

	<p style="text-align: center;">Cabinet 24 October 2016</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Report from the Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships</p>
For Action	Wards Affected: All
<p>Local Advice and Guidance Services, Brent Advice Partnership – Advice Small Grants</p>	

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 The procurement and award of Brent's Local Advice and Guidance Service contracts were considered by Cabinet on 16 November 2015 and 8 February 2016. One of the contracts awarded to Brent Citizen's Advice Bureau was the Brent Advice Partnership contract. This contract included administration of a small advice grants programme of £242,000 per year to include recommending to Officers the award of small advice grants of up to £10,000 using delegated powers. A recommendation from Brent Advice Partnership's Advice Fund Grant's Panel has now been received to award a grant in the sum of £18,500 and as a result Cabinet approval is sought to permit such award.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- 2.1 Note Chief Officers' powers to make grants as set out in paragraph 3.5.
- 2.2 Note the making of Round 1 Brent Advice Partnership's Advice Fund grants using delegated powers as set out in Figure 1 at paragraph 3.8.
- 2.3 Approve the making of a Brent Advice Partnership's Advice Fund grant of £18,500 to Advice4Renters for the period of 1 year for the reasons detailed in paragraphs 3.09 – 3.12. If approved, the grant will be used to employ a Client Support Co-ordinator to provide consistent casework assistance, undertake training and supervision of both volunteer teams to free up specialist solicitors/advisers time to assist more clients of Advice4Renters. This will have a positive impact on individuals / groups experiencing socio-economic disadvantage including but not limited to homeless people, low income households, lone parents, people who are subject to unlawful eviction, residents living in poor conditions and/or fuel poverty.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 On 16 November 2015, Cabinet approved inviting tenders for local advice and guidance services. One of the contracts to be procured was for the operation of the Brent Advice Partnership (BAP), a borough wide advice partnership, including the provision of a digital information and advice gateway. In addition however, the BAP contract included provision for administration of an advice small grants programme
- 3.2 On 8 February 2016, Cabinet approved the award of the BAP contract to Brent Citizen's Advice Bureau.
- 3.3 In order to ensure efficient administration of the Brent Advice Fund grants programme, previous reports detailed that grant applications would be assessed by a BAP panel and any grants up to £10k would be awarded pursuant to delegated powers.
- 3.5 The position with regard to awarding grants is therefore that Chief Officers have delegated powers to award grants or give other financial or other assistance to organisations in the following circumstances:
- 3.5.1 to make grants of up to £10k in respect of Brent Advice Fund grants:
- 3.5.2 to make grants in accordance with the provisions of section 9 of the table at paragraph 2.5 of the Part 4 of Brent's Constitution namely:
- a) Provided that if the grant or other financial assistance involves the grant of funds from Council's own resources:
 - (i) the relevant Director is satisfied that no adverse capital finance or other negative implications would arise, unless written consent of the Chief Finance Officer is obtained.
 - (ii) no grant shall be made by officers if it amounts to more than £5k per annum except in the case of the Edward Harvist Trust where a grant not exceeding £7k per annum may be made.
 - (iii) no grant shall be withdrawn or reduced by officers if the receiving body has received a grant from the Council for each of the last five years for the same purpose unless such withdrawal is due to the fact that the body no longer meets the relevant grant criteria or conditions of grant.
 - (iv) the grant criteria has been approved by the Cabinet other appropriate body or person with appropriate authority.
 - (v) no grant shall be made by officers from the council 'Main Programme Grant' (now the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund) or the 'Development Fund' except with the prior approval of the Cabinet.
 - b) Provided that where the grant or other financial assistance involves the distribution of funds received from a third party the grant or other financial assistance complies with the conditions under which the funds have been received by the Council.

Brent Advice Fund Grants

- 3.6 The online application form for Brent Advice Fund grants and guidance notes are available at:

<http://brentadvicefund.grantsupporter.com/>.

Two programmes are available to applicants, namely:

- Capacity Grants of up to £3k, for bidders seeking to improve their organisation's suitability in delivering advice services by funding items such as advice quality marks and capital IT equipment
 - Advice Grants of up to £10k, for bidders seeking to deliver advice services and who already have the "set-up" to begin/resume advice delivery. Organisations can apply for over £10K in exceptional circumstances. Priority areas for the advice grants are updated for each round of grants based on the data around advice needs from the main advice contract from the previous quarter.
- 3.7 There are 4 rounds of advice grants per year. This report refers to Round 1. The closing date for Round 1 of the Brent Advice Fund was 4 July 2016. All applicants must be signed up to BAPs membership agreement. The applications were considered by The Brent Advice Fund Panel which is made up of a Citizens Advice Brent Trustee, the CEO of CVS Brent and the Partners for Brent Manager, Brent Council. 14 applications were submitted, seeking a total of £146,257.10 (£13,650 seeking Capacity Grants and £132,607.10 seeking Advice Grants). A total of £58,162.33 was recommended for award to 9 applicants (£12,000 seeking Capacity Grants and £46,162.33 seeking Advice Grants). In addition the Panel recommended for award an application from Advice4Renters for £18,500 which is subject to Cabinet approval via this report.
- 3.8 Details of the Brent Advice Fund grants approved by the Brent Advice Fund Grants Panel in Round 1 and awarded pursuant to delegated powers are outlined in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1 - Brent Advice Fund Grants 2016: Round 1

Organisation	Grant Summary	Total Grant Approved	Capacity / Advice
Advice4Renters	Funding for a Client Support Co-ordinator to provide consistent casework assistance, undertake training and supervision of two volunteer teams resulting in assisting more clients.	£18,500.00	A
1VoiceCommunity	To achieve Advice Quality Standard (AQS) to provide SEND impartial, information advice and support to families with SEND CYP in Brent and to prepare the organisation to manage a future advice project.	£3,000.00	C
BHCAC	The project will build beneficiaries' resilience through welfare reform support. The project will help beneficiaries make informed choices, secure their welfare entitlements to enable them to remain in control of their own lives and prevent problems arising in the first place or recurring.	£10,000.00	A
Energy Solutions	Aims to strengthen the organisation's capacity to provide advice on utility debts to Brent residents by obtaining the Advice Quality Standard (AQS). Achieving this standard will ensure residents are receiving good quality advice that is in line with current legislation and best practice and strengthen the organisation's ability to attract future funding to continue to offer our services to local people.	£3,000.00	C
Help Somalia Foundation	"Advice4Life" will provide remedial advice and 1-1 support to resolve people's debts and enable increased income to pay for essentials [shelter, food and clothing] plus proactive support enabling beneficiaries to better manage their finances and households avoiding future financial issues – 500 beneficiaries.	£10,000.00	A
Hornstars SC	The project will hold a welfare benefits advice surgery two days a week for those from marginalised communities particularly from the Horn of Africa. Target of 100 clients.	£9,920.00	A
Royal Association for the Deaf	The project will support deaf residents with IAG, Welfare Benefits and other areas. All staff are fluent in BSL. Will also provide Deaf Awareness training to local voluntary organisations.	£8442.33	A
SAAFI	To ensure the continuation of advice, information and information services by employing an advice worker and applying to become accredited AQS.	£7,800.00	A
Salisbury World	To gain AQS in order to improve the quality, monitoring and evaluation of services, with a view to increasing capacity. The project is about empowering refugees and new migrants to access accurate information and make informed decisions, becoming active, fulfilled members of their local communities.	£3,000.00	C
Sufra	To contribute to advice training modules for staff which will improve the quality of life of 360 vulnerable residents who are in need welfare advice and assistance. This will be achieved through one-to-one advocacy and assistance tailored to each individual.	£3,000.00	C
Total		£58,162.33 (not including Advice4Renters) £76,662.33 (including A4R)	

Summary of Advice4Renters Bid

- 3.9 A bid requesting £18,500.00 was submitted by Advice4Renters was approved by the Brent Advice Fund Grants Panel. Advice4Renters are providing £15,135 in matched funding.
- 3.10 Advice4Renters has two volunteer teams assisting their Housing Advice Centre. Frontline volunteers assist clients online and with general enquiries. Volunteer casework assistants work with solicitors and advisers to progress cases. The training and experience provided means that after a few months, volunteers often move on to formal training or employment. The grant has been requested to employ a Client Support Co-ordinator to provide consistent casework assistance, undertake training and supervision of both volunteer teams to free up specialist solicitors/advisers time to assist more clients.
- 3.11 The outputs of the funding are detailed below:

Activity description	Output Measure 1	Output Measure 2
Provision of specialist casework appointments	1 new appt slot per week	1 new client per week (50 weeks)
20 front-line volunteers recruited and trained	20 new front line vols trained	60 enquiries dealt with per week
10 casework assistants recruited and trained	10 new caseworker vols trained	500 client cases progressed

- 3.12 The outcomes of the funding are detailed below:

- i) The outcomes for the additional 50 private renters assisted through specialist casework will include homelessness prevention; improved living conditions (e.g. repairs done and/or lower fuel bills); more affordable rents (e.g. challenging unlawful rent increases; negotiating rent reduction as compensation for disrepair); preventing or ceasing landlord harassment; and reinstatement of tenants who have been evicted and/ or financial compensation for them. Clients will be better informed of the progress of their cases and issues will be resolved more quickly.
- ii) 60 additional clients will be better able to manage their affairs following non-specialist assistance with matters such as online debt advice; savings and loans through the Credit Union; access to Benefits Checker; assistance to navigate Brent Advice Matters website, etc.

iii) Training and work experience opportunities will be created for more volunteers who will be able to get into employment or further education as a result.

- 3.13 In view of the above, Officers would recommend making a grant of £18,500.00 to Advice4Renters

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Advice Small Grants budget allocation for 2016/18 is £242,000.
- 4.2 The recommendations made in this report can be implemented within the available budget. £59k has been approved previously. If this grant is approved that would leave £165k for the remaining 3 rounds.

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. In March 2015 the Government circulated revised Best Value Statutory Guidance, 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
- 5.5 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a new public sector equality duty requiring the Council in the exercise of its functions, to 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
- 5.6 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. Members are referred to Section 6 below.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 An Equality Analysis, also known as an Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the process of the approval of Brent's Local Advice and Guidance Service contracts. This report refers to the purely procedural matter of approving grants recommended by the Brent Advice Fund Grants Panel which exceed £10,000 and therefore there are no diversity implications arising from it, other than the relevant legal implications mentioned above.

Background Documents

- Authority to Tender Contract for Local Advice and Guidance Services – Cabinet Report 16 November 2015
- Authority to Award Contracts for Advice and Guidance Services in Brent – Cabinet Report 8 February 2016

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