

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 2019/20 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 include the provision of information and advice, signposting to local agencies, mediation and outreach work such as visiting clients' homes to assist 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 2017/18 financial year, the Forum has submitted quarterly monitoring which reported that in the period of May to August 2018, the Forum received 153 visitors, and operated two days per week. Advice was provided free of charge on issues including debt, housing, welfare benefits, employment and community care. The Forum has confirmed that it holds Public Liability insurance since September 2017.

It is proposed that a grant of £5,000 be awarded during the 2019/20 financial year for the Community Advice Forum towards the costs of operating the drop-in service at the Maybury Centre. As mentioned in the consultee comments, it is recommended that the Group seek to achieve a Quality Mark, on which the Council's Community and Engagement team can provide advice. In view of the absence of other sources of income, it is recommended that a condition is added requiring the Forum to work with the Council to explore options for fundraising and applying for funding elsewhere.

Recommendations	
The Executive is requested to:	RESOLVE That funding of £5,000 be awarded towards the costs of operating the drop-in service.
Reason for Decision	To enable the Group to continue to provide its services in the community.
Legal Authority	S142 Local Government Act 1972
Conditions	<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>

Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

Payments. Unless exceptional circumstances exist all invoices must be received quarterly with details of the costs incurred and monitoring information for the previous quarter.

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.

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.

Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 – with the introduction of new legislation from April 2018, the council will expect 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 will be 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.

Quality Mark. The Forum to seek to achieve a Quality Mark through the support and advice of the Council's Community and Engagement team.

Fundraising. The Forum to work with the Council to explore options for fundraising and applying for funding elsewhere over the coming months.

Venue Hire. Woking Borough Council has a duty to ensure that publicly-owned venues and resources do not provide a platform for extremists and are not used to disseminate extremist views. This duty extends to organisations that work with the local authority so this includes recipients of any grants from Woking Borough Council. If you hire out your venue/s you should ensure you have good processes in place for record keeping and checking if they are an appropriate group to be making the hire arrangements. The following are some of what should be considered:

- Basic details should be recorded to include speakers address, mobile phone number & organisation details.
- Has the identity of the speaker been confirmed & is their organisation bona fide? Are they known to you?
- Is the speaker from the area? Are they UK citizens or from overseas & will they travel specifically for this event?
- Consider checks on the internet to confirm the status of speaker to include website, YouTube or social media sites.
- How many people are likely to attend (check previous or similar events either locally or online).

Performance Indicators

Users. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the users in the past quarter.

Enquiries. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the enquiries

Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

	<p>received during the last quarter.</p> <p>Publicity. The Organisation to advise how the Council's support has been publicised over the last quarter.</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>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 2019/20 does not imply that a similar application in 2020/21 would be supported. In particular, it is emphasised that the Council is unlikely to be in a position to award any sums above the 2019/20 levels.</p> <p>In view of this, the applicant is to be advised to ensure that contingency plans for the Group's operations for 2020/21 have been drawn up in the event that the Council is unable to continue its support beyond April 2020. 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.</p>

The Executive has authority to determine the above recommendations.

Background Papers:

2019/20 Application Form.

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Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

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 it 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	2, 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	600+, comprising: 2 disabled 90% ethnic minority All resident in Woking 75% aged 19-65 15% aged 65+
1.5 Members	None
1.6 Sum Requested	£5,000 (Revenue)
1.7 Project	Pay the rent at the Maybury Centre Pay for photocopying Telephone and Internet Bill
1.8 Cost breakdown:	The cost breakdown is set out in the budget supplied by the Group in section 2.1.

Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

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.
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2.0 Financial Background	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £4,000 in the bank. The sum of £2,000 is reserved for such eventualities as rent arrears, pensions, legal requirements etc.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a break-even budget for 2019/20 which shows an anticipated income and expenditure of £5,000. No fundraising has been included.</p> <p>Items of expenditure include office rent (£3,020), telephone & internet (£600), postage/stationary (£480), insurance (£400), memberships (£250) and training (£250).</p>
2.2 Accounts	The Group has submitted accounts for 2017/18 which show an income of £5,000 against expenditure of £2,087 resulting in a surplus of £2,913. The sum of £4,913 was carried forward at the end of the 2017/18 year.
2.3 Support over the past five years	<p>2018/19 – £5,000</p> <p>2017/18 – £5,000</p>

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>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Yes</p>

Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

<p>3.2 Consultee Comments</p>	<p><u>Sylvie Marshall, Community Development Manager</u></p> <p>Previously the Neighbourhood Advice Centre, the organisation has re-branded and has reviewed its aims and objectives and has moved away from providing purely immigration advice to incorporate a wider more inclusive service including general advice, referral/signposting, mediation, representation and out reach work. The over-arching aim is to provide free advice and support to minority ethnic community members in their first language.</p> <p>It is recommended that the organisation seek to ensure that an appropriate Quality Mark (or equivalent) is obtained to ensure that the advice given is of an appropriate and recognised standard. The organisation provides an accessible service to some of the more vulnerable members of our community and I would therefore 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>In January 2017 the Group amended its name to the Community Advice Forum and updated its aims and objectives.</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;○ providing talks to external organisations;

Community Advice Forum – Application For Financial Assistance

- 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.

Since the grant award of £5,000 for the 2018/19 financial year, the Forum has submitted quarterly monitoring for the period from January to September 2018. The monitoring reported that the Forum received the following visitors as set out below:

Between January to October in 2018 there had been 317 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, two 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 holds 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.

In light of the Officer comments, it is proposed to add a condition requiring the Forum to work with Woking Borough Council to ensure that an appropriate Quality Mark (or equivalent) is obtained to ensure that the advice given is of an appropriate and recognised standard. Furthermore, it is proposed that the Forum is required to work with Officers with a view to exploring options for fundraising and seeking funding.

It is proposed that a grant of £5,000 be awarded during the 2019/20 financial year for the Community Advice Forum towards the costs of operating the drop-in service at the Maybury Centre.

REPORT ENDS