

MEETING: 09/07/2015

Ref: 12621

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Reducing Poverty

Southwark Law Centre

Adv: Jenny Field

Amount requested: £157,636

Base: Southwark

Benefit: Southwark

Amount recommended: £158,000

The Charity

Southwark Law Centre (SLC) was established in 1976 to relieve poverty through the provision of legal advice, representation, education and research. It provides specialist legal advice and representation in the areas of discrimination, employment, housing, welfare rights and asylum and immigration law to those unable to afford legal services through the private sector.

The Application

Funding is requested towards the salary and related costs of SLC's Immigration Solicitor. Access to specialist immigration and asylum advice is often an essential precursor to accessing welfare benefits and other services. As well as self-referrals, SLC is well networked within the local voluntary and community sector, schools, hospitals and GP surgeries. It has established the Lewisham and Southwark Immigration Network which looks at the need for immigration advice in the two boroughs and works together to make best use of available resources. SLC's Immigration Solicitor is highly experienced in immigration law and practice.

The Recommendation

Through a previous partnership with Southwark CAB, the post has previously been partially supported through time-limited funding from LB Lewisham. This funding has since been redirected to focus solely on Lewisham benefit and has been awarded to a different provider. A high proportion of cases dealt with are from destitute asylum seekers who have grounds for challenging the refusal to protection. As a consequence, they are entitled to accommodation and welfare support whilst their claim is being heard. Good quality immigration advice therefore can play a vital role in reducing homelessness and food poverty. SLC is well-established and well-networked and a grant at the level requested is recommended.

£158,000 over three years (£51,000, £53,000, £54,000) towards the full-time salary and associated running costs of Southwark Law Centre's Immigration Solicitor.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
29/11/1995	£5,500 towards adaptations to provide wheelchair access to new premises and a disabled toilet.

Background and detail of proposal

SLC's Immigration Solicitor is responsible for supervising the centre's immigration casework, including the work of legal volunteers; providing legal support, training and advice to local voluntary, statutory and community organisations; and for identifying

issues arising from the casework that can contribute to the policy arena. The number of cases the solicitor deals with directly may seem relatively low (35 per annum). However, the Solicitor deals with the most complex cases. Clients may have been trafficked, have mental health problems or have experienced violence, abuse or torture. It takes time to build a relationship of trust in such cases and to uncover related, underlying issues that add to the complexity of the case.

Financial Information

Income in 2013/14 was unusually high due to an exceptional year for successfully resolved legal and representation cases which attract a commercial rate of fees. Income in 2014/15 returned to a level more in line with previous years (2012/13 £650,426; 2011/12 £629,529). Forecast expenditure for 2015/16 includes the salary of the Immigration solicitor, the subject of this application. If funding is approved today, therefore, it will help to reduce the deficit forecast for the year.

Of the £642,836 income forecast for 2015/16, 58% (£375,119) had been confirmed as at 16th June 2015. The remaining income what SLC estimates it will earn from legal fees (£293,401) plus bank interest and donations.

SLC's estimate of cost of generating funds is based on the amount of time the Director spends on making funding applications. A high proportion of SLC's income is derived from fees and contracts (77% in 2014/15).

Year end at 31 st March	2013/14 Audited Accounts £	2014/15 Outturn £	2015/16 Current Year Forecast £
Income and Expenditure			
Income	814,286	699,539	642,836
Expenditure	716,521	697,030	716,135
Unrestricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	94,786	2,509	(73,299)
Restricted Funds Surplus / (Deficit)	2,979	0	0
Total Surplus / (Deficit)	97,765	2,509	(73,299)
Surplus / (Deficit) as a % of turnover	12%	0.4%	11.4%
Cost of Generating funds (% of income)	2,630 (0.3%)	5,279 (0.8%)	2,625 (0.4%)
Free unrestricted reserves			
Free unrestricted reserves held at Year End	323,091	325,600	252,301
How many months' worth of expenditure	5.4	5.6	4.2
Reserves Policy target	358,261	348,515	358,068
How many months' worth of expenditure	6.0	6.0	6.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	(35,170)	(22,915)	(105,767)