



**Cabinet  
14 March 2016**

**Report from the Director of  
Performance, Policy and  
Partnerships**

For action

**Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Infrastructure  
Grant 2016 - 2018**

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement on the change of terms of the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Infrastructure Grant for CVS Brent from one year to two years from April 2016.
- 1.2 The current Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund (VSIF) which was approved in 2012 has been allocated to four funding streams: i) Local Grants ii) Infrastructure Support iii) Advice & Guidance Contracts and iv) London Council's Grant with a total yearly budget of £2.04M.
- 1.3 Changes to the terms of the VSIF Local Grants 2016-2018 from 3 year to 2 year grants were approved in February 2016.
- 1.4 An annual £410K savings requirement from the VSIF, to be implemented from April 2016, was agreed as part of the Council's wider budget savings in February 2015. These agreed savings do not impact the VSIF Infrastructure Grant as savings were agreed elsewhere within the VSIF.
- 1.5 The approved annual VSIF Infrastructure Grant is £161K and is currently awarded to CVS Brent on a yearly basis through a conditional grant. The proposed two year grant will total £322K (£161K per year).

**2.0 Recommendations**

Cabinet are asked to:

- 2.1 Approve the award of conditional grant funding of the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Infrastructure Grant to CVS Brent in the sum of £161K per annum for a period of 2 years.

- 2.2 Approve the introduction of a grant condition requiring the payment of all staff funded through the grant referred to in paragraph 2.1 at the London Living Wage.

### **3.0 Detail**

- 3.1 The Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Infrastructure Grant is one stream of the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund (VSIF). The VSIF Infrastructure Grant has over recent years enabled CVS Brent to provide infrastructure support including capacity building, training, developing business and fundraising plans, accessing external funding and developing partnerships and networks for Brent’s voluntary and community sector.
- 3.2 Officers consider that the VSIF – Infrastructure Grant provides essential funding to enable the council’s ongoing engagement with the voluntary sector. Officers are of the view that funding one organisation with the VSIF – Infrastructure Grant ensures a cohesive and targeted approach to infrastructure support. Officers have considered the organisations that may provide such infrastructure support and have concluded that CVS Brent is best placed and best able to continue to deliver such support to individuals and organisations in Brent.

#### *VSIF Infrastructure Grant – Length of Grant*

- 3.3 The VSIF Infrastructure Grant is currently allocated on a yearly basis. Options for the time period of the grant are detailed below:

##### Option 1 – One Year Grant

This option would mean that the grant continues to be allocated for a 1 year period. This option limits the ability for CVS Brent to access external funding opportunities where evidence of matched funding or of longer term funding is required. This option also limits CVS Brent in business planning, service development and capacity building support for groups who need a longer term approach. The administration of a one year grant for council officers means that approval for a new grant and associated paperwork is required on a yearly basis. Monitoring and other support work remains the same.

##### Option 2 – Two Year Grant

This option would mean that the grant would be allocated for a 2 year period. This option would bring the VSIF Infrastructure Grant into line with the VSIF Local Grants funding period of 2 years. The benefits of a two year grant would include the ability for CVS Brent to develop a two year business plan thus providing enhanced support in all areas of its capacity building for the community and voluntary sector, to respond more strategically to emerging needs of the community and voluntary sector, submit bids for longer term funding opportunities especially for those that need matched funding and continue to support Brent in engagement with the community and voluntary sector. The administration of a two year grant for council officers is decreased from Option 1 as approval for a new grant and associated paperwork is required on a two yearly basis. Monitoring and other support work remains the same.

*Option 2 is recommended as the preferred option.*

#### **Grant Conditions**

- 3.4 In line with Brent's Borough Plan 2015-2019 an additional grant condition will be introduced that all posts funded through the grant will need to be paid at least the London Living Wage. Currently CVS Brent pay all staff funded through the grant more than the London Living Wage.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 The Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund budget for 2015/16 is £2.04m. As part of the Council's wider budget savings, this will reduce by the sum of £410k in 2016/17 and for future years but will not fall upon the VSIF Infrastructure Grant stream.
- 4.2 The approved annual VSIF Infrastructure Grant is £161K which is awarded in full to CVS Brent on a conditional grant, and can be met from currently agreed budgets. The current council budget has been agreed for the VSIF for the period from 2016 – 2018 so this option presents no risk for the council in fulfilling the grant funding commitments.
- 4.3 The proposed introduction of an additional grant condition that all posts funded through the grant will need to be paid at least the London Living Wage will not impact this grant as CVS Brent already pay all their staff at least the London Living Wage.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 Under S1 of the Localism Act 2011 the Council has a general power of competence to do anything which an individual may do unless it is expressly prohibited.
- 5.2 The giving of grants to voluntary organisations is a discretionary power which must be exercised reasonably taking into account all relevant considerations and ignoring irrelevant considerations.
- 5.3 The decision to award a grant is discretionary. The Council's discretion must not be fettered by previous commitments they may have given and it should make its decision in the light of present circumstances.
- 5.4 Under section 3(1) of the Local Government Act 1999, Brent Council, as a "best value authority" is under general duty of best value to "make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness". Under the duty of best value, the Council should consider overall value, including environmental and social value, when reviewing service provision.
- 5.5 Before deciding how to fulfil their best value duty, local authorities are required to consult a wide range of local persons, including voluntary and community sector

organisations and businesses as set out in section 3(2) of the Local Government Act 1999.

5.6 In March 2015, the Government circulated revised Best Value Statutory Guidance. According to that Guidance, local authorities should be sensitive to the benefits and needs of voluntary and community sector organisations and should seek to avoid passing on disproportionate cuts.

5.7 The Guidance also advises that where appropriate, local authorities should make provision for an affected organisation or wider community to put forward options on how to reshape the service or project and local authorities should assist this by making available all appropriate information. The full guidance is available here:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/418505/Revised\\_Best\\_Value\\_Statutory\\_Guidance\\_final.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/418505/Revised_Best_Value_Statutory_Guidance_final.pdf)

5.8 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

5.9 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

5.10 The duty continues to be a “have regard duty”, and the weight to be attached to it is a matter for the Council, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations.

5.11 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has recently issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance. The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/legal-and-policy/legislation/equality-act-2010/equality-act-guidance-codes-practice-and-technical-guidance#cop>

5.12 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

- The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
- Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
- Engagement and the equality duty
- Equality objectives and the equality duty
- Equality information and the equality duty

5.13 The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/private-and-public-sector-guidance/public-sector-providers/public-sector-equality-duty/guidance>

5.14 As it is proposed to fund CVS Brent on a conditional grant basis, a condition can be included requiring CVS Brent pay all staff funded through the grant more than the London Living Wage.

## **6.0 Diversity Implications**

6.1 The proposal to approve the change of terms of conditional grant funding of the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Infrastructure Grant to CVS Brent from 1 year to 2 years will enable the Council to provide a more enhanced and sustainable support to community and voluntary sector organisations across Brent in all areas of capacity building to respond more strategically to the changing needs of local communities and foster community cohesion.

6.2 The proposal to approve the introduction of a grant condition of paying all staff funded through the grant the London Living Wage will help the Council to meet its duties under the Equality and Social Value legislation.

6.3 A copy of the EQIA is attached as Appendix 1.

## **7.0 Background Documents**

- Brent Borough Plan 2015- 2019
- Brent Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund 2012 - 2016 Cabinet Report and Appendices 2012

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