

MEETING: 30/01/2020

Ref: 15635

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Advice and Support**Disability Rights UK****Adv: Ciaran Rafferty****Base: Hackney****Benefit: London-wide****Amount requested: £90,000****(Revised request: £175,000)****Amount recommended: £175,000****The Applicant**

Disability Rights UK (DRUK), a charity, resulted from the merger in 2012 of three major disability charities – Disability Alliance Educational and Research Association, RADAR and the National Centre for Independent Living. Its key objectives are to increase disabled people's independence and control and to break the link between disability and poverty. Led by disabled people, it provides advice, information, policy and campaigning services to disabled people, including the 'Disability Rights Handbook' annually, an essential resource for any welfare benefits advisor. Its website reaches 250,000 Londoners each year (one million nationally) with a range of factsheets. Currently DRUK conducts, under contract, the ongoing independent evaluation of your Bridge to Work programme.

The Application

DRUK is seeking support for its London-wide offer of specialist information and advice for disabled people. The charity also plays a very important role in using the information and learning from its work to campaign for change and improvement to those systems which are inappropriate and/or provide obstacles to disabled people having the same rights as others. DRUK also provides the secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group on Disability and is therefore very well linked into central government, providing them with the knowledge of how to raise policy issues and being in a position to understand what's on the horizon.

The Recommendation

DRUK's work is shaped and led by disabled people themselves – people with direct experience of the issues – and is very well placed to provide accurate and appropriate advice and information. Its factsheets are update regularly and its advice line similarly is kept up to date. Initially the charity applied for three years' support as it was unsure that five-year funding could be considered. The annual sum requested was also very conservative and would require the charity to commit funds from its already meagre reserves. Following discussion with your officer it has subsequently revised its request and submitted a revised annual breakdown for five years (on file). A grant for this amount is recommended:

£175,000 over five years (5 x £35,000) towards the salaries, operating and management costs of the London element of the Independent Living Helpline and Members' Advice Line.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
16/07/2014	£80,000 over two years (2 x £40,000) towards a quarter of the total salary and related running costs of information and advice services, in order to benefit disabled Londoners.
20/10/2011	£45,000 for a third year's support towards a leadership development programme for young disabled people.

17/02/2011	£120,000 over three years (3 x £40,000) towards a disability benefits advice and information service, subject to a satisfactory financial assessment of the new charity due to be established in April 2011 through the unification of Disability Alliance, Radar and the National Centre for Independent Living.
20/01/2011	Application withdrawn.

Background and detail of proposal

Members will be very aware of the difficulties and disadvantages experienced by many disabled Londoners. Several recent studies have highlighted the disproportionately high rates of unemployment, for example, or in pay gaps for those in work, compared to non-disabled people. Equally, having to negotiate the myriad rules and processes surrounding the benefits and assistance that are available is not easy. DRUK's helpline and advice services have been essential to tackling many of these disadvantages and are regularly updated in both content and delivery so that they are as accessible as possible. The members' advice line is a significant resource for external agencies providing front line services – eg advice centres, law centres and other disability charities. Equally, the interaction between DRUK's advice service and policy work is very important as it helps gather credible evidence about disabled people's experiences.

Financial Information

Although the organisation's target level of free reserves is £320,000 it has fallen some way short of this. However it is slowly building its free reserves each year and this grant, if awarded, would assist with that as it reduces the need for some of the reserves to be used to support the project in question. The ability to build its free reserves is affected by the current need to pay £80,000 pa (until November 2021) to the Pension Protection Fund. The organisation is a very important one within the sector and its work with Government gives it some stability. It is also well managed and if circumstances require it to make some hard financial decisions in the future your officer is of the view that it would be fully prepared to do so. There is a small deficit forecast in restricted funds for next financial year which, if it materialises, may be covered by unrestricted reserves.

Year end as at 31 March	2019 Signed Accounts £	2020 Forecast £	2021 Budget £
Income & expenditure:			
Income	1,470,182	1,373,441	1,337,900
- % of Income confirmed as at 1/12/19	N/A	93%	78%
Expenditure	(1,450,260)	(1,347,133)	(1,305,215)
Total surplus/(deficit)	19,922	26,308	32,685
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	3,143	0	(2,726)
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	16,779	26,308	35,411
	19,922	26,308	32,685
Operating Expenditure (unrestricted)	771,577	737,866	720,639
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	24,527	50,835	83,520
No of months of operating expenditure	0.4	0.8	1.4
Reserves policy target	320,000	320,000	320,000
No of months of operating expenditure	5.0	5.2	5.3
Free reserves over/(under) target	(295,473)	(269,165)	(236,480)