

CITIZENS ADVICE WOKING – BUSINESS PLAN UPDATE

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. An annual application was received from Citizens Advice Woking and the relevant resolution from the meeting is set out below:

“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.”

Following minute item (v), the Executive received Citizens Advice Woking’s Business and Development Plan 2018-21 at its meeting on 7 February 2019, along with an Action Plan Supplement which had been prepared to expand the Business Plan following the feedback received from the Executive in December 2018. An extract from the minutes of the Executive held on 7 February 2019 is set out below:

“13. Citizens Advice Woking – Business Plan EXE19-009

Following consideration of an application for financial assistance from Citizens Advice Woking at the Executive on 13 December 2018, the Executive agreed that Citizens Advice Woking be asked to prepare a Business Plan setting out how it would work more effectively with the Council. The Leader drew attention to an updated and more detailed action plan which had been tabled at the meeting.

Citizens Advice Woking – Business Plan Update

The Leader advised that, given the significant level of support provided by the Council to Citizens Advice Woking, there was a need for oversight in order to ensure that the Council was achieving value for money. The Leader suggested that such oversight could be achieved by an annual briefing to Members from Citizens Advice Woking or could be undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Barker commented that this would not be appropriate.

In order to allow time for Citizens Advice Woking to work with the Council in a collaborative way, the Leader stated that an update against the Business Plan would be received by the Executive at its meeting on 12 September 2019, and not at the March Executive as originally planned.

RESOLVED

That the action plan be approved.”

In August 2019, Citizens Advice Woking provided the Council with an update on its progress against the approved Action Plan which is attached as Appendix 1.

The Action Plan contains five sections: A – Advice Services; B – Research & Campaigns; C – Promoting Citizens Advice Woking in the Community; D – Resources Strategy (Funding / People / Premises, Equipment and ICT); and E – Contingency Measures. Each section lists the agreed activities to be undertaken by the Organisation as part of its Business and Development Plan 2018-2021, along with updates setting out the position at July 2019 and outstanding work currently being progressed.

As part of the provision of Advice Services, an objective is to roll out and establish the Universal Credit Support Help to Claim (HTC) Service, for which a new HTC Advisor has been recruited and is reported to have made an excellent start with the service. All volunteers have completed training on Universal Credit and Citizens Advice Woking is part of the Community Partnership team operated by Woking Job Centre Plus, attending its quarterly meetings. In addition, work is being undertaken to consider how the numbers of calls answered by the Adviceline can be increased in light of the availability of volunteers, with the aim of recruiting and training twelve volunteers to become Advisors.

In particular, note should be taken of section D – Resources Strategy which contains the objective of strengthening the partnership with Woking Borough Council as the main funder of Citizens Advice Woking. The section sets out the substantive work taking place with the Council since the meeting of the Executive held on 7 February 2019 and includes reference to:

- meetings held with Woking Borough Councillors, including the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July;
- joint working discussions taking place between the Housing Caseworker and New Vision Homes;
- a presentation from the Leader of the Council which provided the Organisation’s staff, trustees and volunteers with information on the Council’s strategic priorities including the Sheerwater Regeneration Project;
- quarterly meetings being held between the Organisation’s Chief Executive, the Council’s Housing Director and the Health and Wellbeing Manager;
- a fundraising Legal Walk having been held and raising £4,000 with the next event to be decided; and
- an update on applications for funding to external agencies.

The sum of £38,000 remains ringfenced in the Community Fund for the work of Citizens Advice Woking in the current financial year, as agreed by the Executive on 13 December 2018, pending the Executive receiving the attached update from Citizens Advice Woking and being satisfied with the progress contained within.

Citizens Advice Woking – Business Plan Update

Over the last 6 months, working arrangements between the Council and Citizens Advice Woking (CAW) have improved greatly. As well as regular meetings between CAW's Chief Executive, the Council's Housing Director and the Health and Wellbeing Manager, there have been topic-based meetings to improve processes and practices. The Council also gave a comprehensive presentation on the Sheerwater Regeneration Project to the CAW, which was extremely well-attended by CAW's paid-staff and volunteers.

It is therefore recommended that the sum of £38,000 should be released to CAW.

Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) the update be noted; and
- (ii) the sum of £38,000 ringfenced in the Community Fund for Citizens Advice Woking towards its work during the 2019/20 financial year be released.

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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