HUNTINGDON AREA Money Advice
Free & confidential debt advice service

Associated with cma community money advice

BUSINESS PLAN

Organisation

Huntingdon Area Money Advice (HAMA) is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation overseen by a board of Trustees. The organisation was established as a project of Huntingdon and Godmanchester Churches Together but is now fully independent of it. The service is provided in affiliation with the national money advice charity Community Money Advice (CMA) to free people from debt and give them hope for the future.

Vision Statement

To develop a sustainable free money advice service in the Huntingdon area, which will be professionally operated, taking account of all relevant risks. The service was put in place because Churches Together identified a need for debt and money advice provision in the local community. Our vision is to give help and hope to people with money problems in the local community, working with other organisations, charities and statutory bodies.

Mission Statement

To provide a free, unconditional, confidential, face to face, money advice service for the Huntingdon Area*, in affiliation with the national money advice charity, Community Money Advice (CMA), to free people from debt and give them hope for the future.

*(Typically our clients are drawn from those living in central and north Huntingdonshire, but occasionally may live outside that area).

Goal

To investigate and understand a client's financial situation and to provide good quality information and advice about the possible solutions to address their financial problems. To empower clients to decide on the best option for them. To demonstrate the love of Christ through the attitude and actions of HAMA's personnel.

The Service/Customer Journey

A team of suitably trained volunteers will provide a service open to clients, offering the following services:

1. Provide an appointment service for clients, which is free of charge.
2. Provide a relaxed, private consultation environment where and when appropriate.
3. To take time to understand clients' circumstances, to build trust and to determine any characteristics of vulnerability.
4. To collect and record relevant information from clients, including assessing/verifying income and expenditure. A number of client meetings may be needed.

5. Act on behalf of the client to negotiate with creditors, courts, insolvency administrators and other third parties to create a sustainable debt solution plan, individually tailored for each client.
6. To keep clients regularly updated on progress, and to be available for any queries.
7. Give impartial debt advice, and provide possible debt solutions, based on the individual needs of each client and their goals, to enable the client to make an informed decision about the solution they wish to adopt. The help and solutions considered can include: Debt Management Plans (formal and informal), insolvency solutions, budgeting education and other approaches as appropriate.
8. To ensure that clients understand their options, using clear communications, so that they can make informed decisions.
9. To be available to clients for as many consultations as required within the limits of HAMA manpower and client cooperation, to achieve a sustainable debt solution plan.
10. To work with the client with regard to budget management to create a sustainable long-term money management regime for the client, which the clients can maintain.
11. To review clients' progress after employing a solution and to monitor for good outcomes.
12. Maintain confidentiality verbally, digitally and with paper notes in accordance with GDPR and recommendations of ICO, recognising that clients sign the Agreement to give consent for their personal details to be shared with other parties for the purpose of progressing their case in their best interests.

Regulatory Requirements

In order to provide the debt advice service, we need to be regulated and authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). We are required to hold 'limited permissions' under our FCA authorisation for not-for-profit Debt Counselling, Debt Adjusting and Providing Credit Information Services. The latter will be used to check any information on a client's credit file. We will not be advising on credit repair. We will not be undertaking activity involving advice on the provision of regulated secured loans, such as mortgages, or on pensions or other financial investments. We will not be approving financial promotions. We will not hold client money.

Consumer Duty

Our clients are at the heart of what we do, and the focus of HAMA is to deliver good outcomes for them. We will monitor and review those outcomes, in line with the FCA's Consumer Duty requirements. Consumer Duty is embedded within the organisation and championed by the Trustees.

Attracting Clients

The majority of our clients will be referred from local statutory bodies, housing associations, healthcare professionals, schools, Churches, Foodbanks and other charities with whom we have built a good reputation. We see networking with other agencies as an essential strategy for our service's success.

Clients may also self-refer by contacting us via our telephone number, e-mail address or website which are freely advertised on all of our leaflets and letters. Many clients come to us on the recommendation of friends or family who have previously used our service.

We will not be using financial promotions, employing lead generators or other professional resources.

Support Routes

As it is essential that the service provides an excellent standard of advice, to ensure good outcomes, it is important that routes of advice support are in place for advisers. To address this, the service will be accessing support via:

1) Shelter Specialist Debt Advice
2) CPAG (for Benefits advice)
3) Leasehold Advisory Service
4) Tax Aid (for tax advice on behalf of low-paid clients)
5) The CMA Adviceline/Specialist Support (for Advisers)
6) Our CMA Operations Support Manager.
7) Online information and training resources such as the CPAG Debt Advice Handbook, Wiser Adviser webinars and e-learning, and other on-line resources.
8) The Business Debt Line

And other agencies as appropriate.

Referrals/Signposting

In the event that our service is not in a position to help a client, due to either excessive case load or lack of relevant expertise, we would seek to signpost or refer them on to another agency or service. This may be the local Citizens Advice, StepChange, other local money advice centre or a professional service, e.g. an Independent Financial Adviser.

Referrals may be made for certain debt solutions. Individual Voluntary Arrangements can be referred to an Insolvency Practitioner via suitable agencies. No referral commission will be received by HAMA.

The service will not be advising on business debts beyond simple sole traders, so will signpost such cases to the Business Debtline or PayPlan.

Regulation and Quality

The service will be run in accordance within the regulatory and operational requirements of Community Money Advice, and by extension, the standards defined by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA), Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) and the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS). The service's debt advice process is detailed in the Advice Process document which is made available to all advisers.

There is a full suite of policies and procedures in place, including a Vulnerable Customer Policy and a Complaints Policy & Procedure. We have carefully considered the potential risks involved in running a free debt advice service, such as the ability to offer continuing advice, the quality of advice and the service quality from the team. We are confident that these have been mitigated by our Corporate

Risk Assessment, Compliance and quality assurance procedures, our training programme and the support routes available to us.

The process of interaction with the client is shown in the Advice Process document.
The HAMA Booklet also contains a summary of the Debt Management options as well as information on Safeguarding and making complaints.

The casework & quality oversight is undertaken within the centre by level 4 trained advisers, alongside continued checking by the CMA OSM. Annual compliance audits of the centre will be undertaken by the OSM along with random file reviews carried out in accordance with the file review policy & procedure.

Quality of advice is also assessed with the in-house Debt Advice Quality Assessment Scheme where advisers' proposed debt solutions to fictitious cases are marked by senior staff.

Team Experience and Development

All debt advisers will be trained, as a minimum, to Level 3 Generalist standard (Parts 1, 2 & 3), through CMA's training programme, accredited by MaPS to Advice level. The Manager / Lead Adviser will also undertake Caseworker standard Level 4 training (Parts 4, 5 & 6), accredited by MaPS to Caseworker/Specialist level. All debt advisers will be encouraged to undertake Level 4 training.

Advisers are also encouraged to maintain current awareness through additional training courses, e.g. CMA, Wiser Adviser, IMA, Shelter, and through their own reading.

Regular Team meetings are held as part of in-house training, hearing speakers on relevant topics and sharing good practice. Advisers are expected to keep a record of their own Continuing Professional Development activities. Each adviser will receive an annual appraisal to review activity in the previous year and set objectives for the coming year.

Record-Keeping and Reporting

There will be both paper-based, and electronic collection of data. Wherever possible, papers will be scanned to provide an electronic copy, Client finances will be recorded in a standard SFS spreadsheet. Clients will be kept informed regularly both verbally and in writing about the best options for their debt management and what actions the advisers are taking on their behalf.

Sustainability and Business Development

Sustainability of the service is dependent on the continued commitment of the management and advice team, and as such staffing is subject to succession planning monitoring and review on a rolling basis.

Sustainability also has financial concerns at its core. HAMA is an independent charity which maintains its own finance system. A Financial Policy is in place, and there is careful financial management, with fundraising as appropriate. Funding comes from donations and grants. There is a record of Income & Expenditure. No funding is received from creditors as part of any debt solution put in place for a client.

Regarding business development, the service will be developed in a sustainable manner according to opportunities for team growth, and with a view to maximising the service's client base within the team's capacity to provide a full and uncompromised service to all clients as defined in 'The Service' (above).

In the event of any cessation of the centre's activities, there is an appropriate wind-down procedure in place.

Review

This business plan will be reviewed on an annual basis by the centre manager and trustees.

Approved by the Trustees 20th October 2026
Due for review October 2027