



## Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Advice Services - Debt Relief Volunteer training proposal
Date:	9 December 2009
Reporting Officer:	Tim Husbands Acting Director of Development ext. 1400
Contact Officer:	Catherine Taggart, Community Development Manager ext 3525

### Relevant Background Information

The current ongoing economic downturn and resultant uncertainty facing many households has resulted in an increase in the numbers of people accessing the services of advice agencies particularly, but not exclusively, in relation to debt and money advice services. The advice sector is experiencing difficulties in responding to this increased demand.

The Belfast advice consortia have indicated that their capacity to address this matter is severely restricted because of the limited numbers of trained volunteers available to deal with these enquires. This issue was discussed at the BCC Economic Downturn Steering Group and the Group considered the potential to source additional training of debt relief volunteers as a way to support the people of Belfast in the present economic situation.

The Council has since received a request from Citizens Advice Belfast (CAB) for financial support for its proposal to increase the capacity of the Belfast advice consortia by providing a debt training programme for an additional 30 volunteers across the City. The proposal entitled 'Recession & Advice: Building Capacity to meet Increased Demands', covers the costs associated with two training courses targeting approximately 15 volunteers per course.

CAB indicate the training will increase the capacity of advice organisations to assist in clearing the present back log of volunteer applicants. The training will also increase the capacity of CAB and their partners in the advice consortia across the City to cope with the expected demand in 2010.

The listed targeted outcomes of this investment are:

- Enhanced skills, proactive citizenship and future employability for course participants
- A minimum of 6,600 additional client contacts enabling support for an additional 12,000 enquires in the twelve months following completion of the training
- Generation of additional income of £8,000 - £10,000 per client via the additional benefits secured. This will result in additional benefits of £250,000 to the local economy
- Leverage of £13.63 for each pound invested
- Further client support via referral to money advice specialists
- Reinforcement of the partnership working model within the Belfast advice consortia

It is proposed the training should be delivered across two programmes in the period up to April 2010. CAB indicates they have already made contact with partners in other consortia to gauge demand.

### **Key Issues**

Officer assessment would suggest that this training resource will enhance the advice organisations/consortia to meet and sustain their capacity in meeting the increased demand for advice on debt relief.

From discussion with DSD, officers are aware that CAB NI has submitted a regional volunteer training proposal to the Voluntary & Community Unit. At time of writing no decision had been taken. In discussion with CAB NI, they indicate this regional proposal is restricted to CAB providers and, in their assessment, there is sufficient demand within the City to support both programmes.

Officers have requested further information from DSD personnel.

In advance of securing funds, CAB would be challenged to detail mechanisms to ensure equal access and benefits across all five advice consortia.

### **Resource Implications**

Resources are available within the existing Community Chest Grant Programme budget.

### **Recommendations**

Members are asked to approve financial support for CAB up to a maximum of £20,000 to coordinate and enable the training of an additional 30 advice services volunteers from across the 5 Belfast advice Consortia.

### **Decision Tracking**

Further to agreement Committee will be updated on the progress of the training initiative.

Timeline: March 2010

Reporting Officer : Catherine Taggart

**Key Abbreviations**

CAB – Citizens Advice Belfast

DSD – Department of Social Development

CAB NI – Citizens Advice Bureau, Northern Ireland.

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1: CAB programme proposal

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