



Subject:	INTEGRATED ADVICE PARTNERSHIP FUND
Date:	14 th January 2025
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan – Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager Margaret Higgins, Lead Officer, Community Provision

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The main purpose of this report is;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To advise members on the outcome of a call for proposals to deliver activity that will meet the aims of the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund. • To ask members to approve funding to Advice Space for the amount of £82,496.86 • To ask members to consider options for the allocation of the remaining budget for the fund for delivery in 25/26 and select an agreed approach.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>Members are asked to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the contents of the report, • approve funding for the bid received from Advice Space • agree an option to allocate the remaining budget for the fund for delivery in 25/26.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background information</p> <p>Members will recall that officers advised in November 24 of additional temporary funding from DfC through the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund for activity in 24/26. The objective of the fund is to 'Improve the uptake of free, independent regulated debt advice through a collaborative partnership approach'.</p>
3.2	<p>Members agreed at November committee that that council should seek proposals from existing Lead partners within each advice consortia that will meet the aims of this Fund. The closing date for receipt of proposals through completion of relevant project documents was 11th December. By this date, one bid from Advice Space (formerly Citizens Advice), had been received. The proposed project will work on a citywide basis with a range of partners providing services in Belfast including; Trussell Trust, Extern, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, NI Chest Heart and Stroke, Cystic Fibrosis, Belfast Unemployed Resource Centre, Positive Life, Age NI.</p>
3.3	<p>The proposal is citywide and includes promotion of debt advice services to new organisations who have Belfast based clients; building and agreeing new referral pathways with partner agencies and providing a FCA Regulated debt information and advice service.</p>
3.4	<p>Officers have assessed this proposal and recommend that it is awarded funding as it meets the aims of the fund and scored highly against each of the agreed success criteria. Advice Space have a debt advisor in post who can provide regulated debt advice.</p>
3.5	<p>Members may wish to note that Advice Space currently receives approximately 35% of generalist advice funding across the city as it is a member of all 5 consortia and delivers in each area of the city. The level of funding requested is £82,496.86, which is 33% of the overall funding of £248,253.48. Members are asked to approve that Advice Space are awarded £82,496.86.</p>

3.6	Officers met collectively with lead partners several times to provide detail on the purpose of the fund and answer any queries/provide guidance on the completion of the project document. Partners recognised that there would be both citywide and local delivery and all supported the project proposal from Advice Space.
3.7	<p>The lead partners who did not submit proposals provided the following feedback;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough time/capacity to engage with new partners to develop proposals for the deadline. • The project delivery timeframe of just over 12 months makes it challenging to recruiting new debt advice staff. Advice organisations have reported increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff particularly because of the short term nature of projects • Rigorous monitoring requirements outlined by DfC were a factor in deciding not to submit bids for delivery in 24/25 • Most were keen to submit bids for activity in 25/26 with a longer lead in time to develop proposals.
3.8	Members will know that a key driver for seeking bids for delivery in 24/25 was a desire to provide support as early as possible and the activity outlined in the Advice Space bid will provide support across the city.
3.9	Given the feedback from Lead partners and based on an allocation for the requested funding to Advice Space, it is recommended that council seek further bids for the remaining budget of £165,756.62 for delivery in 25/26 that meet the aims of the Integrated Advice Fund.
3.10	It is suggested that bids should be submitted by mid February 25 so that they can be considered by March committee and approved by April council with release of funds in April 25. Officers will continue to engage with advice organisations to provide support in the submission of proposals.
3.11	Members are asked to consider the following two options for allocating the remaining budget.
3.12	<p>Option 1</p> <p>Use the agreed area allocation model for each consortia and agree in advance how much each area will be allocated. This is the approach that is used for generalist advice funding. Given the differing capacity within lead partners in each consortia, it is recommended that bids be invited from all members of consortia. This would be based on the requirement that either;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One application will be made for the entire area budget from one partner within the consortia, this must include letters of support from all members. 2. Multiple applications can be made by different partners as long as they do not exceed the overall budget for that area and all applications must include letters of support from all members of the consortia.

The available budget will be distributed using the following area allocation.

Area	% Allocation Model
Central	9%
East	14%
North	26%
South	15%
West	35%

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An area allocation would ensure that there is a resource to support projects in each part of the city and build local partnerships to increase access to advice. The Advice Space project will target key cohorts of people and provides a citywide service. Any remaining unallocated budget can be offered on a pro rata area basis to other successful applicants. Applying limits to the value of bids from each consortia will ensure that council is not encouraging competition across consortia. 	<p>If bids of a sufficient quality are not received from each area for the allocated budget, there will unallocated funding left.</p>

3.13

Option 2

Applications can be made from all advice organisations within the 5 consortia and council would use a quality approach which awards funding to the strongest proposals. On this basis, officers would assess each bid and bring a report back to committee at which point allocations would be made based on the strongest proposals receiving funding first until the full budget has been allocated.

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There will be an opportunity for all organisations with the ability to provide regulated debt advice to apply. Any remaining unallocated budget can be offered on a pro rata basis to other successful applicants. 	<p>If no applications are received from some areas there will be no provision in that locality.</p> <p>This approach would promote competition across consortia.</p> <p>There may be more duplication across projects using this approach.</p> <p>If bids of a sufficient quality are not received from each area for the allocated budget there will unallocated funding left.</p>

3.14

Given the nature of the activity that this fund supports, officers recommend that Members allocate using option 1.

Financial and Resource Implications

The administration of this fund will be carried out by existing staff, there is no financial impact for council as 100% funding is being provided by DfC. The allocation for Belfast is as listed below.

24/25	25/26	Total
£160,804.82	£87,448.66	£248,253.48

DfC have advised that any underspends in 24/25 can be carried forward to 25/26. Members should note that this is temporary funding which ends in March 26. However, it must be allocated by March 2025.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Belfast City Council will carry out a screening exercise for this programme based on the allocation approach selected.

4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
4.1	N/A