

## **Lifeline development – Questions and Answers**

### **Delivering now and in the future for people in distress or despair**

Lifeline is Northern Ireland's crisis response helpline for people who are experiencing distress or despair. It is funded by the Department of Health and commissioned by the Public Health Agency (PHA) to provide crisis support 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to listen and help in confidence, through a free telephone helpline.

Follow-up support services for people of all ages are also available through Lifeline. A Lifeline counsellor helps each caller to identify what type of support will meet their individual needs.

People living in Northern Ireland can call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000. Deaf and hard of hearing Textphone users can call Lifeline on 18001 0808 808 8000. Calls to Lifeline are free for people living in Northern Ireland who are calling from UK landlines and mobiles.

The contract with the current provider is due to come to an end on 31 March 2018. In order to ensure that Lifeline continues to meet the needs of people who require crisis support, the PHA has agreed with the Department of Health to transition the Lifeline service across to Health and Social Care (HSC) for an interim period, with effect from 1 April 2018. Belfast Health and Social Care Trust will take the lead on behalf of the HSC in delivering this service.

This is a continuation of the current model of delivery – the only thing that changes is the provider which delivers it. Investment available for Lifeline will remain at the current level and service users will notice no change in the support they receive.

To address queries people may have, this Questions and Answers document has been created to help provide clarity about what is planned.

## Questions and Answers

### Q. What is Lifeline?

**A.** Lifeline is the Northern Ireland crisis response helpline for people who are experiencing distress or despair. No matter what your age or where you live in Northern Ireland, if you or someone you know is in distress or despair, Lifeline is here to help. Lifeline also provides free follow-up counselling for people who need it. The regional helpline will in the future be delivered by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and follow on support will be co-ordinated by the Belfast Trust and delivered across Northern Ireland.

### Q. Will there continue to be a 24-hour helpline?

**A.** Yes. Lifeline, which is free to call on 0808 808 8000, will continue to be a 24-hour service, 365 days a year.

### Q. What changes are being made to Lifeline?

**A.** The regional helpline will be managed by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, with follow-on support co-ordinated by the trust and delivered locally across Northern Ireland. This is a continuation of the current model of delivery – the only thing that changes is the provider which operates the service.

### Q. WILL CALL HANDLERS BE QUALIFIED?

**A.** Yes. A trained counsellor will listen and help immediately on the phone and follow up with other support if necessary. Lifeline counsellors are experienced in working with trauma, suicide, self-harm, abuse, depression and anxiety. Staff who currently provide the frontline Lifeline service will continue to do so under the new arrangements.

### Q. Will Lifeline receive the same level of investment?

**A.** Yes. The Lifeline crisis response service is highly valued by the Health and Social Care system and is a key priority as it provides essential support to people at a time when they are at their most vulnerable.

### Q. Can people still ring Lifeline now and in the future?

**A.** Yes. We encourage anyone who is in distress or despair to call Lifeline on 0808 808 8000. The person on the end of the line will listen and help immediately on the phone and follow up with other support if necessary. For the service user, they can rest assured that Lifeline will continue to be available 24/7.