

# APPENDIX 2

# **WELFARE REFORM SUPPORT PROJECT**

## **Evason Report - Advice Services**

As part of the Fresh Start Agreement, £8m funding was committed over 4 years to put in place additional independent advice services to support citizens through the introduction of Welfare Reform. The following initiatives have been introduced into the independent Advice Sector and other key advice organisations

### **Front line face to face independent advice / Freephone advice service**

Since November 2016 the Department has in place an additional 37 welfare reform face to face advisers across Northern Ireland, 25 within frontline Citizen's Advice Bureau and 12 Advice NI affiliated offices. A further 9 advisors cover the telephone helpline, 3 legal advisors in the Law Centre NI are also funded for tribunal representation and to advise on complex cases.

New services include support and tribunal representation for customers appealing the impact of the welfare changes on their benefit entitlement across Northern Ireland.

### **Advice Sector Support Initiatives**

The following advice sector support initiatives have been introduced into the Independent Advice Sector and delivered by partners in Advice NI, Citizens Advice and the Law centre NI and others to enable the independent advice network to support customers through the implementation of Welfare Reform.

#### 2016/2017 Year

Welfare Reform Readiness Programme - £600K allocated to frontline advice organisations to enable them to, maintain services during training, develop management information processes, develop capacity for additional enquires, enhance links with specialist organisations and manage displacement issues.

Welfare Reform Front-line Advisor Training Programme providing training on the following elements:

- PIP including form completion
- ESA legislative changes/mandatory reconsiderations
- Sanctions
- Mitigation schemes
- Discretionary support
- Rates/housing changes

Welfare Reform Awareness Sessions – free half day Welfare Reform awareness session were delivered to 1500 people who are working with impacted customers, including elected council members, statutory bodies, constituency office staff and voluntary and

community organisations.

Digital Self- help Terminal – a pilot terminal introduced in Citizens Advice Mid and East Antrim to enable those who are IT literate to access information and advice, make claims online and test Universal Credit feasibility.

Front Line Managers Forum established to support advice front line managers through the various stages of Welfare Reform implementation.

Welfare Reform Communications Bulletins – introduced for the Advice Sector to update the Sector on key issues and initiatives throughout Welfare Reform implementation.

### 2017/2018 year

Universal Credit Front-line Advisor Training Programme - provides training on the following elements:

- Universal Credit changes
- Supporting customers digitally
- Financial Capability
- Employability, Sanctions
- Housing Benefit changes
- Vulnerable customers.

Universal Credit Awareness Sessions –free half day Universal Credit awareness sessions delivered to approximately 6000 people to date who work with impacted customers, including elected council members, statutory bodies, constituency office staff and voluntary and community organisations. Positive feedback was received from participants.

Universal Credit Digital Support Package - a digital support package was provided to each frontline independent advice organisation in the area where Universal Credit went live from September 2017 to April 2018. This allows the advice sector to assist customers in making and maintaining a digital claim to Universal Credit. This will continue with the continued roll out of Universal Credit in 18/19 financial year.

Support for Housing Rights / NIHE - training support package to enable Housing Rights to support organisations assisting customers with housing benefit issues through the implementation of Universal Credit. This was delivered to 233 attendees during 17/18 year and was found to be extremely informative and invaluable training for those who attended.

Welfare Reform Support Officer - a Welfare Reform Support Officer was introduced in Advice NI. Their role is to work closely with front-line advice organisations and the Department throughout Welfare Reform implementation.

Support for tribunal representation - a project to assist customers with the tribunal representation process has been introduced in the Law centre NI.

The Department has worked with the British Deaf Association and the Advice Sector to develop a Programme of initiatives to support customers with hearing difficulties through Welfare Reform. The Programme delivered 6 PIP roadshows across NI specifically for customers with hearing difficulties. The next steps of this Programme will provide additional funding for advice and interpreter costs.

#### 2018/2019 year

It is anticipated that as well as continuing to provide digital and training packages to Advice Frontline offices in line with UC Roll out, a targeted intervention approach with vulnerable customers will be introduced.

### **Evason Report - Tackling Food Poverty – focusing on the most vulnerable in society with issues such as homelessness, mental health, migrant communities**

The Evason report included the requirement to tackle food poverty in Northern Ireland by improving access to affordable food through a network of community shops and social stores/supermarkets

The Department has in place 5 pilot social supermarket models. This will help inform the design of Social Supermarkets more generally, testing a delivery model that integrates food provision, advice (including debt and benefit advice) and employment support to prevent relieve and transition out of food poverty. It will also test the prospects for collaborations, the added value impact of the wrap around services and the capacity of potential delivery bodies, prior to any broader implementation of a larger more co-ordinated Social Supermarket programme.

### **Evason Report - Money Management and Financial Adjustment**

The Evason report called for One to one support – A helpline, website and text back facility to support people on managing money, responsible lending, value for money, a family resilience programme, financial inclusion and digital inclusion;

#### **The following Financial capability projects have been/are being delivered:-**

Free 1 day money management training sessions on a 'train the trainer/champion' basis to key staff/volunteers/members in networks and community groups working with those impacted by Welfare Reform

A financial capability research project was commissioned to provide insight into interventions to support the needs of specific vulnerable groups e.g. homeless, refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

'Get online and money management pilot' involving intensive guidance sessions to vulnerable individuals or small groups to increase financial resilience and ability to complete transactions online has been delivered throughout Mid and East Antrim

Financial capability sessions providing budgeting advice and support to a group of the women involved in the Community Transformation Project (Tackling paramilitarism) will commence shortly.

### **Credit Union Pilot**

The Department commissioned an independent feasibility study into a possible affordable credit pilot scheme which would provide small value loans at affordable interest rates to households currently excluded from mainstream credit.

**Advice Service Team**  
**Voluntary and Community Division**

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