The WCFP shops in North Road and Chapel Street were required to close for three months from March 2020, which resulted in a total loss of revenue during this period, slightly offset by the rates-related grant. Additional PPE, signage and sanitizing equipment had to be purchased and so there was a shortfall incurred during the lockdown period. As the service provided had been unavailable, the Group experienced a spike in demand upon re-opening.</p> <p>After re-opening, there was a general downturn in revenue due to a reduced footfall in the Town, alongside more specific impacts as services had been adapted, for example limiting the number of staff in a van for collections and deliveries and reducing the amount which could be collected. Some services had been suspended where they involved direct contact with the public, such as the Micro Moves and Medical Moves service. The shop closed for the second lockdown.</p>

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2.0 Financial Background	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £63,000 in the bank. The sum of £14,759 is reserved for salary support, medical moves, support for Southern Housing clients and a small lottery grant, with the remainder being allocated as reserves.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a budget for 2021/22 which shows an anticipated income of £133,200 against an anticipated expenditure of £133,079, resulting in an anticipated surplus of £121.</p> <p>Anticipated income includes shop sales (£86,000), donations (£25,000) and Gift Aid (£13,500). Items of expenditure include salaries (£110,524) and motor vehicle expenses (£2,500).</p>
2.2 Accounts	<p>The Group has submitted accounts for 2019/20 which show an income of £130,354 (£136,593 in 2018/19) against expenditure of £144,311 (£137,551 in 2018/19), resulting in a deficit of £13,957 (a deficit of £958 in 2018/19). The sum of £167,400 was carried forward at the end of the 2019/20 year.</p>
2.3 Support over the past five years	<p>2019/20 – no grant awarded 2018/19 – no grant awarded.</p>

3.0 Assessment of Application																																					
3.1 Key Information	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 5%;"><input type="radio"/></td> <td style="width: 70%;">Constitution</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Registered Charity</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>VAT Registered</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Equal Opportunities Policy</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Safeguarding Policy</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Reserves Policy</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Quality Mark</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Other funding sources pursued</td> <td>No</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Other support by the Council</td> <td>Yes *</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Fundraising</td> <td>Yes</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Two quotes</td> <td>N/A</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="radio"/></td> <td>Regular monitoring provided previously</td> <td>N/A</td> </tr> </table> <p>* mandatory rate relief and discretionary rate relief.</p>	<input type="radio"/>	Constitution	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	Registered Charity	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	VAT Registered	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	Equal Opportunities Policy	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	Safeguarding Policy	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	Reserves Policy	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	Quality Mark	No	<input type="radio"/>	Other funding sources pursued	No	<input type="radio"/>	Other support by the Council	Yes *	<input type="radio"/>	Fundraising	Yes	<input type="radio"/>	Two quotes	N/A	<input type="radio"/>	Regular monitoring provided previously	N/A
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3.2 Consultee Comments	<p><u>Liz Macintyre, Funding Officer</u></p> <p>WCFP is registered with Volunteer Woking, recently provided an update on their organisation and receives regular information on volunteering, funding and other matters from us. The fact that they have not approached me for specific funding support confirms the claims in their application that this request for funding is due to a blip caused by the pandemic. The project is mainly self-funding, provides</p>																																				

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	<p>a significant level of support to Woking residents and is requesting a relatively small grant so I would support their application for Community Grant Funding.</p>
3.3 Assessment	<p>The Charity has been providing local service users with used furniture and electrical items since 1996, and the level of assistance has been either rising or fairly consistent since its inception, with the level of work taking place stated to have trebled over the last ten years.</p> <p>The majority of the 1,500 or so households provided for are low income families. The purpose of the Group is to provide furniture and electrical items at cost to those in need, unlike other used furniture providers who would be raising funds for other objectives, therefore inevitably charging more with no reduction available for those on low incomes.</p> <p>When collecting items from at least 800 households each year, typically two out of three offers of furniture are turned down (post lockdown this rose to nine in ten) which demonstrates a high demand for the service.</p> <p>Last year the Project took on three existing volunteers with mental health issues into part-time roles, with grant funding received from the Community Foundation of Surrey towards two of them and the remaining post being funded by the Group. Due to the lockdown period and the ensuing reductions in revenue, the Group does not anticipate being able to continue funding these roles into the 2021/22 financial year and so is requesting a grant from the Council on a one-off basis, as the three posts are expected to be self-financing from the end of the grant year.</p> <p>The Group expects that with a gradual resumption of normal trading, along with the re-starting of the additional services currently suspended (Micro Moves and Medical Moves) during the current pandemic will enable the roles to be paid for by the Group.</p> <p>Attendance takes place at local community events for fundraising purposes. In the past year a total of £16,100 was received, £8,000 of which supported the payment of the three part-time roles, along with funds for specific projects (£2,000), Medical Moves service launch (£2,000) and support for Southern Housing tenants (£2,500).</p> <p>The Project is a significant contributor to the community, addressing social needs in the form of re-used furniture and electrical items and alleviating poverty by making good quality items affordable to those on low incomes, with a 50% discount available for those who are referred by local agencies to the service. From an environmental perspective, the Group reports that it has removed over 90 tonnes of waste from the waste stream, alongside helping to reduce fly tipping.</p> <p>It is clear that providing support to the Charity in its endeavour to assist three people with mental health issues by providing employment opportunities would be beneficial to those people and also the wider population they would serve. It is recommended that a grant of £15,417 be awarded for the 2021/22 financial year, on a one-off basis noting the Group expects the roles to be self-financing from beyond the end of the grant year.</p>

REPORT ENDS