

	Chief Executive
	Report from the Assistant Chief Executive
Responding to Covid-19 with Brent's Voluntary and Community Sector: Emergency Fund	

Wards Affected:	All
Key or non-key decision	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
No. of Appendices:	1
Background Papers	None
Contact Officer(s): <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Shazia Hussain – Assistant Chief Executive Shazia.hussain@brent.gov.uk

1.0 Purpose of the Report

1.1 This report seeks agreement on the proposed response to Covid-19 working with Brent's Voluntary and Community Sector.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Chief Exec:

- Approve the establishment of a Steering Group made up of lead voluntary sector providers overseeing implementation of the new approach.
- Approve the setting up of thematic groups for the areas detailed in this report co-ordinated by the CVS.
- Approve the administration of small grants of up to £500 and the mapping/monitoring of the thematic groups activity across the borough by CVS Brent.
- Approve the adoption of a two-phased approach to this work.
- Approve the establishment of emergency funds.
- Agree that the council takes a more flexible approach to how it manages currently grant-funded projects.

- Note the establishment of a new helpline number dedicated to assisting those who do not have support from friends or family, and no close links to the local community.

3.0 Detail

3.1 The Council is working with key voluntary sector agencies and organisations to put forward an approach to ensure the most vulnerable get the additional help and support they need to deal with the coronavirus crisis.

3.2 The proposed collaborative way of working will draw on the expertise, reach and delivery capacities of the various organisations involved to identify and help those most in need in the borough.

3.3 Until further notice, it is recommended that a Steering Group made up of lead voluntary sector providers overseeing implementation of the new approach will be held weekly:

- The Group will fulfil a number of functions, including providing intelligence about emerging needs, sharing resources, promoting best practice in addressing Covid-19 and its impacts on individuals and communities, coordinating voluntary and community sector responses across the Borough, submitting joint bids for targeted funding (including to national and London government) and providing a channel for the Council to engage with harder to reach organisations and groups
- The Group will review performance with a risk matrix and delivery and ensure the activities of all the organisations and agencies involved are getting to the people that need it the most. There will be a two-way feed-in to/from the thematic groups and locality discussions. This will help ensure that local issues are picked up
- Meetings will be held either virtually or in person depending on attendee's needs, relevant professional advice and local and government guidance

3.4 Thematic Groups and Clusters

Meetings have taken place with the Multi-Faith Forum, voluntary and community sector organisations, Food bank providers, service leads working with vulnerable communities and the CVS. Based on these discussions we have collectively identified the following seven thematic leads for issues that residents maybe facing or want information and advice on.

It is recommended that thematic groups will be set up for the following areas and have designated VCSO leads, as follows:

Theme	Lead (collective agreement by the sector and the council)	Other Organisations (to be agreed by lead) Quality Standard Accredited
Disabilities	To be decided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mencap • Brent Carers • Young Carers • Royal Association of the Deaf
Older People	To be decided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age UK • Elders Voice • Ashford Place • Brent Carers/Sudbury
Young People	Young Brent Foundation	Young Brent Foundation
Homeless	Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis • Salvation Army • Ashford Place • BIAS
Foodbanks	Sufra	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brent Foodbanks • St Laurence's Larder • Rumi's Cave • Trussell Trust
Advice and Information	Citizens Advice Brent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice4Renters • Age UK • Ashford Place • BCAN Network • BIAS • Step-Up Hub • The Sherriff Centre
Cultural/Community Groups	To be decided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asian Womens Resource Centre • Brent Indian Association • Latin America House • Bosnia and Herzegovina Community Advice Centre • Pakistani Cultural Centre • Step Up Hub

Discussions have taken place with members of the Multi Faith Forum who are keen to work on gathering local community intelligence on needs and support for those that might be experiencing hardship, isolation or other vulnerabilities. CVS Brent and the Multi Faith Forum are to decide on how their input could be developed further.

Mutual Aid Groups

3.5 Many residents have self-organised across the borough to create local groups to help support mutual aid for those communities that have been or are likely to become vulnerable. Whilst these are self-organised groups and the council would not expect to manage their activity the council has created the thematic lead to act as key conduits for sign posting, intelligence gathering and disseminating to support the activities of these self-organised groups.

The intention of our proposals is that these groups would be able to seek support from the CVS and we will fund the CVS accordingly.

Role of the CVS

3.6 The thematic groups will be co-ordinated by CVS Brent, who already have the infrastructure in place to undertake this role. This role will include undertaking a mapping/monitoring exercise of activity across the Borough in discussion with the thematic leads. An essential part of CVS's work will be to give small grants of up to £500. The council will also fund the CVS to undertake all of this work and they are due to come back to officers with costings.

A phased approach

3.7 A two-phased approach is proposed.

Phase One - would look to mitigate the immediate impact of Covid-19 for example making sure that those who need it have access to food and basic necessities and that vulnerable older, long term sick and disabled people have access to their services.

Phase Two - Assuming that the UK could be affected by Covid-19 for a period of months, the second phase of our response will focus on building medium term resilience as far as possible, by supporting communities and groups to help themselves. This phase will focus on helping community-based mutual aid groups to operate as safely as possible, supporting community groups with access to resources - and to the extent that professional advice confirms this is safe and with appropriate protection, building an effective volunteer force to support those who need it.

Food Supplies – The Leader is arranging to speak with wholesalers in the borough regarding safeguarding supplies for the vulnerable. This was a specific ask from food banks.

Establishment of Emergency Funds

3.8 To support the local response the establishment of emergency funds is proposed:

Community Networks grant

- Up to £5,000 for umbrella VCS organisations to act as a conduit between the Council and smaller community organisations.

- Funded groups would be expected to engage and build networks with smaller organisations in the Borough to:
 - ❖ identify Covid-19 impacts on vulnerable individuals and groups
 - ❖ signpost to local statutory and mutual aid services and support
 - ❖ provide assistance to vulnerable individuals and groups
 - ❖ distribute information and updates
 - ❖ record and relay emerging community concerns to the Council

- The fund will be administered by CVS Brent, who will be tasked with developing networks that are representative of Brent's diverse communities, cover the whole Borough and are able to adapt to emerging needs and what is likely to be a rapidly changing situation.

- Up to seven organisations can be awarded grants, collectively totalling £35,000 in the first instance. The Council can consider additional organisations if required.

Foodbanks

3.9 Council officers have met with foodbanks and offered funding. Some would like it and others would rather a different kind of support. Officers have asked them to come back to the council by Friday 20th March and will take forward their requests accordingly. We will update members as soon as we can.

Neighbourhood Support

3.10 We will use the intelligence we gain from the lead organisations over the forthcoming months to focus our efforts at neighbourhood level and identify ways of coordinating Council and other statutory agency activities with those of the VCSO and other sectors.

Managing currently funded projects

- 3.11 It is also proposed that the Council takes a more flexible approach to how we manage our currently grant-funded projects. It is likely that organisations will incur costs such as salary or rent, but will see a drop in performance against previously agreed targets as their clients or other stakeholders practice social distancing. It is suggested that we adjust targets, consider alternative delivery models, encourage partnerships and the sharing of resources.

Establishment of a Helpline – social care

- 3.12 In addition to the actions outlined here, Brent Council has also introduced a new helpline number dedicated to assisting those who do not have support from friends or family, and no close links to the local community. Trained social care professionals will staff the new helpline number, - 020 8937 6589 - 5 days a week with an out of hours emergency service. They will ask a series of questions of callers to establish what support each individual needs and then will set it up via the usual processes or by making use of the new services. The service will be for those residents needing social care and are completely isolated from help by friends or family.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The recommendations if agreed would have financial implications. The Chief Executive under her delegated powers for acting in an emergency will make this decision on 20th March 2020. Resources will be taken from our allocated reserve for service pressures.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 Pursuant to the s1 of the Localism Act 2011, the council has the discretionary power to do anything an individual may do, subject to any specific restrictions set out in other legislation. Furthermore, in accordance with s111 of the Local Government Act 1972 the council has the power to undertake any activity which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive, or incidental to, the discharge of any of its functions; and accordingly implementing processes which increase and improve community engagement would fall within these powers.

6.0 Equality Implications

- 6.1 Brent is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion; the council is determined to be an exemplar of good practice in equality, diversity and human rights and it is our policy to treat everyone fairly and with respect. We aim to ensure that all our current and future residents, staff and stakeholders are treated fairly and receive appropriate, accessible services, and fair and equal opportunities.
- 6.2 This commitment requires that equality considerations play a key role in our decision-making processes and that our policies are fully compliant with the duties placed on us as a public sector body by the Equality Act 2010. Our

Equality Analyses (EAs) ensure that we follow through on our commitment to equality and they provide a method for clearly demonstrating the necessary legal compliance.

- 6.3 The Equality Act 2010 replaced the pre-existing anti-discrimination laws with a single Act. The legislation covers the exercise of public functions, employment and work, goods and services, premises, associations, transport and education. The act prohibits victimisation and harassment, and all of the following forms of discrimination: direct; indirect; by association; by perception; or discrimination arising from disability. When considering the Public Sector Equality Duty pursuant to section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it,

- 6.4 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, 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.

- 6.5 The impact of these proposals on people with protected characteristics will be monitored on a regular basis. An Equality Analysis has been carried out and further analyses will be undertaken if the recommendations in this report are adopted.

7.0 Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders

- 7.1 The Lead Member has been consulted throughout the process and as detailed in the report discussions have taken place with the voluntary and community sector.

8.0 Human Resources/Property Implications (where appropriate)

- 8.1 N/A

Report sign off:

Shazia Hussain

Assistant Chief Executive