

Outline proposal for Local information & Guidance 'One Stop Shop' for consideration by South, North & Dearne Area Councils

Recommendation:

That the South Area Council approve the proposal and ask officers to proceed with working up a detailed specification for the Area Council to approve at its next meeting.

Background:

This outline proposal has been put together by a Local Information & Guidance group, working on behalf of the South Area Council. This group originally comprised:

- Cllr Mick Stowe (South Area Council Chair)
- Pat Heath (Barnsley CAB)
- Pete Francis (BMBC Welfare Rights)
- Kate Faulkes (South Area Council Manager)

It was identified that a similar set of priorities had been identified by the North Area Council; at which point the North Area Council Manager, Rosie Adams also joined the group to look at the development of proposals.

It was agreed that to avoid duplication of effort and to maximise possible economies of scale, this proposal once developed would then need to be considered by a larger working group which also sought to include the Area Chairs and Area Council Managers for all of the 3 Areas which had identified this theme as a priority – South, North & Dearne. The proposal could then be taken for further discussion and/or development at future meetings of the three Area Councils.

This development work crosses over other emerging work done by Pat Heath at the request of Martin Farran, which examines the need for a possible borough wide approach using devolved funding at either ward or area level.

Identified need for the approach:

There is a clear need for this approach through figures and intelligence collated by both Barnsley CAB and BMBC Welfare Rights, including:

- Increases in CAB service use of 23% (face to face) and 50% (phone support) last year.

- An increasing need for support services amongst the elderly, disabled, single and newly redundant.
- A 46% increase in debt cases dealt with over the past 12 months
- The Welfare Rights Service is now working to capacity with no scope to expand existing service into the community further than it does already.
- The migration of claimants from Incapacity Benefit to Employment Support Allowance which is already underway and the forthcoming migration from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payments through the harsher ATOS medical assessment process is creating a huge surge in appeals of which barely 10% can now be supported by agencies because of cuts to services.
- An accelerating increase in sanctions to Jobseekers' Allowance claimants, which is creating growing hardship and clients in immediate crisis.
- The impact of the Bedroom Tax and the move to housing payments made monthly in arrears, which are now starting to filter through and look likely to continue to increase.
- A growing number of housing related enquiries around risk of homelessness (up 65% last year) and mortgage payment problems, particularly amongst single people.
- Uncertainties around the implementation of Universal Credit and the likely sanctions arrangements to be implemented.
- Increasing numbers of clients with poor money management skills combined with a lack of resources within support organisations to offer support early on to help people to avoid reaching crisis point.

This clearly calls for an approach which brings in support from Barnsley CAB to offer generalist advice on a wide range of issues including debt, working alongside support from the Welfare Rights Service who can offer specialist advice around benefits and support through the existing central service for representation at appeals/tribunals which is so badly needed.

The proposed 'One Stop Shop' approach:

This approach would seek to use existing local venues (Libraries, Community Centres, Childrens' Centres, Churches etc.) to provide a range of outreach support services in each ward to support those most in need.

The employment of additional full time staff within support services would create a multi –agency outreach team which could be deployed in each ward, offering a series of regular 'slots' in easily accessible buildings across each ward. The aim would be to provide a minimum of a one day per week (one half day per week?) service to each ward within the Area.

Depending on the need identified locally and the limitations of available venues, all or some of the following services could be provided 'under one roof':

A key part of the approach would be the recruitment of volunteers to help to support and signpost clients with more straightforward issues, which would relieve some of the pressure on the more specialist workers. It would also be useful to explore utilising the support of Council employees taking part in the Employee Supported Volunteering Scheme, to see where and how existing skills could be most usefully deployed.

A presence from the Credit Union would also be a key feature of this new approach. Until recently, the lack of instant access to savings caused problems for many of the community based collection points, but this now needs to be reconsidered in the light of the recent development of the CU 'debit card' which provides instant access.

There would also be the possibility for participating Area Councils to share the costs of other additional specialist support if needed – for example, the shared use of a specialist Welfare Rights Appeals Officer (at a cost of £45,000 per annum including oncosts) if the need was identified. There may also be the possibility of offering parts of this approach at pro rata cost to Ward Alliances who are identifying this as a priority, but where it is not emerging as a priority for their Area Council.

In addition, there would be a need to consider the reconfiguration of existing boroughwide services to complement and support this new provision, and to reflect the change in balance between Town Centre and community based provision.



Outcomes to be achieved by the approach:

- £ Benefit Gain
- Numbers seen by category

- Numbers signposted to other specialist provision
- Numbers of successful appeals (and associated benefit gain)
- Homelessness averted
- Financial/debt settlements negotiated
- £ Debt written off
- Referrals to Credit Union and/or money management training
- People into work/onto in work benefits
- Volunteers trained
- Numbers supported by volunteers (form filling etc.)
- Numbers receiving IT training (accredited & non-accredited)

Potential benefits to Area Councils of this approach:

There are a number of potential benefits to Area Councils of the approach outlined in this paper, including:

- There would be no need for Area Councils to employ staff directly – this could be done through a Service Level Agreement with the partner organisations outlined
- There would be no recruitment or management costs
- This approach would look to place generalist welfare rights and citizens' advice advisers in outreach settings, with the full backup of existing specialist advisers (for example, debt, appeals) at no extra cost, since it is estimated that the pressure released on advice services by these extra posts would free up specialist time within the centralised teams.
- The recruitment and training of community based volunteers to support clients with more straightforward needs (for example, form filling) would free up the paid workers to deal with more complex cases.
- Early intervention by services which are easy to access locally would reduce the numbers of clients in crisis over time, with a longer term 'knock on' effect in reducing problems around homelessness, acute mental health issues.
- Existing client surveys already in use by the partner organisations could provide extensive performance management data
- The evaluation of service effectiveness can also be easily assessed through the calculation of £ Benefit Gain (in other words, the extra money generated into the local economy by retaining benefits through appeals won or through benefits which previously went unclaimed). This was estimated at £10.6m in the last 12 months for the Welfare Rights Service alone, with an average of £929,440 per Adviser post for face to face appointments and £481,000 for phone contacts.

- A similar methodology for evaluating effectiveness and impact could also be developed for saved costs around homeless averted and problem debt managed.
- Regular reporting at both ward and area level for all of these outcomes could easily be produced.
- The release of extra money into the local economy which is spent locally will offer a badly needed boost to local business, with research suggesting that for every extra £1m made available a multiplier effect of 1.7 comes into effect once the money is circulated, creating extra work opportunities.
- Research also suggests that extra income coming to individuals and families also has a positive knock-on effect in terms of reducing fuel poverty, warmer homes which allow kids to study better, access to better food, access to prescriptions which may otherwise go uncollected, money for public transport to increase mobility and reduce social isolation. This in turn promotes better mental and physical health and reduces demand on other services.

Known project costs:

- CAB Generalist Adviser costs – 1 Full Time Equivalent Post @ £34,000 per annum including oncosts and overheads
- Welfare Rights worker costs – 1 Full Time Equivalent Post at Scale 5 @ £30,000 per annum including oncosts (*This is an indicative grade prior to evaluation. This may alter due to the outreach requirements of the post.*)

Unknown projects costs and further information required to progress development:

- Suitable venues within each ward (easily accessible to all, confidential space, internet access, access to phone as a minimum)
- Costs for publicity and promotion of the new approach – and possible match from partner organisations – for example, inclusion of the new services within existing publicity/promotional campaigns
- Costs from other voluntary/community sector organisations to offer complementary training – for example, IT skills training provided on an outreach basis by organisations like Oaks Millenium Technology Initiative or Dearne Electronic Community Village.
- Costs to provide a Credit Union presence/collection point in wards where one was not already available.
- The new Credit Union 'debit card' and how this could best be used to promote the use of the Credit Union.
- Costs to provide Careers Guidance and support for those clients not covered by existing Adult Learning contracts.

Next steps:

After amendment by working group members, this outline proposal now needs to be shared with Area Councils for consideration.

Although originally established as a working group for the South Area Council, the Local Information & Guidance working groups may need to expand to include the Area Chairs and Area Council Managers from areas which have identified this as a priority theme – currently South, North and Dearne – and continue its work to develop a model and detailed proposal on behalf of all areas wanting to opt in.

In order to test this new approach thoroughly and evaluate its effectiveness, the working group will be developing a 2 year funded proposal for consideration by Area Councils.

Background papers -

1. Area Plan Priorities and Area Plan Leaflet - Sac.18.10.2013/6

Kate Faulkes – on behalf of the South Area Council Local Information Working Group

25/10/13