



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Consultation: DSD Guidance on the Provision of Local Generalist Voluntary Advice
Date:	16 March 2011
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development ext. 3470
Contact Officer:	Barbary Cook, Policy & Business Development Manager, ext 3620

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	As the committee will remember a paper regarding the DSD Consultation on Guidance on the Provision of local Generalist Voluntary Advice was tabled on the 15th February requesting an information session for Members. Due to diary pressures Democratic Services have not been able to arrange this session, instead the relevant papers have been sent to Members for information.
1.2	The deadline for a response to DSD was Monday 7th March 2011. We asked for an extension to the deadline but unfortunately DSD would only agree an extension to the 10th March. As a result we have notified DSD that we will submit a formal response after the deadline. To support committee consideration, officers have prepared a draft for discussion.
1.3	<u>DSD Guidance on the Provision of Local Generalist Voluntary Advice</u>
1.4	The draft guidance from DSD was produced in response to many Councils requesting such a document. The guidance will act as a tool to support Councils in making informed decisions about resourcing local generalist voluntary advice provision. The guidance does not seek to replace any requirements in relation to voluntary advice the Council already has in place nor is it intended to replace any legal advice that Councils feel they should seek in respect of any aspect of their relationship with local voluntary advice organisations.
1.5	There is little specific detail in the draft guidance. The approach taken is to provide a basic framework that lists key considerations and then points to good practice where it exists.

1.6	<p><u>SUMMARY of the draft guidance</u></p> <p>The guidance has 4 main sections.</p>
1.7	<p>Section 1: Method for allocating funding</p> <p>The business case for funding should be explained within the Council's Community Support Plan. It is recommended that advice services are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accessible to all, and targeted at those most in need; - can be sustained in the long term; - can demonstrate value for money; and - can demonstrate appropriate quality of provision.
1.8	<p>This should be achieved through a network of Area Advice Centres backed up by appropriate outreach provision, to be determined by Councils, along with the use of technology to ensure access to the greatest number of disadvantaged communities.</p>
1.9	<p>Section 2: Overarching principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independence - Be independent of political parties, statutory organisations and free from other conflicts of interest. - Impartiality - Provide an impartial service open to everyone regardless of race, religion, politics, age, sex, sexual orientation or disability. - Accessibility - Provide a free and accessible service to all members of the community which it serves. - Confidentiality - Provide a confidential service to all its clients and meet all data protection legislative requirements. - Effectiveness - Provide an effective service to all of its clients and the community which it serves. The advice centre should be able to show its effectiveness through demonstrable and measurable outcomes. - Accountability - Provide a service which is accountable to users and others who work with the advice centre.
1.10	<p>Section 3: Quality of advice</p> <p>The framework suggests measuring quality in 5 areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing the facts and diagnosing the problem - The advice - Action or support - Signposting and referral - Advice records
1.11	<p>Councils are advised to discuss with their local voluntary advice organisations how their documentation and recording systems evidence that the criteria are being met. Consideration can also be given to any other quality schemes they may use to meet the standards.</p>
1.12	<p>Section 4: Organisational frameworks</p> <p>This section covers the governance arrangements that should be in place for a well run advice organisation. This includes, finance, planning, people management, and client care. Most of the section refers to existing guidance on good practice such as that from Investors in People, Volunteering NI, Investing in Volunteers, and DSD's earlier guidance on finance and governance in the voluntary and community sector. Reference is also made to legal requirements that apply to the provision of debt and immigration advice.</p>

1.13	The full proposal is available online: http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultation-provision-of-local-generalist-voluntary-sector-advice.htm , also see Appendix 1.
1.14	The 'Opening Doors' strategy is available at: http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary-and-community/vc-publication/vc-strategy-for-voluntary-advice-services.htm
1.15	The consultation document has been passed to all Departments within Council as well as to the Development Department Management Team to gather feedback. On Friday 28th January Community Services attended a briefing from DSD to better understand the proposals and their implications for Belfast. Attached is the summary from that meeting.

2	Key Issues
2.1	Belfast City Council's current practice on local generalist advice, which was endorsed by Council on 9 December 2009 following the Deloitte report, is in line with the draft guidance document. BCC has an established pattern and system for our advice services investment in the City. Deloitte's report concluded that our consortia model represents best practice in advice delivery.
2.2	Point 2.6 of the draft guidance document proposes that advice provision is "provided through a network of Area Advice Centres" – this is the structure which is currently in place in Belfast City Council.
2.3	The document recommends that funded advice groups should work to quality advice standards. The advice hubs currently funded by the Council are members of CAB or Advice NI and work to these organisation's quality standards. This is in line with the draft guidance recommendations.
2.4	Committee have agreed to extend the current funding arrangements to the Area Advice Consortia for 2011/12 pending consortia compliance with agreed procedure. This which will include the submission of effective work programmes and ratification of 2010/11 monitoring returns. They have further agreed to review the current BCC Advice Grant Programme in advance of any 2012 funding arrangements. This DSD guidance can inform the design of the new advice programme.
2.5	At the briefing sessions with DSD, some members of the advice sector raised concerns regarding potential hidden costs particularly regarding IT. They also strongly suggested that the funding be moved to a 3 year time scale to fit with the Community Support Plan cycle.
2.6	In general however the advice sector and other councils were in support of the guidance proposals.
2.7	As noted above, the deadline for a response to DSD was Monday 7th March 2011. We asked for an extension to the deadline but unfortunately DSD would only agree an extension to the 10th March. As a result we have notified DSD that we will submit a formal response after the deadline. To support committee consideration, officers have prepared a draft for discussion.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	There are no additional resource implications for Belfast City Council.

4	Equality and Good Relation Considerations
	It is unlikely that the guidance would have an adverse impact on equality or good relations issues.

5	Recommendations
5.1	It is recommended that committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider the draft BCC response to the DSD consultation specific questions and raise any specific issues relating to the consultation document.

6	Decision Tracking
	Time line: Response by 10 March 2011 Reporting officer: Barbary Cook

7	Key to Abbreviations
	DSD – Department for Social Development

	Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1: Department for Social Development “Consultation document on Guidance on the provision of Local Generalist Voluntary Advice” January 2011-02-17</p> <p>Appendix 2: Draft Response to Department for Social Development “ Guidance on the Provision of Local Generalist Voluntary Sector Advice Survey” Consultation</p> <p>Appendix 3: DSD’s Session notes from their information session 28 January 2011.</p>