

Local Services and Community Safety

(Community Initiatives)

Voluntary Sector Advice Services Commissioning Prospectus

2007 – 2010

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Important: To check your eligibility to apply for funding to deliver the services as outlined within this funding prospectus please complete the self assessment questions contained at page 11 of this document at your earliest opportunity.

1. Corporate Introduction

Birmingham City Council is committed to supporting the work and future of the voluntary and third sector. This coupled with the drive for best use of resources has provided the unique opportunity to reshape our relationships, including funding, with voluntary and third sector organisations.

The City Council has established a corporate commissioning framework for third sector funding.

The key drivers for the development of the corporate framework are:

- To improve our partnerships with voluntary and third sector groups and increase their involvement in our services and activities
- To work towards strategic and longer term funding for voluntary and third sector organisations in return for high levels of performance
- To ensure that Birmingham City Council's funding is outcomes focused and aligned to the Council Plan and Community Strategy priorities.
- To ensure that the Council achieves value for money from its funding and that this funding supports the delivery of excellent public services for citizens and residents in Birmingham.

1.1 Purpose of Commissioning Framework

The commissioning framework opens up the opportunity for both existing and new organisations to work with the City Council to have a positive impact on the delivery of excellent services to our communities. This approach will ensure that the funding is aligned with the Birmingham Strategic Partnership and the Council Plan priorities.

Community Initiatives will operate a commissioning process from September 2006 to select service providers to deliver particular services and activities from April 2007. There are three areas of work being commissioned through this prospectus:

- Priority 1: Information, referral and signposting on legal services and entitlements
- Priority 2: General help, advice and advocacy on legal services and entitlements
- Priority 3: Representation at Social Security Appeals Tribunals.

1.2 Corporate Priorities

The Council Plan 2006 sets out the Council's Corporate Priorities and includes the key priorities of

- Creating a city of vibrant urban villages
- and
- Creating a fair and welcoming city

Within these overarching priorities, Community Initiatives is committed to supporting high quality and effective voluntary sector advice services.

A full copy of the Council Plan 2006 can be downloaded from our website at www.birmingham.gov.uk/councilplan.bcc

1.3 Why the Council works in partnership with the voluntary and third sector

The Council desires to achieve added value alongside price competitiveness using a full cost pricing strategy. Service delivery by voluntary and third sector organisations can help to develop Birmingham's social capital thus complementing and adding value to existing mainstream provision. Inclusive networks, voluntary activity, membership in formal and informal groups, trust, social participation and civic engagement to include volunteering can support the wider communities within Birmingham beyond the delivery of funded service and activities. The sector can contribute added value through a clear focus on users needs, the reinvestment of surpluses and the feedback of service experience into policy development and advocacy.

During 2006, the Council worked with a small group of representatives from Birmingham's third sector on a IDeA project 'Partnership Improvement Programme'. Participants concluded that partnerships with the third sector are "clearly not advocated solely on the grounds that the third sector is a cheaper option. Underpinning the need for greater third sector involvement in public service delivery is an assumption that the third sector has something to offer that is different and distinctive from the contribution made by the state or the private sector".

The project participants also "argued that the third sector is not just a provider of services but can be a powerful agent of civil renewal. Through working with the third sector, commissioners and planners of public services can achieve greater diversification and a focus, not only on the user and community choice, but on more responsive services, which are genuinely user or customer controlled. The ultimate outcome can be to bring individuals closer to the state and to create the conditions for greater community cohesion".

2. Directorate Specific Information - Service Specifications

2.1 SERVICES TO BE FUNDED

There are 3 categories of service to be funded:

Assisted Information Services

The Portfolio will commission agencies to help Birmingham citizens access information on legal entitlements, to identify where a customer needs further information or advice and help customers select an appropriate service where they will be able to receive this. Such a service would be required to provide a form filling service and operate a robust referral and signposting system. Such services will not be required to provide advice or advocacy. It is intended that successful applicants will be funded for up to three years. As a general guide, it is expected that the cost of providing such services will be in the region of £25,000 per year. Funding will be paid in advance, by quarterly instalments.

General Help Advice Services

The Portfolio will commission agencies to provide legal advice and guidance services targeted at Birmingham Citizens. The funding will be aimed at services capable of diagnosing people's problems; giving information and explaining options; identifying further action; giving basic assistance e.g. form filling, contacting third parties, drafting letters; and casework including advocacy and negotiating with service providers.

A variety of services will be funded across the city, and funded agencies will have to comply with the general requirements set out in *Service Provision – Performance Standards and Targets*. It is intended that successful applicants will be funded to provide the services for up to three years. As a general guide, it is expected that the cost of providing such services will be in the region of £60,000 per year. Funding will be paid in advance, by quarterly instalments.

Consortium bids, or bids from agencies wishing to apply for funding to provide an advice service or range of advice services larger than the model set out in, *Service Provision – Performance Standards and Targets*, (e.g. a number of services from a variety of outlets or offices) will be considered. However, such bids would need to clearly state how the consortium/agency would manage larger contracts and indicate what added value such an arrangement would provide.

Tribunal Representation Service

The Portfolio will commission a service to provide representation at social security tribunals for Birmingham Citizens. Details of the service required are set out in *Service Provision – Performance Standards and Targets*. It is intended that successful applicants will be funded to provide the services for a period of up to three years. As a general guide, it is expected that the cost of providing such services will be in the region of £160,000 to £170,000 per year. Funding will be paid in advance, by quarterly instalments.

2.2 SERVICE PROVISION - PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND TARGETS

Assisted Information Services

Quality Standards

Assisted Information agencies will need to have adopted and successfully implemented a recognised quality assurance system (e.g PQASSO Performance and Quality Assurance for Small Organisations, EFQM Excellence Model, CLS Quality Mark)

Service Hours

Successful agencies will be required to provide an open door service for at least 30 hours per week.

Output and Outcomes

Applicants should make clear in their application what outputs they intend to deliver (e.g. number of enquiries, number of forms filled in for clients). They should also record signposting and successful referrals.

Definitions (Assisted information Services)

Enquiries

Each form filled in may count as a separate enquiry. Each request for information and each signposting and referral may count as a separate enquiry. The self-selection of information leaflets or forms on general display, by service users, will not be counted as an enquiry.

As stated above, agencies funded at this level will not be required to provide advice or advocacy (including for instance, benefit calculations), but should they provide such a service then the resulting productivity may be recorded as specified in the definition of enquiry recording in *Definitions (General Help Services)*, below.

Signposting and Referrals

Signposting is acceptable when the customer is able and willing to accept and understand redirection to a more appropriate source of help.

Referral is more appropriate when, because of the needs of the customer and/or the needs of the agency accepting the referral, a formal introduction is required.

NB. A referral may count as a successful outcome if the customer subsequently receives an appropriate service from the agency they are referred to. For example, if a customer is referred to another agency for tribunal representation, the successful outcome will be that they have received a good service from the agency they are referred to (irrespective of whether the case is ultimately successful).

Monitoring and evaluation

Funded agencies will be required to record all productivity and outcomes related to the grant payment. Productivity and outcome data must be provided to the grants team on a quarterly basis. Funded agencies will also need to agree to the random sampling of case files each quarter.

Funded agencies will be required to record client profiles as follows;

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability
- Ward in which the client lives

The productivity and outcomes reported must be clearly identified as being supported only by Local Services and Community Safety Portfolio funding.

General Help Advice Services

Quality Standards

Successful agencies will be required to have obtained and maintain the Community Legal Services Quality Mark at General Help level or above.

Service Hours

Successful agencies will be required to provide an open door service for at least 30 hours per week. This figure may be made up from a mixture of drop-in and appointment sessions, but such sessions must not overlap or run concurrently. Consideration will also be given to other forms of proposed service access (e.g. telephone, e-mail, outreach, home visits etc).

Outputs

Applications should clearly state the number of enquiries to be dealt with annually. As a guide, it is expected that a figure in the region of 5,500* enquiries per year would be appropriate for most contracts.

Outcomes

Applications should clearly state what outcomes should be expected. Outcomes will arise from casework, and there will need to be a robust verification system for recording them. Example outcomes are;

- Annualised welfare benefits gained
- Lump sum welfare benefits gained
- Amount of debt rescheduled
- Amount of debt written off
- Number of possessions/evictions prevented
- Number of positive immigration/nationality decisions

In addition to the above, successful agencies will be required to record the “General” outcome of all closed cases as;

- Successful
- Unsuccessful
- Client withdrew
- Client advised to withdraw
- No further contact

As a general rule, it is expected that 20% of enquiries will become cases. In addition, the fact that an issue has become a “Case”, will not prevent further work on it counting towards the productivity target (e.g. when dealing with an ongoing case, each subsequent contact with the client or piece of work done on the case can be recorded to satisfy the “Enquiries” target).

**Applications that do not closely match these guidelines will be considered where the applicant can demonstrate that the nature of the service proposed is likely to lead to a greater proportion of casework, and fewer enquiries, but the Council will still need to be satisfied that there is an appropriately balanced service in such proposals.*

Definitions (General Help Services)

Enquiries

An enquiry can be any issue a customer presents with, to do with legal entitlements. A customer may bring up several issues during one visit, and each one may be recorded as a separate enquiry. In the case of welfare benefits for example, if a customer asks for advice on Incapacity Benefit, but also requires a Housing Benefit calculation, the advisor may count this as two separate enquiries. A repeat visit on the same issue, where the customer still retains responsibility for any action, or just requires further information, can also be counted as an additional enquiry.

Form filling will generally be counted as an enquiry, except in the case of Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance forms – see below. The self-selection of information leaflets or forms on general display, by service users, will not be counted as an enquiry. All enquiries counted must have full client details recorded (Name, address, details of enquiry etc).

Casework

If at any time the advisor takes responsibility for acting on behalf of clients, then this becomes a case. Examples of casework are;

- Making representations in writing to third parties on the customer’s behalf, other than requesting a claim form or basic information
- Preparing revision, supersession or appeal submissions.
- Considerable research on the customer’s behalf to be reported back to the client at a later date.
- The completion of DLA or Attendance Allowance forms with the customer may be counted as a case.

The outcomes of all such work must be recorded.

Monitoring and evaluation

Any successful agency/consortium will be required to record all productivity and outcomes related to the grant payment on a suitable electronic casework recording system. Funded agencies must supply productivity and outcome data to the grants team on a quarterly basis. They will also need to agree to the random sampling of case files each quarter.

Funded agencies will be required to record client profiles as follows;

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability
- Ward in which the client lives

The productivity and outcomes reported must be clearly identified as being supported only by Local Services and Community Safety Portfolio funding.

Tribunal Representation Service

This grant will be awarded to an agency/consortium able to demonstrate its ability to deal with a full range of social security appeals, including appeals to the Social Security Commissioner. The work funded will include interviewing customers, preparing written or verbal submissions, and representation at the hearing. It will be expected that in almost all cases, customers will be represented at the hearing.

Productivity and Outcomes

The successful agency/consortium will be expected to deal with at least 750 tribunals a year (as described above). A success rate of over 75%, across a range of cases will be expected.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The successful agency/consortium will be required to record all productivity and outcomes related to the grant payment on a suitable electronic casework recording system. Funded agencies must supply productivity and outcome data to the grants team on a quarterly basis. They will also need to agree to the random sampling of case files each quarter.

Funded agencies will be required to record client profiles as follows;

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Gender
- Disability
- Ward in which the client lives

In the main, cases eligible to be counted towards the productivity and outcome targets in the final service level agreement will have to be funded solely by the funding awarded by Local Services and Community Safety Portfolio. However, other arrangements for recording work done may be considered where the funded agency can clearly identify work done on certain cases, which has not been supported by another funding source (e.g. providing representation for clients where case preparation has been funded by the Legal Services Commission).

Targeting Funds

Funding will be allocated in line with the council's corporate priorities, though a range of other factors will also be considered, e.g. groups identified as being in need, areas of deprivation and strategic priorities identified by the Community Legal Services Partnership.

2.3 Call for proposals

Community Initiatives now invites organisations to apply for the services detailed within the service specification section of this document (Section 2 – Services to be funded).

2.4 Key Dates

The following timetable will be applied to the commissioning process.

Activity	Date
Prospectus Launch	September 2006
Deadline for submission of application documents	24 th November 2006
Applications Assessed and Scored	December 2006
Funding Recommendations Approved by Cabinet	February 2007
Funding agreements offered to selected service providers	February/March 2007
Funding agreement activity commences	1 April 2007

2.5 Funding Available

The total amount of funding available will be approximately £1.4 million. It is intended that most grants will be for a three-year period. However, applicant organisations must note that the budget is set on an annual basis and as such whilst this prospectus covers a three year period, awards will be reviewed annually to take account of changes to budgets, need and performance.

3. How to apply

3.1 Applicant organisation self assessment form

This commissioning prospectus relates to a proposed programme of funding for third sector agencies, as such it is targeted at a specific group of applicant organisations.

Before you begin to complete the application form which accompanies this prospectus you are advised to answer the self assessment questions below.

Does your organisation have:

A formally approved Constitution of Memorandum and Articles	Yes	No	Unsure
Approved policies and procedures relating to: Financial Management Equal Opportunities Health and Safety Complaints	Yes	No	Unsure
A formally appointed Management Committee or Board of Directors which meets regularly	Yes	No	Unsure

Can your organisation supply the following financial evidence:

Accounts for the last three years	Yes	No	Unsure
Proof of bank account	Yes	No	Unsure
Management accounts relating to the current financial year	Yes	No	Unsure

Has your organisation experience of delivering projects or services for:

Birmingham City Council	Yes	No	Unsure
and/or			
Any other statutory or private sector funder	Yes	No	Unsure

If you have ticked either no or unsure to any of these self assessment questions please contact the Community Initiatives grants team or a relevant support agency such as Birmingham Voluntary Services Council.

3.2 Useful Contacts

The following Community Initiative Officers can provide you with support in respect of the Commissioning process. It should be noted however that to remain impartial they are not able to provide you with specific advice regarding the content of your application submission.

Chris Hyland

Manager

Voluntary Advice Agencies Support Team

0121 303 0454

Aftab Inayat

Senior Liaison Officer

Voluntary Advice Agencies Support Team

0121 303 2049

Birmingham Voluntary Services Council (BVSC)

BVSC can provide support, advice and guidance to the third sector on a range of issues related to funding and capacity building.

0121643 4343

3.3 Your application

The purpose of your application is to provide information about your organisation and the services that you would like to deliver. Your application must relate to the service specifications detailed within this prospectus.

Applications for a city-wide service must clearly demonstrate how the needs of the whole target group are to be met. Proposals should address the practicalities of delivering a service across the whole local authority area and should clearly detail how equality of access will be promoted for all those within the target group.

Applications for smaller services can be made on the basis of geographical boundary for delivery or target group specialisms e.g. BME communities. You should ensure that the parameters for your proposed service are clear within your application.

All applicants should ensure that their proposed service is properly costed with both direct and indirect costs being identified. The budget headings in the finance section of the application form should help you to think about ensuring that you apply for the full costs of your proposed service.

3.4 Completing the application form

Applications must be submitted on the form supplied. An electronic version of this form can be made available by contacting the grants team on 0121 303 0432.

Please ensure that you have fully completed all sections of the application form and have supplied all the requested supporting information. Incomplete applications may be rejected.

No additional supplementary papers, folders, or brochures will be considered.

3.5 Appraisal of applications

Please note that submitting an application does not guarantee that funding will be received.

All applications received will be appraised to establish the suitability of the applying organisation to receive public funds and the degree of fit with the service specification.

First stage – Eligibility and Document Completeness

Upon receipt of applications an initial assessment will be conducted which will assess the applying organisations eligibility to receive funds from the Community Initiatives budget. Within this eligibility check compliance with the self-assessment questions will be verified.

Organisations felt to be ineligible to receive grant aid will be contacted and concerns discussed. Those found to be ineligible will be removed from further consideration at this point and rejected.

A check will also be made during this stage 1 assessment to ensure that application forms have been completed and required supporting documentation submitted.

Applicant agencies who have submitted incomplete applications will either be contacted and asked to submit the missing information/documents, or in the case of major omissions, will be removed from the process and rejected.

Second stage – Scoring Panel

Applications will be assessed and scored by a panel of appraisers, including representation from the voluntary sector (the position of voluntary sector appraiser has been advertised nationally via Advice UK). The scoring panel will normally recommend funding, based only upon the assessment of the completed application form. Consequently it is essential that the content of the application meets the requirements set out in the service specifications as fully as possible.

The application form for grant aid for advice services to be funded by Community Initiatives has an indication of the potential score for each question. It is essential that applicant organisations take these weightings fully into account.

Where it is difficult for the scoring panel to make a clear distinction between two or more agencies regarding “Best fit” with the service specifications, applicant organisations may be invited to supply further details or attend a meeting with the scoring panel.

If the scoring panel requires any further clarification or information from an applicant agency, any contact with the agency made by the scoring panel may not be construed as an indication of success for that application.

3.6 Notification of decisions

All applicants will be informed of the decision in respect of their tender and will have the opportunity to receive feedback on their submission.

The City Council will publish details of successful applications and will identify where services have not been commissioned because of a lack of suitable applicants.

4. Funding Management

4.1 Funding agreement

Funding agreements will take the form of a Conditions of Grant Aid, or a Conditions of Grant Aid plus Service Level Agreements which will lay out the responsibilities of the selected service provider and the Council.

Final negotiations and verification activity will be concluded for funding agreements to be approved and signed during February/March 2007 so that selected service providers can prepare for service delivery to commence on 1 April 2007.

All funding granted as a result of this Prospectus is subject to the City Council's Standing Orders, Financing Regulation and Audit Requirements.

4.2 Monitoring and Review

Successful agencies will be required to provide productivity and outcome data to the Voluntary Advice Agencies Support Team on a quarterly basis as specified in the relevant **Monitoring and Evaluation** specifications set out in section 2 above (Service Specifications).

During the period of the Service Level Agreement a financial systems audit may be conducted by Officers of the City Council to ensure that adequate audit trails and internal controls exist.

The financial systems review may assist the selected service providers to improve their current systems, provide assurance of the robustness and reliability of their financial administration and contribute to effective risk management.

4.3 Payment arrangements

Unless agreed through negotiation selected service providers will receive payment via 4 equal quarterly payments. The Council will endeavour to make all payments relating to a quarter within its first month. Payments will however only be made on the submission of relevant and appropriate documentation and monitoring information.

Payments will normally be made directly into the selected service providers' accounts via BACS

All funding given relates specifically to the funding period covered by the Service Level Agreement and cannot be accrued unless agreed in writing by the Council.

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
CLS (Community Legal Services) Quality Mark	A quality assurance badge awarded and monitored by the Legal Services Commission, at one of three levels; Information, General Help or Specialist Help
Birmingham Strategic Partnership	The local strategic partnership for Birmingham bringing together, at a city wide and district level, key public agencies and representatives from the business, community, voluntary and faith sectors to achieve more effective joined up action.
BME	Black and minority ethnic
Council Plan	Identifies the priorities and forward strategy for the City Council