

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 04 April 2023

TITLE	Extension of Advice Grant	
Ward(s)	All wards	
Author: Katie Wright	Job title: Investments and Grant Manager	
Cabinet lead: Ellie King Cabinet Member for Public Health, Communities and Bristol One City	Executive Director lead: Hugh Evans, Executive Director Adults and Communities	
Proposal origin: BCC Staff		
Decision maker: Cabinet Member Decision forum: Cabinet		
Purpose of Report: To approve a two-year extension of the Advice Grant for the delivery of advice and the development of a citywide strategic approach, from 1st April 2024 to 31 st March 2026. A total value of £1.12m for the two-year period.		
Evidence Base: <p>1. Cost of living impact on the city</p> <p>1.1. The cost of living crisis is presenting significant challenges to the city and placing huge demand on the advice sector.</p> <p>1.2. The Bristol City Council Cost of Living Impact Assessment (see background documents) indicates that the cost of living will widen existing inequalities in the city and drive some households further into poverty leading to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in child poverty, fuel poverty and food insecurity • Poorer mental health and emotional wellbeing - including stress, anxiety and mental health problems • Wider social impacts on communities – including reduced social cohesion, increased crime rates, hate-crime, domestic violence, substance misuse, homelessness and negative impacts on children’s education learning and development <p>2 Advice provision and cost of living</p> <p>2.1 Bristol City Council are part of a one city approach to delivering a cost of living community response (see background document ‘Cost of Living Crisis Bristol’s One City approach) to support citizens and communities’)</p> <p>There are four key themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Immediate emergency & welfare support 2. Maximising incomes and reducing living costs 3. Keeping well 4. Community assets and Community wealth building <p>2.2 VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) advice organisations have a lead role in supporting citizens to both gain immediate emergency and welfare support and in maximising income and reducing living costs</p> <p>2.3. As key partners in the one city approach the advice sector is coordinating advice and support and</p>		

working to extend services to Welcoming places

2.4 Monitoring of five key cost of living issues by Citizens Advice Bristol shows the impact of cost of living on advice services (See Table one below) with significant increases in the last 8 months for:

- a. Charitable support and Food banks
- b. Council tax arrears
- c. Council tax arrears
- d. Energy
- e. Energy Debts
- f. Personal Independence Payment

Table 1 Citizens Advice Bristol percentage increase (or decrease) in people seeking advice Apr '22 - Nov'22

Five key cost of living issue	April '21 v April 22	May' 21 V May' 22	June '21 v June'22	July '21 v July'22	August '21 v August'22	Sept '21 v Sept'22	October '21 v October'22	Nov '21 v Nov'22
% increase/decrease 2021 vs 2022	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Charitable support & Food Banks	13%	32%	13%	33%	70%	60%	29%	24%
Council tax arrears	-5%	41%	-15%	62%	143%	158%	300%	200%
Energy	153%	200%	83%	64%	108%	85%	-10%	16%
Energy debts	-9%	86%	33%	12%	19%	27%	76%	113%
Personal independence payment	9%	21%	-20%	22%	18%	13%	-17%	-12%

3. Current Advice Grant

3.1. The current grant has run from 1st April 2019 and will run until 31st March 2024. For a full history of current funding please see Appendix A(i)

3.2. The Advice grant is £560,000 per annum (£484k General Fund; £76k Public Health). It has been reduced from £819.5k in 2016/17. The grant is now focused on specialist, indemnified advice.

3.3. The current grant is awarded to the Bristol Advice Partnership (BAP), made up of 7 advice providers in the City (see Appendix A (i) for list of current providers).

3.4. The grant funds high quality, regulated, general advice focusing on the provision of 5 main types of advice, including specialist advice for disabled citizens:

- Welfare benefits
- Housing
- Employment
- Money and Debt
- Immigration

3.5. This contributes to:

- Maintaining tenancies in social and private housing, and preventing homelessness
- Supporting the poorest and most excluded individuals and families to maintain sustainable finances and maximise their income
- Supporting the poorest and most excluded people to achieve positive results at tribunals and appeals
- Reducing financial, food and fuel poverty

3.6. Over the last fiscal year (April 2021- March 2022) – (see Appendix A (iii) for further detail) the partnership has:

- Given advice to over 8,000 citizens
- Achieved additional benefits payments for citizens amounting to £8,854,340
- Managed debt for citizens to the value of £12,537,286
- Negotiated payment arrangements on £944,260 worth of council tax that could have otherwise gone unpaid.
- Handed out 3300 food bank vouchers
- Levered in an additional £3,884,015 of funding for the provision of Advice in the city in 2021/22

4. Holistic benefits of advice provision

4.1. The social benefits from debt advice are estimated to be £300 million - £700 million annually across the UK (See background paper The Economic Impact of Debt advice – The Money Advice Service)

4.2. The improvement in quality of life is estimated to be worth £24-52 million annually (see background document – (The Economic Impact of Debt advice – The Money Advice Service 2021)

4.3. Debt advice has a direct, beneficial impact on improving the mental health states of those suffering from conditions such as depression, anxiety, and panic attacks. The associated benefit due to reduced health service costs is £50-93 million annually, across the UK (The Economic Impact of Debt advice – The Money Advice Service 2021)

5. Impact of extending Advice grant

5.1. Extending the current grant arrangements until 31st March 2026 (an additional two years) will enable:

- BAP partners and other advice providers in the city to fully focus their operational and strategic resources on addressing the immediate cost-of-living crisis, reducing the risk of disruption of key support to vulnerable citizens which a new grant process could trigger
- BCC to work with Advice agencies to build on the improvements in co-ordinated working achieved by them in response to the 2019 Grant funding plan and develop further a strategic, One City approach to advice in the city
- BCC to work with Advice agencies to embed the learning from covid-19 and cost of living response and build in asset-based community development principles into the One City approach. (See background document ‘Cost of Living Crisis Bristol’s One City approach)
- BAP partners to work with ACFA (Advice Centres for Avon) to involve other providers of advice in the city to be part of a strategic approach
- Bristol City council and advice agencies to work with other funders in the city (Quartet, National Lottery, Health etc) via the Bristol Funders Network to develop a joined-up approach to funding advice delivery for the future
- BCC to develop an effective funding plan to shape use of grant funding from April 2026 informed by the insights and opportunities which this extension of funding will enable.

Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:

That Cabinet

- 1) Authorise the Executive Director Adult and Communities to take all steps required to extend the Advice grant from 1st April 2024 to 30th March 2026 at a total cost of £1.12 million as outlined in this report.

Corporate Strategy Alignment

- Equality and inclusion – proactively tackle it by designing it into everything we do
- Resilience – building Bristol city resilience through early intervention. Build our ability to cope by learning from our past, taking a preventative approach.

- Children and young people CYP1, CYP4
- Health, care, and wellbeing- HWC2, HCW3
- Homes and Communities-HC3

City Benefits:

- Maintaining tenancies in social and private housing, and preventing homelessness
- Supporting the poorest and most excluded individuals and families to maintain sustainable finances and maximise their income
- Supporting the poorest and most excluded people to achieve positive results at tribunals and appeals
- Reducing financial, food and fuel poverty

Consultation Details:

- Conversation with the Bristol Funders Network to introduce idea of development of advice funding strategy for the city. Positively received
- Conversation with BAP around development of existing model. A development day for the partnership in January will produce a development plan
- Original consultation in 2018
- Consultation will be central to developing the approach to the grant from 2026 onwards

Background Documents:

- Cost of Living Crisis Bristol’s One City approach to support citizens and communities
[Bristol Cost of Living Crisis Plan 2022 2023.pdf](#)
- Bristol City Council Cost of living Impact Assessment
[Cost of Living Crisis Impact Assessment - Oct22 v2 - Copy.docx](#)
- The Economic Impact of Debt Advice – the Money Advice Service
[Economic-impact-of-debt-advice-summary.pdf](#)

Revenue Cost	£ 560,000 per annum	Source of Revenue Funding	£484,000 of this is from Bristol City Council general fund £76,000 is from Public Health funding
Capital Cost	£ N/A	Source of Capital Funding	N/A
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>		Ongoing cost <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
		Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:

1. Finance Advice: This report seeks approval for the extension of the grant funding plan using existing arrangements for Advice provision, for an annual grant of £560,000 from 1st April 2024 to 30th March 2026 at a total cost of £1.12 million, for the two year period. This is fully funded with £484,000 coming from Bristol City Council general fund and £76,000 from Public Health Grant funding. There are therefore, no additional cost pressures for the Council.

Finance Business Partner: Denise Hunt 13 March 2023

2. Legal Advice: As this is a grant funding arrangement the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council’s own procurement rules do not apply. Legal Services will advise and assist officers in completing the documentation for the grant extension.

Legal Team Leader: Eric Andrews 13 March 2023

3. Implications on IT:

I can see no implications on IT in regard to this activity.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Senior Solution Architect 13 March 2023

4. HR Advice: The report is seeking approval for a two-year extension of the Advice Grant to retain the delivery of advice and development of a citywide strategy with the existing resources in place. There are no HR implications

arising from this request for Bristol City Council employees.

HR Business Partner: Lorna Laing 13 March 2023

EDM Sign-off	Hugh Evans	18 January 2023
Cabinet Member sign-off	Cllr Ellie King	2 February 2023
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's Office	6 February 2023

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal: Appendix A (i) Advice Grant Briefing FINAL; Appendix A (ii) 2019 Grant Funding Plan for advice services; Appendix A (iii) Bristol Advice Partnership - 21_22 end of year report	YES
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	YES
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO
Appendix L – Procurement	NO