

**Ms Suzanne Wylie
Belfast City Council
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Voluntary and Community Division
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Email: Elaine.downey@communities-ni.gov.uk

Date: 21st September 2016

Dear Ms Wylie,

Re: Community Support Programme 2016-17: Letter of Variance – Welfare Reform Advice monies for; Welfare Reform Readiness, and Welfare Reform Training.

I am pleased to advise you that the Voluntary and Community Division (VCD) has secured an additional £812k for the Community Support Programme in 2016/17. This funding is allocated for the following:

- **Welfare Reform Readiness Programme** to support the efforts of existing front line services pending the implementation of the Welfare Reform Advice Service. Details at Annex 1.
- **Welfare Reform Training Programme** consisting of six Welfare Reform courses required by all front line generalist advisers and volunteers. Details at Annex 2.

The funding is in year and must be spent by the 31 March 2017. Councils are not required to match this additional funding which must be used to meet the specific objectives referred to above. Additional funding will not be extended into the next financial year.

If you are unable to make use of this additional funding for the purposes outlined, and within the financial year, please alert me as soon as possible. This may allow the Department to re-allocate funds to community support welfare reforms advice provision in other council areas.

If you have any queries about the purpose of these additional funds please contact either:

Paul Holbrook (Paul.Holbrook@communities-ni.gov.uk or Tel 02890829397) or
Gloria Brush (Gloria.Brush@communities-ni.gov.uk or Tel 02890829433).

Yours sincerely

Elaine Downey
Advice Services and Programme Delivery Team
Voluntary and Community Division

Welfare Reform Readiness Programme Deliverables and Objectives

1. **Maintaining Services during training**- All staff will require 'Welfare Reform' training. There is a need to maintain services during this time. This could be achieved through overtime, additional outreach or advertising to recruit new volunteers.

Objective- Provide additional services for time lost through staff training through overtime, additional outreach, tailored services and recruitment of extra volunteers.

2. **Capacity for Additional Enquiries** - There will be additional queries due to Welfare Reform. This has the potential to have a negative impact on service delivery with clients having to wait longer to be seen. The recruitment of additional volunteers, overtime, additional services will support service delivery.

Objective - Enhance staff availability to manage the increase in enquiries pending the introduction of the Welfare Reform Support Service.

3. **Management Information** - The introduction of Welfare reform changes will require additional management information to be gathered. This will be additional to current management information and will require additional resources;

Objective - Ensure staff have sufficient awareness to effectively record and report all additional management information as a result of Welfare Reform enquiries.

4. **New Processes** - The new Welfare Reform service will introduce new processes into the current front line service. Additional work steps will be defined and agreed between both parties. This will require additional resources in the short term to allow new processes to 'bed in'.

Objective - Ensure all front line staff are aware of the impact of the new service on current processes and provide feedback on effectiveness when required.

5. **Displacement** - There is a strong likelihood that current front line advisers will apply for the new Welfare Reform positions. This will lead to potential

recruitment of new staff. Additional costs will be incurred for advertising and interviewing new staff.

Objective - Ensure potential displacement issues in the current advice service are identified and managed effectively.

6. **Enhancing - Links with Specialist Organisations due to Welfare Reform Issues-** Welfare Reform enquiries will require additional interaction with specialist organisations. There will be a need to develop additional referral processes to meet customer needs.

Objective - Develop and enhance relationships with specialist services ensuring seamless customer referrals when required.

Welfare Reform Training for Front Line Advisers

Background

A Welfare Reform training package has been identified consisting of six courses required by all front Line generalist advisers and volunteers. Funding for the training has been provided in the four year funding programme recommended by Professor Evason. The department is planning to use the councils as their delivery partners to distribute this funding to the front line to ensure all advisers receive the full training package

Training Package

The following six Welfare Reform related courses have been identified as essential for front line advisers to provide accurate advice to clients

1. PIP including form completion
2. ESA legislative changes/mandatory reconsiderations
3. Sanctions
4. Mitigation schemes
5. Discretionary support
6. Rates/housing changes

When these training needs are fulfilled organisations may use this funding to identify/develop training initiatives which will assist in the provision of Welfare Reform information

Deliverables and Objectives

1. **Training Package.** All staff will receive sufficient Welfare reform training to allow them to confidently provide advice and information to clients

Objective- Ensure all front line advisers receive sufficient Welfare Reform training to enable them to give accurate information and advice to customers

2. **Training Provision.** Front Line Managers will work with Training providers to deliver training at times and locations which meet their staff needs.

Objective- Liaise with Training Providers to deliver training at times and locations suitable for the front line advisers

3. **Training Delivery.** A training timetable should be developed to ensure all front line advisers receive the required Welfare Reform training before the end of the 16/17 financial year

Objective- Training delivery will be organised to ensure all front line advisers receive essential Welfare Reform training by 31 March 2017

4. **Training Evaluation-** Each course will be evaluated by trainees and any comments and recommendations will be used for continuous improvement

Objective- Ensure all recommendations and improvements identified during evaluation are used for continuous improvement