

	<b>Cabinet</b> 10 February 2020
	<b>Report from the Assistant Chief Executive</b>
<b>Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund (VSIF) Infrastructure Grant; Brent Advice Partnership - Local advice and guidance services &amp; Brent Advice Fund - 2020/2021</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>No. of Appendices:</b>	None
<b>Background Papers:</b>	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 (VSIF) Infrastructure Grant to CVS Brent in the sum of £80,000 to the end of March 2021.
- 1.2 It also seeks agreement on the approval of a one-year extension to the Brent Advice Partnership – local advice and guidance services contract with Citizens Advice Brent (CAB) – in the sum of £171,475 and of the Brent Advice Fund in the sum of £120,000.

## 2.0 Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 approve a one-year extension to the Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund (VSIF) Infrastructure Grant to CVS Brent in the sum of £80,000 to the end of March

2021 to provide services during the transition period of the introduction of the new model of collaboration.

- 2.2 approve a one-year extension to the Brent Advice Partnership – local advice and guidance services contract with Citizens Advice Brent – in the sum of £171,475.
- 2.3 approve a one-year extension of the Brent Advice Fund in the sum of £120,000.

### **3.0 Detail**

- 3.1 Brent's voluntary & community sector offers a comprehensive range of services and activities that both contribute significantly to the wellbeing of Brent's residents, and complement local statutory services. The Council acknowledges the pivotal role played by the voluntary & community sector and recognises the significant challenges currently confronting these organisations. Meeting the aspirations of the people of Brent requires a close and strong partnership between the Council and the voluntary and community sector organisations (VCSO). As the Council reviews the support it offers to the VCSO, it has a unique opportunity to strengthen this partnership. In turn, and while respecting the independence of the sector, the Council needs partners it can work with, that it has confidence to invest in.
- 3.2 CVS Brent currently deliver Brent's infrastructure provision, which includes training, governance advice, funding and governance support and assistance from 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 Edward Harvist Trust (where the sum is £7k) or Brent Advice Fund (where the sum is £20k). Cabinet approved a VSIF grant to CVS Brent in 2016, which was extended by conditional grant agreement in 2019.
- 3.3 The proposal is that the grant is extended to the end of March 2021 at a cost of £80k to sustain provision during the introduction of the new model of collaboration. Provision of services by the existing provider, CVS Brent, will provide stability during the transition period and it is considered that the proposed grant of £80k for this period represents good value for the authority. During this time, delivery will be monitored on a quarterly basis based on targets agreed with CVS Brent covering areas such as capacity building, training and funding. The CVS grant will be released in stages and only once key outcomes have been delivered in areas such as governance, organisational development, capacity building, advice and training.
- 3.4 The local advice and services contract with Citizens Advice Brent (CAB) – Brent Advice Partnership ends on 31 March 2020. The proposal is that this is extended for a year until the end of March 2021. Monitoring will be undertaken during this period and the monies released in stages once agreed outcomes have been delivered. The contract covers:
  - Establishing and developing a Brent Community Advice Network to support and provide capacity building to local advice agencies and to improve access to advice.

- A home visiting service to people who cannot access advice in the conventional way, delivered by Age UK.
- Brent Advice Fund administration.
- Providing support and training for Freshworks (Customer Service Management system).
- A project manager post and
- Management and development of the Brent Advice Matters website

3.5 The Brent Advice Fund allows voluntary and community organisations to bid for funding to improve capacity building and advice services in the voluntary sector. The proposal is that this is extended until end of March 2021 at a cost of £120k.

3.6 The approach proposed in this report would bring all of these arrangements in line and would put in place a framework during the transition to the new model of collaboration.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

4.1 If the recommendations in this report are approved the total cost is £371,475. This will be contained within the Strategy and Partnership budget.

#### **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.

5.2 The giving of grants to voluntary organisations is a discretionary power that 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 it 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". Officers have indicated at paragraph 3.3 reasons why the proposed grant will offer best value.

5.5 Under section 9 of the table at paragraph 9.5 of Part 3 of the Constitution, Cabinet approval is required for award of grants from the Council's Voluntary Sector Initiative Fund and other grants from the Council's own resources. Officers also have delegated authority to award grant for financial or other assistance to organisations for up to a maximum of £20k per annum but Cabinet approval is required for the recommendations in this report.

#### **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 the proposed extension of the grant on people with protected characteristics will be monitored on a regular basis and where any unintended negative consequences are identified, the council will implement remedial actions. An Equality Analysis has been carried out with no negative consequences identified. Further analyses will be undertaken if the recommendations in this report are adopted.

## **7.0 Any Other Implications (HR, Property etc. - if necessary)**

- 7.1 There are no other implications.

## **8.0 Proposed Consultation with Ward Members and Stakeholders**

8.1 The Lead Member has been consulted throughout the process.

**Report sign off:**

**Shazia Hussain**  
Assistant Chief Executive