

Costs Associated with Subscription for Portable Enhanced Disclosure Certificates

Volunteer Now has welcomed the proposals to review the Criminal Records Regime in Northern Ireland, and in particular we support arrangements which will maintain or enhance public protection while reducing the burden and bureaucracy of vetting checks, particularly on volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. We continue to promote the need for robust recruitment and selection procedures, and appropriate vetting checks which will compliment thorough procedures. As an organisation we continue to raise awareness of practice that enhances the protection of children, young people and vulnerable adults when they are in receipt of services and/or engaged in activities where they have close and sustained contact with staff/volunteers.

In our view, good safeguarding practice must include implementation of recruitment and selection procedures, development of safeguarding policies and procedures to recognised standards, information and training, and support and supervision of staff/volunteers, as well as compliance with all legislative requirements. To date we have largely welcomed the Government's approach in respect of the review and scaling back of the Vetting and Barring Scheme.

Volunteer Now welcome the proposed introduction of a portable Enhanced Disclosure Certificate (EDC) for all staff/volunteers engaged in regulated activity. The introduction of an online facility for organisations to check the validity of a potential employee/volunteer's EDC is to be welcomed and we believe this will significantly reduce the burden on volunteers and the voluntary and community sector. However we are concerned at the current lack of clarity regarding payment for the associated subscription service. **Volunteer Now are strongly opposed to any suggestion that volunteers will be required to meet the cost of subscription.**

Many volunteers are not engaged in any form of regulated activity outside their voluntary activity and will use the subscription service purely in a voluntary capacity. In addition there are many volunteers who are retired or unemployed and these individuals would be significantly impacted by an annual cost to have their EDC made portable. Volunteer Now are of the view that volunteers should not be

penalised financially nor should they be ineligible for this service because they are giving their time without financial gain. For those who work **and** volunteer in regulated activity Volunteer Now would support the costs associated in respect of the paid employment.

We strongly recommend that consideration be given to introducing a system where volunteers can have a **free and portable** EDC. This would uphold the Government's commitment to seek to protect volunteering from the unintended negative consequences of legislation and Government policy as outlined in **Join In, Get Involved: Build a Better Future, The Volunteering Strategy for Northern Ireland 2011**.

To date, Volunteer Now has raised these concerns with DHSS&PS and DOJ. We maintain a representative role on the DHSS&PS-led Vetting and Barring Scheme Stakeholders Group for Voluntary, Community and Faith Sector Groups and through this forum will continue to seek Government commitment to provide EDCs to **all volunteers free of charge, in addition to the option to gain portability free of charge**.

Finally, Volunteer Now remain supportive of any commitment to ensure that individuals seeking to enter regulated activity are facilitated to do so in the most time efficient and cost effective manner as possible while upholding the most robust safeguarding practice.

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