**Workers’ Meeting Minutes**

**Date:**  Tuesday 2nd February 2021

**Present:** Salim, Farrukh, Catherine, Kalpna, Vikki, Penny, Jamie, Christine, Shelley, Rosie, Malcolm, Judith, Raminder, Gillian, Annette, Mahtab, Vanita, Jim, Carmel, David, Solinda, Steph, Ardita, Roy, Rob, Peter, Sue, Jackie, Rita, Helen, Judeth, Ruth and Jonny.

Apologies received from Frank, Vicki and Gladys.

**Guest speaker:**

**Welcome and introductions:**

Catherine welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular Ardita who was attending for the first time. She also noted that Annette had recently been appointed as trainee ASS. Everyone was then asked to say a few words about their role.

**Chief Officer Update:**

Salim reported that the Board strategy day had been held at the end of January at which objectives and a new Bureau plan had been set. The goals were ambitious and the intention was to use unrestricted reserves. The Board were hoping to begin opening up the Bureau from 8 March, with a gradual build up as had happened last year. He noted that if volunteers wished to claim expenses for home working, they needed to provide some evidence of costs – a utility bill would be sufficient. Paid staff could claim a tax allowance. He was pursuing the possibility of vaccinations for Bureau workers with HCC. Salim reported that the Covid Winter Grant scheme was in being run centrally from Hatfield CA and there was a lot of demand. The DWP Kickstart Scheme would subsidise the cost of employing staff who had

**Training update:**

Rosie welcomed Ardita who was an Advice Line assessor. She thanked the new assessors for joining the rota. Docebo had a number of new courses and e-learning was being updated frequently. Citizens Advice were offering wellbeing webinars in February and March which could be booked via her. Finally, Rosie asked everyone to complete their GDPR training renewal as soon as possible if it was due.

**Guest speaker: Amarpreet Hullait, DWP Partnership Manager**

Catherine welcomed Amarpreet to the meeting and congratulated her on her new post. Amarpreet said she had been at the DWP for 3 years, starting as a work coach and front of house. She passed on John Flood’s thanks to WCA for the helpful working relationship that had been developed.

She noted that it had not been an easy year – claims had increased threefold over the last year. 22 new work coaches in Watford had been recruited and there now 42 in Watford. They were working mainly online and by phone but there was small team in the office and no-one would be turned away between 10-2.

**Bureau update:**

Catherine thanked everyone for their work and support for CA,Watford, whether they were working in the office, remotely or currently unable to work.

Statistics for January:

214 advice appointments

36 Evidence forms

160 simple queries

368 Advice Line calls

264 email enquiries

The softphones system was now in place and working well, with access to supervision via a single number. Catherine invited any feedback on this and on home working generally.

The local MP would be attending the next Workers’ meeting.

Full details of the Covid Winter Grant funding were available on the Staff & Volunteer website – ASS approval was needed for referrals and outcomes needed to be added.

Catherine reminded everyone to make sure they took a lunch break, and paid staff should take their annual leave; volunteers should consider taking a break when needed.

A new volunteer rep was needed – anyone who was interested in this should email Catherine.

As social get-togethers were not currently possible, Catherine encouraged everyone to think about starting smaller social activity groups eg a book club – she asked for ideas to be emailed to her but in the meantime, the weekly Google Hangout was still taking place at 12.30 on Wednesdays.

**Research & Campaigns:**

Catherine thanked Steph for her work on research and campaigns and thanked all those who had completed EFs. Tasks could be sent to Steph flagging possible EFs if that was helpful. Steph had been tweeting about advice@home so any pictures or quotes could be sent to her to use.

**Trustee Chair update:**

Faroukh noted the Board were looking at upgrading the website and asked for any feedback on the softphones.

**Next meeting:**

The next meeting would be held on Tuesday 2nd March.

**Vikki Molloy**

**February 2021**