

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 2021/22 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 services provided by the Forum includes the provision of information and advice, signposting to local agencies, mediation and outreach work such as visiting clients' homes to assisting with GP appointments. 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 assist its clients.

Since the grant award of £5,000 for the 2019/20 financial year, the Forum has submitted visitor figures for 2019, the Forum has received 391 visitors, and operated two days a week. Advice was provided free of charge on issues including debt, housing, welfare benefits, employment and community care. The Forum has confirmed that it has held Public Liability insurance since September 2017.

Due to Covid the Forum had to close their offices from March to September 2020, resulting in no face to face meetings with clients, however outreach work was conducted on a case by case basis.

It is proposed that a grant of £5,000 revenue be awarded during the 2021/22 financial year for the Community Advice Forum towards the costs of operating the drop-in service at the Maybury Centre.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:	RESOLVE That , subject to the outcome of the Council's budgetary process, a grant of £5,000 be awarded from the Community Grants Budget towards the cost of operating the drop-in service.
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Reason for Decision	To enable the Group to continue to provide its services in the community.
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Legal Authority	S142 Local Government Act 1972
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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>
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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>Enquiries. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the enquiries received.</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>
Future Support	<p>Due to the impact of Covid-19, the financial pressure on the Council's budgets is higher than ever and is expected to continue in the coming years. 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 2021/22 does not imply that a similar application in 2022/23 would be supported. In particular, it is emphasised that the Council is extremely unlikely to be in a position to award any sums above the 2021/22 levels.</p> <p>In view of this, the applicant is to be advised to ensure that contingency plans for the Group's operations for 2022/23 have been drawn up in the event that the Council is unable to continue its support</p>

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beyond April 2022. 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.

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 Group renamed itself from the Neighbourhood Advice Centre to the Community Advice Forum in January 2017. As the former 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"> • 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. • To raise awareness of healthy and sustainable living practices and thereby empower people to adopt healthier, happier lifestyles. • 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. <p>The objectives of the Forum are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide advice, information, and to signpost to other services. • To provide information on other innovative services to facilitate the reintegration of socially and economically excluded people.
1.2 Employees	None.
1.3 Volunteers	5, 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	<p>400, comprising:</p> <p>250 male</p> <p>150 female</p> <p>90% ethnic minority</p> <p>100% resident in Woking</p> <p>80% aged 19-65</p> <p>20% aged 65+</p> <p>Users are not charged for any of the services offered.</p>
1.5 Members	None.
1.6 Sum Requested	£5,000 (Revenue)
1.7 Project	<p>Pay the rent at the Maybury Centre</p> <p>Pay for photocopying</p> <p>Telephone and Internet Bill</p>

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1.8 Cost breakdown:	The cost breakdown is set out in the budget supplied by the Group in section 2.1.
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 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.
1.10 Covid-19 Impact	The Forum offices were closed during the lockdown period from March 2020 and only recently reopened them, resulting in no face to face meetings with clients during this time. However, the Group had conducted outreach work on a case by case basis.

2.0 Financial Background	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £6,498 in the bank. The sum of £2,500 is reserved for rent arrears, pensions and legal fees.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a budget for 2021/22 which shows an anticipated income of £0 against an anticipated expenditure of £5,000, resulting in an anticipated deficit of £5,000.</p> <p>Anticipated income consists of the Council's Grant (£5,000). Items of expenditure include office rent (£3,300), telephone and internet (£350), postage/stationary (£400), insurance (£200), volunteer expenses (£400), memberships (£150), and training (£200).</p>
2.2 Accounts	The Group has submitted accounts for 2019/20 which show an income of £5,000 (£5,000 in 2018/19) against expenditure of £4,994 (£3,421 in 2018/19), resulting in a surplus of £6 (a surplus of £1,579 in 2018/19). The sum of £6,492 was carried forward at the end of the 2019/20 year.
2.3 Support over the past five years	2020/21 – £5,000 2019/20 – £5,000 2018/19 – £5,000 2017/18 – £5,000

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 	Yes Yes No Yes Yes

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reserves Policy ○ Quality Mark ○ Other funding sources pursued ○ Other support by the Council ○ Fundraising ○ Two quotes ○ Regular monitoring provided previously 	<p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Yes</p>
<p>3.2 Consultee Comments</p>	<p><u>Zafar Iqbal, Senior Policy Officer</u></p> <p>The Community Advice Forum (CAF) provides general advice, referral/signposting, mediation, representation to the more vulnerable members of predominantly minority ethnic communities. In the current pandemic the role of CAF to provide any additional support is particularly welcome especially to the cohort of the society at which it is aimed at.</p> <p>I would support funding to the level of £5,000.</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 Forum provides information on a wide range of issues including education, employment, welfare rights and information regarding services provided by other organisations and bodies. The principle is to serve everyone and provide the free advice and support to minority ethnic communities in their own language.</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"> ○ providing information to clients in person, on the phone and by email; ○ researching individual cases, assessing problems and identifying 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; 	

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- 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.

Between January to December in 2019 there had been 391 visitors who received advice 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, six outreach cases were undertaken during this time.

The Charity helps to reduce the amount of cases that could be referred to the Council and other public services, which would add pressure and impact these services.

The Forum aims to continue to play a key role in tackling poverty and increasing 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 has held 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 2021/22 financial year for the Community Advice Forum towards the costs of operating the drop-in service at the Maybury Centre.

REPORT ENDS