

Delegated Cabinet Member Key Decision Report

Decision Maker and Portfolio area:	Councillor Shoab Akhtar, Cabinet Member for Employment and Enterprise
Date of Decision:	20 th March 2023
Subject:	Priority Programme Fund – Legal & Advice Services
Report Author:	Rachel Dyson, Thriving Communities Lead
Ward (s):	All

Reason for the decision: To allocate grant funding from the Priority Programme Fund (PPF) for legal and advice services, renewing existing grants for one year (23/24).

Summary: The purpose of this report is to seek approval to allocate funding from the Priority Programme Fund for the renewal of grants to Citizen's Advice Oldham for one year until 31st March 2024, at a total cost of £260,000.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s): Option 1 – Decommissioning: This is not regarded as a viable option. For Citizen's Advice this would represent the loss of their core funding and may result in a significant reduction in the services they are able to offer and could result in closure of the service.

Option 2 – Renew the grant agreement for one year (23/24): This would sustain funding enabling Citizen's Advice to continue to provide services to residents at a time when demand for advice and support is increasing due to cost of living increases and their impacts.

Recommendation(s):

Option 2 – Renew the grant agreement for one year (23/24): This would sustain funding enabling Citizen’s Advice to continue to provide services to residents at a time when demand for advice and support is increasing due to cost of living increases and their impacts.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*

The total grant payable to CAO in 2023/24 is £378,200. There is budgetary provision of £240,440 in the Priority Programme Funding base budget leaving a shortfall of £137,760.

The shortfall is to be funded from resources identified for the Cost-of-Living initiative in 2023/24 and 2024/25.

(Nicola Harrop – Finance Manager)

*What are the **procurement** implications?*

There are no procurement implications as this relates to the approval of grants.

(Emily Molden, Senior Category Manager)

*What are the **legal** implications?*

Legal Services supports the recommendation to renew the grant agreements for one year (23/24) which is in accordance with the Council CPR’s and Public Procurement Regulations. The Service provided by Citizen’s Advice is a key service which is at all time high demand by residents of Oldham in view of the current economic climate.

(Sukie Kaur – Solicitor)

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?*

None

***Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment** attached or not required because (please give reason)*

No vulnerable group will be disproportionality affected from the proposals contained within this report. However, an EIA would be undertaken in the event that grant funding is not agreed or is reduced or withdrawn.

*What are the **property** implications*

None

Risks:

The way forward does not seem unreasonable from a risk perspective.
(Mark Stenson, Assistant Director of Finance)

Co-operative agenda

Citizen’s Advice Oldham are key partners in empowering residents and communities to help themselves and supporting them where needed with legal and advice services, reducing demand on Council and partner services.

Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? Yes

Reason why this Is a Key Decision (1) to result in the local authority incurring expenditure or the making of savings which are, significant (over £250k) having regard to the local authority’s budget for the service or function to which the decision relates

The Key Decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **five working days** have elapsed from the publication date of the decision.

This item has been included on the Forward Plan under reference **enter Key Decision Document reference.**

List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

Title	Available from
Priority Programme Fund – VCFSE Support (22-23)	https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4407
Oldham’s Cost of Living Response	https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?ID=4508

Report Author Sign-off:	
	R. Dyson
Date:	3 rd April 2023

1 Background

1.1 The Council has, for a number of years, funded a range of voluntary, community and faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector organisations through its Priority Programme Fund (PPF). The fund has had three main strands, alongside supporting a small number of community events:

- Voluntary Sector Infrastructure
- Community Centres and Organisations
- Legal and Advice Services

The focus of this report is grants for Legal and Advice Services. Community Centres & Organisations are subject to a separate report. A grant for Voluntary Sector Infrastructure is in place until 2025.

As part of the VCFSE review described in Section 3 consideration has been given to the grant funding of Citizen's Advice and whether the Priority Programme Fund remains the most appropriate means to fund those services. It is proposed that there would be benefits to the realignment of the available funding within the wider Customer Services offer as this may present opportunities to better integrate the service offer operationally and to bridge the funding gap for Citizen's Advice to enable services to be maintained in a more sustainable way longer-term. This transition is planned during 23/24.

1.2 **Citizens Advice Oldham** provides legal and advice services to residents and was also instrumental in supporting the response to Covid-19 as a result of the circumstances of so many individuals changing e.g., as a result of furlough, welfare benefit changes, government changes to housing possession proceedings, etc. as well as more recently being key to our Cost of Living response. Citizens Advice Oldham services will also form part of the placed based offer, ensuring that residents have access to timely housing, debt and welfare benefit advice.

2 Current Position & Proposals

2.1 In 22/23 Citizen's Advice Oldham were awarded **£260,000** from the Priority Programme Fund to support their core activities. Previously this was supplemented by a contribution from Councillors of **£48,200** from their respective budgets, however this ceased in 21/22 and the grant was instead supplemented from the Covid19 Contain Outbreak Management Fund in 21/22 and 22/23.

2.2 It is proposed that Citizen's Advice Oldham are awarded **£260,000** for 23/24 from the Priority Programme Fund to support their core activities. It has previously been agreed by Cabinet that the shortfall of **£48,200** to the Priority Programme Fund will be met as part of the Cost of Living response, as well as an additional **£70,000** for 23/24 being awarded to

enable them to increase capacity and provide additional face to face support to residents within community based venues. The equates to a total grant of **£378,200**.

- 2.3 The total of grants awarded from the Priority Programme Fund results in a short fall of £19,560, which has previously been met by contributions from the CCG and subsequently by Covid Outbreak Management Funds (COMF). For 23-24 it was agreed by Cabinet that the shortfall will be met by funds allocated to the Cost of Living response given the significant contribution of all awardees to supporting residents facing financial challenges.

3. Conclusions: VCFSE Sector Commissioning Review

- 3.1 The Priority Programme Fund budget represents only one element of the Council's funding to the VCFSE sector, which has historically been set aside for core revenue funding to key local organisations. VCFSE organisations are also funded from across the Council via grants from other departmental budgets, through external grant programmes, via commissioned contract awards and through Members' local budgets. Given the ongoing shortfall within the PPF budget it is proposed that the use of this budget should be considered within the totality of that investment and recognising that impacts extend not only to the Council's relationship with the sector as a whole, but also to the range of outcomes within wider strategies to which these key organisations contribute.
- 3.2 At a Greater Manchester level there have been significant policy developments and commitments made by all GM authorities including Oldham in relation to the VCFSE. Notably in September 2021 all GM Authorities signed a refreshed [Accord](#) with the VCFSE sector which builds on the previous 2017 Accord with GMCA and 2017 MoU with the Health & Social Care Partnership. The Accord sets out eight commitments to ways of working with the sector and shared goals which recognise the role of the sector in delivering the Greater Manchester Strategy and the GM Integrated Care strategy as well as the key role they have played within the pandemic response. These commitments include fully implementing the recommendations of the previously published [GM VCFSE Commissioning Framework](#), of which a central element is the relationship of the public sector as commissioners and grant givers to the VCFSE.
- 3.3 It is now more than 10 years since the Council published its Compact with the VCFSE and although many of the principles underpinning that remain, there have been significant developments in the policy and commissioning landscape since then which should inform our approach. Likewise, there are additional obligations introduced through the new Subsidy Control legislation around the justification and publication of grants awarded which require robust decision making and recording in relation to the funding of the VCFSE.
- 3.4 In light of all of the above a full review is underway of the Council's commissioned activity and services to the voluntary sector, whether that be contracted or through the provision of grants. This review should give consideration to the role of the PPF funded activity within it, and to the following:
- Purpose and objectives of funding
 - Alignment of funding priorities to refreshed Council Plan & Oldham Plan
 - Current delivery & outcomes
 - Funding terms – use of grants / contracts, commissioning approach
 - Proportionate Monitoring
 - Equalities Impact Assessment
 - Compliance with subsidy control
 - Appropriate future funding term – contribution to resilience of the sector
- 3.5 This exercise would seek to make recommendations to ensure Oldham's alignment to the GM VCFSE Commissioning Framework, as well as refreshing the Compact with the VCFSE

Sector. It would also make a significant contribution to other key pieces of work in development across the system, in particular the development of a whole system Prevention Framework and the consideration of the role of VCFSE in place-based integration, the implementation of the Social Value Portal, the development of a single investment fund for the VCFSE and the Cooperative Approach to Use of Community Assets policy.

Signed: Cllr Shoab Akhtar (Cabinet Member)



Date: Thursday 6th April 2023

In consultation with:

Signed:



Sayyed Osman (Deputy Chief Executive)

Date: 6th April 2023