**Citizens Advice Watford Workers’ Meeting**

**2nd March 2021 - Minutes**

1. **Attendance and apologies**

**Present:**

Catherine, Farrukh, Lesley, Vikki, Gillian, Steph, Malcolm, Frank, Solinda, Patsy, Ruth, Shelley, Ardita, Rita, Vanita, Jamie, Jim, Raminder, Ian, Gladys, Roy, Chris, Jackie, Judeth, Ciera, Mo, Jonny, Sue, Mahtab, Salim, Kalpna, Penny, Annette, Judith, Carmel, David, Rosie (minutes).

**Apologies:**

Stephen Bolton

1. **Introductions**

Everyone introduced themselves, their role and how long they had been with CAW.

1. **Chair of Trustees update (Farrukh)**

Salim is leaving his role as CO on 7th April for a new role as a Management Consultant with the NHS. Farrukh thanked Salim for his service.

1. **Website update (Malcolm)**

Malcolm had added a new R&C section to the S&V homepage.

1. **ASM update (Catherine)**

Catherine shared a video recording of Jonny promoting our campaign for the UC uplift to be retained. Penny has also contributed to the campaign on our Twitter feed.

Steph thanked all those who have completed evidence forms and encouraged everyone to keep them coming. 34 evidence forms were completed in February.

1. **CO update (Salim)**

We are preparing for a phased return to the office from 8th March.

1. **Learning update (Rosie**)

Congratulations to Roy who has completed his gateway training and is now a qualified Gateway Assessor. Thanks to Ian, Raminder, Rita and Gillian from the same group, who are nearly qualified but for the paperwork. All this group have worked hard to overcome the challenges of remote working without the benefit of experience working from the office. Likewise, the group who started their training in September and are newly on the rota, and whose training took place entirely remotely. Rosie thanked them all!

1. **Office update (Catherine)**

* A phased return to the office will start on 8th March with supervisors and managers. From April anyone who is unable to work from home may return, circumstances permitting. No decision is made as to when the face to face service will resume but this is unlikely before the summer.
* Welcome to Ciera and Michael who start on Monday under the Kickstart scheme. Their role is advice assistant, reception, email and Adviceline.
* Supervision has been busy, please continue to be patient. Catherine is monitoring the queue and will take calls when demand is heavy, but if you have waited a long time please put a message on Skpye.
* In February we helped more people than in any previous month before. Thanks to everyone for working so hard.
* 342 emails answered
* 397 Adviceline calls answered
* 243 telephone appointments
* 187 simple queries
* 1411 case notes
* 34 evidence forms

1. **ASS update (Vikki)**

Where SCD of third party is recorded please obtain consent from the third party and note this in the case record.

Please make use of the Expert Advice Teams. Details are on the homepage.

1. **Visiting speaker Rt Hon Dean Russell MP for Watford**

Steph presented a report on the issues affecting our clients. The MP gave a review of his work which included funding for homelessness, Watford as a Wellbeing Community with 1000 MH first aiders trained, the digital divide, Put Dean in your Team, and being a Small Business Ambassador. The MP responded to questions.

**Q: How many applications for the £500 self-isolation grant have been received by Watford residents and how many paid?**

A: Not known but will confirm.

**Q: How can we get involved in MH first aid training?**

A: He will find a way for all those who wish to do complete the course.

**Q: What help can he offer to people who face barriers (eg language / digital / rough sleepers) to accessing services or funds?**

A: Contact him about individual cases.

**Q: How can you help us help rough sleepers who are difficult to contact and / or engage with?**

A: No-one needs to sleep on the streets in Watford. Funding secured for NH and One YMCA.

**Q: Rough Sleeping Intervention Project ends in March but demand for our service will increase when eviction ban ends.**

A: Will raise this at Government level.

**Q: Poor quality decision making at the DWP due to poor quality medical assessments by contractors is leaving PIP claimants without money to pay for essentials. People typically wait for up to a year to have their appeals heard, at which the majority of decisions are found to have been wrong and are overturned. Why?**

A: In discussion with CASTR about this same issue. Need to understand what challenges the DWP faces on the ground which lead to these decisions. Will chair a meeting with CASTR, CAW and DWP to find out why this is happening.

* **Follow up actions:**  
  How many self-isolation grant payments received and paid?
* MH first aid training
* Contact MP re individual cases of rough sleepers and those who face language barriers in accessing services.
* PIP meeting
* Further invitations to workers’ meeting welcomed.
* Put Dean on your Team
* Any further questions please send to Catherine.

**Matters arising from February meeting:**

A list of suggested books etc was created. Please feel free to add further ideas:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1NUgFykZISkYOi4wlsbZsZ83N6V-EsdIctfPssebohMY/edit>