

# GREATER **LONDON** AUTHORITY

## REQUEST FOR ASSISTANT DIRECTOR DECISION – ADD2496

**Title:** Debt Free London helpline

### **Executive Summary:**

This document seeks approval for the expenditure of £32,000 to provide grant funding direct to Toynbee Hall which hosts the Debt Free London partnership. The money would be used to allow the partnership to continue its debt advice hotline on a 24-hour and weekend basis throughout February 2021.

### **Decision:**

That the Assistant Director of Communities & Social Policy approves:

Expenditure of £32,000 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 throughout February 2021.

### **AUTHORISING ASSISTANT DIRECTOR/HEAD OF UNIT**

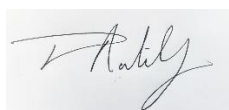
I have reviewed the request and am satisfied it is correct and consistent with the Mayor's plans and priorities.

It has my approval.

**Name:** Tom Rahilly

**Position:** Assistant Director,  
Communities & Social Policy

**Signature:**



**Date:**

2 February 2021

## **PART I - NON-CONFIDENTIAL FACTS AND ADVICE**

### **Decision required – supporting report**

#### **1. Introduction and background**

- 1.1. Mayoral Decision (MD) 2732 in December 2021 authorised expenditure of £900,000 from the GLA 2020-21 Recovery Fund on projects falling within or complementing the ‘Robust Safety Net’ recovery mission. That MD indicated that further proposals would be brought forward via a separate decision document with respect to the remaining £100,000 from the mission’s allocation.
- 1.2. Following the return to a situation of national lockdown early in the New Year, 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 debt 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 are the most likely to have drawn down on them to get 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. It runs a London wide 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 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.

#### **2. Objectives and expected outcomes**

- 2.1. Conversations with Toynbee Hall and Thrive LDN have indicated that there is likely to be a need for a 24-hour service throughout February. Funding of c.£32,000 would allow provision based on one-and-a-half debt advisors and one supervisor to operate outside of work hours throughout February.
- 2.2. If we were to provide funding to extend provision through February, we would make a grant funding allocation directly to Toynbee Hall.

#### **3. Equality comments**

- 3.1. The Mayor and the GLA are subject to the public sector equality duty in the Equality Act 2020, which requires the identification and evaluation of the likely potential impacts, both positive and negative, of the decision on those with protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, gender, religion or belief, sexual orientation).
- 3.2. The Survey of Londoners<sup>1</sup> 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 strategy<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/survey-of-londoners-headline-findings>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/equality--diversity-and-inclusion-evidence-base>

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.

#### **4. Other considerations**

##### *Key risks and issues*

- 4.1. The team will provide oversight of delivery against a grant agreement. The key risks and issues are outlined below:
- Risk - There is insufficient demand for extended hours provision to warrant the expenditure.
  - Mitigation – This risk will be mitigated by 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, and the pressing need resulting from the return to lockdown, it is proposed to make a direct award to Toynbee Hall rather than inviting bids from a range of potential bidders.

##### *Links to Mayoral strategies and priorities*

- 4.3. 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*

- 4.4. 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 £32,000 to provide grant funding direct to Toynbee Hall which hosts the Debt Free London partnership.
- 5.2. The expenditure will be funded from the 2020/21 'Recovery Fund' [approved by MD2666] and allocated to the CSP Unit Budget.

## 6. Planned delivery approach and next steps

Activity	Timeline
Anticipate approval of expenditure	1 February 2021
Grant award and funding agreement drafted	w/c 1 February 2021
Delivery Start Date	1 February 2021
Delivery End Date	28 February2021

### 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:

✓

#### Corporate Investment Board

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

### ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF FINANCIAL SERVICES:

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

#### Signature

*Anna Eastcott*

#### Date

1 February 2021