

MEETING: 25/07/2019

Ref: 14997

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Advice and Support

North Kensington Law Centre

Adv: Sandra Jones

Amount requested: £100,000

Base: Kensington & Chelsea

Benefit: Kensington & Chelsea

Amount recommended: £100,000

The Applicant

North Kensington Law Centre (NKLC) was established in 1970 as the first Law Centre in the country with the aim of providing free/affordable independent legal advice, principally for residents of North Kensington, although it can see people from all parts of London. It is located in Goldbourne Ward, ranked the second most deprived in London on the 2010 Indices of Deprivation.

NKLC, a charity, currently has two legal aid contracts, one covering housing, the other immigration. It also provides legal advice on welfare benefits and employment, areas of law that fall outside legal aid (since April 2013). All individuals attending NKLC will receive basic advice and information but where this is in areas of law that fall outside its specific expertise, the individual will be referred to other agencies. It also works with other advice agencies in the borough in order to share good practice and resources and avoid unnecessary duplication.

The Application

The application is for two years' continuation funding for NKLC's Triage Service, a project you initially funded for three years. Before the project, the law centre was only able to help those people that fall within the areas where it already has funding or legal aid contracts. This meant that they had to turn down at least 40 potential clients, and your funding has allowed the law centre to assess, signpost and engage with many more people and meet an increased demand. Funding will cover a full time Triage Co-ordinator and related costs.

The Recommendation

As with many other independent advice centres NKLC has been through a challenging period due to loss of income from legal aid and several grant sources coming to an end. Your previous funding has enabled the organisation to provide an effective triage service which has meant that they have been able to meet the growing demand for their services. Prior to the original grant NKLC triaged 400 clients, compared to 2018 when they triaged 3,000 people. The request closely fits with your area of interest around Advice and Support. The grant was extended beyond the three years due to staff changes.

£100,000 over two further and final years (2 x £50,000) for a full time Triage Co-ordinator and associated running costs.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
10/04/2014	£150,000 over three years (3 x £50,000) towards the salary of a Triage Co-ordinator and associated running costs of establishing a triage system within the law centre.
12/01/2012	Declined as did not fully meet the funding priorities

Background and detail of proposal

As well as an overall increased number of people seeking advice, and in particular with the introduction of Universal Credit and the fire at Grenfell Tower, NKLC is seeing more people facing multiple problems and its caseloads are increasingly complex. All too often with welfare benefits, housing and employment cases, there is a link with depression and mental health. Without assistance and representation these problems are not resolved and so much of the emphasis of NKLC's work has become advocacy based. The triage service enables each person's individual needs to be assessed and to then be presented with a package of options – these may include referral to other agencies; identifying pro bono support; providing access to self-help materials; as well as offering legal support and in-house representation. Critical to the success of this model is the recruitment of volunteers who are then trained in the triage approach. NKLC has a good track record in recruiting volunteers with a legal background. The volunteers provide vital 'hand-holding', meaning that when someone is referred to another agency, for example, the volunteer will broker that to ensure the client does not become 'lost'.

The project is based on an open access service to all visitors to NKLC between 10-13.00 and 14-17.00. each person is seen for approximately 20 minutes by two triage volunteers supervised by the Triage Co-Ordinator. Each person is assessed and immediately informed if their case will be handled by NKLC or referred to another service. If referred, the law centre broker an initial contact.

Financial information

Income has decreased for 2020 as two grant sources will be ceasing. The first is a Legal Education Foundation grant for their trainee solicitor who is being funded under the Justice First Fellowship (£38,191) and the second is Tudor Trust grant for £40,000. To mitigate this and build reserves the organisation has a three pronged strategy; to build up their legal aid casework concentrating on litigation cases where they can win interpartes costs; to reduce costs by paring down their admin team ; finally to launch a fundraising initiative.

Year end as at 31 March	2018 Audited Accounts £	2019 Draft Audited Accounts £	2020 Forecast £
Income & expenditure:			
Income	441,252	383,766	416,277
- % of Income confirmed as at 20/01/2019	n/a	n/a	91%
Expenditure	(418,981)	(380,423)	(403,094)
Total surplus/(deficit)	22,271	3,343	13,183
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	27,361	0	-
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(5,090)	3,343	13,183
	22,271	3,343	13,183
Cost of Raising Funds	0	0	0
- % of Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
unrestricted expenditure	297,851	201,145	294,524
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	51,604	54,936	68,119
No of months of unrestricted expenditure	2.1	3.3	2.8
Reserves policy target	74,463	50,286	73,631
No of months of total expenditure	3.0	3.0	3.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	(22,859)	4,650	(5,512)