

MEETING 30/10/2019

Ref: 15608

**ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Advice and Support****Refugee Action****Adv: Natalie Jordan****Amount requested: £118,719****Base: Westminster****Benefit: London-wide****Amount recommended: £119,000****The Applicant**

Established in 1981, Refugee Action (RA) is one of the leading national charities working with refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and their families and dependants. Through advice services, complex casework, campaigning and the provision of capacity-building support to of refugee support organisations across the UK, RA provides relief of need, hardship and distress, particularly for those going through the asylum process who face poverty, destitution and homelessness.

**The Application**

Continuation funding is sought for a further two years of the Asylum Crisis London (ACL) project. ACL supports London-based asylum seekers who are destitute (or at risk of destitution) through advice and casework support, enabling them to understand and engage effectively with their claim and the asylum process, avoiding misinformation, destitution and homelessness. This is delivered by two project co-ordinators, one of whom would be supported by this grant request, supported by trained volunteers.

**The Recommendation**

ACL is a strong fit for your Advice and Support priority, reaching vulnerable people with multiple and complex needs including mental and physical health, domestic violence survivors and lone parents. The project also closely aligns with your values of Early Action, aiming to reach as many as possible before crisis point, particularly through outreach work and relationships with other frontline organisations, and Enabling Voice and Representation. The latter is achieved both through building skills and understanding so that service users can make their own decisions, and through cases from the project contributing to a body of evidence used in RA's campaigning and policy work. Funding is recommended:

**£119,000 over a further and final two years (£59,000; £60,000) towards the cost of a 4 days per week Project Co-ordinator, volunteer costs, a contribution to core costs and direct management, and associated running costs.**

**Funding History**

Meeting Date	Decision
10/01/2017	£165,000 over three years (£54,900; £54,700; £55,400) towards the costs of 4 days per week Project Co-ordinator; 1 day per week Deputy Manager; volunteer costs for 10 volunteers; and associated running costs.

**Background and detail of proposal**

RA has exceeded its targets in provision of support in the first two years of the project, which is thought to be a result of the sheer level of need and effective triaging identifying those who are eligible for support. Growing need has been particularly observed amongst those with mental health problems since the

decreasing presence of relevant services. Since January 2016, the project has responded to urgent needs of over 450 vulnerable people at the point of crisis.

Support is led by Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC)-regulated caseworkers, and all volunteers undergo internal training. As well as accepting self-referrals and referrals from partners, ACL provides outreach work, ensuring reach to people who are lost in the system but would otherwise not know they can access support with their claim or appeal of a decision. Individuals are assessed and needs identified and, where necessary, are supported with more in-depth casework, as well as support with other needs including immediate housing issues.

Challenges to asylum support refusals are assisted by issuing pre-action protocols, instructing partner solicitors to judicially review decisions and engaging partner organisations through stakeholder referrals and outreach advice sessions. Currently, 60% of support refusals are turned over on appeal.

### Financial Information

RA's reserves policy changed in 2019, from basing it on unrestricted expenditure only, to one where total expenditure is used in 2019 and 2020, hence the variation shown in the table below.

RA plans deficits for 2019 to 2022 in its three-year strategy, supported by a designated fund of £708,000 which has been allocated towards free reserves resulting in high levels of unrestricted reserves. The designated fund is forecast to be fully spent by the end of 2022, free reserves remaining within policy, as these funds are invested into fundraising and frontline services, continuing to build its sustainability having lost a significant source of funding from the Home Office between 2014 and 2017.

Year end as at 31st March	2018 Signed Accounts £	2019 Draft Accounts £	2020 Budget £
<b>Income &amp; expenditure:</b>			
Income	6,499,000	7,260,000	6,788,000
- % of income confirmed	N/A	100%	89%
Expenditure	(6,753,000)	(7,534,000)	(7,214,000)
Total surplus/(deficit)	(254,000)	(274,000)	(426,000)
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	169,000	440,000	0
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	(423,000)	(714,000)	(426,000)
	(254,000)	(274,000)	(426,000)
<b>Cost of Raising Funds</b>	822,000	820,000	866,000
- % of income	12.6%	11.3%	12.8%
Unrestricted/total expenditure	1,448,000	7,534,000	7,214,000
<b>Free unrestricted reserves:</b>			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	667,000	2,247,000	1,821,000
No of months of operating expenditure	5.53	3.58	3.03
Reserves policy target	525,000	1,300,000	1,300,000
No of months of operating expenditure	4.35	2.07	2.16
Free reserves over/(under) target	142,000	947,000	521,000