

MEETING: 14/11/2018

Ref: 14896

ASSESSMENT CATEGORY: Bridging Divides - Advice and Support

Camden Community Law Centre

Adv: Gilly Green

Base: Camden

Amount requested: £136,624

Benefit: Camden

Amount recommended: £136,700

The Applicant

Camden Community Law Centre is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee that opened in 1972 with a mission to make a positive impact to people's lives – particularly the most vulnerable and socially excluded. It does this by providing free and independent legal advice and representation in housing, employment, welfare benefits and immigration and asylum law matters to people in the LB Camden. Last year it helped 2,500 people and opened 760 new legal cases.

The Application

The application is to increase the capacity of the Welfare Benefits team through the appointment of a caseworker to provide tribunal representation where there is a legal basis for an appeal. Over the last couple of years, the Centre has seen certain groups of people disproportionately affected by welfare reform. This includes disabled people, those with long term health conditions and single parents. The rollout of Universal Credit has commenced and many people are facing reduced income. Applications for Personal Independence Payments are regularly refused by DWP leading to between 80-90% requests for mandatory reconsideration. Additionally, long delays in receiving benefits are creating hardships and the benefit cap on rental incomes is causing significant problems for low income families. There is a well demonstrated need for additional capacity to help people prepare appeals where they will represent themselves, or to represent those who need additional support.

The Recommendation

Camden Community Law Centre is an important player in the borough for the provision of legal advice and support. Housed in the same building as the Citizen's Advice Bureau, it has an efficient referral service between the two organisations. It also has a strategic policy remit, taking its frontline casework experience into relevant local and at times national, fora to influence policy change. CCLC has a proven track record in delivering high quality, specialist legal advice in housing, benefits and immigration – and regularly achieves over 90% success rate in its benefit appeals. The proposed work will meet your criteria of increasing the provision of legal services to people in need. Funding is recommended:

£136,700 over 3 years (£46,000, £45,100; £45,600) to meet the salary and on-costs of a Welfare Rights Representation caseworker. The second year of funding is conditional upon Trustees adopting an appropriate reserves policy.

Funding History

Meeting Date	Decision
09/07/2015	Application withdrawn
09/09/2010	Application declined as it did not meet the priorities at that time.

Background and detail of proposal

The context of welfare reform has had a significant impact on advice and legal services. The introduction of Universal Credit – to date in London only for single people but due to be rolled out for everyone from November 2018 – has caused considerable difficulties and delays for claimants, resulting in increased debt. Whilst CCLC's use of volunteers for some aspects of case preparation is helpful, there is a clear need for an experienced and trained staff member for representation work. It is expected the worker will represent approximately 100 people a year. The organisation is well networked and recognises that partnership working can often achieve more – it is an active member of the Camden Advice Forum. The organisation is currently housed in a LB Camden owned property, the lease of which expires in 2020, so it is actively seeking alternative premises, most probably along with the CAB. The part time CEO is also the CEO at Hackney Law Centre and manages his time efficiently between the two centres. The organisation has appropriate accreditation to carry out its work and is inspected every year.

Financial Information

CCLC is funded through a mix of grants and donations including a recurring grant from LB Camden for its advice work and earned income with contracts from the Legal Aid Agency. It has recently secured 6 new Legal Aid contracts for different areas of work but changes to the way payments are made means these charges are paid in arrears. This has meant managing cash flows carefully. The contract from LB Camden is up for renewal in 2020 and brings with it uncertainty, but the organisation feels reasonably confident that it will secure funding beyond 2020. CCLC has seen a decrease in income in 17/18 due to a gap in staffing resulting in a net drop in Legal Aid income and ended the year in deficit. It is predicting a further decrease in 18/19. The trustees do not have a stated reserves policy but aim to maintain at least 6 months running costs in reserves and this is currently achieved.

Year end as at 31 March			
	2017 Examined Accounts £	2018 Draft Accounts £	2019 Budget £
Income & expenditure:			
Income	519,599	461,805	429,546
- % of Income confirmed as at 1/10/18	n/a	n/a	43%
Expenditure	(425,758)	(505,618)	(459,894)
Total surplus/(deficit)	93,841	(43,813)	(30,348)
Split between:			
- Restricted surplus/(deficit)	18,489	(19,659)	0
- Unrestricted surplus/(deficit)	75,352	(24,154)	(30,348)
	93,841	(43,813)	(30,348)
Cost of Raising Funds	0	0	0
- % of Income	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Operating expenditure (unrestricted funds)	261,306	321,360	292,035
Free unrestricted reserves:			
Free unrestricted reserves held at year end	221,193	200,317	169,969
No of months of operating expenditure	10.2	7.5	7.0
Reserves policy target	130,653	160,680	146,017
No of months of operating expenditure	6.0	6.0	6.0
Free reserves over/(under) target	90,540	39,637	23,952