

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE The Right Advice at the Right Time: a review of advice services provided in the Borough of Camden (CS/2019/14)	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Promoting Culture and Communities	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Cabinet	DATE 17 July 2019
SUMMARY OF REPORT <p>Camden 2025 sets out a clear vision that we want Camden to be a place where everyone has a chance to succeed and where no one is left behind. We believe that high quality independent advice is a powerful way to empower residents and help build resilient communities.</p> <p>In order to best deliver this and encourage a resident-focussed, rights-based, partnership approach to advice services, a new model of provision is proposed. This model includes a grant award strategy for the Camden Advice Partnership, to replace the current advice contracts which come to an end on 31st March 2020.</p> <p>This report recommends using a competitive grants process to award funding to organisations who provide independent specialist and general voluntary sector advice. The recommendation to move from contractual to grant arrangements is being made in order to better respond to changing needs, by enabling greater flexibility. The intention is to award grant funding of up to £7million over an initial 3 year period and then a further 4 years subject to review (up to a maximum of £1million per annum), to support and achieve the advice provision outcomes as set out in this report.</p> <p>The model aims to achieve the following outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents have the right information and support so that they feel empowered and equipped to deal with problems themselves • Residents can access advice in a way and location that is best for them and they know where they can go for support • A reduction in poverty by helping ensure people have access to the benefits they are entitled to (“income maximisation”) • All residents from across our wide range of diverse communities have equal access to advice and no one is excluded • The amount of contact with services is reduced as residents are able to get information, advice and support from the service they already have a relationship with • Emerging concerns and trends are promptly identified and appropriately responded to as a result of all services in the advice network working in collaboration. <p>The proposed model aims to better deliver on the Camden 2025 objective of working with a range of partners in the community to improve residents’ lives and to support both individuals and organisations to become more resilient.</p>	

Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information

No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet agree:

1. The model for the Camden Advice Partnership delivered independently by Voluntary & Charity Sector (VCS) organisations under a new framework outlined in section 2 of the report
2. the introduction of a new grant funding model to award funding for these services as laid out in section 2 of the report
3. the competitive grant strategy proposed in section 2 of the report. This comprises the award of up to £7 million in annual instalments over 7 years (with a maximum of £1 million paid per annum). Grants would be issued for an initial period of 3 years, and then (subject to a review of the performance of the overall Camden Advice Partnership model at the end of year three) a further period of 4 years (3+4).
4. that authority is delegated to the Executive Director Supporting Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Promoting Culture and Communities, to make the arrangements for the award of grant.
 - i) choosing which organisations should form the Camden Advice Partnership and receive the grants
 - ii) agreeing on the final form of the grant agreement and mechanisms for in period assessment
 - iii) ensuring the grant recipients successfully deliver the agreed outcomes as per the grant agreement through ongoing monitoring with the option to suspend or withdraw payments if the grant agreement is not adhered to
 - iv) leading the review at the end of year three and bringing a report to cabinet noting that in taking all of the above steps that the Executive Director will assess and give due regard to the Councils equality duties

Signed: 

Date: 8th July 2019

1 CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In a time of increasing pressures and reducing financial resources, Camden has made the commitment to continue to invest significantly in our community as part of our ongoing vision to ensure Camden is a borough where everyone has a chance to succeed and no one is left behind. As part of this vision, this report seeks approval for a new model for the provision of advice services in Camden. We believe our residents have a right to high quality, independent advice, which helps empower them to make good decisions and build further resilience, especially for those that are vulnerable or currently less able to engage within their wider community. We also recognise that there have been significant funding cuts to legal aid services nationally and therefore quality advice services are now more important than ever.
- 1.2 Our vision is to create a network of advice services with the resident at the heart of all they do, that will deliver high quality proactive advice, are able to respond flexibly to resident's needs, are rooted in the community and who will work collaboratively to ensure all residents are empowered, resilient and able to thrive.
- 1.3 The current Camden Advice Partnership (CAP), comprises four voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, Age UK Camden, Citizens Advice Camden, Camden Community Law Centre and the Mary Ward Legal Centre. It was commissioned in 2012 and the current contracts will expire in March 2020. These services were commissioned to deliver a range of general and specialist advice services on a spectrum of advice, ranging from:
- **Information:** Providing information so people are empowered to make their own decisions about their situation. This could include their rights, what services are available to them or information about policies and procedures.
 - **Advice:** Understanding someone's situation and the issues involved in order so appropriate information and options can be provided. This could also involve guidance on appropriate actions and next steps.
 - **Support:** Taking action to help people articulate their needs.
 - **Advocacy:** Representing someone's needs and rights.
- It is intended that the new CAP would continue to deliver this spectrum of advice services and whilst we will encourage innovative use of tools such as online and digital, we expect the focus of the CAP to be on advice and advocacy for Camden residents.
- 1.4 Several reviews of existing advice services have been undertaken over the course of the last year which have influenced the proposed framework including the Employment and Income Review and the Landlord review. It has also been influenced by reviews of the wider range of services within the Council including the recent work undertaken by adult social care and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) approach to supporting vulnerable people in the community through for example, social prescribing. Specific to the CAP, Public Health completed an evaluation which was then further developed on by an external agency, Traverse who were commissioned to assist in the framework development.
- 1.5 Whilst the CAP has been able to deliver advice services over the last eight years and has supported a large number of residents through difficult times, the reviews have also found there are restrictions and issues identified that needed to be addressed when looking at enabling the new advice partnership. These reviews also analysed the types of needs people had approached services for to ensure a future framework provides services based on identified needs.
- 1.6 One of the major concerns raised was due to the nature of the contract and the fact they were commissioned to deliver specific outcomes. As a result the CAP organisations are not always able to respond flexibly to issues that have emerged over the last eight years. Issues

such as Welfare Reform and the introduction of universal credit, the forthcoming exit of the UK from the European Union, Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and the ongoing effects of austerity especially around housing have had a significant impact on residents and the support they need. These new challenges require specialist advice to support residents, however the commissioning structure does not allow the advice partnership to be appropriately responsive to these emerging needs. This theme of a future model being more flexible was a consistent finding across all reviews.

- 1.7 Although one of the original aims of the previously commissioned CAP was more collaboration and closer partnership working, this has not been realised to the level that was intended. The CAP organisations do meet regularly and work together, however the commissioning approach led to the council interacting individually with the organisations and with very little contact with the wider range of VCS organisations that also provide advice. Despite the best of intentions advice services are still fragmented and not empowered to work in partnership. A new framework would need to encourage greater partnership and collaboration, not only within the VCS but also with the council.
- 1.8 A further concern raised which was partially due to the fragmentation of services was around accessibility and people not always being clear on where to go to get the advice and support they needed. Key to the success of any advice network will be ensuring a good spread of advice both geographically and within specific communities (recognising that much access to advice relies on word of mouth).

2 PROPOSAL AND REASONS

Framework Overview

- 2.1 Building on what was found in the reviews and in line with the vision of Camden 2025 we have developed an advice framework to deliver our intended vision and outcomes for residents in collaboration with Traverse and the VCS. We believe this approach will encourage a more collaborative relationship to work together in developing creative solutions to meet the needs of the community. It is proposed that we develop an 'advice network' which includes all elements of advice, both VCS and council to implement this collaborative approach and ensure all parts of the network are working together in partnership rather than a series of individual services working separately.
- 2.2 Having analysed the findings from the various reviews, the data available to us from CAP monitoring and information from council services we have identified as well as general advice, several topic areas we would want the CAP to provide information, advice and advocacy on.
 - **General advice.** As well as providing general advice it is expected that an organisation with sufficient capacity to do so would also take on a central triage role to link in with the rest of the network. This would provide a single point of contact for those unsure where to get support, however residents could also approach other organisations directly if they already have a relationship or know what specialist support they need.
 - **Specialist advice.** This would be broken into a series of subcategories as follows: Over 65's; Young People (16-25); People with Disabilities; Welfare/Benefits; Housing; Employment & Immigration; Debt & Money
- 2.3 After development with Council officers and representatives from the VCS, a new model is proposed which at its heart would provide social value to Camden residents through the delivery of high quality, person centred advice services. It was agreed that any services should consider the following principles when working with someone.
 - Advice is empowering and encourages independence whilst recognising when people need more intensive support.

- Advice should be solution focused and recognise people are on a 'journey'
- Relationships with a trusted advisor should be encouraged and built
- Support plans are consistent across the network
- Organisations will use self-evaluation tools to understand the impact of their support

2.4 It should be guided by four characteristics that are preventative and proactive which are:

- Focused on priorities, flexible and responsive to change
- Integrated, accessible and rooted in the community
- Strength based, empowering and enabling
- A voice for individuals and communities

In practice this would mean that we would expect organisations provide advice and support in their communities in innovative ways rather than being based in an office and expecting residents to come to them.

2.5 Building on the above principles and characteristics for advice services, the advice network as a whole will be expected to display three core elements:

- ***An easily navigable advice network***

Ensuring residents can get access to the help they need and it is easy to find the help they need. Reduces inefficiencies in the process and avoids people having multiple contacts with services and having to repeat their stories

- ***Planning and partnership***

Collaboration in the network is actively encouraged to create a constant feedback loop as well as encouraging peer to peer advice and ongoing resilience in the community. Organisations meet regularly to share learning, reflect on needs, monitor consistency of approach, refine referral advice systems and plan for future needs based on the collated information

- ***Gathering and using evidence***

Council and advice services agree an agile evaluation framework that is person centred and able to adapt to changing priorities. Council, providers and community organisations proactively use data to understand trends in demand, effectiveness of advice services and their ability to respond.

2.6 The other key feature of this framework will be an ongoing accountability and support structure built into the network to ensure advice services meet regularly to review trends and needs and how the network can respond appropriately. This network would consist of relevant council officers, alongside representatives from the VCS. It is intended that the network will be comprised of those organisations that form the CAP but also include other organisations who may not receive funding directly from the Council but still deliver advice and advocacy, often to specific community groups.

Funding Approach

2.7 A key change to enable the new framework is moving away from the previous approach of commissioning through a contract and instead fund the CAP through a competitive grant of £7m spread over the course of an initial 3 year period then a further 4 years. A competitive core grant is a transparent and fair approach whilst allowing the flexibility organisations would need to deliver the intended outcomes for residents. This approach is also in line with our wider approach to the VCS, including our Strategic Partnership Funding.

2.8 This grant approach also encourages the Council and the VCS to work more in partnership and recognise that many of the VCS organisations already have strong relationships with their communities and reach vulnerable people the Council could not. On review, the relationship in the traditional commissioning approach was felt to be transactional rather

collaborative and VCS organisations expressed a strong desire to be working in genuine partnership with the Council, rather than just a 'delivery vehicle' for council objectives.

- 2.9 If agreed, we will begin the grant process in late 2019 to determine the future grant recipients, with the grant awards beginning in April 2020. Due to the nature of the grant and the proposed framework it is envisaged that the delivery of the new Camden Advice Partnership will be iterative in nature and there will be a process of ongoing learning and refinement throughout the 7 year grant award. To ensure that the framework as a whole is delivering the outcomes intended however there would be a formal review at the end of the first 3 years, meaning the grant would technically be 3+4. This allows for changes to the approach and framework if any major concerns are identified in the first 3 years and also brings the project roughly in line with the duration of the current MTFS.
- 2.10 It is proposed to evaluate based on 100% quality. The quality of the advice provision is the most important element of the success of this proposal and encourages local organisations to apply for funding and be a part of the partnership. In contrast to the contract approach, the lowest price offered will not be considered in the award criteria.
- 2.11 Consortia bids will be encouraged and supported through the application process, to help establish the type of partnership approach and advice network that is intended in this new framework. Multiple organisations may wish to deliver on the same topic areas (as laid out in 2.2) and therefore some of the allocated funding may be split to reflect this. Conversely, some organisations may wish to cover multiple areas and may wish to bid for multiple categories. It is proposed that the money be allocated across the topic areas based on the applications received and influenced by the data we have indicating need.

Outcomes and ongoing monitoring

- 2.12 To guide the impact of the proposed model, the advice network will know it is successful when it achieves the following outcomes:
- Residents have the right information and support so that they feel empowered and equipped to deal with problems themselves
 - Residents can access advice in a way and location that is best for them and they know where they can go for support
 - A reduction in poverty by helping ensure people have access to the benefits they are entitled to ("income maximisation")
 - All residents from across our wide range of diverse communities have equal access to advice and no one is excluded
 - The amount of contact with services is reduced as residents are able to get information, advice and support from the service they already have a relationship with
 - Emerging concerns and trends are promptly identified and appropriately responded to as a result of all services in the advice network working in collaboration.

In line with the collaborative approach we are seeking these outcomes may be subject to further refinement once the new CAP grants have been awarded and based on need.

- 2.13 There will also be regular ongoing evaluation of the organisations individually to ensure they are delivering the agreed outcomes. The grant would be given in annual instalments but there would be an option to suspend or withdraw payments to individual organisations if they are unable to show they are delivering outcomes or they do not adhere to the grant agreement. This monitoring would be done by the Community Partnership team under direction from the Executive Director Supporting Communities.
- 2.14 To further help organisations show they are delivering the intended and agreed outcomes a robust monitoring framework will be developed with the successful applicants and will be

informed by their applications. This is to ensure the money being invested is delivering on the intended vision and outcomes, as well as supporting the CAP to easily demonstrate the impact they are having for residents.

- 2.15 Grant award criteria have been developed based on the intended outcomes (as outline in 2.10) and on the proposed framework (outlined in 2.3-2.5). Organisations wishing to apply for grant funding will need to show they intend to deliver on these outcomes and how they will measure their success against these criteria. At the heart of all applications, organisations will need to consistently show how their advice will be high quality, accessible (including a geographical spread across Camden) and encourages resilience especially for Camden's most vulnerable residents
- 2.16 Further details of the proposed grant award criteria (subject to further development and refinement) are set out in Appendix 4.

3 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 3.1 A working group comprised of VCS representatives and council officers from a range of departments including strategy & change, legal, finance, community partners and procurement contributed to the framework which included a detailed analysis of all information available across the various reviews and after careful consideration, three options were considered in relation to this project and further analysis of the options can be found in appendix 7.
- 3.2 ***Option One – Do nothing***
Not all boroughs have comprehensive independent advice services, however in Camden having advice services available for our residents is something councillors and officers believe is valuable and a key part of developing resilience and therefore it is strongly recommended that the 'do-nothing' option is not considered.
- 3.3 ***Option Two - Council Provision of all advice services.***
Camden is currently assessing the benefits of insourcing some services and as part of this wider strategy, bringing advice services in-house was considered. It was considered that advice should be independent of the Council, and the proposed framework aims to build a network of advice including small organisations that reach a range of vulnerable people in the community which insourcing would not be able to achieve. It was further identified that the VCS can deliver specialist services more efficiently than the Council and therefore it was agreed that this option is not recommended
- 3.4 ***Option Three - Recommissioning through an outsourced contract***
The previous approach was to commission these types of services with a contract as this clearly sets out what outcomes we want organisations to achieve and clear accountability if they do not deliver. Based on the intentions of the framework and existing strategy in regards the VCS, a contract was not considered to be the best option. It was identified that it would not be sufficiently flexible to respond to any new emerging issues and would not allow the innovation from the sector we want to encourage. It is also not in line with the desire to have a genuine partnership with the VCS as part of a wider advice network rather than the organisations simply being a delivery vehicle. Therefore commissioning through a contract is not recommended.
- 3.5 ***Option Four – Supporting services through a competitive grant process.***
To achieve the broad vision and outcomes for residents through advice services a competitive grant was an approach that has been used elsewhere to achieve similar objectives. The grant core funding (which is also in line with the strategic partners funding)

can provide sufficient flexibility and innovation to respond to needs as they arrive as the services can use the funding to provide advice services in a way that has resident needs as the focus rather than commissioning objectives. The grant also changes the relationship the Council has with these organisations to more collaborative and partnership-based as opposed to a transactional commissioner relationship. Officers also consider that the grant is the best way to empower the smaller organisations that work with a range of communities in Camden that do not usually engage with other services, so we can provide support to all who need it. The grant also encourages development of more direct relationships between these organisations and the Council, in contrast with a formal subcontracting arrangement which would happen under a contract model. The competitive grant process and the agreements will still ensure bidders would be rigorously assessed for ability to deliver the outcomes, and there would be claw-back provisions where the VCS provider was not meeting the objectives stated in the grant agreement.

- 3.6 Option four is recommended as the preferred method for supporting the advice partnership as it not only allows the money to be distributed fairly and in a transparent way as well as appropriate mechanisms for holding organisations to account for delivery of outcomes, but still allows for the flexibility and innovation that the CAP would need to provide appropriate advice for residents in the wider advice network. It also encourages the type of collaborative relationship the council wants to have with the VCS as outlined in Camden 2025 to support the VCS to be more resilient and responsive to resident need. The recommendation of the competitive grant process was also based on the fact that the area of service covered was much wider than the simply Camden services – part of the grant recipient’s intended role was around co-ordinating other non-Camden services in a way that best achieved the intended outcomes. Legal Services have set out the factors which should be considered when awarding grants rather than contracts, as detailed in the legal comments (section 7).

4 WHAT ARE THE KEY IMPACTS / RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 4.1 Project specific impacts / risks, and the associated mitigation strategy are set out in Appendix 6. The main risks highlighted are in relation to organisations not receiving or losing out on funding on an ongoing basis, and no longer being financially viable. This would not only affect the organisations but also have a significant effect on the communities they serve and the borough as a whole due to the extra resource and skills they bring to the borough, leveraged through council funding. A review completed to establish which organisations this may affect and what support they will need.
- 4.2 Other factors central to common areas of risk are detailed In Appendix 2.
- 4.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed and the outcome is that the proposed Grant Model is the most fair and transparent process for supporting advice services to ensure protected groups have access independent advice services that empowers individuals’ decision-making abilities and promotes resilience. Protected groups will able to access advice from an organisation they know and trust and CAP organisations will also be encouraged to be proactive and meeting people where they are in the community which is especially important for groups that are isolated or vulnerable.

5 LINKS TO OUR CAMDEN PLAN

- 5.1 The overarching aim of Our Camden Plan is to make Camden a place where everyone has a chance to succeed, where nobody gets left behind, and where everybody has a voice. A series of strong independent advice services working within the wider advice network would contribute to many of Our Camden Plan objectives.

- Safe, strong and vibrant communities: Residents empowered through advice services are better able to participate in the community and our VCS will be resilient and responsive to resident need.
- Homes and housing: Housing advice is consistently one of the topics residents contact advice services for support on, therefore a strong advice network will support residents who need help to have a place they can call home.
- Strong growth & access to jobs: Employment advice is another key topic identified and advice services can support people back into work.
- Healthy independent lives: Advice and advocacy supports people to age well and live independently for as long as possible and help those that may be isolated connect back into their community and be able to ask for help and support when they need it.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 As part of the review of the previous advice partnership a report was produced which involved consultation with 275 residents who have used advice services as well as with the advice partners themselves. Details of this report are in appendix 3.
- 6.2 In the preparation of this proposed new Grant model, an external consultant, Traverse was employed to work alongside council officers, the current advice partnership and a number of smaller VCS organisations that also deliver advice to help develop the characteristics of the new Grant Model.
- 6.3 All organisations involved in the consultation have expressed a desire to continue to be involved with the ongoing framework development and the wider advice network regardless of whether they receive grant funding or not.

7 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 This report requests the approval for a competitive grant process to award a combined total of £1m per annum across 8 topic areas of the voluntary sector for up to 7 (3+4) years, to a number of voluntary sector organisations who apply for such grants.
- 7.2 Under Part 3 of the Constitution, the following provisions confirm that Cabinet approval is required to award the Grant Funding as described in this report:
Cabinet to agree:
14. To agree the award of grants of over £100,000 in any one year
- This report recommends that responsibility for the award of grants is delegated to the Executive Director Supporting Communities in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Promoting Culture and Communities.
- 7.3 Under a grant agreement, the funder makes a payment to the recipient for a specific purpose. The recipient is not obliged to deliver any goods, works or services to the funder, although the funder may claw back grant which has not been spent or is misapplied. Grant agreements may enable the funder to withhold or suspend payment and require repayment of all or part of the grant if, among others, the recipient:
1. Misuses the grant
 2. Fails to comply with the grant agreement
 3. Obtains duplicate funding from a third party
 4. Commits fraud or bribery
 5. Ceases to operate, is wound up, dissolved or becomes insolvent

An arrangement whereby the recipient of funding is not bound to provide anything in return is unlikely to amount to a contract for pecuniary interest. If the recipient is obliged to provide

anything in exchange for its funding the arrangement is likely to be contractual, and if a grant is found to be a contract which was let in breach of the Public Contract Regulations (PCR) 2015, it risks being declared ineffective. Officers should be mindful of this advice when drafting the intended grant outcomes.

- 7.4 By agreeing to a 7-year grant award, there should be a strong strategic justification as to why the arrangements will be in place for such period, as the Council will be creating an expectation from the grant recipients to model their income including such awards. In addition, officers would need to set out in the grant conditions the circumstances which would give the Council flexibility not to award the funding if circumstances change.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 This paper proposes moving from a traditional contractual arrangement to a competitive grant process to ensure a responsive advice service that meets changing needs. The grant will be awarded for a period of three years initially and then following a review could be continued up to a possible seven years in total (three plus four years). The grant will be paid and reviewed annually with an ability to clawback funds in certain circumstances.
- 8.2 The report requests that Cabinet delegate authority to award grants to the Executive Director for Supporting Communities in consultation with the Cabinet member for Promoting Culture and Communities.
- 8.1 The VCS service has an MTFs saving target of £0.916m of which £0.240m has been allocated to come from the advice service budget. The budget available for advice services in 2018/19 is £1.2m, which will be reduced by £240k over a three year period from 2019/20 to deliver the agreed MTFs saving target.
- 8.2 The evaluation split is 100% Quality as the grant available will be specified and will not exceed this.

9 TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- 9.1 Once agreed, the grant award process will run from September to December 2019 with a transition period from January to April 2020.
- 9.2 The new advice partnership will start from April 2020 and begin with an initial development phase over the first three years which will establish the wider network and further develop the framework. A detailed implementation plan is being developed with Traverse including development of award terms and an evaluation toolkit that will be available by the time we begin the grant award process. This process will be iterative in nature and will apply learning as the model is further developed, however there will be a formal review at the end of the third year to evaluate the success of the approach. This is separate to the annual outcomes reviews which will be completed with individual organisations.

APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – Part II Not for Publication
- Appendix 2 – Key considerations
- Appendix 3 – CAP evaluation report
- Appendix 4 – Grant Award Criteria
- Appendix 5 – Equalities Impact Assessment
- Appendix 6 – Risk Log
- Appendix 7 – Detailed Options Analysis

Report Ends