



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	BCC Support for Advice and Information Services 2008-2009
Date:	9 April 2008
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### Relevant Background Information

Belfast City Council is a major funder of Advice services in the city and established a consortium approach to funding and Advice delivery in 2005/06. Monitoring and evaluation indicates this approach is working well at both a Community Services and Consortia level.

Deloitte MCS were appointed in August 07 to independently review BCC Advice and Information services across the City. The terms of reference were to review the Council's current Advice and Information grant service, identify best practice changes that are needed to the current delivery model and make recommendations on delivery approach going forward particularly in light of the new regional strategy. In particular the review should :

- Consider the consortium approach for delivering Advice services.
- Review the performance and consistency of the Consortia.
- Review the Grant Allocation process including the assessment process and criteria.
- Identify best practice to maximise support to clients and improve Consortia working.
- Monitor and evaluate the quality of the Advice services.

Deloitte were asked to make recommendations on how

- The BCC strategy could support the DSD regional strategy
- The most appropriate delivery approach for future allocation and delivery
- How to improve partnership and cooperation between advice providers
- The implications of implementing the DSD's future recommended approach

A report on the recommendations will be brought in due course to Committee.

This approach was outlined by DSD in 'Opening Doors: The Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community' which was launched in September 2007. DSD outlined their intention to establish pilots to deliver this strategy from April 08. This pilot phase, however, has been delayed and recent communication suggests it will not now take place until April 09.

The level of BCC Advice grant aid in 2007/08 is £320,330.00

Since 2005 BCC and DSD have also provided additional funding to enable the Consortia to extend Advice & Information services in areas of little or no provision.

The level of additional funding provided has been:

DSD match	2005/06 - £152,725	2006/07 - £152,725	2007/08 - £309,725
BCC match	2005/06 - £0	2006/07 - £152,725	2007/08 - £152,725

DSD have indicated that this extra level of Advice support will continue, but despite formal approaches, they have not yet made known the actual amounts or the level of match funding which may be required from BCC to secure their investment.

### **Key Issues**

The delay in initiating the pilot phase of the DSD Opening Doors strategy has resulted in a level of uncertainty both for BCC and the Advice Consortia. The original schedule for implementation of the pilot initiatives would have offered the various partners an opportunity to agree Service Level Agreements for advice provision across the city which would both meet the strategic aims of the regional strategy and be informed by the agreed outcomes of the Deloitte led BCC review.

This delay has been further compounded by the lack of formal notification by DSD in regards to the continuation of their financial support for the 2008/09 period and the level of match funding required.

As current contracts with Advice Consortia expired on 31 March 2008, it is now imperative that BCC considers the merit of extending their core funding for the provision of generalist Advice support so as not to disrupt this vital service to the end user and in order to sustain the qualified staff and volunteer base on which the service is reliant.

An extension of contracts for 1 year, based on last years values uplifted for inflation, would permit the following:

- Necessary planning time to agree how to best incorporate the recommendations of the Deloitte review within the broader context of the Development Department Review of Grant Aid
- Clarity of information from DSD as to the terms of reference of the proposed regional pilots and related funding streams
- An implementation plan for revised generalist advice service provision in the city agreed by all partners, that is, Consortia, regional support organisations, Council and DSD
- An opportunity for the Deloitte review to inform the Community Services structure review

Until such times as formal notification of the DSD advice grant becomes available, officers cannot bring a report seeking continuation of required match/leverage funding for extended service provision.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

The revenue estimates for grant for 2008/09 includes provision for BCC core Advice grant of £329,940.

#### Human Resources

Implementation of the Deloitte report may require consideration of additional staff input. This will be considered via the BIS structural review of Community Services.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the positive independent evaluation of BCC grant support, and in advance of formal DSD notification, it is recommended that BCC should continue to support the Advice sector in the City by agreeing to:

- Approve a further 12 months grant support to each of the 5 area Consortia at the same level as 2007/08 uplifted by inflation (3%)
- The current make up of the Consortia continuing.
- Officers working with Consortia to agree an implementation plan so that the Advice sector in Belfast is in a position to fulfil the requirements of the DSD Opening Doors pilot phase and any revised BCC grant support requirements.

### **Key to Abbreviations**

BCC - Belfast City Council

DSD – Department of Social Development

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