



Subject:	Integrated Advice Partnership Fund
Date:	8th April 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	The main purpose of this report is to advise members on the outcome of a second call for proposals to deliver activity that will meet the aims of the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund (IAPF) and seek their approval to award funds for delivery until 31 March 2026.			
2.0	Recommendation			
2.1	Members are asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the contents of the report, • approve funding for the bids received from organisations that are part of existing advice consortia • to consider and agree if the remaining unallocated IAPF budget can be used to recruit a dedicated staff member (who would be employed by one of the Lead Partners) whose role would be to co-ordinate the services offered by all BCC funded advice services. 			
3.0	Main Report			
	Background information			
3.1	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'.			
3.2	Following committee approval, members sought proposals from existing Lead partners within each advice consortia for projects that would meet the aims of the scheme. Advice Space (formerly Citizens Advice), submitted a project proposal and was awarded funding of £82,497 for delivery of a citywide project in January 2025, which will include delivery in central and east Belfast.			
3.3	Members agreed that council would invite further applications from all BCC funded advice organisations to allocate the remaining budget of £165,756.62. The deadline for submission of applications was 12 th March 25. The table below shows bids that were received by that date;			
	Organisation	Amount Requested	Debt Service Provision	DEA
	Upper Springfield Development Trust	£45,923	The project will deliver a range of additional debt advice to 640 beneficiaries, including; Income Maximisation , e.g. Benefit Checks Crisis Intervention to ensure those facing immediate hardship have access to basic necessities - Bryson House Emergency Relief, Warm and Well project, Social Supermarket and Food Parcels	Black Mountain Court

			<p>Referral to other organisations providing access to the most appropriate organisations.</p> <p>Debt Advice via money and debt services</p> <p>Cost of Living Workshops - how to navigate the complexities of managing finances and developing appropriate skills and resources.</p> <p>The provision of a Financial Wellbeing Booklet to 500 families.</p>	
The Vine Centre	£48,867	<p>The project will provide a range of centre based and outreach activities to 365 beneficiaries.</p> <p>Augmenting the capacity of existing debt services to meet an increased level of demand. Increasing service hours offering specific debt advice available on an outreach basis.</p> <p>Developing an extended and enhanced referral network across north Belfast- increasing capacity of organisations to meet the needs of clients in relation to debt management and alleviation.</p> <p>20 workshops - focusing on debt and financial management</p> <p>Developing in partnership with the Science Shop at the University of Ulster, a website with accessible information and guidance on debt, money and financial management, and direct contact to services.</p>	Castle, Oldpark, Court	
South City Resource and Development Centre	£24,864	<p>Provision of services to 468 beneficiaries.</p> <p>The recruitment and training of Trainee Debt Advisors- Increase the capacity of the organisations to offer specific debt related services within local areas.</p> <p>Provision of additional service hours- increasing access to debt advice in a range of local facilities.</p> <p>Enhanced information services- provision of a debt advice and financial management handbook- 20,000 copies.</p> <p>Increase the number of organisations and their capacity to provide access to debt advice- including the development of a referral system</p>	Lisnasharragh, Balmoral, Botanic	

Officers have assessed these proposals and recommend that each is awarded funding as they meet the aims of the fund and scored highly against each of the agreed success criteria.

3.4 The total allocation for these projects is £119,652.87 This leaves an amount of £46,103.75 that has not been allocated. All partners within each advice consortia have had the opportunity to present proposals and there is no indication that any further proposals will be submitted if a further call was to be opened.

Members may recall that council undertook an independent Review of BCC funded Advice Services which completed in December 2024. One of the key recommendations was that council should explore ways to enhance the current consortia model including efforts to increase co-ordination amongst existing delivery partners.

3.5 Members are asked to consider and agree if the remaining unallocated budget from IAPF can be used to recruit a dedicated staff member (who would be employed by one of the Lead Partners) whose role would be to co-ordinate the services offered by all BCC funded advice services. This would meet the key aim of the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund, which is; 'to test proposals which focus on **enabling better integration of funding/services, collaboration for early intervention and prevention** to increase the reach of debt advice. This approach is grounded in **collaborative advice partnerships; connecting services to improve the uptake** of debt advice reach via an **integrated approach.**'

3.6 At the time of writing, officers have not concluded consultation with all lead partners and consortia to identify the organisation best placed to employ this staff member, a verbal update on this process can be provided at committee. Funds are currently only available to fund this post until 31 March 26; if approved it would be introduced on a pilot basis and its effectiveness evaluated with a view to being funded on an ongoing basis through available advice funding if the post proves to be effective.

3.7 **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

Members will know that advice funding is allocated on an area basis and members agreed in January that they would use the agreed allocation model for each consortia. The table below shows the percentage of the remaining budget that should be allocated to each area. However, given that no bids from central and east were received and that the entire budget has not been used, it is recommended that members provide the full requested allocation to each of the bids received. It is also worth noting that the Advice Space proposal which has already been funded covers all areas of the city; the north bid will also cover the Court DEA (Shankill) and that the South bid will also include Lisnasharragh.

	Area	% Allocation Model	
	Central	£10,768.76	
	East	£17,349.67	
	North	£31,109.75	£48,867
	South	£18,546.19	£24,864
	West	£41,878.50	£45,923
	Total	£119,652.87	
3.8	<p>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.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> Belfast City Council is undertaking a screening exercise which will be concluded when allocations are agreed.</p>		
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached		
	N/A		