

CITIZENS ADVICE WOKING – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Executive Summary

Citizens Advice Woking seeks to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. The Centre holds the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) quality mark at General Help with Casework in Welfare Benefits and Debt, and Specialist level in Housing. Core activities are 'individual' focused and aim to deliver advice and support to the community of Woking. The Centre also operates the successful Financial Capability Project, funded primarily by Woking Borough Council, a Court helpdesk and outreach services.

The Centre has approached Woking Borough Council with a request for continued financial support in the coming year. The request totals £277,900, broken down into the core service (£224,400), the financial capability project (£11,500), Guildford County Court Help Desk (£10,000) and the service charge of the offices in Provincial House (£32,000). The Centre has stated that it has requested an additional £4,400 towards core costs due to increasing demand for its services. In addition, funding of £10,000 has been requested towards the Court Help Desk. The funding requested for the Financial Capability project remains the same and the service charge element is reviewed annually by the Council.

Taking into account the consultee comments set out in this report, which note that the user numbers have reduced by circa 30% over the past year and that the organisation holds a significant level of reserves, it is recommended that the level of support towards core costs be reduced from £220,000 to £180,000 for 2019/20. It should additionally be noted that the annual accounts set out a surplus of £59,869 for the 2017/18 financial year and £41,372 for the 2016/17 financial year.

It is considered that the Guildford County Court Help Desk provides assistance in avoiding homelessness to the most vulnerable in the Borough and therefore Woking Borough Council should match the level of funding provided by Guildford Borough Council equating to £2,000.

The level of funding awarded for the Financial Capability Project (£11,500) and the service charge element covered by the Council (circa £32,000) remain unchanged.

Accordingly, the proposed level of support for the coming year is recommended as follows:

£180,000 for core services;

£11,500 towards the Financial Capability project;

£2,000 towards the costs of the Guildford County Court Help Desk; and

Circa £32,000 towards the service charge element for the offices in Provincial House.

Accordingly, the total level of support proposed for the 2019/20 equates to approximately £225,500 (a reduction of £38,000 from the level awarded for 2018/19). In considering the financial support, it is worth noting additional support of circa £34,000 is also provided in the form of the offices in the Town Centre through the Council's Community Lettings Policy.

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Recommendations	
The Executive is requested to:	<p>RESOLVE That</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) core funding of £180,000 be awarded to continue to support the core service of Citizens' Advice Woking in 2019/20; (ii) funding of £11,500 be awarded to ensure the continuation of the Financial Capability programme in 2019/20; (iii) funding of £2,000 be awarded towards the costs of the Guildford County Court Help Desk in 2019/20; and (iv) the Council continues to cover the service charge for the accommodation at Provincial House, which for 2019/20 will be circa £32,000.
Reason for Decision	To enable the organisation to provide its services to the residents of Woking.
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> <p>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>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.</p>

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	<p>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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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	<p>Users. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the users in the past quarter.</p> <p>Activities. The Organisation to provide details of activities and events held during the last quarter.</p> <p>Enquiries. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the enquiries 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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4 December 2018

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1.0 Summary of Application	
1.1 Status and Aims	<p>Citizens Advice Woking (CAW) was established in 1939. It is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. CAW is a member of Citizens Advice (Cit A) and is audited every three years to ensure it continues to meet the membership standards as determined by Cit A. The Advice Quality Standard (AQS) quality mark for General Help with Casework in the areas of welfare benefits, debt and housing is also held.</p> <p>The aims and principles of CAW are to provide independent, impartial, confidential and free advice to all of the residents of Woking and anyone who works in the Borough. CAW values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.</p> <p>There are two main objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and to support them to decide what options to take to improve or resolve their situation• to raise local and national issues to help improve policies and practices that affect peoples' lives. <p>CAW's main activities are the advice sessions offered at its main town centre offices and outreach sessions as well as its telephone and email advice service.</p>
1.2 Employees	<p>13, including the Chief Executive (37.5 hours per week), the Operations Manager (37.5 hours per week), 2 x Administration Officer (30 and 7.5 hours per week), a Training Supervisor (21 hours per week), a Money Advice and Financial Capability Coordinator (21 hours per week), 2 x Welfare Benefit Caseworkers (26 and 15 hours per week), two Advice Session Supervisor (19 hours each per week), Home Visiting Caseworker (20 hours per week), Housing and Court Desk Advisor (26 hours per week) and Court Desk Advisor (25 hours per week).</p>
1.3 Volunteers	<p>76.</p> <p>The different types of work carried out by volunteers are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- working as advisers to give advice to members of the public either face to face, on the telephone or via email and web chat.- training to become specialist advisers, advising members of the public who need more in depth advice, e.g. immigration and welfare benefit enquiries.- working on particular projects e.g. financial capability tasks, supporting clients in fuel poverty and the Healthwatch Telephone Information and Advice line.- becoming a Trustee. <p>The team of volunteers are dedicated to providing the best possible service to the clients who contact the Group, either by training to become fully trained advisers or supporting those advisers to deliver the advice. They commit to working at Citizens Advice Woking for one seven hour day a week, although many work more hours, and in total provide over 34,000 hours of volunteering each year.</p>

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	<p>When committing to the training to become an adviser, volunteers undertake a rigorous training programme which results in being awarded a Certificate in Generalist Advice.</p> <p>Initially volunteers will carry out an initial interview to establish the help required by the client. If the client needs actual advice about their issue they are offered a further appointment when they would be seen by a fully qualified adviser.</p> <p>All volunteers have to train in the following topic areas: welfare benefits, family and relationships, money advice and financial capability, housing and employment. Volunteers also have knowledge about immigration, consumer, health and education queries. They must be aware of how clients may be discriminated against in all areas.</p> <p>Volunteers who have a special interest in a particular area voluntarily go on to build up their knowledge to a higher level and there are specialist volunteers advising on immigration, welfare benefits and employment matters.</p> <p>All volunteers have to be IT literate and become fully conversant with the case recording system. With the advancements in technology volunteers also provide advice via email and web chat channels. Twelve volunteers have trained to become Healthwatch Surrey advisers on a telephone advice line. Others assist clients who live in fuel poverty to switch energy supplier and make sure their energy is being used efficiently.</p> <p>Trustees who volunteer for the Board attend four Board meetings a year. In addition they support the Chief Executive Officer to ensure the correct governance of the Service.</p>
1.4 Clients/Users	<p>6,500, comprising:</p> <p>2,730 male</p> <p>3,730 female</p> <p>2,925 disabled</p> <p>1,495 ethnic minority</p> <p>6,500 resident in Woking</p> <p>4,984 aged 19-65</p> <p>1,516 aged 65+</p>
1.5 Members	N/A
1.6 Sum Requested	£245,900 plus service charge, circa £32,000 for 2018/19 (Revenue)
1.7 Project	<p>Citizens Advice Woking is applying for a grant to enable it to continue providing its core service to the residents of the Borough as well as maintaining support for the financial capability project and the Guildford County Court Help Desk project.</p> <p>The main areas requested for advice as part of the core service are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits – 30% • Debt – 13%

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing – 10% • Relationships and Family – 10% • Employment – 7% <p>Half of the total clients receive face to face advice at the Town Centre office, or at an outreach appointment at Guildford County Court, the Vyne or Trinity Methodist Church. The remainder receive advice by telephone, email or webchat. There is a team of 8-12 volunteers supported by specialist caseworkers under the supervision of the Operations Manager. There is also a home visiting service for people who are either physically unable or too vulnerable to travel.</p> <p>Citizens Advice Woking has requested an increase in its core funding due to an increase in demand, and has drawn attention to the fact that the grant from the Council has been maintained at the same level for the past few years. Due to an increase in vulnerable clients and an ageing population it would like to increase the home visiting service and provide additional outreach sessions.</p> <p>The Financial Capability Project increases knowledge of finance and empowers people to make the right choices when managing their money. It is aimed at clients experiencing debt issues, young people and community groups.</p> <p>The Guildford County Court Help Desk provides support to the most vulnerable in the community who are at risk of homelessness. During 2018/19, funding has been received from the Police and Crime Commissioner (£8,500) and Guildford Borough Council (£2,000). Applications will also be made to the Access to Justice Foundation.</p> <p>The aims of the Help Desk are to prevent homelessness and stabilise a client's housing situation, as well as improving access to legal assistance and maximising clients' household income. The service includes providing pre-court advice following self referral or referral from local authority or housing association; representation for initial Possession Claim on Line Hearings and additional adjourned hearings; emergency applications to suspend warrants of eviction; and post hearing follow-up work and referral to relevant agencies for continued support.</p> <p>Outcomes are stated to be the prevention of homelessness in 95% of cases and stabilising clients' tenancy situations. The Group notes that there is an increasing demand for the service year on year and that the Homeslessness Reduction Act provides the Council with a duty to help anyone at risk of homelessness within 56 days.</p>
1.8 Cost breakdown:	<p>The total funding request for 2019/20 is £245,900, comprising:</p> <p>A request for £224,400 to continue the core service for which there is an increasing demand;</p> <p>A request for £11,500 to continue the financial capability project which maintains the same level of support as 2017/18; and</p> <p>A request for £10,000 to support the Guildford Court Help Desk Project.</p>
1.9 Community Benefit	<p>From 1 April to 30 July 2018 Citizens Advice Woking assisted 2,019 clients with 5,199 different issues creating an income gain of £474,675. The numbers of clients being helped is around 120 and</p>

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130 per week. Examples of the community benefit are set out below.

Financial gain

The Centre aims to record as many outcomes as possible against a client's enquiry and one of these will be whether the advice resulted in them making a financial gain. This could be due to being awarded a benefit they did not know they were entitled to, a compensation following an employment dispute, or successfully suing a third party for a debt owed. The Group's data for 2017/18 shows an income gain of £1,427,189 for all the clients we helped during the year.

Debt

Clients struggle to cope with debt, which can cause stress, anxiety and relationship breakdown. Helping people to manage their debts and finances has a benefit. In 2017/18 £374,720 of debt was written off. Between 1st April and 30th July 2018 £92,493 of debt was written off.

Threatened Homelessness

The aim of the County Court Help Desk is helping clients avoid becoming homeless, stated to be achieved in 95% of cases. Clients are then helped to ensure they continue to live in their homes and not have to return to Court again. The 5% who do leave their homes are helped by the adviser who asks the Court to allow as long as possible for finding alternative accommodation. Clients also liaise with Housing Options.

Energy Best Deal

Clients are asked whether they have checked the cost of their energy provider and whether they should switch to another supplier. Usually this will reduce the amount being paid, with an average income gain of £163 for clients who changed supplier.

Research and Campaigns

The information gathered from clients allows the Centre to watch for trends, spot cases of unfair practice, contribute to discussions, and influence change in the community. In 2017/18 the Group raised a total of 273 evidence forms highlighting concerns in 15 different areas, with welfare benefit problems being the biggest area of concern. With Universal Credit being rolled out in Woking in October 2018 the Centre anticipates there will be issues with how clients make and sustain their claims.

Concerns have been raised about local issues, particularly in housing cases where there is a shortage of suitable affordable accommodation for low income families. Issues concerning the impact of Brexit have also been raised on behalf of clients.

Social media, in particular Twitter, is used to let the wider community know about any campaigns running which is an obvious benefit to others who may not have even accessed the service.

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2.0 Financial Background	
2.1 Budget	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £150,000 in the bank. Citizens Advice Woking holds money on behalf of the Wenceslas Project, which have been donated by Woking Lions to be used specifically for clients requiring assistance with their fuel bills.</p> <p>The Group has submitted a budget for 2019/20 which shows an anticipated income of £328,990 against an anticipated expenditure of £326,894, resulting in an anticipated surplus of £2,096.</p> <p>Anticipated income includes WBC Grant (£224,400), Projects - Energy Best Deal / Healthwatch / Local Assistance Scheme (£33,000), Court Help Desk (£30,000), Other and Event Income (£19,000), Financial Capability (£11,500), and Donations (£9,000). Items of expenditure include Payroll (£250,806) and Computer Expenses (£18,360).</p>
2.2 Accounts	<p>The Group has submitted accounts for 2017/18 which show an income of £475,958 (£490,457 in 2016/17) against expenditure of £416,089 (£449,085 in 2016/17), resulting in a surplus of £59,869 (a surplus of £41,372 in 2016/17). The sum of £159,481 was carried forward at the end of the 2017/18 year.</p>
2.3 Support over the past five years	<p>2018/19 – £262,500 2017/18 – £262,500 2016/17 – £262,500 2015/16 – £257,986 2014/15 – £257,986</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>* Mandatory rate relief, discretionary rate relief, concessionary rent, ten voluntary sector car parking spaces.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes*</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Yes</p>

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3.2 Consultee Comments

Sylvie Marshall, Community Development Manager

The main objectives for the organisation are to provide free independent, impartial, confidential advice and support to the community.

During the previous year the organisation provided support and advice to 6,500 individuals, both new and ongoing clients, with a variety of issues often complex in nature. This shows a significant decrease, of around 30% in the number of individuals attending the organisation for support and advice from the previous year, the organisation changed its reporting systems during the year which may account for a small percentage of the decrease. Client support for Welfare Benefits and Debt issues have increased by 1% and 2% respectively whilst Relationship and Family, Housing and Employment issues have each decreased between 1% and 3% over the year.

	<i>New Clients</i>	<i>Ongoing Clients</i>	<i>Total Clients</i>	<i>Face to face interactions</i>	<i>Telephone interaction</i>	<i>Email interaction</i>	<i>Webchat interaction</i>
2019-20 application data	5,411	1,089	6,500	51%	23%	18%	8%
2018-19 application data	7,577	Data not provided	7,577 (excludes ongoing clients)	45%	35%	15%	10%
2017-18 application data	Data split not available	Data split not available	11,276	47%	32%	21%	Combined with email data
2016-20 application data	Data split not available	Data split not available	11,074	52%	34%	N/A	N/A

The organisation has requested an uplift of 2% in order to open another outreach drop-in centre and to increase the home visiting service, these services have already commenced. In addition, the organisation holds £102,232 in funds, with an additional £40,000 designated to support the Court Help Desk, the opening of additional outreach service and home visiting service as well as a digital inclusion project.

The Council is aware of the benefits provided by the Group to the wider community and recognise the importance of having an independent advice service within the Borough, however, the organisation has significant reserves and has already identified from their own budget, the financial support required to open a further outreach, increase the home visiting service and the £10,000 requested to support the County Court Desk, therefore the recommendation is that a grant of £180,000 be awarded for core services. The County Court Desk service is very beneficial to some of our most vulnerable community members and therefore it is recommended that we match the level of grant award provided by Guildford BC with a grant award of £2,000.

Councillor Hilary Addison

I fully support the application for funding by Citizens Advice Woking and the

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request for an increase of 2% on last year's amount on the basis that this organisations work is both vital and increasing. The CAW has not had an increase in the grant for the last five years.

CAW provides an invaluable service to the residents of the Borough. It is available to everyone, is free, confidential and impartial. Each week between 120 and 130 clients visit the town centre office and in addition there are advice sessions held at The Vyne in Knaphill, the Trinity Methodist Church in the town centre and the new advice session at the Mascot Hub in Sheerwater. There is also a home visiting service which has recently been expanded which helps those clients who are unable to travel to the different locations on offer. There is a team of fully trained Volunteers who are fully committed to helping people. We are also fortunate in Woking that there is a team of paid staff who are specialists in their field. If this was not available clients would receive no second tier advice due to legal aid cuts.

Citizens Advice is a trusted brand and has existed in the Borough since 1939. If it is unable to deliver this level of service clients could find themselves denied access to advice and their situation could deteriorate. They will need to be more reliant on other agencies, if that help is available, and ultimately the Council. The financial gain shown for clients in 2017 – 2018 far outweighs the level of the Grant and the cost per client of £36 is money well spent. There is an aging population in Woking and an increase in vulnerable clients who need additional support due to cuts in other areas who need the support provided by CAW. With the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act and Universal Credit in October there will be more people than ever in need of assistance. CAW has plans to expand the service it provides and will therefore need the support of Council funding for this to happen.

3.3 Assessment

Citizens Advice Woking seeks to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. The Centre holds the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) quality mark at General Help with Casework in Welfare Benefits and Debt, and Specialist level in Housing. Core activities are 'individual' focused and aim to deliver advice and support to the community of Woking. The Centre also operates the successful Financial Capability Project, funded primarily by Woking Borough Council, a Court helpdesk and several other new outreach services. A Healthwatch project is also being undertaken.

Citizens Advice Woking has applied to increase the Council's support in the coming year to cover the costs of the core service, the financial capability project and the service charge of the offices in Provincial House. The amount requested for the core service totals £224,400 (£220,000 awarded in 2017/18) and the request for the Financial Capability service remains at the same level (£11,500 awarded in 2017/18). In addition, the Council covers the Service Charge for the Group's accommodation at Provincial House (circa £32,000).

The amount requested represents an increase in the funding for the core service of £4,400. The applicant has advised that this increase is to reflect the growing demand for case support as stated by the Centre in its application. The funding for the financial capability project remains unchanged and the service charge element is reviewed annually by the Council.

The Group is also requesting the sum of £10,000 from the Community Support Scheme towards its Guildford County Court Helpdesk scheme,

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which provides support to vulnerable people facing homelessness.

Citizens Advice Woking provides a nationally recognised service which delivers advice on whatever subject the client asks about, along with ongoing assistance to those who have nowhere else to turn to. The majority of clients require ongoing support and for complicated issues this can be for several months. Examples include:

- A client may have a vulnerability due to their physical or mental health which makes it more difficult for them to manage their affairs;
- A client may have an addiction which prevents them from coping with everyday tasks;
- English may not be the client's first language so understanding systems and procedures, whether spoken or written is very difficult;
- Relationships end which could be because a partner leaves or dies. Or there could be domestic violence or illness which changes the basis of a relationship;
- Care packages can be reduced or removed entirely so support previously relied upon disappears but it does not mean a client suddenly knows how to cope on a daily basis.

Clients in the above scenarios are more at risk of losing their homes, jobs and incurring debt which can affect their health and relationships. The Group's aim is to ensure these problems do not get out of control and the client is supported to stabilise their situation, aiming to reduce their reliance on statutory agencies.

Citizens Advice Woking states that it is working on potential projects for funding in the future:

- a Surrey wide citizens advice project with the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner to report hate crimes across the County
- Helping people in fuel poverty with all aspects of their energy use, being explores with Surrey Action and National Energy Action.
- The introduction of smart metres which may be eligible for some funding from National Energy Action.

Fundraising remains a challenge and donations are encouraged. The Group aims to fundraise and receive donations of at least 10% of core funding. During 2017/18 approximately £30,000 was raised.

Taking into account the consultee comments set out in this report, which note that the user numbers have reduced over the past year and that there are a high level of reserves, it is recommended that the level of support towards core costs be reduced from £220,000 to £180,000 for 2019/20. It should additionally be noted that the annual accounts set out a surplus of £59,869 for the 2017/18 financial year and £41,372 for the 2016/17 financial year.

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REPORT ENDS