



<b>Subject:</b>	Department for Communities (DfC) Letter of Offer Community Support Programme (CSP) 2025/26
<b>Date:</b>	5 August 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Jim Girvan, Director Neighbourhood Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager
<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b>	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Information relating to any individual</li><li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li><li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li><li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li><li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li><li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li><li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li></ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	<p>The main purpose of this report is;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform Members that Council has received the Letter of Offer for the Community Support Programme 2025/26 from the Department for Communities (DfC). The Department has provided an uplift of 9% across certain elements of the programme.</li> <li>• Advise Members that the Chief Executive has accepted the Letter of Offer, subject to Council approval and seek approval for him to accept subsequent Letters of Variance on behalf of the Council.</li> <li>• Seek members' approval to issue further payments to funded organisations upon their completion of monitoring and relevant administrative checks.</li> <li>• Seek agreement from members on the option to allocate the additional funding provided based on the detail provided in the report.</li> </ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>Members are asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the CSP funding allocation of £2,939,450.49 presented in the Letter of Offer from the DfC for the 2025/26 financial year.</li> <li>• Note that the Chief Executive has accepted the Letter of Offer, subject to Council approval and seek approval for him to accept subsequent Letters of Variance on behalf of the Council.</li> <li>• Agree option relating to the Community Support General additional funding.</li> <li>• Agree option for the reprofiling of the budget for Advice and Tribunal services.</li> <li>• Agree the proposed additional funding allocation for: Community Support General, Advice Grant, Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension-Tribunal Representation and Welfare Reform Mitigations- Face to Face Advice.</li> <li>• Note the additional funding to Social Supermarket projects based on previous committee decisions.</li> <li>• Approve that officers progress funding payments where appropriate, following completion of due diligence requirements based on the proposals.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
	<b><u>Background</u></b>
3.1	Members will be aware that the Department for Communities (DfC) provides an annual grant to Council through its Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer. This funding provides an element of the budget towards Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building grant, Summer Scheme Grant as well as Generalist Advice.
3.2	The CSP also provides 100% funding for other elements of activity such as Social Supermarkets, Welfare Reform Mitigations and Integrated Advice Partnership Fund (debt related services)
3.3	At the March Committee, Officers advised that the Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer for 25/26 had not yet been received by Council from DfC. At that stage, Members granted approval for officers to progress funding agreements and provide 50% payments for the Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building grants and Generalist Advice.
3.4	Council received the CSP 2024/25 Letter of Offer from DfC on 13 June 2025. There is an increase to this year's funding across several new and existing elements. Table 1 below presents a breakdown of the allocation for 2025/25 in comparison to 2024/25.

**Table 1**

<b>Belfast City Council</b>	<b>2025/26</b>	<b>2024/25</b>
Community Support General	£993,199.04	£911,191.78
Advice Grant	£727,984.03	£667,875.26
Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation - Appeals	£84,302.81	£77,342.02
Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Face to Face Advice	£268,704.81	£246,518.17
Social Supermarket	£777,811.14	£711,627.57
Integrated Advice Fund Partnership (2024-2026)*	£87,448.66	£160,804.82
<b>CSP Grand Total (Per Year)</b>	<b>£2,939,450.49</b>	<b>£2,775,359.62</b>

\*Please note that the Integrated Advice Fund Partnership (IAP) is allocated over a two-year period thus there is no uplift in 2025/26. Members agreed the funding awards for IAP at Committee in April 2025.

### **Additional Funding by CSP Heading**

**Table 2** illustrates the additional 9% uplift and available budgets under each heading.

**Table 2**

<b>CSP Heading</b>	<b>Additional Funds 2025/26</b>
1. Community Support General	£82,007.26
2. Advice Grant	£60,108.77
3. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation- Appeals	£6,960.79
4. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Face to face Advice	£22,186.64
5. Social Supermarket	£66,183.57

### Proposed Allocation of Additional Funds

It is proposed that additional funding for elements 1-4 should be allocated using the approaches outlined below. Further detail is provided in Appendices 1-3

#### *1. Community Support General*

Members are asked to consider and agree their preferred option for allocating the additional funding provided under the Community Support General heading (£82,007.26) as outlined in Table 3. Further detail on the organisations funded through Capacity and Revenue awards is provided in Appendix 1

**Table 3**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Pro</b>	<b>Con</b>
1	Allocate all the additional funding £82,007.26 to the	Capacity grant funding enables the provision of training, development and support programmes provided by	Revenue organisations do not have access to these additional funds.

		43 Capacity funded groups. Each group will receive a non-recurrent payment of £1,907.15	43 organisations to smaller organisations within communities. The funding contributes to staff and programme delivery running costs. As employers Capacity funded groups have seen an increase in staff related costs this past year particularly in relation to National Insurance Contributions. They have also seen an increase to the costs running costs of their programmes.  At Committee in March 2025, members agreed to double the funding allocation received by Revenue funded groups from a maximum of £20,629 in 2024/25 to £41,258 2025/26. Capacity funded organisations did not receive an uplift.	
	2	Allocate the funding to Revenue and Capacity funded groups. 130 organisations will receive a non-recurrent payment of £630.83	Revenue and Capacity organisations will receive additional funding to meet their running costs and provide services.	This option does not take into account the difference in the annual level of funding to both Revenue and Capacity applicants.
	3	Use the funding to offset the council allocation that was used to double the revenue awards in 25/26.	This would offset the significant council investment that was made to double revenue awards in 25/26.	This option would not provide an additional support to funded organisations.
	<p><b>Appendix 1</b> provides a revised allocation for Capacity and Revenue based on options 1 and 2 above.</p>			
3.9	<p>Members will be aware that this is the final year of awards of Capacity and Revenue Grants 2023-2026 in its current form. An open call for our new Large Grant grant programme 2026-2029 will be launched at end of July/beginning of August.</p> <p><i>2. Advice Grant and Provision for Appeals.</i></p>			
3.10	<p>Members will recall the Council agreed to provide £270,000 on a recurrent basis for the provision of an Appeals and Tribunal Service in the City. At Council in July, members agreed to extend the provision of the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service (BCTS) provided by Ligoniel Improvement Association on behalf of the Belfast Advice Group (BAG) to the end of March 2026. Members also agreed that future services will be procured and for Officers to begin the process with the contract awarded and provider in place for April 2026.</p> <p>This year DfC provided an allocation of £84,302.81 towards the provision of Appeals and Tribunal Services. Including Council's contribution of £270,000 the total available budget is</p>			

3.11 £354,302.81. BCTS requested £242,000 which was agreed by Council in July. Thus, there is a potential underspend in the budget of £112, 302.81.

Funding relating to Advice and Appeals is a specific element of the Community Support Programme and ringfenced for the provision of related services. The review of Advice services which council completed in December 23 highlighted the rising delivery and staffing costs experienced by advice organisations, this additional funding will support organisations to address these issues. Members may also wish to note that the DfC regional review of advice services is ongoing. Members are asked to consider the reprofiling of the budget and agree a preferred option presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

3.12

Option	Description	Pro	Con
1	Redistribute the £112,302.81 providing an uplift for Generalist Advice and Appeals to the five area-based Advice Consortia using Council's allocation model. (Table 5 below)	<p>Council currently funds 5 Area based Advice consortia that includes 14 independent advice providers in 19 locations and additional cover via extensive outreach provision.</p> <p>Providers have expressed concerns regarding the growing costs relating to staff such as National Insurance Contributions and operating overheads.</p> <p>Staff retention has posed a significant problem for advice providers. Due to short-term contracts and lower salary compared to other agencies such as Housing Associations</p> <p>Providers have also discussed the growing need for the provision of services that meet the needs of more complex cases and also of a growing population who do not have English as a first language.</p> <p>An additional non-recurrent allocation for this year will provide the Advice providers with sufficient resources to maintain their current level of staff, meet increased overheads and provide additional resources to meet the growing demand for services on complex cases as well as for people who require additional support such as translation services.</p>	<p>The demand for services and complexity of dealing with multiple needs is growing. This greatly impacts on the level of service provision. The additional funding is short-term for 2025/26 on a non-recurrent basis. Next year the provision will return to its current level thus the service capacity of the organisations will reduce. Providing funding for 1 may lead to a higher dependency of the providers on Council funding and of people on the service. A demand that may be inflated with the provision of additional support this year.</p> <p>The providers may use some funding to increase its staff salaries and off set NIC. This increase may lead to an unmanageable cost next year</p>
2	Redistribute the £112,302.81	As Above	As Above

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>providing an uplift for Generalist Advice and Appeals to the five area-based Advice Consortia using Council's allocation model. (Table 5 below) up to £85,302.81.and allocating the remaining £27,000 towards the procurement process ensuring that contingencies are in place to effectively transition from current funding to contracted service provision e.g. costs to transfer service user records and systems from the current to the new provider. Grant permission to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations to the generalist advice services should the budget provision of up to £27,000 not be used.</li></ul>	<p>This is the final year of the current arrangement for the Tribunal Service. From April 2026 the service will be provided by a contracted organisation following a procurement process. It is envisaged that the provider will be secured by December 2026. The current provider has extensive case records and systems in place for maintaining the records. The provider is also dealing with an extensive caseload that may take longer to complete beyond the 31March 2026.</p> <p>This allocation will provide Council with an opportunity to manage the transition from the current funding arrangements to the new contract. It may cover items such as transfer of Casefiles and systems, current caseloads, issues relating to GDPR.</p>	<p>Its £27,000 that can be used for direct service provision.</p>
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In relation to the Advice Grant, DfC has provided an uplift of £60,108.77 for the provision of Generalist Advice Services. Members are asked to consider allocating the uplift based on Council's current advice grant funding model.

Table 5 below presents the level of additional funding each Area Based Advice Consortia will receive this year for the uplift and budget reprofile options. The additional funding is non-recurrent.

3.12

**Table 5**

Area Consortium	Council's Funding Allocation Model	Advice Grant Uplift	Additional Budget Reprofile Option 1	Additional Budget Reprofile Option 2
Central	9%	£5,381.69	£9,953.06	£7,560.13
East	14%	£8,628.51	£16,229.47	£12,327.66
North	26%	£15,556.90	£29,063.05	£22,075.67
South	15%	£9,259.96	£17,299.22	£13,140.11
West	35%	£21,281.71	£39,752.01	£30,199.34

	Appendix 2 provides details of the revised allocation for each Consortium based on uplift plus Options 1 and 2																		
3.13	<p>3. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation- Appeals</p> <p>Members are asked to note the increase of £6,960.79 towards the provision of tribunal and appeals and agree the allocation be used for the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service.</p>																		
3.14	<p>4. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Face to face Advice</p> <p>The funding relating to the WRME Face to Face Advice is funded 100% by DfC. The Department allocates the funding of £268,704.81 as follows for 2025/26.</p>																		
3.15	<p><b>Table 6</b></p> <table><tr><th>Organisation</th><th>% Of Total Allocation</th><th>Uplift Allocation</th></tr><tr><td>Advice Space</td><td>46.74%</td><td>£125,585.24</td></tr><tr><td>Advice Space (EBIAC)</td><td>13.32%</td><td>£35,779.89</td></tr><tr><td>Falls Community Council (NDA)</td><td>13.32%</td><td>£35,779.89</td></tr><tr><td>Ballynafeigh Community Development Association</td><td>13.32%</td><td>£35,779.89</td></tr><tr><td>North Belfast Advice Partnership (LIA)</td><td>13.32%</td><td>£35,779.89</td></tr></table> <p>The allocation is made to specific organisations covering the geographical areas aligned with the advice consortia. Should an organisation not be able to use all or part of this allocation, the area consortium will be able to bid for the available funds. All decisions relating to expenditure reprofiling, monitoring and reporting is made by the Department.</p> <p>Members are asked to note DfC’s allocation relating to Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension.</p>	Organisation	% Of Total Allocation	Uplift Allocation	Advice Space	46.74%	£125,585.24	Advice Space (EBIAC)	13.32%	£35,779.89	Falls Community Council (NDA)	13.32%	£35,779.89	Ballynafeigh Community Development Association	13.32%	£35,779.89	North Belfast Advice Partnership (LIA)	13.32%	£35,779.89
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3.16	<p>5. Social Supermarket Funding</p> <p>In May 25 Council agreed to provide bridging support to 2024/25 funded groups from 01 April – 30 June 25, up to a maximum amount of £13,738 per group. In June, council further agreed that grants to the 24/25 scheme would be rolled over until 31 March 2026 except to those organisations which received funding in 2024/25 but did not apply for funding in 2025/26.</p> <p>Council also granted delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations based on the agreed option, if further funding becomes available. The total amount of funding required for 25/26 to make the awards approved by council is £752,109.67 with DfC allocating £777,811.14 in the current year. Members will be aware that DfC fund Social Supermarkets at 100%, this provides additional funding of £25,701.47 for 25/26 Social Supermarkets. Given the low value of these additional funds, the Director has used his delegated authority to provide an equal allocation to all 19 groups who have been awarded funding in 25/26. This would equate to £1,352.71 which could be used to meet increasing demands for the services that social supermarkets provide.</p>																		
3.17	<p>Members will note that the criteria for funding Social Supermarkets will be reviewed by September 2025 and Officers will bring a report to Committee in advance of the open call for 26/27.</p>																		
3.18	<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>All awards listed in the appendices can be made in line with existing budgets for 2025/26 . Members should note that the Capacity and Revenue awards which are multi annual awards from 23/26.</p>																		

3.19	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment</u> This will be considered throughout, and any appropriate issues highlighted to Members. Any amendments to existing scheme or new scheme will be considered in the context of any equality/good relations and rural needs considerations.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
4.1	<b>Appendix 1:</b> Options for Capacity and Revenue Funded Groups Awards 2025/26 <b>Appendix 2:</b> Allocation Approach for Advice, Tribunal Service and Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension (Face to Face) and Awards. <b>Appendix 3:</b> Social Supermarket Funding Awards 25/26