

Equality Impact Assessment: Proposal for removal of funding for Citizens Advice Woking 2024/2025

Officer responsible for completing EIA: Funding Officer	Manager responsible for EIA: Louise Strongitharm
Strategic Director responsible for EIA: Louise Strongitharm	Date last updated: 29 February 2024

1. Introduction

This Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) seeks to identify impacts and effect of this proposal with the aim of assessing whether it would have a disparate impact on persons with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. As part of this assessment, consideration will be given to ways in which any such impact can be avoided or mitigated, any negative impacts arising from this proposal will be assessed and where this could be reduced in their impact this will be noted in the attached action plan. The Council also recognises that it may not completely remove all negative impacts.

The purpose is to provide impartial information to assist in the decision-making process and inform rather than determine policy. The objective is not to make the decision but to assist decision makers through the provision of relevant information.

The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy which has resulted in unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing and high values of irrecoverable loans.

To address these severe financial challenges the Council must make significant saving alongside taking steps to 'live within its means' in the future.

Widespread reductions and changes to public-facing services, alongside reducing management and internal costs, have been set out in the [Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy](#).

This Equality Impact Assessment covers the exercising of the break clause in the Service Level Agreement and removal of £265,750 grant funding to the Citizens Advice Woking (CAW) as part of the Council's withdrawal of all discretionary community grants from 2024/25. Funding from Woking Borough Council (WBC) represented 51% of Citizens Advice Woking's total income in 2022/23 (including Household Support Funding). CAW does not pay rent to WBC for the use of their office space at Provincial House, which has a rateable value of £41,250 and is not included in the amount above.

Although the Council is no longer able to provide core funding to Citizen's Advice Woking, it has agreed the following support package for 2024/2025:

- £10,000 funding to provide the Court Desk Service from the Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- £24,500 funding for the Ukrainian Hub and Syrian and Afghan Refugee Support.
- £30,000 funding from UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support the transition to a new business model.

- £50,000 from the Council's proposed Hardship Fund for the delivery of a Hardship co-ordination package.
- To continue to allow CAW to use office space at Provincial House, which has a rateable value of £41,250.
- To continue to cover £69k for services charges.
- To provide up to £4,210 in discretionary business rates relief.

In relation to the Hardship co-ordination package, the full details are still being scoped, but high-level objectives are likely to include:

- Supporting volunteers from CAW to continue to provide advice services (related to debt, money management, employment etc) within their new business model.
- Working with partners and community groups to identify and map the range of hardship support services available across Woking, to produce a comprehensive directory.
- Delivering an "Advice First Aid" approach to upskill volunteers within faith and community groups to expand knowledge locally of the range of services that customers can be signposted to.
- Actively signposting clients to a range of providers of hardship support.
- Facilitating a network of hardship support providers across Woking, bringing together the variety of voluntary, community and faith organisations, and ensuring that information is shared and voluntary capacity maximised.
- Monitor the impacts of the increased Council tax and gaps in service provision, building community capacity where required.

CAW will identify a lead contact to oversee the delivery, but the package will be delivered by multiple staff and volunteers. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this package will be two-fold – supporting residents immediately with advice services whilst also strengthening the wider support offer in Woking so that it is sustainable and can continue to assist residents in future years.

2. Services which will no longer be delivered

The current Service Level Agreement requires Citizens Advice Woking (CAW) to:

- Provide Woking residents with free, confidential, impartial, and independent advice on all areas of social law, as specified on the Citizens Advice Woking website.
- Provide the County Court Help Desk service.
- Deliver the Financial Capacity Programme.

CAW received over 6,700 customer contacts during 2022/23. The Centre holds the Advice Quality Standard (AQS) quality mark at general help with casework in welfare benefits and debt, and specialist level in housing.

Further statistics provided by CAW for April 2023 and September 2023;

- 63% of clients helped, stating they were disabled or have a long-term health condition.
- 20% of all clients with disability or long-term health condition also having mental health illness.

It is recognised that a reduction in the Council's core funding will reduce the level of service provision that CAW can provide.

3. Engagement and consultation

The Council has carried out public engagement on all proposed savings to ensure a balanced budget for the 2024/25 financial year.

The **first phase of the engagement** took place in **summer 2023**. Residents and businesses had the opportunity to have their say on how to tackle the budget shortfall. [View the report on the Woking Community Forum website.](#)

The **second phase of the public engagement** took place between **2 October and 12 November**.

Residents and businesses had another opportunity to scrutinise the proposed savings and have their say.

This included a range of options for finding further budget savings, such as increasing Council Tax and making changes to the way services are delivered, which may mean reducing or withdrawing services, or indeed making revised charges or working with partner organisations. The outcome of this consultation will be reported to Council in January 2024, with a full Council decision on 8 February 2024. [View the consultation feedback.](#)

Specific stakeholder consultation took place with Citizens Advice Woking. Citizens Advice Woking responded to a specific stakeholder consultation survey and participated in meetings with the Leader of the Council, Chief Executive and Strategic Director for Communities. Citizens Advice Woking were also provided the opportunity to speak at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (mitigation to be included in action plan) This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
Gender	Men					x	39% of CAW clients are male, compared to 49.7% of Woking population. There will be no specific impacts for men.

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (mitigation to be included in action plan)
	Women				x		<p>61% of CAW clients are female, compared to 50.3% of Woking population. Therefore, the withdrawal of WBC funding is likely to negatively impact women to a greater extent if advice and support offered by CAW reduces.</p> <p>Mitigations: Facilitation of third sector organisations to see if they can work together to provide services traditionally supplied by CAW</p> <p>Meetings with CAW to discuss alternative operating models and provision of £30,000 UK Shared Prosperity Funding to enable them to transition to this model.</p> <p>Volunteer Woking Funding Officer to contact CAW to offer support to secure funding from alternative sources. A meeting with the National Lottery took place in January 2024 at the Woking Borough Council Offices. CAW attended this meeting.</p> <p>Signpost alternative sources of local and national advice on the Council's website. Continued partnership meetings with CAW and third sector providers in Woking, to monitor take up of services to vulnerable people.</p> <p>The following local organisations offer similar services.</p> <p>Age UK Surrey, Byfleet Citizens Advice, Byfleet United Charity CAP, Catalyst, Christchurch – Woking, Community fridges, MASCOT, Mindwords, The Shah Jahan Mosque, Relate, SHIFA, The Lighthouse and Welcome Church</p> <p>The following National organisations offer similar services too:</p> <p>Acas, Money Helper, Richmond Fellowship, Shelter</p> <p>The Council will fund CAW to provide a Hardship Co-ordination package – the details of which are outlined at the start of the EIA..</p>

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (mitigation to be included in action plan)
Gender reassignment						x	There is no client data available on gender reassignment. Therefore, it is assumed that there will be no specific impacts for this group.
Race	White					x	71% of CAW clients in 2022/23 were White, compared to 78.4% of Woking population. Impact will be across all ethnicities but no specific impact on this group. There are no specific services aimed at a particular ethnic group.
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups					x	No client data available. Impact will be across all ethnicities but no specific impact on this group.
	Asian/Asian British				x		17% of CAW clients in 2022/23 were Asian, compared to 14.2% of Woking population. Therefore, the impact on this group is likely to be higher. Mitigations as above.
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British				x		4% of CAW clients in 2022/23 were Black, compared to 1.8% of Woking population. Therefore, the impact on this group is likely to be higher. Mitigations as above
	Gypsies / travellers					x	No client data available. Impact will be across all ethnicities but assumed no specific impact on this group.
	Other ethnic group					x	No client data available. Impact will be across all ethnicities but assumed no specific impact on this group.
Disability	Physical				x		Stats provided by CAW for April 2023 and September 2023, 63% of CAW clients identified as disabled or having long-term health condition, compared to 14.2% of Woking population. There has been a 11% increase in clients with multiple health issues. 1 in 5 of all CAW clients with disability or long-term health condition also has mental health illness (equating to
	Sensory				x		
	Learning difficulties				x		

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated? (mitigation to be included in action plan)
	Mental health				x		12.6% of CAW clients). Therefore, the withdrawal of WBC funding is likely to negatively impact disabled residents to a greater extent. Support for organisations in Woking have been signposted to external resources i.e. Catalyst, National Mind and private organisations.
Sexual orientation	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					x	No client data available. Impact will be across all groups but assumed no specific impact on this group. Mitigations as above.
Age	Older people (50+)				x		Between April 2023 and September 2023, data showed that 23% of CAW clients are over the age of 65 years old, compared to 16.6% of Woking population. Therefore, the impact on older residents will be greater. Mitigations as above. However, this group is more likely to be digitally excluded. Therefore mitigation will include producing hard copy signposting information and making it available in the community (for example, through community meals, community centres, etc.)
	Younger people					x	There are no services aimed specifically at younger people so there will be no specific impact on this group.
Religion or belief	Faith groups					x	No client data available. There are no services aimed specifically at faith groups so there will be no specific impact on this group. Mitigation: WBC will facilitate better working arrangements/ signposting to faith organisations that can provide debt advice.

Pregnancy and maternity				x	No client data available. There are no services aimed specifically at this group so it is assumed there will be no specific impact.
Marriage and civil Partnership				x	No client data available. There are no services aimed specifically at this group so it is assumed there will be no specific impact.
Socio-economic background			x		No client data available. However, any reduction to benefits advice by CAW in response to funding cuts is likely to disproportionately impact those from more deprived groups. Mitigations as above.
Carers			x		No client data available. However as stated above a large number of users of the service have a disability or long-term health condition, as a result there could be a negative impact on carers. Mitigations as above.
Other identified groups	Immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers		x		This service is primarily intended to support the most vulnerable residents so it is likely that any reduction to support and advice is likely to disproportionately impact this group Mitigations as above. The funding for specific refugee groups will be allocated for the 24/25 financial year for specific projects.
	The homeless		x		This service is primarily intended to support the most vulnerable residents, so it is likely that any reduction to support and advice is likely to disproportionately impact this group. Mitigations as above.

Action plan

Actions identified from EIA	Target completion date	Responsible officer	Comments
WBC to provide CAW £30k of UK Shared Prosperity Funding to support CAW's transition to a new operational model which allow them to maintain some advice services within Woking.	31/03/2025	Strategic Director - Communities	Funding agreed by Woking Borough Council Executive on 18.01.2024. Funding to be provided for 2024/2025 financial year.
WBC to provide £50,000 from the Council's proposed Hardship Fund for the delivery of a Hardship co-ordination package	April 2024	Strategic Director - Communities	Funding due to be agreed by Council on 4 March 2024.
Facilitation of third sector organisations to see if they can work together to provide services traditionally supplied by CAW.	31/03/2024	CEX/ Strategic Director - Communities	WBC has facilitated a meeting between CAW and Church Groups to see how they can work together to provide holistic debt advice services across the Borough. Further meetings to be facilitated by WBC.
Meetings with CAW to discuss alternative operating models.	31/03/2025	CEX/Strategic Director - Communities	A number of meetings have already been held. These will continue through the next financial year to understand how the UK SPF is being applied.
Volunteer Woking Funding Officer to contact CAW to offer support to secure funding from alternative sources.	31/03/2024	Funding Officer	Contact has been made with CAW with offer of support. A National Lottery meeting was organised for organisations to attend at Woking borough Council. CAW attended the meeting.
Signpost alternative sources of local and national advice on the Council's website	31/03/2024	Improvement and Recovery Programme Co-ordinator	Map alternative services available. Marcoms to publish on Council website
Continued partnership meetings with CAW and third sector providers in Woking, to monitor take up of services to vulnerable people.	Meeting arrangements to be put in place by 31/03/24.	Strategic Director - Communities	

Sign off

LEGAL SERVICES: Completed	DATE: 8 January 2024
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: Completed	DATE: 22 January 2024
REVIEW PANEL MEMBER: Completed	DATE: 4 January 2024