



Organisation Name	Citizens Advice
Project Name	Training specialist benefits advisers
Funding Stream	Community Area Priorities / Health & Wellbeing
Total Cost of project	£5128
Amount of Match Funding	£0
Amount being applied for	£5128
Amount suggested	£5128

Project Summary

Our project is to upskill advisers with specialist benefits training. The objective is to continue to assist local people in Chesham and the surrounding villages with the most up to date, accurate and detailed welfare benefits advice. The benefits system is complex, ever changing and more clients are reliant on it since the outbreak of the pandemic.

We will use a combination of in-house training by our Training Manager and external online training courses to ensure our advisers continue to give excellent advice.

How does the project address local priorities?

Health and Wellbeing: With specialist training, our advisers can help local people to ensure they claim the income they are entitled to which can prevent further crises such as debt, eviction and homelessness and emotional distress.

How does the project align with the values, objectives and corporate priorities of Buckinghamshire Council?

Protecting the vulnerable: Often it is the most vulnerable people in our community who are reliant on welfare benefits. With specialist training, our advisers can help to ensure they claim the income they are entitled to.

How does the project achieve value for money?

People in the UK are already experiencing the financial impact of COVID-19. Nationally, six million have fallen behind on household bills. Locally, Buckinghamshire authority saw a 197% increase in jobseekers from April - August 2020. This equates to over 10,500 more people and many need welfare support. This is reflected in our own data where the demand for benefits advice in Chesham has almost doubled from the first to the second quarter of the year. People need advice with different aspects of welfare support.

Some have never claimed benefits before and need help to apply. Others are already in receipt and need guidance on how being furloughed affects their benefits. Others, such as those who are disabled, may need help to appeal a decision about the amount of benefit they receive.

While all of our advisers receive general benefits training, the pandemic has highlighted a need for specialist training to help local people with complex benefits issues. The funding is imperative in upskilling the advisers to provide guidance and support.

Community Board Coordinator comments

The process of accessing benefits whilst dealing with debt or financial insecurity is daunting and can be harmful to health. Residents in Chesham and the local villages who are struggling financially as a result of COVID (furloughed income, facing redundancy or out of work and need to apply for benefits) will have an opportunity to access specialist advice, guidance and support which can help to alleviate the stress financial situations can bring. Chiltern Citizen's Advice has researched external training courses and identified courses to build their advisers' specialist benefits knowledge.

The applicant will be required to agree to terms and conditions, which include a monitoring agreement, as discussed with the Community Board Coordinator before the fund will be formally awarded.