

Financial Assistance to Offenders Policy

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1. The rational for the policy

The Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) has a responsibility to ensure the regularity and propriety of the public finances for which it is accountable. To maintain PBNI's integrity and reputation, there is a need for transparent practices that withstand public scrutiny and meet expectations in terms of the efficient use of available resources.

Under Article 5 (1) (b) of The Probation Board (Northern Ireland) Order 1982, the Board may *'defray travelling and other expenses in connection with the performance of work by persons in respect of whom community service orders are in force.'*

Under Article 5 (3) (a) of the Probation Board (Northern Ireland) Order 1982, the Board may *'give financial and other assistance to, or in respect of, persons under the supervision of a probation officer or in connection with whom probation officers are required by the Board to perform any duties and persons remanded on bail.'*

This document sets out PBNI's policy on the provision of financial assistance to offenders.

2. The Overarching Aim

To clearly set out PBNI's policy and procedures on:

- a) small-scale, emergency financial assistance to offenders; and
- b) financial assistance with travel where an offender meets required criteria.

3. Objectives

To ensure that financial assistance is offered appropriately, within defined limits and that financial regulations are adhered to.

4. Procedures

This Policy is supported by a two separate Procedures Documents. These are as follows:

- (1) Offender Travel Expenses procedures
- (2) Emergency Financial Assistance to Offenders procedures

5. Structures/mechanisms

Financial assistance will only be paid where the immediate need cannot be met from other sources or where an offender meets the required criteria to make him/her entitled to assistance. All payments will be made in accordance with PBNI external and internal financial regulations. All such payments will be subject to regular audit.

6. Responsibilities

6.1 Chief Executive of Probation

The Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer, has a leadership role in relation to propriety – his or her actions and behaviors should set a high standard for the organisation. The essence of an Accounting Officer's role is a personal responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances for which he or she is answerable; for the keeping of proper accounts; for prudent and economical administration; for the avoidance of waste and extravagance; and for the efficient and effective use of the available resources.

6.2 Head of Finance

The Head of Finance has the lead advisory role on the provision of financial assistance to offenders in PBNI. He or she should ensure that clear procedures are in place, which are understood and adhered to.

6.3 Directors and Assistant Directors

Responsibilities will include taking decisions affecting the provision of financial assistance within their Directorates/Departments. They should contribute to ensuring that systems are established in order to demonstrate and monitor compliance with this policy and associated procedures.

6.4 Area Managers, including Programme Managers

Managers should be satisfied that any expenditure on financial assistance to offenders is incurred in the best interests of the organisation, provides value for money and complies with current policies and procedures. Managers should ensure that all staff are familiar and adhering to current procedures.

6.5 Office Managers

Office Managers are available to provide advice and support to Area Managers and other staff on current procedures.

6.6 All Staff

All staff must avoid using public resources for personal benefit and must not provide services to a third party that may be seen to compromise their judgment or integrity. All staff should refer to the clear procedures which are in place in all instances of providing financial assistance to offenders.

7. Resources

This policy does not require any specific resources in addition to that currently in place.

8. Communication

- 8.1 Staff will be notified of the revised policy and supporting procedures.
- 8.2 All new operational staff will be informed of the policy and procedures during their induction.
- 8.3 On-going training and support will be available at team level through staff supervision arrangements.

9 Monitoring and evaluation

The operation of the policy will be monitored through procedural approval mechanisms and supervision arrangements.

All payments will be recorded on ledgers at each office, as appropriate. Ledgers will be kept and completed in line with PBNi Instructions for Completion of Ledger Spread sheets. Payments and associated ledgers and supporting documentation will be subject to regular audit.

Evaluation of the operation of the policy may also be carried out on behalf of the Head of Finance.

10 Review

This Policy will be reviewed 3 years from date of approval.

Interim reviews may also be prompted by feedback, challenge or identified best practice.

11 Implications of non-compliance

Breach of the Board's policy and procedures by employees may merit consideration under the Board's Disciplinary Policy.