

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY

REQUEST FOR DIRECTOR DECISION – DD2535

Title: Debt Free London helpline 2

Executive Summary:

Further to ADD2496, this decision seeks approval for the expenditure of up to £41,000 to provide further grant funding to Toynbee Hall which hosts the Debt Free London Partnership – taking the total expenditure provided to Toynbee Hall to date to £73,000.

The funding would be used to allow the partnership to continue for one further month until March 2021 to provide its debt advice hotline on a 24-hour and weekend basis – the service began in January 2021 and which the GLA has been funding since February 2021 and advertise this extended provision via social media advertising.

Decision:

That the Executive Director of Communities & Skills approves:

Further expenditure of £41,000 in grant funding to Toynbee Hall to allow the Debt Free London partnership to continue its debt advice hotline on a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week basis for a further period of one month until the end of March 2021.

AUTHORISING DIRECTOR

I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

Name: Sarah Mulley / Halima Khan

Position: Executive Director,
Communities & Skills

Signature:



Date:

2 March 2021

PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE

Decision required – supporting report

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1. Mayoral Decision (MD) 2732 in December 2020 authorised expenditure of £900,000 from the GLA 2020-21 Recovery Fund on projects falling within or complementing the ‘Robust Safety Net’ pandemic recovery mission¹. That MD indicated that further proposals would be brought forward via separate decision forms with respect to the remaining £100,000 from the mission’s allocation.
- 1.2. Following the return to a situation of a national lockdown from January 2021, officers and mission leads have considered options to complement the work already being planned to underpin London’s long-term recovery from the Coronavirus pandemic, with shorter-term programmes that would speak to imperatives and opportunities that would likely emerge in the coming 4-6 weeks.
- 1.3. An already pressing issue in London, problem debt² is anticipated to become an even bigger challenge as a result of this third national lockdown. Analysis has shown that those with the lowest levels of savings were the most likely to have to draw down on loans to get them through the first phase of the pandemic, while the final months of 2020 saw a record increase in county court judgements against struggling borrowers.
- 1.4. Debt Free London is a London-wide partnership of 26 debt advice-giving charities, hosted by Toynbee Hall and funded by the Money and Pensions Service – an arms-length body sponsored by the Department for Work & Pensions. It runs a debt advice service that allows Londoners to get in touch by phone, online or social media for advice on a range of personal finance problems.
- 1.5. Recognising the burden that problem debt can place on an individual, the Thrive LDN partnership – a city-wide movement for mental health supported by the Mayor of London and the London Health Board – has provided funding to extend the service to run 24 hours a day and at weekends throughout January - primarily as a preventative mental health/suicide intervention.
- 1.6. ADD2496 approved expenditure of £32,000 to continue to allow the service to run on an extended basis throughout February 2021. It is now proposed to extend this support into March by providing further funding, taking the total provided to Toynbee Hall to £73,000.

2. Objectives and expected outcomes

- 2.1. On the basis of current demand for the extended provision, Toynbee Hall has indicated that there is likely to be a continued need for it throughout March 2021. Funding of circa £36,000 would allow provision based on one-and-a-half debt advisors and one supervisor to operate outside of work hours throughout March.
- 2.2. Furthermore, funding of £5,000 would enable a boost to paid-for social media advertising to promote the availability of this extended provision.

3. Equality comments

- 3.1. The public sector equality duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 requires the identification and evaluation of the likely potential impacts, both positive and negative, of the decision on those with

¹ <https://www.london.gov.uk/coronavirus/londons-recovery-coronavirus-crisis/recovery-context/robust-safety-net>

² Problem debt is defined by the Family Resources Survey as being behind with any household bill or credit commitment

protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation) and set out how you are addressing the duties.

- 3.2. The Survey of Londoners³ found that low-income Londoners, social renters, single parents and disabled Londoners were more likely to find their debts a heavy burden. The evidence base for the Mayor's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy⁴ flags that young women, people aged 35-44, disabled adults, unemployed men and people who are obese are groups likely to be at greater risk of poor mental health, with evidence also existing showing young women experience issues around financial insecurity and poor mental health.
- 3.3. Enabling the extended provision of this debt-advice helpline should therefore be beneficial to these groups. To ensure this is the case, details of the extended funding should be promoted through appropriate networks, including through Deaf and disabled people's organisations, housing associations and others supporting affected groups.
- 3.4. The service can be accessed via a range of media – phone, video call, WhatsApp and webchat – helping to ensure it is as inclusive as possible.

4. Other considerations

Key risks and issues

- 4.1. The GLA's Equality & Fairness team will provide oversight of delivery against the pre-existing grant agreement between the GLA and Toynbee Hall that will be varied for this additional funding. The key risks and issues are outlined below:
 - Risk - There is insufficient demand for extended hours provision to warrant the expenditure.
 - Mitigation – Management information from January and February 2021 indicates that the current level of provision is appropriate given levels of presenting demand. This risk will be further mitigated by continued effective promotion of the extended provision. There is substantial evidence to suggest that issues of problem debt have risen from their already high levels as a result of the pandemic. The effectiveness of a 24-hour seven-day helpline in meeting that challenge of problem debt – and its mental health impacts – will be determined by the awareness of potential users of its existence. As a funder of the extended provision, Thrive LDN is already promoting the service through its networks (which the Mayor has amplified). Continuing to promote the service through a range of media (both social and mainstream) and stakeholder networks will be vital in securing the benefit of this investment of extended provision.
- 4.2. While there are other providers of debt advice (both commercial and non-profit) operating in London, Debt Free London is unique in a) being the only London-wide network of providers of debt advice; and b) having an existing helpline that can be accessed by a wide range of Londoners. Given this, the pressing need resulting from the return to lockdown, and the fact that the GLA is already providing grant funding, it is proposed to make a further grant to Toynbee Hall rather than inviting bids from a range of potential bidders for this one month extension.
- 4.3. The GLA's support for the Debt Free London is intended to be short-term in nature, reflecting the pressures brought about by the winter lockdown. With the roadmap out of lockdown now published, it is not anticipated that there will be a need for ongoing funding after March. Any further support that the GLA may wish to provide to this service would be subject to a fresh decision on the use of the 2021-22 budget.

³ <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/survey-of-londoners-headline-findings>

⁴ <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/equality--diversity-and-inclusion-evidence-base>

Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities

- 4.4. Providing this grant funding will contribute towards the Robust Safety Net recovery mission's goal of raising awareness amongst Londoners of their rights and financial entitlements and where they can get help to enforce or claim them.

Conflicts of interest

- 4.5. There are no conflicts of interest to note from officers involved in the drafting or approval of this decision form. Jim Minton, the chief executive of Toynbee Hall who would be the grant recipients, is the co-lead of the Robust Safety Net recovery mission. However, he neither proposed the funding nor has any role in the decision-making process which is internal to the GLA.

5. Financial comments

- 5.1. Approval is sought for expenditure of £41,000 in grant funding to Toynbee Hall to allow the Debt Free London partnership to continue its debt advice hotline throughout March 2021 and advertise this extended provision via social media advertising.
- 5.2. The expenditure will be funded from the 2020/21 Social Mobility programme budget within the Communities and Social Policy Unit.

6. Legal comments

- 6.1. Sections 1 and 2 of this report indicate that:

the decisions requested of the mayor concern the exercise of the GLA's general powers, falling within the GLA's statutory powers to do such things considered to further or which are facilitative of, conducive or incidental to the promotion of economic development and wealth creation, social development or the promotion of the improvement of the environment in Greater London; and in formulating the proposals in respect of which a decision is sought officers have complied with the Authority's related statutory duties to:

- pay due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people;
- consider how the proposals will promote the improvement of health of persons, health inequalities between persons and to contribute towards the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom; and
- consult with appropriate bodies.

- 6.2. In taking the decisions requested, the mayor must have due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty; namely the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, and to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic (race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment) and persons who do not share it and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010). To this end, the mayor should have particular regard to section 3 (above) of this report.
- 6.3. The contribution of £41,000 to Toynbee Hall amounts to the provision of grant funding and not payment for services. Officers must ensure that the funding is distributed fairly, transparently, in accordance with the GLA's equalities and in manner which affords value for money in accordance with the Contracts and Funding Code.

- 6.4 Officers must ensure that an appropriate variation to the funding agreement is put in place between and executed by the GLA and Toynbee Hall before any further commitment to fund is made.

7. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Anticipate approval of expenditure	1 st March
Variation to funding agreement agreed	W/c 1 st March
Delivery Start Date	1 st March
Delivery End Date	31 st March

Appendices and supporting papers:

None

Public access to information

Information in this form (Part 1) is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FoIA) and will be made available on the GLA website within one working day of approval.

If immediate publication risks compromising the implementation of the decision (for example, to complete a procurement process), it can be deferred until a specific date. Deferral periods should be kept to the shortest length strictly necessary. **Note:** This form (Part 1) will either be published within one working day after it has been approved or on the defer date.

Part 1 - Deferral

Is the publication of Part 1 of this approval to be deferred? NO

If YES, for what reason:

Until what date: (a date is required if deferring)

Part 2 – Sensitive information

Only the facts or advice that would be exempt from disclosure under FoIA should be included in the separate Part 2 form, together with the legal rationale for non-publication.

Is there a part 2 form – NO

ORIGINATING OFFICER DECLARATION:

Drafting officer to confirm the following (✓)

Drafting officer:

Dan Drillsma-Milgrom has drafted this report in accordance with GLA procedures and confirms the following:

✓

Assistant Director/Head of Service:

Tom Rahilly has reviewed the documentation and is satisfied for it to be referred to the Sponsoring Director for approval.

✓

Financial and Legal advice:

The Finance and Legal teams have commented on this proposal, and this decision reflects their comments.

✓

Corporate Investment Board

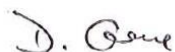
This decision was agreed by the Corporate Investment Board on 1 March 2021.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESOURCES:

I confirm that financial and legal implications have been appropriately considered in the preparation of this report.

Signature

Date



2 March 2021