

CITIZENS ADVICE WOKING – BUSINESS PLAN

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 13 December 2018, the Executive received the applications for financial assistance from local voluntary and charitable organisations as part of the Community Support Scheme 2019/20. One of the applications received was from Citizens Advice Woking and an extract from the minutes of the meeting is set out below:

“13. CITIZENS ADVICE WOKING - APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE EXE18-086

The Executive received a report which recommended that a significant level of support be continued for Citizens Advice Woking during the 2019/20 financial year, equating to £225,500, which was stated to be in addition to estimated rent for the office at Provincial House (£34,000), car park spaces (£18,000) and rate relief (£3,500). Woking Borough Council was stated to provide the highest amount of funding for Citizens Advice in Surrey, with Guildford approving a level equating to around half of Woking's contribution and Waverley agreeing a third. The Leader reported that the recommendation represented a reduction of £38,000 due to the user numbers reducing by 30% over the past year and the level of reserves held by the organisation.

Members of the Executive noted the excellent work undertaken by Citizens Advice Woking, along with the ongoing pressure on local authority budgets, the need for identifying savings, and improving its partnership working with the Council.

Councillor Lyons advised the Executive that the Centre was greatly concerned by the reduction proposed and that the resulting effects could include reducing the opening hours of the Town Centre office, including late night opening hours on Tuesdays; and the possible closure of the Guildford County Court Desk Helpdesk, all of which could require the Council to deal with emergency cases whilst the Centre was closed. Councillor Lyons reported that the funding reduction of £38,000 could require the Centre to lose skilled specialist staff from its payroll and asked for the grant to be approved as applied for.

The Leader summarised the views expressed and stated that Citizens Advice Woking should look to carry out more fundraising, which was undertaken on a larger scale by the other Centres in the County, and develop its working relationship with the Borough Council. Accordingly, it was agreed that the recommendation as set out in the report should be approved. The Leader further proposed that Citizens Advice Woking should be asked to prepare a business plan setting out how it would work more effectively with the Council. The Business Plan was to take into account the comments made by the Executive regarding improved partnership working with the Council and fundraising, and was to be submitted to the Council by Monday, 21 January 2019. The Business Plan would then be received by the Executive at its meeting on 7 February 2019.

The Leader proposed that Citizens Advice Woking should also be requested to submit an update report to the Council setting out its progress against the agreed Business Plan. The Executive would look to receive the update report at its meeting on 28 March 2018 and determine whether there was justification towards awarding the remaining £38,000 of grant funding. In order to ensure the Executive would be in a position to do so, it was recommended that the sum of £38,000 should be ringfenced in the Community Fund.

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In addition, the Leader stated that a briefing would be arranged for Citizens Advice Woking on the objectives of the Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme and the benefits it would bring about for local residents.

Finally it was agreed that, in view of the level of support provided, Citizens Advice Woking would in future years be asked to complete the Council's application form with basic information and attach a comprehensive annual business plan setting out its priorities and plans for the year ahead.

RESOLVED

- That (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;
- (iv) the Council continues to cover the service charge for the accommodation at Provincial House, which for 2019/20 will be circa £32,000;
- (v) Citizens Advice Woking be asked to submit a Business Plan to the Council setting out how it would work more effectively with the Council for consideration at the Executive on 7 February 2019, along with an update on progress against the Business Plan for receipt by the Executive at its meeting on 28 March 2019;
- (vi) the sum of £38,000 be ringfenced in the Community Fund until the Executive has determined whether the extra funding should be awarded to Citizens Advice Woking for the 2019/20 financial year;
- (vii) for future applications to the Community Support Scheme, Citizens Advice Woking be requested to complete the basic information within the Council's application form and attach an annual Business Plan setting out its priorities and plans for the year ahead.

Reason: To enable the organisation to provide its services to the residents of Woking."

On 18 January 2019, Citizens Advice Woking submitted its agreed Business and Development Plan 2018-21, which is attached to this report. In addition, the Organisation has prepared an Action Plan Supplement, as requested by the Executive, which has been produced to expand the Business Plan following the feedback received from the Executive in December 2018, which is also attached.

The Action Plan Supplement contains two appendices setting out firstly the proposed activities, along with who they should be carried out by and appropriate timescales; and secondly supporting data collated over a period of 17 working days setting out the Group's liaison with sections of the Council such as Housing Options, Housing Benefit and Council Tax.

If the action plan is approved by the Executive, Citizens Advice Woking has been requested to provide an update against the Business Plan which would be received by the Executive at its meeting on 28 March 2019, enabling the Executive to determine whether the additional ringfenced sum of £38,000 should be awarded towards the core costs of the Organisation for the 2019/20 financial year.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

the action plan be approved.

Reasons for Decision

Reason: To further strengthen relationships between Citizens Advice Woking and Woking Borough Council.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
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