

WOKING TALKING NEWSPAPER – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Executive Summary

The Woking Talking Newspaper Association has applied for a grant to cover the costs of renting office space at the Moorcroft Centre. The Group provides visually impaired people of Woking with a weekly audio tape containing local news. The Service is available to those of any age and the Group is working with Sight for Surrey with the aim of increasing the overall numbers to between 60 and 100 listeners.

Woking Talking Newspaper has applied for grant support of £1,964 in 2021/22. The funding would offset the charges from Woking Borough Council for renting a room at the Moorcroft Centre in Westfield for a period of approximately four hours per week.

The Association has been able to continue its recordings throughout the pandemic as it has amended its process to enable the volunteers to work from home, which has helped provide stability for its vulnerable users. The recordings have gone some way to relieve the isolation felt by many visually impaired people during such times. If the Group decided to no longer use the room provided at Moorcroft it would amend its future applications to the Council for a grant.

It is noted that the Group provides an excellent and valued service to those with a visual impairment in the Borough, along with ongoing awareness-raising to increase its number of users. The Group states that it currently supports a total of 46 users in the Borough who are registered blind or have a visual impairment, with the Trustees actively engaged on programmes to increase the number of listeners through contacts with care homes, carers and relations of visually impaired persons.

The service has been described by many users as a "lifeline". Many radio and television stations provide regional news but with the aid of the Woking News and Mail they can deliver Borough news and information to visually impaired persons.

The Council has supported the Group for many years and it is recommended that a grant of £1,964 be awarded for the 2021/22 financial year.

Recommendations

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| The Executive is requested to: | RESOLVE That , subject to the outcome of the Council's budgetary process, funding of £1,964 be awarded from the Community Grants Budget towards the cost of renting a room at the Moorcroft Centre. |
| Reason for Decision | To enable Woking Talking Newspaper to continue to provide its service to those people in the Borough with a visual impairment. |
| 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 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 |

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| | <p>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 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>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 all literature and leaflets produced.</p> <p>Payments. Payments. 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>Payment Period. 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>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>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>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 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</p> |

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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 | |
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| 1.1 Status and Aims | <p>Formed originally in the late 1960s and converted to a registered charity in 1988, Woking Talking Newspaper provides a free weekly news information service to blind and visually impaired persons. The Association produces an audio version of the Woking News and Mail together with other publications and "Magazine" items. The recordings are produced every Thursday evening (the day of publication of the newspaper) and distributed via Royal Mail on USB thumb drives/memory sticks. All their readers and recording producers give their time on a voluntary basis and are from the Woking area. A Christmas message is recorded by the Mayor each year from the Mayor's Parlour and recordings are made of civic events in the Town Centre.</p> <p>The weekly recordings are produced in a rented room at the Moorcroft Centre for the Community. Woking Borough Council currently provides a grant to meet the rent of the room and storage facilities for their equipment.</p> |
| 1.2 Employees | None |
| 1.3 Volunteers | 41, whose activities include preparing the Talking Newspapers as well as volunteers who run a programme of marketing and awareness initiatives that comprise contacts with Sight for Surrey, The Macular Society and other charities, doctors, care homes, carers and care managers. |
| 1.4 Clients/Users | <p>46, comprising:</p> <p>13 male</p> <p>33 female</p> <p>46 disabled</p> <p>45 resident in Woking</p> <p>The service is provided free of charge to users. In addition, player units can be loaned to users. The weekly productions are also available on the Group's website.</p> |
| 1.5 Members | <p>87, comprising:</p> <p>33 male</p> <p>54 female</p> <p>3 disabled</p> <p>1 ethnic minority</p> <p>87 resident in Woking</p> <p>All listeners and volunteers are classed as members. The Group believes that the vast majority of its members are over 65 years old.</p> |
| 1.6 Sum Requested | £1,964 (Revenue) |

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| 1.7 Project | <p>The Grant funding will offset the charges made by Woking Borough Council for renting a room (The Moorcroft Suite) at the Moorcroft Centre for the Community in Westfield. This room is used for approximately 4 hours each Thursday and serves as a recording studio.</p> <p>In addition the Association uses two storage cupboards in this room to store its recording, copying and administration equipment. The equipment stored is fully insured by the Association.</p> <p>The grant is paid as an internal transfer within the Council.</p> |
| 1.8 Cost breakdown: | <p>The application is intended to directly offset the charges made by Woking Borough Council for the rent of the room referred to above and is based upon the charge of £1,870 for the year 2020/21 with an annual increment of 5%.</p> <p>In the past Woking Borough Council has made an internal accounting transaction so that the Grant is set off against the rent and no payment is made to or by the Association.</p> |
| 1.9 Community Benefit | <p>The Association currently has 46 registered listeners who, but for the service provided, would not have access to local news and details of local events. If the Grant funding is continued this will allow the Association to continue to seek to expand its listener base to reach more and more citizens in the Borough as well as continue the service to existing listeners.</p> <p>The Trustees are actively engaged on programmes to increase the number of listeners through contacts with care homes, carers and relations of visually impaired persons.</p> |
| 1.10 Covid-19 Impact | <p>The Trustees have had to completely reorganise the method of operation due to Covid-19 and have made efforts to ensure that the service has been able to continue with minimum risk to the volunteers and to the listeners. However, the service has been able to continue since the onset of the pandemic, which has helped provide stability for its vulnerable users. The recordings have gone some way to relieve the isolation felt by many visually impaired people during such times. The listeners have, with the aid of helpers, been able to return the recording wallets in a timely fashion despite many of them not being able to leave their homes.</p> |

2.0 Financial Background

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| 2.1 Budget | <p>At the time of the application, the Group held £2,480 in the bank, of which the sum of £417 is reserved for the purpose of replacing and repairing equipment.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a budget for 2021/22 which shows an anticipated income of £2,365 against an anticipated expenditure of £2,740. After the transfer from the replacement reserve for the equipment costs of £500, there would be an anticipated surplus of £125.</p> <p>Anticipated income includes Grant from Woking Borough Council</p> |
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| | (£1,963), donations from members (£200) and donations from public (£200). Items of expenditure include rent (£1,963), insurance (£152), subscriptions (£45), website maintenance costs (£35) and printing / postage / stationery (£25). |
| 2.2 Accounts | The Group has submitted accounts for 2019/20 which show an income of £2,445 (£2,204 in 2018/19) against expenditure of £2,274 (£2,914 in 2018/19), resulting in a surplus of £405 (a deficit of £121 in 2018/19). The sum of £2,608 was carried forward at the end of the 2019/20 year. |
| 2.3 Support over the past five years | 2020/21 – £1,870 2019/20 – £1,781 2018/19 – £1,696 2017/18 – £1,615 2016/17 – £1,537 |

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| 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 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes No No No Yes N/A Yes |
| 3.2 Consultee Comments | <p><u>Diana Chan, Health and Wellbeing Manager</u></p> <p>Woking Talking Newspaper produces an audio version of the Woking News and Mail together with other publications and “Magazine” items. The recordings are produced every Thursday evening (the day of publication of the newspaper) and distributed via Royal Mail on USB thumb drives/ memory sticks. All readers, recording producers and administrators give their time on a voluntary basis and are from the Woking area. In addition the Group records a Christmas message from the Mayor, recorded in the Mayor’s Parlour.</p> <p>Funding will cover the cost for renting a room (The Moorcroft Suite) at the Moorcroft Centre for the Community in Westfield, Woking. This room is used for approximately 4 hours each Thursday and serves the Association as a recording studio. In addition, the Association uses two cupboards in this room to store its recording, copying and administration equipment.</p> | |

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| | <p>I would recommend that Woking Talking Newspaper be awarded the full £1,964 requested to continue this beneficial service for Woking residents, this takes into account the 5% incremental rise in room hire costs.</p> |
| 3.3 Assessment | <p>The Woking Talking Newspaper Association was founded in 1988 to provide Woking residents who have a visual impairment access to the local newspapers through a weekly audio cassette containing local news.</p> <p>The administration team meets on a weekly basis to log the recorded memory sticks (in the form of flash drives) which have been returned by users and prepare the despatch wallets for the new recordings. The recording team meets to read and record the news from the local newspaper, producing a Master flash drive, with the aid of a producer. The reading is recorded onto a master USB thumb drive / memory stick using a sound mixer deck linked to a laptop computer. The Producer controls the recording sound levels and monitors the recording using bespoke recording software. Once handed over to the copying team, the Master flash drive is duplicated and circulated by Royal Mail to the registered listeners in wallets which are used to return them after use.</p> <p>During the current pandemic, the production processes have changed as access to Moorcroft has been restricted and there was no wish to confine the readers in a small room. Woking News & Mail is allowing early access to the whole paper via the internet. Volunteers have been recording contributions in their own homes using their own recording equipment.</p> <p>Woking Talking Newspaper is applying for grant support of £1,964 for the financial year 2021/2. The purpose of the funding is to offset the charges levied by the Moorcroft Centre in Westfield for renting a room to prepare the recordings. Prior to Covid-19, the room was used for approximately four hours each Thursday and serves as a recording studio. In addition, the Association uses two storage cupboards in the room to store its recording, copying and administration equipment. The equipment is fully insured by the Association. As the Group has currently amended its process for volunteers to work from home, if it decided to no longer use the room provided at Moorcroft it would amend its future applications for a grant.</p> <p>The support provided by Woking Borough Council to the Association is acknowledged at the start of the recording each week, in any communication from the Association and also on its website. Historically, the vast majority of referrals to the service have been from Sight for Surrey (previously known as the Surrey Association for Visual Impairment). Copies of the recordings have been distributed to residents in the Borough along with Woking Homes. An online version is provided through the website. In addition, a copy is provided to British Wireless for the Blind Fund.</p> <p>In addition, the Association has submitted an application for a grant of £1,795 to the Co-op Community Fund towards the purchase of a new laptop and a second USB copying machine, and new microphones.</p> <p>Without the support of the Council the provision of the service would not be possible as the Group could not afford the level of commercial rents which would be levied. The number of listeners has varied over</p> |

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the past few years between 50 and 60, and the Group now has 46 listeners, with the Trustees actively engaged on programmes to increase the number of listeners through contacts with care homes, carers and relations of visually impaired persons.

The Council has supported the Group for many years and it is recommended that a grant of £1,964 be awarded to support this organisation.

REPORT ENDS