

Office of the Social Fund Commissioner

Publication Scheme

Last reviewed: 13 January 2012

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1. Introduction

Welcome to the Publication Scheme of the Office of the Social Fund Commissioner (OSFC), which has been produced in accordance with Section 19 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“the Act”). The Social Fund Commissioner, who heads up the OSFC, is required by the Act to adopt and maintain a Publication Scheme. The OSFC’s Publication Scheme (“the Scheme”), sets out information which:

- we have published on our website; and
- is available on request, how to request it and whether or not it will be provided free of charge.

The aim of the Scheme is to make as much information as possible about the OSFC easily available to the public.

The Scheme replicates the Model Scheme that has been approved for Northern Ireland’s Non-Departmental Public Bodies (“NDPBs”) by the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner is responsible for ensuring public authorities comply with their duties to adopt and maintain a publication scheme in accordance with the Act.

2. The Classes of Information Published

The Scheme sets out the information that is available on the OSFC website and information that OSFC holds which it will release on request.

3. The Way in which Information is Published

Most of the information referred to in the Scheme is available on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk. For those who do not have access to the internet the OSFC can provide hard copies of the documents available on the OSFC website, however there may be a charge for the provision of this information. Some of the information referred to in the Scheme is available from the OSFC in hard copy format only, there may be a charge for the provision of this information. Other information referred to in the Scheme can only be accessed via other organisations, and in these cases relevant contact details are supplied. For each piece of information we have indicated the way in which the information is available.

4. Copyright

The OSFC retains copyright for all the material in the Scheme except where individual material shows otherwise, for example, where there is Crown Copyright. Information about the use of Crown Copyright material can be obtained from the National Archives web site at: www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/information-management/our-services/crown-copyright.htm. You can copy or distribute OSFC copyright material for personal or in-house use without our permission, subject to the following conditions:

- it is copied accurately and is not used in a misleading context;
- where the material is being copied for others, the copyright status of the material is acknowledged; and
- the copying is not for financial reward.

All other rights are reserved.

5. Requests for Information from the OSFC

Requests for a copy of the Scheme, copies of information available under the Scheme, or information not available on the OSFC website should be directed to: The Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by one of the following means:

In writing to:

The Publication Scheme Co-ordinator
Office of the Social Fund Commissioner
5th Floor
24-26 Arthur Street
Belfast
BT1 4GF

By e-mail: sfc@osfcni.org.uk
By telephone: 028 90247202
By Textphone: 0808 1270418

We are able to take calls in languages other than English, using Language Line; and our most important leaflets can be translated upon request.

6. Obtaining Information that is not Included in the Scheme

If you require information that is not included in the Scheme the OSFC may still be able to provide the information. Requests should be directed to the Publication Scheme Coordinator.

7. Requests for Personal Information under the Data Protection Act 1998

Under the Data Protection Act 1998 you have a right of access to personal information about you held by the OSFC, subject to some exceptions. Requests for such information may be directed to the Publication Scheme Coordinator.

8. Responsibility for the Scheme

The person responsible for maintaining the Scheme on a routine basis is the Publication Scheme Coordinator.

9. Comments and Complaints about the Publication Scheme

Please let us know if you have any suggestions for adding to the Scheme. We shall consider your comments when we review the Scheme. Furthermore, if you have any complaints about the Scheme, please let us know. Comments and complaints should be addressed to the Publication Scheme Coordinator at the address above. We aim to investigate and respond to complaints within 20 days.

If after the investigation of a complaint you remain dissatisfied then you may ask for an internal review. We aim to conduct internal reviews and to issue a response within 20 days. If, after the internal review of a complaint, you are still dissatisfied, you may refer your complaint to the Information Commissioner:

The Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745
Fax 01625 524510
Email: notification@ico.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.ico.gov.uk

10. Who we are and what we do

10.1 Roles and responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of the Social Fund Commissioner and OSFC staff are set out in the current OSFC Annual Report which can be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk

10.2 Organisational structure

The organisational structure of OSFC, which incorporates information on pay scales, can be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above.

At 1 January 2012 the following staff were in post in OSFC with the following remuneration:

- 1 Social Fund Commissioner c. £28,847. p.a. for 4 days per month on Northern Ireland issues.
- 1 Office Manager – Deputy Principal grade (pay scale £34,163 to £38,893).
- 6 Social Fund Inspectors – Staff Officer grade (pay scale £27,115 to £30,520).
- 1 Executive Office 2 grade (pay scale £21,392 to £23,250).
- 1 Administrative Officer grade (pay scale £18,038 to £22,180).

The roles and responsibilities of these staff are explained in more detail in the OSFC Annual Report for 2010/11 which can be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

10.3 Information relating to the legislation relevant to the authority's functions

OSFC is not responsible for taking the lead in any legislation. However, the table below gives an overview of the legislative basis for the OSFC together with a list of social fund legislation which has a bearing on the work of the Social Fund Inspectors. The legislation is subject to Crown Copyright and is available online at www.legislation.gov.uk, or can be purchased in hard copy format from The Stationary Office, located at:

TSO Ireland
19a, Weavers Court,
Weavers Court Business Park,
Linfield Road,
Belfast,
BT12 5GH
Call: +44 (0)2890 238451
Email: enquiries@tsoireland.com

Primary legislation relevant to the discretionary Social Fund in Northern Ireland	
Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1986	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1988	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1990	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
Social Security Contributions and Benefits (Northern Ireland) Act 1992	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
Social Security (Consequential Provisions) (NI) Act 1992	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
Social Security (Northern Ireland) Order 1998	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.

Secondary legislation relevant to the discretionary Social Fund in Northern Ireland	
Social Fund (Application for Review) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1988 (S.R. 1988 No. 20)	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office.
Social Fund (Recovery by Deductions from Benefits) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1988 (S.R. 1988 No. 21)	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office
Social Fund (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (NI) 1990	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office
Social Fund (Application for Review) (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2006 No. 169	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
The Social Fund (Applications and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (NI) 2008 No. 357	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
The Social Fund (Applications and Miscellaneous Provisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009 No. 392	Available to purchase from The Stationary Office and accessible on the www.legislation.gov.uk website.
Social Fund Directions and Guidance	www.dsdni.gov.uk/social_fund_guide

10.4 Lists of and information relating to organisations with which the NDPB works in partnership

A list of organisations with which OSFC works in partnership, together with information on our relationship, is contained in the table below.

Organisation	Function	Relationship
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Independent Review Service (“IRS”)	This office carries out the equivalent functions to OSFC for Great Britain and is based in Birmingham.	OSFC and IRS liaise on discretionary Social Fund matters.
Social Security Agency (“SSA”)	The SSA’s function includes operational delivery of the discretionary Social Fund.	Social Fund Inspectors in OSFC review discretionary Social Fund decisions made by the SSA and provide feedback to SSA staff on such cases. OSFC also works with SSA staff to try and help improve decision making in the discretionary social fund through providing feedback on cases, regular statistical reports and training.
Department for Social Development (“DSD”)	DSD is responsible for Social Fund legislation and policy development in Northern Ireland.	A relationship agreement is in place with this organisation, which may be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above. OSFC reports once a year to the Minister for Social Development in the form of its Annual Report.
Welfare rights organisations	Organisations with customers who have an interest in the discretionary Social Fund.	OSFC staff meet with such organisations to hear their views on the operation of the discretionary Social Fund. OSFC also provide training to such organisations on request.

10.5 Senior staff and management board members

The Social Fund Commissioner in Northern Ireland, Mr Karamjit Singh CBE, is responsible for the Office of the Social Fund Commissioner. Mr Singh is also separately appointed as the Social Fund Commissioner in Great Britain and is responsible for the Independent Review Service (“IRS”) (the equivalent office to OSFC in GB).

OSFC is managed on a day-to-day basis by the Office Manager, Steven Rea.

10.6 The locations and contact details for the authority

Office of the Social Fund Commissioner
5th Floor
24-26 Arthur Street
Belfast
BT1 4GF

Telephone: (028) 90247202
Freephone Textphone: 0808 127 0417
Freephone Minicom: 0808 127 0418
Fax: (028) 90230921
E-mail: sfc@osfnci.org.uk

11. What we spend and how we spend it

11.1 Financial statements, budgets and variance reports

The OSFC's expenditure is summarized in its Annual Report which can be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk. More detailed budget information for the current year and previous two financial years can be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above.

11.2 Capital programme

OSFC is not a party to any public private partnership contracts and does not currently have any major plans for capital expenditure.

11.3 Spending reviews

OSFC does not hold any information regarding spending reviews.

11.4 Financial audit reports

OSFC does not hold any information regarding financial audit reports.

11.5 Staff and board members' allowances and expenses

The total amount of allowances and expenses claimed by the Commissioner and OSFC staff in the current and previous 2 financial years is detailed in the OSFC's budget information. The budget information can be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above. The allowances and expenses are claimed in line with NICS procedures.

11.6 Pay and grading structures

This information is contained in the OSFC's organizational structure in Section 10.2 above.

11.7 Procurement Procedures

Goods and Services are acquired through the Northern Ireland Government's "Account NI" procedures. Account NI listed suppliers have been appointed by Central Procurement Group. OSFC does not currently have any contracts available for public tender.

11.8 Lists of contracts awarded and their value

OSFC uses the following suppliers:

- Airtricity – c. £125 per month excl. VAT
- BT – c. 160 per month excl. VAT
- Cable and Wireless – c. £20 per month excl. VAT
- QCS Contract Cleaning Ltd – £200.85 per month excl. VAT

11.9 Financial statements for projects and events

OSFC does not currently have any projects or events planned.

11.10 Internal financial regulations

OSFC is governed by the procedures set out in “Managing Public Money in Northern Ireland” and does not have any separate internal financial regulations.

12. What are our priorities and how are we doing

12.1 Strategic plans, Annual business plan

OSFC’s Corporate Plan sets out the organisation’s strategic plan and contains a work programme for the current year. The Corporate Plan and work programme can be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

12.2 Public service agreements, Reports to Parliament, Annual report, Service standards

The Social Fund Commissioner is required by Article 37(6) of the Social Security (NI) Order 1998 to report annually to the Development on the standard of reviews by Social Fund Inspectors. The Annual Report contains information regarding the Government targets its functions contributes to achieving; the performance of OSFC in carrying out these functions; and information relating to its service standards. Annual Reports can be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

12.3 Internal and external performance reviews

The OSFC was reaccredited as an Investor in People in December 2010.

12.4 Inspection reports where the NDPB is subject to formal inspection

The OSFC has not been subject to any formal inspections.

12.5 Statistics produced in accordance with the NDPB’s requirements

OSFC produces quarterly and annual statistics reports on the quality of discretionary Social Fund decision making by the SSA. Recent editions of these reports can be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

13. How we make decisions

13.1 Major policy proposals and decisions and background information relating to major policy proposals and decisions

Major policy proposals discussed and decisions taken at regular Quality Forum meetings held in IRS, at which OSFC is represented. Copies of any such papers which OSFC has retained may be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above.

13.2 Public consultations

Current OSFC consultation exercises can be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

13.3 Reports and papers provided for consideration at senior level meetings and Minutes of these meetings

OSFC holds regular Management Team Meetings, copies of the minutes of the meetings held since 1 January 2008 can be requested from OSFC by following the procedure set out in Chapter 5.

13.4 Internal communications guidance and criteria used for decision making i.e. process systems and key personnel

Social Fund Inspectors are required by law to take account of the Social Fund Directions and Guidance issued by DSD when making their review decision, these may be viewed by clicking here: www.dsdni.gov.uk/social_fund_guide.

Inspectors also take into account advice and associated support notes issued by the Social Fund Commissioner when making their review decision, these may be viewed on the IRS website at: www.irs-review.org.uk.

14. Our policies and procedures

14.1 Policies and procedures for the conduct of departmental business and the provision of services

Information regarding OSFC's policies and procedures for the conduct of its business and the provision of its services are contained in the Corporate Plan and Annual Report. These may be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

14.2 Policies and procedures for the recruitment and employment of staff

The Memorandum of Understanding governing the relationship between OSFC and DSD may be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above.

The Social Fund Commissioner is a public appointment made by DSD. The remaining staff are seconded from DSD and are appointed in line with Northern Ireland Civil Service policies and procedures.

OSFC is fully committed to complying with the Section 75 obligations of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which deal with the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. The OSFC has set out in its Equality Scheme how it proposes to fulfill those obligations. In addition, the OSFC has also produced a Disability Action Plan. The OSFC Equality Scheme and Disability Action Plan may be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

Information which is not already published on the OSFC website may be requested by following the procedures set out in Chapter 5 of this Scheme.

14.3 Customer service

The OSFC Annual Report and Corporate Plan set out the organisation's customer service standards. Complaints about any aspect of the OSFC's service can be made via the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk.

Alternatively, complaints and requests for information can be made to the Office Manager by email to sfc@osfcni.org.uk, or in writing to the following address:

Office of the Social Fund Commissioner
5th Floor
24-26 Arthur Street
Belfast
BT1 4GF

14.4 Records management and personal data policies

14.5 Security Policies

OSFC staff comply with DSD's policies for safeguarding customers' information. Requests for copies of these policies should be directed to DSD for consideration, at:

Records Management Branch
Department for Social Development
Ground Floor, Lighthouse Building
Gasworks Business Park
Ormeau Road
Belfast
BT7 2JB

or e-mail: foi@dsdni.gov.uk

Please state your name and contact details in your requests and applications should provide as much detail as possible to identify the information sought.

In line with the clear desk policy, case papers containing applicant's details are only removed from OSFC premises in exceptional circumstances (e.g. when high workloads require staff to work from home on overtime, or when case papers are required to be taken to meetings for business purposes). In these circumstances any electronic information containing customers' details that is removed from the office is protect by encryption.

Customers' case papers are returned to the SSA following completion of the review by OSFC. Where a customer has requested a further OSFC review by an Inspector, the written request and a copy of any related papers produced are retained by OSFC and subsequently destroyed in line with the OSFC destruction schedule.

No other customer information is retained by OSFC unless it relates to particular Human Rights, Equality or Judicial Review proceedings. In these instances papers are retained for reference purposes.

14.6 Charging regimes and policies

OSFC does not charge for any documents or information which is either:

- published on the OSFC website; or
- is held electronically by OSFC and can be successful emailed to the person requesting the information.

Where the information requested is held only in hard copy format, OSFC may charge for its provision to cover the cost of photocopying (at 1p per page), staff time and postage (if required) only where this cost exceeds £25. In such cases we will let customers know of the charge at the time of your request. Any charge would be payable in advance.

15. Lists and registers

15.1 Public registers and registers held as public records

OSFC does not hold any public registers or registers held as public records.

15.2 Asset registers and Information Asset Register

Copies of the OSFC Asset register can be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above. The OSFC does not hold an Information Asset Register.

15.3 Disclosure logs

Copies of the OSFC Disclosure log can be requested from the Publication Scheme Co-ordinator by following the steps set out in paragraph 5 above.

15.4 Register of gifts and hospitality provided to Board members and senior personnel

Date of Offer	Offered to: Name & Grade	Offered From	Description of Offer	Reason for Offer	Details of Contracts – current or potential	Est. / actual value of offer £	Action Taken i.e. Accepted/ Refused/ Returned	Entered by	Entered Date	File Ref
13/4/10	Karamjit Singh CBE, Commissioner	Patricia Lewsley, Children's Commissioner	Lunch	Exchange of views between stakeholders on common areas for both commissioners in relation to the social fund and tackling child poverty.	No potential contracts.	Cost of £23 for both parties. Equivalent to £11.50 to Mr Singh	Accepted	Steven Rea	13/4/10	n/a

15.5 Any register of interests kept in the department

The OSFC does not hold a register of interests.

15.6 Other lists required by law

The OSFC does not hold any other lists.

16. The Services we offer

16.1 Regulatory responsibilities

OSFC does not have any regulatory responsibilities.

16.2 Services for public authorities

OSFC provides the following services to the SSA:

- feedback on the quality of its discretionary Social Fund decision making;
- statistical reports on its discretionary Social Fund decision making; and
- training on the discretionary Social Fund.

16.3 Services for industry

OSFC does not provide any services for Industry.

16.4 Services for other organisations

OSFC provides training on the Social Fund to voluntary and community organisations with an interest in the discretionary Social Fund.

16.5 Services for members of the public

OSFC provides a free, independent, quick and accessible review for applicants to the discretionary part of the Social Fund who are dissatisfied with the decision made by the SSA on their community care grant, crisis loan or budgeting loan application. OSFC Inspectors can only review decisions that have already been reviewed by the SSA and applications for an Inspector's review should be made in writing directly to the OSFC within 28 days of the SSA's review decision.

16.6 Services for which the NDPB is entitled to recover a fee together with those fees

OSFC is not entitled to recover any fees.

16.7 Leaflets, booklets and newsletters

OSFC produces a variety of leaflets relating to its service. These may be viewed on the OSFC website at: www.osfcni.org.uk. The Independent Review Service's website (the organisation which is equivalent to OSFC in Great Britain) publishes a Journal which features articles on a wide range of subjects relevant to the social fund and the review process. The Journal is accompanied by a document called the Digest of Decisions which features case studies illustrating particular aspects of social fund law and practice. Issues of the Journal and Digest of Decisions may be viewed on the IRS website at: www.irs-review.org.uk

16.8 Advice and guidance

The Social Fund Commissioner produces advice and guidance on the discretionary Social Fund. It is published on the Independent Review Service's website (the organisation which is equivalent to OSFC in Great Britain) and may be viewed on the IRS website at: www.irs-review.org.uk

16.9 Media releases

OSFC has not issued any media releases.