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Our ref: COR0006/2019

1 February 2019

Dear Carolyn

Brexit – EU Settlement Scheme

Thank you for your letter dated 9 January 2019 on the above matter.

While Immigration is an Excepted Matter it is vital that the implementation of the Scheme in NI is facilitated to ensure that the geographical and logistical issues here are duly recognised. It is a priority, given the profound contribution that EU nationals make to our economy and society, to ensure that they are given every opportunity to apply for the Scheme and have at least the same access arrangements as is provided to those in the rest of the UK.

Currently in Northern Ireland, 'Generalist Advice Services' are available at approximately 60 advice centre locations across NI. This is a free, independent advice service, on issues including benefits, housing issues, immigration, health issues and Brexit. The Advice Sector has been identified as a priority one area for

Brexit day 1 delivery plans and additional funding has been requested to up skill the Advice Sector and to deal with the increased demand for services.

As you will be aware the EU Settlement Scheme is a Home Office (HO) initiative. The Home Office has developed a Safeguarding Strategy to ensure that the Scheme is accessible for vulnerable EU nationals. Both TEO and NILGA are members of the 'Safeguarding Standing Group', established by the Home Office to inform the development and implementation of its Safeguarding Strategy.

In support of this strategy, the Home Office plans on implementing a range of support mechanisms in Northern Ireland to support vulnerable EU citizens in making their application. These include:

- Grant Scheme – open to applications from community groups who are willing to provide support to applicants to the Scheme;
- Digital Assistance – IT assistance provided to those who experience difficulties completing the on-line application; and
- Chip Checker Locations – venues where applicants can access a device to verify their identity without having to physically send off their passports.

My officials are continuing to work with the Home Office to inform their implementation of the strategy and its various support mechanisms in NI. I am happy to share details with you as and when, any further detail is available.

In the interim, the HO has published toolkits for Local Authorities, Employers and Voluntary Groups, which you may find useful in informing concerned citizens.

Toolkits can be accessed at the following link - <https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/articles/eu-settlement-scheme>.

I hope this provides you with some clarification around the implementation of the Scheme in NI. I will ensure that my officials keep you updated as developments arise in respect of specific engagement and outreach in NI.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'DS' with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

DAVID STERLING
Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service