



Cabinet
12 February 2018

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

**Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Voluntary and
Community Sector Infrastructure Support and Assistance
Grant 2018 – 2019**

Wards Affected:	All
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt:	Open
No. of Appendices:	One
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement on the approval of a one-year extension to the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund Infrastructure Grant for CVS Brent from 1 April 2018-31 March 2019. The proposed grant will total £160K per annum.
- 1.2 The report also seeks an increase to the financial level delegated to relevant Officers for the award of grants under the Brent Advice Fund.
- 1.3 The report provides an overview of the Brent Advice Fund review and recommendations.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Approves a one-year year extension to the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund (VSIF) Infrastructure Grant to CVS Brent in the sum of £160K for 2018-19 commencing 1 April 2018.
- 2.2 Approves an increase to the financial level delegated to relevant Officers for the award of grants under the Brent Advice Fund to a maximum grant of £20k per annum.

3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund – Infrastructure Grant is one stream of the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund (VSIF) and grants made from this fund require Cabinet approval. Under the constitution Cabinet approval is similarly required for the award of grants over £5k per annum except within the case of the Edward Harivist Trust (where the sum is 7k) or the Brent Advice Fund (where the sum is 10K).
- 3.2 A two-year VSIF grant totalling £320K for CVS Brent was approved in 2016. £160K is awarded annually based on a conditional grant agreement to provide infrastructure support including capacity building, training, business development and fundraising plans, accessing external funding and developing partnerships and networks for Brent's voluntary and community sector.
- 3.3 The grant provides essential funding to enable the council's ongoing engagement with the voluntary and community sector. The continuation of funding of CVS Brent for 2017-18 will provide a consistent and cohesive approach to the sector's infrastructure support. A one-year extension would also align with the 2019 new budget cycle and the expansion of the community hub model.
- 3.4 During 2017, CVS Brent has undergone several personnel changes, completing its staff recruitment in November 2017. An extension of the current VSIF award would allow the organisation and its new staff team a full fiscal year to embed and deliver on the grant condition targets and priorities. A one-year extension would also align with the 2019 budget and the expansion of the community hub model.
- 3.5 Additionally, a voluntary and community sector needs review was recently conducted by the Partnerships & Engagement team and further work is required with staff, stakeholders and the voluntary and community sector to design a future infrastructure support framework based on its findings. Additionally the requirements of sector organisations delivering within community hubs will also feed into future infrastructure requirements.
- 3.6 In line with Brent's Borough Plan 2015-2019, a grant condition was introduced in 2016 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.
- 3.7 In February 2016, Cabinet approved the award of the Brent Advice Fund ("BAF") contract to Brent's Citizen's Advice Bureau. In order to ensure efficient administration of the BAF grants programme, previous reports detailed that the grants applications would be assessed by a BAF panel and any grants up to £10k would be awarded pursuant to officer delegated powers of authority. In exceptional circumstances, the grant value may exceed £10k, however this requires officer sign-off and approval by Cabinet.

- 3.8 The BAF is currently in its second year and a review was undertaken in November 2017 which created a number of recommendations. One of which was to increase the maximum grant approved by panel from £10k - £20K under delegated authority. The aim is to increase the number of applications as organisations may not have to 'match' fund which has restricted the number of applications.
- 3.9 An increase in award would expedite the approval process as grants in excess of £10k can take approximately four to six months from submission of the initial application to approval by Cabinet which may delay the delivery of a much needed advice service.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund budget for 2018/19 is £1.7m. The approved annual VSIF Infrastructure Grant is £160K. This grant will be awarded in full to CVS Brent, on a conditional grant basis. The currently existing budget is sufficient to cover the grant.
- 4.2 The current grant includes the provision that all posts funded through the grant will need to be paid at least the London Living Wage. CVS Brent already pay all their staff at least the London Living Wage, therefore this condition will be met.

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 or extend 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 Relevant Officers currently have delegated authority under the Constitution to agree the award of grants under the Brent Advice Fund to a maximum grant of £10k per annum and it is recommended to increase this level to a maximum grant of £20k per annum. As an executive decision, Cabinet is able to approve the increase. If approved, this will require amendment to the Constitution to reflect the increased financial level.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 Under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty when exercising its public functions to have ‘due regard’ to the need to eliminate discrimination and other conduct prohibited under the Act; advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between those who share a “protected characteristic” and those who do not. This duty is known as the public sector equality duty (PSED). The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The purpose of the duty is to enquire into whether a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic. In other words, the indirect discriminatory effects of a proposed decision. Due regard is the regard that is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- 6.4 An Equality Analysis attached at Appendix 1 was undertaken as part of the approval of the initial Brent’s Local Advice and Guidance Service contracts and has been updated to assess any potential equality implications of this proposal. This report refers to the purely procedural matter of approving the Brent CVS grant award and BAF grant approved by delegated authority.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 7.1 None required

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (if appropriate)

- 8.1 None

Report sign off:

PETER GADSDON
Director of Performance, Policy and Partnerships