

2 November 2010

Mr John Nelson
Belfast City Council
Cecil Ward Building
4-10 Linenhall Street
BELFAST

Dear John

I am writing to you on behalf of the North Belfast Advice Partnership regarding the provision of advice to the area of North Belfast formerly served by Lower North Belfast Community Council.

As you will be aware, Lower North Belfast Community Council ceased providing an advice service at the end of May this year. As we were not informed of this closure in advance, we were unable to consider an intervention which might have guaranteed some continuity of service to the area, and have been left with the challenge of re-establishing a viable service in the area from scratch.

The Partnership has agreed that our aim should be to secure a new local partner organization who could assume responsibility for the provision of advice services in this area. Our experience is that this arrangement has worked well elsewhere in North Belfast, embedding the service within wider local networks which generate referrals to our services, and which in turn offer clients access to a wide range of programmes, activities and services which might potentially benefit them. A local organization should also be more aware of, and therefore more responsive to, changing local needs.

As you know we invited two local organizations who had expressed an interest in becoming a partner (First Step Drop In Centre and Loughview Community Action Partnership) to make presentations to us, outlining how they met a set of criteria we had outlined in advance in terms of a prospective partner. These presentations took place on 30 September. Unfortunately, neither of those organizations provided sufficient evidence that they met the criteria we had clearly set out.

Whilst we remain committed to securing a new local partner, we now believe that the process will take longer than we originally anticipated, and we welcome your offer of assistance from council staff in facilitating discussions with and between interested parties, with the aim of reaching either a consensus on how advice services might be delivered locally, or an outcome if groups wish to compete for that role through a formal process. Our aim would be to have a new partner organization identified and in place by April 2011 at the very latest.

This leaves the question of what happens in the interim. To date, we have been providing a service to the area on an outreach basis, using funding made available to the Partnership by Belfast Regeneration Office. We have two part time staff providing advice at 6 locations within the Lower North area

We would like to make two proposals to improve the service provided to clients in that area.

Firstly, we would like to augment this service, by recruiting a temporary advice worker to provide advice at a further three locations within the area. All of these locations are front of road locations, easily accessible to the public, and in areas where there is significant existing footfall. We hope that this will go some way to raising the profile of the service, until such time as a more permanent solution can be found

Secondly, we would also request your permission to use some of the resources available to extend the employment of Partnership staff providing a shared resource across North Belfast, not only in terms of specialist advice, but also in terms of co-ordination, developmental work and administrative support. This will not only benefit the Partnership as a whole, but will ensure that these resources remain in place to support the provision of an interim service to the Lower North area, the process of identifying and appointing a new local partner, and any work which needs to be undertaken in terms of building the capacity of the identified group to deliver an effective service once appointed.

A more detailed rationale for these proposals, with associated costs, is attached for your consideration. I have also included a revised overall budget for the current financial year, reflecting the impact of the proposed changes to our delivery of the service.

Our aim remains to deliver a comprehensive and high quality service to clients across North Belfast, regardless of where it is initially accessed, and whilst the circumstances have not been ideal I would argue that these proposals offer a positive response which is consistent with that aim.

For that reason, I trust that these proposals will meet with your approval. However, if you should have any queries, or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me. In the interim, I attach a minute of the last meeting of the Advice Partnership, confirming that these proposals have the support of other partner organizations.

Yours sincerely

Elaine Burns
Ardoyne Association

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A: Detailed Proposals

At present the sum of £14,604.05 has been provisionally allocated towards the provision of advice services in the area formerly serviced by LNBCC

Our two proposed uses for these resources are:

Shared Staff – Advice Partnership

The rationale for this request is as follows:

- Supporting the salary costs of the **Co-ordinator** will ensure the post remains in place to provide a developmental function for the partnership, supporting the day-to-day delivery of services to clients, and the development of the Partnership as an organization. It is also important to note that the Co-ordinator has been instrumental in putting in place the interim service being offered by the North Belfast Advice Partnership in the Lower North area, and will continue to support the provision of a service in that area, both in terms of overseeing the delivery of current provision and working to support any new partner organization in assuming responsibility for the service beyond the end of the current financial year.
- Supporting the salary costs of **Tribunal Representative** will ensure that this service remains available to clients across North Belfast for the remainder of the current financial year, including those living in the area previously served by LNBCC. The loss of this service would have a significant negative 'knock on' effect, not only in terms of its direct impact on clients who receive representation, but also in terms of an increased workload for generalist advisors, at a time when staff are seeing increased enquiries generally.
- Supporting the salary costs of the **Administrator** will ensure that continued administrative support is provided to specialist staff and others within the Partnership. The Administrator will also provide support to those staff providing the interim service in the Lower North area; as this service is being provided on an outreach basis, the Administrator will provide support in areas such as case recording to ensure that the time advisors have available for contact with clients is maximised.

The costs associated with this are as follows:

Post	Currently Monthly Salary	Post Currently Secured to	Cost of Securing to 31 March 2011
Co-ordinator	2384.47	February 2011	2384.47
Tribunal Representative	2145.41	February 2011	2145.41
Administrator	784.87	November 2011	3139.48
		Total Costs	7,669.36

We are currently working to identify and secure funding which would sustain all three posts beyond the end of the current financial year.

Interim Service: Lower North Belfast area

Pending the appointment of a new partner organization for the area, we would propose augmenting the existing outreach provision funded by Belfast Regeneration Office, to enhance the service offered to clients. We will do

this by employing an additional advice worker for three days each week, to extend the service to the following three new locations:

- Grove Wellbeing Centre;
- Grove Housing Association;
- North City Training.

All of these are 'front of road' locations which are easily accessible to the public, and located in areas where there is significant footfall in terms of people using shops and other amenities. We estimate the costs associated with this would be as follows:

Expenditure	Cost
Salary Costs: Advice Worker Part Time Post 22.5 hours per week	£6,042.14
Staff Travel	300.00
Hire of Room, Grove Wellbeing Centre	525.00
Total Costs	£6,867.14

The total costs of both elements of this proposal are **£14,536.50**, which is within the amount indicated above.

B: Revised Partnership Budget for 2010/11

AVAILABLE RESOURCES	AMOUNT
Standard Allocation	58,303.98
Supplementary Allocation	92,273.85
Underspend at	48,983.43
Total Resources Available	199,561.26

ANTICIPATED COSTS	BUDGETED
ALLOCATIONS FOR GENERALIST ADVICE PROVISION	
Ardoyne Association	
Salary/Running costs	31,765.80
Ballysillan Community Forum	
Salary/Running Costs	17,445.30
Ligoniel Improvement Association	
Running Costs (Hosting of Shared Partnership Staff)	7,697.43
Lower North Belfast Community Council	
Salary/Running Costs (Until closure in May)	4,651.27
Lower North Belfast Area: Interim Service	
Salary/Running Costs (As outlined in B)	6,867.14
Tar Isteach	
Salary/Running Costs	17,445.30
Vine Centre	
Salary/Running Costs	41,436.90
Subtotal: Allocations for Generalist Provision	127,309.14
OTHER COSTS	
Partnership Staff	
Salary Costs: Partnership Co-ordinator	28,618.20
Salary Costs: Tribunal Representative	25,749.60
Salary Costs: Money & Debt Worker (April – July 2010)	6,381.64
Salary Costs: Administrator	5,760.73
Travel & Subsistence/Shared Costs: Partnership Staff	2,000.00
Travel Cost: Outreach provided by Ligoniel Improvement Association	1,000.00
Additional Hours: Specialist Employment Advice	559.86
Bank Charges	60.00
Subtotal: Other Costs	70,130.03

TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENDITURE	197,439.17
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CURRENTLY UNALLOCATED*	2,122.09
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* Retained for contingencies but likely to be allocated before end of current financial year.