



Report to:	Development Committee
Subject:	Generalist Advice: update on developments
Date:	18 February 2014
Reporting Officer:	John McGrillen, Director of Development, ext 3470
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1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	This paper is to provide Members with an update on recent developments in the advice sector, namely; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Financial Support Service pilot - An update on the Tribunal Service - Policy developments in relation to a second advice strategy
1.2	<u>The Financial Support Service Pilot:</u> The NI Programme for Government has made a commitment to develop and implement a financial strategy and to feed into its overarching strategy, the Social Security agency has developed a Financial Independence strategy.
1.3	The aim of this strategy is to: “assist customers to achieve and maintain financial independence by giving them support and advice, including access to appropriate financial products and services”.
1.4	The strategy proposes the introduction of a Financial Support Service that aims to operationalise the objectives of the Financial Independence Strategy. The Financial Support Service will be piloted in three areas over a 3 month period commencing May 2014. The areas include: Falls Jobs & Benefits Office, Strabane Social Security Office and Omagh Jobs & Benefits Office.
1.5	The scope of the Financial Support Service will include the current agency financial products and evolve to include Discretionary Support, Short Term Benefit Advances and finally Universal Credit financial products
1.6	The design principles of the Financial Support Service are to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide information on products and services to help financial inclusion 2. Provide a responsive service to short term financial need by helping customers choose the product that best suits their circumstances; 3. Refer or signpost customers to the independent sector for advice and support on personal budgeting and financial capability to help address longer

	<p>financial independence and to help improve their budgeting and money management skills and address any debt issues and</p> <p>4. Ensure customers are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to by making referrals to improving benefit uptake.</p>
1.7	<p>The difference between current service provision and Financial Support Service include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Financial Support Service is intended to be a holistic service; - The Financial Support Officer will be required to consider the range of information available to them to determine the most appropriate support that can be offered to the customer; - At the appointment the customer will be given an opportunity to advise of any changes to their circumstances including any crisis situations
1.8	<p>The full roll out of the service is anticipated to commence in Autumn 2014.</p>
1.9	<p><u>Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service:</u> The Development committee agreed in February 2013 to resource the establishment of a city wide tribunal service to facilitate the five area consortia to come together to establish a Belfast Advice Group. Officers wish to provide members with an update on the progress on the first 6 months of the service and its impact.</p>
1.10	<p><u>Development on the 2nd Advice Strategy:</u> The Department for Social Development are currently holding pre consultation workshops with key stakeholders on the development of a second advice strategy. The development of the new strategy will supersede the Opening Doors strategy and provide a new strategic framework for advice services in NI.</p>
1.11	<p>The timescale for the implementation of the new strategy will be late Autumn 2014. It is planned that the public consultation will commence in late Spring.</p>

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p><u>Financial Support Service</u> The role of the advice sector in the west of the city during the pilot phase will be to offer an integrated support service to Agency customers with additional needs to help them become self sufficient and financially independent, the scope of the third sector support is:</p>
2.2	<p>Financial support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Budgeting support- Money management advice for customers who are not in debt but are struggling to make repayments; - Debt support – advice to manage debt
2.3	<p>Community Services are working in partnership with the Department for Social Development (DSD), Advice NI and the west Belfast advice consortium to facilitate engagement in the initiative from May 2014.</p>
2.4	<p><u>City Wide Tribunal Service</u> In the first 6 months of the project (1 July - 31 December 2013), the following has been reported:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 tribunal representatives have been employed across the city.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representation at 600 appeals - £1,274,477 money claimed back at appeal - 18 Service promotion sessions
2.5	The project has helped to identify new social policy issues that have been brought forward to Advice NI and The Law Centre.
2.6	Two cases have been taken forward to the Commissioner: one regarding Pension Credit and the other regarding Incapacity Benefit and Occupational Pension.
2.7	Since the start of the project, the service has been in contact with 150 plus organisations, forwarding them information posters on BCTS. The organisations contacted include Health and Wellbeing Centres, GP surgeries, Jobs and Benefits Office, Support Organisations, Political Parties, Community Centres, Sure Start Groups, NICEM, etc.
2.8	The Senior Tribunal Rep attends the Social Security Agency and Advice Service Alliance quarterly meetings.
2.9	<u>Development of second advice strategy</u> Council are a key funder of the Advice sector in Belfast through the Community Services grant programme via a consortium model. It is therefore important that Council consider a formal response to the draft advice strategy during the formal consultation period.
2.10	Officers will keep members informed of the public consultation events being run as part of the consultation process throughout the city. Member may wish to consider a presentation on the draft strategy when available.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	There are no resource implications at this time.

4	Equality and Good Relations Considerations
4.1	There are no Equality and Good Relations implications attached to this report.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

6	Decision Tracking
Timeline: February 2014 Reporting Officer: Cate Taggart	

7	Key to Abbreviations
DSD	Department for Social Development
BCTS	Belfast City Wide Tribunal Service