

**ASSESSMENT CATEGORY - Reducing Poverty**

**Lambeth Law Centre**

**Adv: Rebecca Green**

**Amount requested: £135,150**

**Base: Lambeth**

**Benefit: Lambeth**

**Amount recommended: £133,500**

**The Charity**

Lambeth Law Centre (LLC) was founded in 1981 and provides direct legal advice, case work and representation, including at tribunal level, free of charge to over 2,500 people each year in the local community. Advice in housing, immigration, asylum, debt, welfare benefits and employment is delivered by a team of solicitors and caseworkers as well as generalist advice sessions with volunteer lawyers.

LLC offers its services through a variety of mediums including drop in sessions and email advice as well as through direct referrals from specialist agencies and partners. LLC is increasingly looking to create partnerships with other organisations in order to reach marginalised individuals, including work with West London Day Centre and New Horizon's Youth Centre. LLC is also the lead agency in the Lambeth Advice Network contract with the Local Authority to provide social welfare advice in Lambeth, and runs specialist training in employment and discrimination issues through the London Discrimination Unit project

**The Application**

LLC requests funding for a Welfare Benefits & Debt Project Case Worker and project costs for a new outreach project. LLC proposes to develop an integrated debt and welfare benefits advice service targeting hard to reach groups. This project will deliver outreach advice sessions in local charities and community groups, and also receive targeted referrals. In addition, these will be backed up by training sessions delivered both to frontline advice workers, community activists and client groups.

**The Recommendation**

The Law Centre has a good track record of delivery of specialist legal advice projects both independently and in partnership with other agencies, and this project to deliver outreach debt and benefits advice to vulnerable and socially excluded groups in the community fits well with your Reducing Poverty programme. The original request was amended downwards slightly in line with updated salary and budget calculations and this sum is now recommended:

**£133,500 over 3 years (£43,500; £44,500; £45,500) for a Welfare Benefit & Debt Project Case Worker post (31.5 h/p/w), and the associated project costs of a new debt and welfare benefits advice outreach project.**

**Funding History**

None

**Background and detail of proposal**

Lambeth is the 8th most deprived borough in London, and there are an estimated 87,000 people in poverty after housing costs. Property prices and rent rises have forced many out of the borough and made it far more difficult for lower paid people to

access secure housing and maintain a reasonable standard of living. 12% of the working age population are in receipt of out of work benefits, above the average for London, and 20% are in low-paid jobs.

LLC is looking for ways to ensure its service is accessible to those who need it most, including migrants, those with mental health difficulties, or long term health or disability issues. LLC have previously run sessions with a mixture of training, problem identifying and self-help and plan to build on this model. The proposed project will therefore include outreach advice sessions and referrals, casework at all levels, as well as delivering second tier training. LLC has already developed several relationships and partnerships with local charities, for example, Mosaic Clubhouse, Lambeth and Southward MIND, LAWRS and London Lighthouse. It will also look to establish links with other communities throughout the project.

### Financial Information

Whilst a decrease in Local Authority funding is expected in the coming years, the Law Centre plans to increasingly focus on Legal Aid income and Trust and Foundation fundraising, hence the increased level of income. The Cost of Raising Funds for 2017 and 2018 reflects the cost of the Director's time taken up by this activity and excludes the pro bono support from trustees and Law Centres Network (which is estimated to be worth approximately £1,250 p/a). The charity explained that reserves are presently above policy as a large percentage of cases are and remain Work in Progress, i.e. the value of work that should be paid were they to close all their cases on a particular date. It was noted that points were raised on the SRA audit of the Client Account. LLC have confirmed that procedures are being implemented to prevent re-occurrence and that there was no financial loss to any client.

Year end as at 31 March	2016 Audited Accounts £	2017 Forecast £	2018 Budget £
<b>Income &amp; expenditure:</b>			
Income	567,960	642,307	656,435
- % of Income confirmed	n/a	n/a	28%
Expenditure	(557,496)	(638,728)	(645,270)
Total surplus/(deficit)	10,464	3,579	11,165
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	(28,257)	0	(15,000)
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	38,721	3,579	26,165
	10,464	3,579	11,165
Cost of Raising Funds	0	2,156	3,246
- % of income	0.0%	0.3%	0.5%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	384,498	438,782	438,357
<b>Free unrestricted reserves:</b>			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	272,462	276,041	286,206
No of months of operating expenditure	8.5	7.5	7.8
Reserves policy target	96,125	109,695	109,589
No of months of operating expenditure	3.0	3.0	3.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	176,338	166,346	176,617