

**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 from the Council, noting that the three posts were expected to be self-financing from the end of the grant year. The organisation is continuing with two of the roles on the same basis and funding them directly from its own payroll.

In addition, an application to the Council has been submitted for one of the roles to be expanded into a full-time position. It would enable the postholder to increase the level of work carried out whilst also mentoring and training other volunteers, particularly those with mental health issues and learning difficulties. The person earmarked for this role was previously funded by the Council last year and the Project has stated that he has proved to be an asset with particularly strong interpersonal skills and an excellent work ethic.

The Charity 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.

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.

The Woking Community Furniture Project assists many of our most financially vulnerable and homeless residents to help set up homes or move. The actual funding is to enhance the service offer whilst helping employ residents with their own complex needs to support others. It is recommended that a grant of £10,000 be awarded for the 2022/23 financial year, equating to a reduction of circa 33% on the award from last year, to enable the role identified to move from two days to five days per week. The Project anticipates that the extra revenue generated by the role would fund it in the future.

**Recommendations**

The Executive is requested to:

**RESOLVE That**, subject to the outcome of the Council's budgetary process, subject to the outcome of the Council's budgetary process, a one-off grant of up to £10,000 be awarded from the Community Grants Budget towards the salary cost of the role applied for.

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.

Confirmation of funding

This award is provisionally made on the expectation that the Council's

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	<p>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 10 February 2022. 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 2022/23 funding until this confirmation has been received.</p>
<p>Conditions</p>	<p><b>Accounts.</b> 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><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> <p><b>Publicity.</b> Where possible, the Organisation is required to publicise the support received from Woking Borough Council, including on websites and literature / leaflets produced.</p> <p><b>Payments.</b> Unless exceptional circumstances exist all invoices must be received quarterly with monitoring information for the previous quarter.</p> <p><b>Payment Period.</b> 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><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> 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><b>Users.</b> The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the users.</p> <p><b>Activities.</b> The Organisation to provide details of activities and events held.</p> <p><b>Publicity.</b> The Organisation to advise how the Council's support has been publicised.</p> <p><b>Statement of Use.</b> The Organisation to provide a statement stating the use to which the grant money has been put.</p>
<p>Future Support</p>	<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 2022/23 does not</p>

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imply that a similar application in 2023/24 would be supported. In particular, it is emphasised that the Council is unlikely to be in a position to award any sums above the 2022/23 levels.

In view of this, the applicant is to be advised to ensure that contingency plans for the Group's operations for 2023/24 have been drawn up in the event that the Council is unable to continue its support beyond April 2023. 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:**

2022/23 Application Form.

### **Reporting Person:**

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### **Date Published:**

30 November 2021

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<b>1.0 Summary of Application</b>	
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>The Project 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 &amp; 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	8. Project Director, Administrator, Driver, 2 x Van Assistants, PAT Tester / Electrical Repairer, 2 x Shop Workers / PAT Tester and Shop Manager.
1.3 Volunteers	<p>24, 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, pre-pandemic there were over 40 Community Service placements who performed circa 4,800 hours of unpaid work. This was suspended due to the pandemic, however 2 new placements had recently begun.</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>A number of volunteers have been referred from local agencies such as Corner House, MIND, Richmond Fellowship, LinkAble and Surrey Choices.</p>
1.4 Clients/Users	<p>In a usual year, the Project would support 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 £40, 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 attractive alternative to paid options and helping to avoid fly tipping.</p> <p>A significant proportion of the households assisted are on low</p>

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	<p>incomes. Once referred a user can access the service at the discounted rate for a year and has the option to continue after this period if they are in no better a financial position. There are also many clients from the Syrian community. In addition, a number of users have been recently re-housed after facing homelessness and often at a financial low point.</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 the 2021/22 financial year the Project was awarded a grant from the Council towards the salary costs of three people with mental health issues who had moved from volunteering to part time paid roles. This helped them considerably and also provided financial stability; going forward the Charity is funding two of these roles permanently from April 2022, for the two days per week formerly funded by the Council.</p> <p>The Project is seeking a grant for 2022/23 to expand one of those three roles to five days per week, to enable an expansion of the current role (warehousing / customer service and van assistant) whilst also mentoring and training other volunteers, particularly those with mental health issues and learning difficulties.</p> <p>The person who has been earmarked for this role is one of the roles funded by the Council last year who the Charity states has proved to be an asset with particularly strong interpersonal skills and an excellent work ethic. He has significant lived experience of some of the issues encountered by volunteers and can manage them with a high degree of empathy.</p>
1.8 Cost breakdown:	The full-time role would be paid for two days each week by the Project. The cost for the remaining three days, working for seven hours per day, would amount to £10,603 per annum.
1.9 Community Benefit	<p>The immediate beneficiary would be staff member occupying the expanded role, 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 waste services.</p>
1.10 Covid-19 Impact	<p>The Project is pleased to report that with the assistance of grants and some income from sales it was able to make up its employees' salaries to 100% whilst on furlough, and did not make any redundancies during the pandemic.</p> <p>Whilst now re-open, there is still a reticence within the community to fully engage in activities such as shopping as readily as they had done previously, which has had an impact on revenue. This impact is also shared by staff and volunteers, many of whom feel vulnerable, and</p>

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	has in turn resulted in a higher level of support and assistance being required.
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<b>2.0 Financial Background</b>	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Project held £72,253 in the bank. The sum of £5,517 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 Project has submitted a budget for 2021/22 which shows an anticipated income of £146,200 against an anticipated expenditure of £140,958, resulting in an anticipated surplus of £5,242.</p>
2.2 Accounts	<p>The Project has submitted draft accounts for 2020/21 which show an income of £166,344 (£130,353 in 2019/20) against expenditure of £136,928 (£144,311 in 2019/20), resulting in a surplus of £29,416 (a deficit of £13,958 in 2019/20). The sum of £196,815 was carried forward at the end of the 2020/21 year.</p>
2.3 Support over the past five years	<p>2021/22 – £15,417                  2020/21 – no application made.                  2019/20 – no grant awarded.                  2018/19 – no grant awarded.</p>

<b>3.0 Assessment of Application</b>		
3.1 Key Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Constitution</li> <li>○ Registered Charity</li> <li>○ VAT Registered</li> <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> <p>* mandatory rate relief and discretionary rate relief.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes *</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>N/A</p>
3.2 Assessment	<p>The Woking Community Furniture Project assists many of our most financially vulnerable and homeless residents to help set up homes or move. The actual funding is to enhance the service offer whilst helping employ residents with their own complex needs to support</p>	

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others.

In light of the Council's financial position, it is recommended that a grant be awarded at a reduced level of circa 33% of last year, equating to £10,000 for 2022/23.

REPORT ENDS