

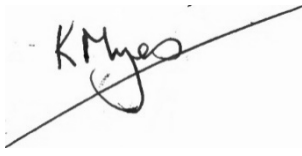
LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Funding for Camden Advice Network (CS/2026/11)	
REPORT OF Cabinet Member for Community Resilience	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Cabinet	DATE 6 July 2026
STRATEGIC CONTEXT Camden's voluntary and community sector (VCS) plays a critical role in delivering the Council's ambitions set out in <i>We Make Camden</i> , particularly in tackling poverty and inequality, preventing crisis and supporting residents to live well. Independent, community-based advice services are a core part of Camden's local welfare system, working alongside Council services to support residents experiencing financial hardship, debt, housing insecurity and wider social and economic challenges.	
SUMMARY OF REPORT This report seeks Cabinet approval to extend the current CAN Grant awards to 12 organisations by 12 months (totalling £1 million). The current CAN Grant is due to end on 31 March 2027. Approval is required to extend existing grant awards for a further 12 months, from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028, to ensure continuity of independent advice provision for residents while the Council undertakes the design and implementation of the next phase of CAN funding, as part of a wider review of Camden's approach to supporting the financial resilience of residents. This extension is sought to provide certainty for providers, support ongoing access to vital advice services for residents, enable programme planning and support the Council's strategic commitments to prevention, tackling inequality and partnership working.	
Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information	
The following documents have been used in the preparation of this report:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Right Advice at the Right Time: a Review of Advice Services Provided in the Borough of Camden (CS/2019/14) • 2023/24 Revenue Estimates and Council Tax Setting (CS/2023/03) • Decision - Grant award report for Camden Advice Network 	
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is asked to approve a 12-month extension to the current Camden Advice Network (CAN) Fund, extending existing grant awards totalling £1 million to current funded organisations, as set out in Appendix 1, from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028, to ensure continuity of independent advice provision.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KMyers', is written over a horizontal line.

Kathryn Myers, Executive Director Corporate Services

Date: 22 June 2026

1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Camden Advice Network (CAN) is a partnership of independent voluntary and community sector organisations delivering free, specialist advice to Camden residents. Established in 2020, the Network currently comprises 12 funded organisations (listed at Appendix 1) providing welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment and immigration advice.
- 1.2. CAN organisations deliver advice through trusted, community-based settings across the borough, including neighbourhood centres, estates, and specialist community organisations. This model enables residents to access support early, in familiar settings, and complements the Council's internal advice and welfare services.
- 1.3. Camden has a long history of independent advice provision, with community organisations playing a vital role in supporting residents to navigate complex systems and assert their rights. The independence of advice agencies is central to their effectiveness, enabling trusted relationships with residents who may be reluctant to engage directly with statutory services. The council has a long-standing commitment to providing grant funding to the advice sector to enable this work.
- 1.4. Independent advice services are a key part of Camden's local welfare system. They support residents to maximise income, manage debt, prevent homelessness, and address wider social and economic challenges, reducing pressure on crisis services and statutory provision.

Impact and Outcomes

- 1.5. The Camden Advice Network (CAN) is a key element of the Council's Voluntary and Community Sector Investment Programme, agreed by Full Council in February 2023. CAN delivers independent advice through trusted voluntary and community organisations embedded within neighbourhoods and communities across the borough, enabling early intervention, income maximisation and homelessness prevention.
- 1.6. Sustained cost-of-living pressures, rising housing costs and increasing complexity of need continue to drive high demand for advice services in Camden. Continued investment in independent advice provision supports the Council's preventative approach, helps reduce pressure on statutory and crisis services, and contributes to a strong, inclusive local economy.
- 1.7. Investment in independent advice services directly supports the Council's commitments under We Make Camden, particularly the missions focused on tackling poverty and inequality, preventing crisis, and enabling residents to live well.

- 1.8. Since its launch, the CAN has delivered significant outcomes for residents and the borough, including:
- Supporting over 59,000 residents with advice on welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment and immigration.
 - Securing over £55 million in unclaimed welfare benefits for residents, strengthening household financial resilience.
 - Supporting the reduction or write-off of approximately £1.7 million in resident debt.
 - Contributing to homelessness prevention through early housing and debt advice.
 - Generating an average of £2 million per year in external match funding, bringing additional investment into the borough; and
 - Supporting over 120 advice volunteers, contributing skills, capacity and social value to local communities.
- 1.9. For every £1 million invested annually, CAN partners secure over £10 million in additional income for residents, through welfare benefits, debt relief and other financial gains, alongside approximately £2 million per year in external match funding, demonstrating strong value for money and a high return on public investment.
- 1.10. Learning from the current programme demonstrates that:
- Multi-year grant funding provides stability, supports workforce retention and enables organisations to respond flexibly to emerging need.
 - Independent, community-based advice delivered by trusted organisations is most effective in reaching residents at greatest risk of hardship; and
 - Strong partnership working between the Council and independent advice providers improves outcomes for residents while maintaining the independence that underpins trust.
- 1.11. These lessons will directly inform the proposal for CAN Grant Funding for 2028 onwards. This will be developed as part of a council-wide review of advice provision across services, as part of Camden's broader strategy to enable financial resilience and income security, prevent residents falling into crisis and create a more joined-up approach across services and in partnership with the voluntary sector for residents.

Current and Future Funding Arrangements

- 1.12. The CAN forms part of the Council's wider Voluntary and Community Sector Investment Programme. The funding programme for the CAN was agreed by Cabinet in 2019 through the report '[The Right Advice at the Right Time: a Review of Advice Services Provided in the Borough of Camden \(CS/2019/14\)](#)'

- 1.13. Decisions for the grant allocations to organisations were made by the Executive Director Supporting Communities, following consultation with the Cabinet Member for Promoting Culture and Communities, in December 2019 and are detailed in the report [‘Decision - Grant award report for Camden Advice Network’](#)
- 1.14. The current CAN fund awards of £1 million per annum are due to end on 31 March 2027. Without further approval, funding for existing CAN partners will cease at that point, creating significant risk to continuity of advice provision for residents.
- 1.15. Camden continues to face significant and persistent social and economic inequalities and the CAN plays a critical role in addressing the impacts of this. Around one in four residents live in poverty, and child poverty remains high, with approximately two in five children living in poverty after housing costs are considered. Housing pressures are acute, with around 1,000 households in temporary accommodation and rising demand for homelessness prevention support. These conditions drive sustained demand for advice relating to debt, welfare benefits and housing insecurity, particularly among residents experiencing multiple and overlapping disadvantages.
- 1.16. In 2023 Cabinet agreed to Camden’s Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Investment Programme 2024-2031 of £4 million per annum. The CAN forms part of this investment programme but runs on a different timetable. Through this decision, Cabinet has approved budget through to 2031.

2. PROPOSAL AND REASONS

- 2.1. Cabinet is asked to approve a 12-month extension to the current Camden Advice Network (CAN) Fund, extending existing grant awards totalling £1 million to current funded organisations, as set out in Appendix 1, from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028, to ensure continuity of independent advice provision.
- 2.2. The purpose of this extension is to ensure continuity of independent advice provision for residents while the Council undertakes the detailed design, consultation and implementation of the next iteration of the CAN Grant Fund. Without an extension, funding for existing advice providers would cease in March 2027, creating a significant risk of service disruption and increased pressure on statutory and crisis services.
- 2.3. Approving the extension will provide some stability for advice organisations operating in a context of rising demand, increasing case complexity and ongoing workforce pressures, while allowing sufficient time to undertake a robust and proportionate redesign of the future programme. It will enable the development of future funding plans as part of a wider review of Camden’s advice landscape and strategy for building financial inclusion and resilience, working with other services and the voluntary sector to enable a more joined-up approach that works better for residents and makes best use of resources.

- 2.4. Continued investment in the CAN is supported by the demonstrated impact of the current programme, including income maximisation for residents, debt reduction, homelessness prevention and the significant additional funding leveraged into the borough. Independent, community-based advice remains a critical component of Camden's local welfare system and a key mechanism for early intervention and prevention. This is particularly important in the context of rising demand, increasing case complexity and sustained cost pressures across the advice sector.
- 2.5. Extending existing grant funding arrangements reflects the Council's strength-based partnership with the voluntary and community sector, supports the independence of advice providers, and enables trusted advocacy-based support for residents. This approach aligns with the Council's commitment to open and trusting grant-making, including the principles set out by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR).

3. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 3.1. **Option 1: Approve the recommendation in full (Recommended Option)**
Approving the recommendation will extend the current CAN Fund for a further 12 months, ensuring continuity of independent advice provision for residents while the next programme is designed. It will also enable council officers to initiate work on developing the next iteration of the CAN Grant Fund from 1 April 2028 onwards in timely manner, including engagement across services and with the voluntary and community sector as part of a wider review of Camden's approach to supporting the financial resilience of residents.

This option maintains stability for residents and providers, reflects learning from the current programme, and supports the Council's strategic commitments to prevention, tackling inequality and partnership working with the voluntary and community sector. This is the recommended option.

- 3.2. **Option 2: Approve the recommendation in part (Not Recommended)**
Approving the recommendation in part (e.g. an extension shorter than 12 months or only to certain providers) would provide some temporary stability for organisations and residents, but it would create significant uncertainty about arrangements beyond March 2028, delay programme development, and increase the risk of a rushed or fragmented transition to future funding arrangements. It would create a significant risk around loss of vital advice provision for residents at a time when there is clear demand for support and high impact for those who access advice.

It would create a great deal of uncertainty for providers in a difficult funding environment, with the potential of losing skilled staff. It would reduce the time available within the council to design a robust offer for the next phase of the CAN grant and limit opportunities to create a more joined-up approach with other advice provision or a wider strategy around financial inclusion and resilience.

Overall, it would affect planning, provider confidence and continuity of service. For these reasons, this option is not recommended.

3.3. **Option 3: Do not approve Recommendations 1-3 (Not Recommended)**

Not approving Recommendations 1-3 would result in the current CAN ending on 31 March 2027, with no extension and no agreed future funding framework.

This would lead to significant disruption to independent advice services, increased pressure on statutory and crisis provision, and reduced support for residents experiencing financial hardship, debt and housing insecurity.

This option is not recommended.

4. WHAT ARE THE KEY IMPACTS / RISKS? HOW WILL THEY BE ADDRESSED?

- 4.1. Approving the recommendation will enable continuity of independent advice provision for Camden residents during a period of sustained demand, rising hardship and increasing complexity of need. The proposed 12-month extension will reduce the risk of a gap in provision while the Council takes the opportunity to review, develop and design future provision for the financial resilience of residents.
- 4.2. A 12-month extension would allow time for a more in-depth and joined-up review of the design of advice provision through engagement with funded organisations and relevant internal stakeholders. Without this extension, the opportunity to take a more strategic approach will be missed. The gap in provision would also leave residents at greater risk of financial hardship, debt and housing insecurity.
- 4.3. A further risk is that, if independent advice provision were reduced or disrupted, this would increase pressure on statutory, crisis and other council-funded services, particularly in relation to housing, debt, welfare support and homelessness prevention. The recommendation would mitigate this by maintaining provision and supporting a planned transition to the next funding model.
- 4.4. Equalities impacts are being considered through the Equalities Impact Assessment. Continued investment in the CAN helps mitigate the risk of reduced access to advice for residents who face barriers to mainstream services, including residents experiencing poverty and multiple disadvantage and those who benefit from specialist, community-based and culturally competent provision.

5. CONSULTATION/ENGAGEMENT

- 5.1. Engagement has taken place with CAN partners through regular network meetings, including structured discussions on the strengths, challenges and opportunities for the future programme. This feedback has informed the proposed approach, including the importance of multi-year funding and flexibility in delivery.
- 5.2. Engagement has also taken place with internal stakeholders across the Council, including relevant services involved in welfare, housing and

employment support, to ensure alignment with the Council's wider priorities and service delivery.

- 5.3. Further engagement will take place during 2026/27 to inform the detailed design and implementation of the next CAN Grant Fund.
- 5.4. The Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Voluntary Sector, Equalities and Cohesion was consulted through regular portfolio meetings. The Cabinet Member for Community Resilience will be consulted on the development of the future CAN Fund.
- 5.5. The CAN supports residents who would not otherwise access support due to barriers such as trust, language, culture or accessibility, as specialist, independent, community-led providers working with groups including disabled people, women, young people, and global majority communities and supports residents facing multiple, intersecting inequalities. Extending the current grant awards by 12-months will support these equalities outcomes.
- 5.6. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken throughout the design and development of the future CAN Fund and will be completed alongside any future grant recommendations and final grant decisions report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. To give effect to the Council's public law duties and specific duties in relation to equalities, decision makers must take into account in coming to any decision the Council's equality duties and have due regard to them. In summary, these legal obligations require the Council, when exercising its functions, to have 'due regard' to the need to: a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act (the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership is also relevant); b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't; and c) foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who don't (which involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding). Under the Duty, the relevant protected characteristics are Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Pregnancy and maternity, Race, Religion, Sex, and Sexual orientation.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. This report seeks approval for a 12-month extension to the current Camden Advice Network (CAN) Fund. The extension will continue existing grant awards totalling £1 million to current funded organisations, as detailed in Appendix 1, covering the period from 1 April 2027 to 31 March 2028. This is to ensure the continuity of independent advice provision.
- 7.2. The costs associated with this request will be met from within the existing VCS Investment Programme budget.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Allocation of this funding is not anticipated to have any detrimental environmental impact.

9. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND NEXT STEPS

9.1. The following timetable sets out the proposed next steps for the development and implementation of the next CAN Grant Fund.

Date	Next Steps
Summer 2026	Issue grant extension offers and SCGAs (grant agreements) to existing CAN providers for a 12-month extension of current funding arrangements
Summer 2026-Spring 2027	Design and development work for future advice funding, as part of a wider review to enable financial resilience of residents.
Spring - September 2027	Funding programme applications and decisions
September 2027	Notification of current CAN partners ahead of contract end in March 2028

10. APPENDICES

- Appendix 1 – Organisations Funded through the Camden Advice Fund 2020-2027

REPORT ENDS