



East Sussex Advice Plus



East Sussex Advice Strategy

May 2011



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Foreword -

Section 1: Working More Effectively in Partnership.

Key Issues.

Every section of this strategy in some way concerns partnership working. This chapter of focuses on three specific aspects of partnership working:

- Reducing costs through the achievement of efficiency savings.
- Improving access to external sources of funding.
- Better advocacy on behalf of the sector and its service users.

The advice sector in East Sussex encompasses a considerable number of organisations, some delivering similar work in different geographical areas, some specialising in particular types of advice, others specialising in reaching particular service users.

Organisations within the sector are committed to working in partnership, but value their particular skills and remit, and their independence, which they think best serves their service users. If they are to maintain their independence in an age of public sector austerity, they must demonstrate that this independence is no barrier to maximising efficiency.

Many external funding opportunities, particularly contract opportunities, require organisations to provide holistic or wrap around services. All external funding opportunities require services to meet clear standards in terms of equal access by different groups. In such circumstances more than one agency is likely to be best placed to deliver particular aspects of a contract, or contribute to meeting the needs of particular service user groups.

Developing partnership proposals in such circumstances requires agencies to be open and honest about where their particular strengths, and to some extent their weaknesses lie. That in turn requires a degree of trust between agencies, both in terms of their dealings with each other and in terms of accepting the collective responsibility for the effective use of funding.

There are two areas in which the advice sector's collective voice is particularly required:

- To ensure that key agencies understand the value of the work done by the sector for the achievement of their own objectives and for the wellbeing of the population of East Sussex.
- In their social policy role, supporting agencies to improve their own practice, based on their understanding of systemic problems within those agencies developed through their casework.

Current Situation.

This section sets out:

- Steps that have been taken to promote better joint working at a strategic, service development and delivery level.
- The sector's own power as a purchaser of goods and services.
- Challenges facing the sector in exploiting the opportunities it faces.
- The pressure on the sector arising from public sector cuts.

The advice sector has taken a number of steps towards better joint working at a strategic level in the last couple of years:

- The creation of East Sussex Advice Plus as a resource for the sector.
- Closer working between the CABx in the area through Citizens Advice East Sussex.
- The extensive consultation with agencies as part of the development of this strategy.
- The involvement of agencies in the development and delivery of the county's financial inclusion action plan.

At a service development and delivery level:

- Work on the development of Legal Services Commission proposals and their delivery involved individual ESAP partners identifying the specific contributions they could make in some areas, and stepping back from service delivery in others.
- Several initiatives have been taken forward which involve a number of different organisations delivering their services in the same premises; including the HUB in Newhaven and the Renaissance House Project in Hastings.

Organisations within the advice sector are also major purchasers of goods and services in their own right. Goods will include IT and other equipment and office supplies. Services may include training or accountancy and audit services.

The advice sector is aware of the potential opportunities that may arise from the current public sector reform agenda in areas ranging from employability to the delivery of health services. Past experience suggests that the sector faces challenges if it is to take advantage of these opportunities, with possible competition from national charities, other third sector and private sector organisations.

Advice services that are already under pressure are increasingly burdened by dealing with the consequences of administrative failure elsewhere in the system as public sector cuts bite:

- Staff in key statutory agencies are being lost at the same time as the demands on them rise, increasing the risk of poor decision making.
- Particularly in the current economic climate, such mistakes are unlikely to be in favour of the client.

Currently, the sector's advocacy and social policy work tends to be on an ad hoc and individual basis, or in the case of the CABx, to focus on providing information to their national body to be used as part of social policy work at a national level.

Responding to these Challenges

Objective 1: To work together in partnership to take advantage of opportunities arising from public sector reform.

The advice sector will continue to work to identify and take advantage of key opportunities arising out of public sector reform. To do so, it will operate in accordance with the following principles:

- Organisations within the local advice sector will avoid competing with each other for contracts/ opportunities wherever possible.

- When developing a joint service offer, organisations will be open with each other about their strengths and weaknesses, and will step back from delivery of particular elements of a service where that is the most appropriate approach.
- Agencies will take a flexible approach to the contribution that they offer to services.

ESAP will have a particularly important role in the brokerage of discussions between agencies looking to be part of bidding consortia.

Several of the other commitments within this strategy, in particular those to work to common quality standards, and to measure outcomes in a common fashion, are designed in part to facilitate the trust between agencies that is essential for any effective partnership working, and to improve the offer being made to funders.

Objective 2: To identify potential savings in the purchase of goods and services available to the advice sector through more effective joint working.

Whilst the view of the sector is that 'back office' savings are likely to be less extensive than might be hoped, there is agreement in relation to the need to maximise whatever potential for these does exist.

ESAP will oversee the delivery of a study with its members exploring the level of back office savings that might be achievable through:

- The sharing of premises.
- Bulk purchasing of goods and equipment.
- Information sharing in relation to price offers for the purchase of goods and equipment.
- Joint commissioning of services.

One of the consistent themes running through this strategy is the extent to which the advice sector can be strengthened through increasing the level of mutual support that its members offer to each other. In particular, agencies have particular areas of expertise which they can share with each other. There may be the opportunity for significant cash savings to be made where training or other services can be provided 'internal' to the sector, on an 'in kind' or 'quid pro quo' basis.

Objective 3: To develop the collective voice of the advice sector in advocating for the value of the work that they deliver, and in promoting system change on behalf of its service users.

ESAP will carry out an exercise with the advice sector aimed at identifying:

- Areas of public policy, and (parts of) organisations in the public and voluntary sectors where they do not feel that the value of advice work is well understood.
- (Based on the information generated by the sector's casework), key points in the various systems used by their clients at which consistent poor decision making or other system failures generate extensive, and potentially long lasting and expensive, difficulties for their clients, and a burden for the sector.

Based on this exercise they will devise an advocacy and influencing strategy for the sector. This will look to effect system change through:

- Work with existing forums at which the sector is already represented, for example the county wide financial inclusion steering group.

- Representation in new contexts where the sector currently has no involvement, but involvement would be to its benefit.
- Putting into place, where appropriate, bi or multilateral relationships between the advice sector and public sector organisations

Section 2: Ensuring Delivery of Quality Services

Overarching Objective: To further strengthen quality assurance systems within the advice sector to ensure continuous improvement in services for service users and value for money for commissioners and funders.

Key Issues.

The advice sector is made up of complex organisations; professionally staffed and run- yet supported by huge effort from volunteers; working across a number of complex and rapidly changing fields of law; and engaging with service users whose problems may require intensive inputs over time and involve a number of people within the organisation.

The support provided by the sector can have a major impact on the lives of service users. At the same time, should the advice provided be inaccurate or in any way substandard, service users may not only miss out on the opportunity to resolve some of the difficulties that they face, but at worst find themselves in greater or more intractable difficulties.

All this work is delivered through a considerable level of funding provided by agencies which the sector is required to satisfy in relation to the quality of the work it is delivering.

The sector faces a number of interlinked challenges in respect of this objective.

- Ensuring consistency in the quality of services delivered by staff and volunteers.
- Creating the opportunity for those delivering services to keep abreast of legal and other changes affecting the advice they provide.
- Embedding quality assurance and performance management processes in the work of organisations so that they are a standard and valued part of what the organisation does, and are not seen as a burden.
- Communicating clearly to funders and commissioners the work that it has done to continuously improve the services that it delivers, and the quality of service that they are able to expect in return for their investment.
- Effectively using feedback from service users as part of its quality assurance processes (see section 4 for more detail).

These challenges all have to be met in a context in which the demands on the sector are growing due both to an increasing pace of legislative changes and reforms and to the impact of the recession.

At the same time, the resources available to the sector are declining, reducing the level of support that can be offered to an ever increasing number service users, potentially leading to the loss of some of their highly skilled and most experienced practitioners, and placing increased burdens on those who remain. Services are therefore being forced to consider new ways of working, of targeting and triaging service users. (These issues are explore in more detail in Section 3.)

Funders and commissioners will also be under ever greater pressure to ensure that their resources are used wisely, and may look to make savings in areas in which they feel their investment is yielding less impact.

Current Situation

This section sets out:

- Work the sector is currently required to carry out in terms of quality assurance.
- Additional work that the sector chooses to carry out in this regard.
- A range of challenges facing the sector in terms of maintaining service quality.

ESAP partners are already involved in a huge amount of work to ensure that they deliver a high quality service to their users. These include the carrying out of audits and support for the professional development for staff and volunteers.

Some of this work is in response to requirements from funders, or to the need to maintain accreditation as part of membership of broader networks of organisations.

- CABx must conform to CitA requirements that they deliver advice on at least 10 topics of advice to agreed standards, and as part of the process are subject to regular casework audits.
- CABx must also pass an organisational audit concerned with governance and management issues.
- Under its contracts for the provision of welfare rights, debt and housing advice the LSC requires subcontractors to fulfil a number of governance requirements and undertake client satisfaction surveys, and carries out casework audits.

Many organisations within the sector work within one or more organisational quality frameworks, for example PQASSO, Matrix and ISO 800.

Through these processes, organisations within the East Sussex advice sector ensure that they deliver a high quality service to their clients. Each one of the CABx in the area has average or above average CitA audit scores, and all of the partners involved in the LSC contract comfortably passed their audit. ESAP has also set a clear objective to support ongoing improvement in the audit scores for each of its member agencies.

However, partners are undertaking a range of further audit work, based on the acknowledgement that there are variety of aspects of service quality that are missed by the assurance processes described above. ESAP is supporting work with its members which will lead to peer audit between the CABx, and an interim audit is being conducted between HARC and BHT of their respective welfare rights services.

Partners are concerned that the potential loss of LSC funding will not only result in a loss of services, but may also lead to a loss of the LSC quality mark, which is used to demonstrate to both to service users and to funders that a quality service is being delivered.

The sector is already, or expects shortly to be, impacted by a number of other challenges:

- Current levels of demand are already putting front line staff under pressure to seek short cuts in the service that they are providing.
- The potential loss of LSC funding from October 2012 suggests that the resources may not be available long term to support some of the specialist posts in place within the sector.
- The need to support volunteers if they are to perform specialist advice functions, both in terms of training and day to day management, and in terms of the lack of client contact time that they can accumulate to grow their own expertise.

- The challenge of identifying the appropriate training for staff or volunteers involved in triage work, to ensure that at initial contact they focus on triage rather than on casework.
- The particular challenge of keeping up to date with changes as a result of welfare reform in a field that is already complex.

Responding to these Challenges

Objective 1: To clearly state the centrality of the sector's commitment to the delivery of quality services, and embody this commitment through action.

Fulfilling the advice sector's commitment to quality services will require leadership from senior managers within the sector. That leadership will involve:

- A set of actions focused on maintaining their organisations' commitment to quality in the context of the greater pressures operating on the sector.
- Ongoing investment in the continued development of staff and volunteers.
- The improvement of the performance measurement and management processes that will back up the organisation's commitment to quality and service improvement.

In playing this leadership role, senior managers should be aware of their own needs for professional development, practice learning and sharing, and mutual support. A critical role for ESAP going forward, and any successor structure, will be to broker and provide such support for senior managers.

Objective 2: To develop closer partnership working within the advice sector aimed at maximising the mutual assistance available to the sector to continuously improve the delivery of its services.

Effective quality assurance and performance management can involve organisations taking a number of actions which may include:

- Peer review of case management and casework.
- Peer audit.
- Mystery shopping.
- Training, staff and volunteer development.
- Mentoring for staff and volunteers.

Some of these actions may be taken forward internally by organisations. Others may be appropriately delivered through partnership working.

In particular, organisations may wish to build on current peer review of case management, and peer audits being taken forward by some ESAP partners. They may also wish to explore the possibility of increasing the use of mystery shopping (already carried out by a small number of organisations in the sector) through volunteers with one agency carrying out mystery shopping work on behalf of another and vice versa.

As noted above, organisations within the advice sector are far from homogenous in terms of their expertise. There are specialist advisers and specialist agencies working in specific areas of advice, or with specific knowledge of how to engage and deliver effective services to particular groups within the population.

Such expertise needs to be shared better across the advice sector. Agencies make a substantial financial and resource investment in the ongoing personal and professional development of staff and volunteers. At a time when the resources available to do so are under pressure, close work between agencies in the sector in the commissioning of training, and in the use of experts within the sector may offer cost savings. The latter may also be the basis for ongoing mentoring relationships between experts in specific areas of work/ work with specific groups which can ultimately drive service improvements.

Such work cannot happen without some form of brokerage role being performed to bring agencies together to review needs and identify solutions. ESAP is currently ideally placed to perform such tasks. Consideration will be required as to how such support can be resourced in the longer term.

Objective 3: To develop a set of clear advice standards to which the advice sector, and other organisations locally delivering advice and information, would be expected to conform.

Both the limitations of existing advice standards, and the potential loss of the kitemark associated with one of those sets of standards have been noted above.

ESAP partners, and those working within the broader advice sector, will seek to respond to these issues by exploring the possibility of the development of a set of advice standards to which those within the sector would be expected to sign up. Such standards would:

- Avoid the duplicating of existing standards, clearly setting a more challenging bar for delivery in specific areas where appropriate
- Allow organisations to align themselves to the standards required relevant to the level of service that they provide.
- Have a greater focus on service delivery and customer experience issues.
- Cover quality across a number of the other issues covered in this strategy;
 - User involvement.
 - Performance measurement.
 - Referral to other services.
 - Effectiveness in partnership working both internally and with organisations external to the sector.
 - Quality assurance and performance management processes.

Consideration will have to be given to a number of issues as part of the exercise, in particular whether/ how:

- The standards should be of sufficient detail to be used as the basis for peer review and peer or external audit.
- They should be backed by a kitemark achieved by satisfying peer audit/ review.
- Their existence, content and use might be communicated to funders and commissioners, and how such funders and commissioners might be engaged in their development.
- Their use might be encouraged through local funders and commissioners agreeing to channel resources to those organisations meeting the standards, or through agreement within the sector to, where appropriate, only work in partnership with agencies delivering to the standards, or actively seeking to achieve them.

Whatever the answer to this set of questions, ESAP can use the process of agreeing the standards as a tool to generate deeper agreement and understanding of the quality aspects of the range of issues explored within the strategy.

Section 3: Delivering Effective Outreach, and Effective and Efficient Services.

Overarching Principle: Each organisation involved in the development of this strategy is committed to the principle that all residents of East Sussex should be able and supported to access the advice they need, to the level of support that they need and at the appropriate time, in accordance with the advice sector's capacity to offer such services.

Overarching Objectives:

- **To remove barriers to the use of services.**
- **To reach out to service users:**
 - **Primarily by developing a 'no wrong door approach', which seeks to ensure that with whichever agency they engage, residents of East Sussex who may benefit from advice are supported to access high quality advice appropriate to their needs.**
 - **By being flexible how and where services are delivered.**
- **To focus limited resources where they are most needed.**

Key Issues.

The considerable existing pressure on advice services within the county points to the sector's success in offering their services to local people. However, 'Tip of the Iceberg', the recent review of the capacity of the advice sector makes it clear that the sector does not and cannot fully meet the potential demand for its services, that some of those most in need of advice are not currently using services, and that many service users do not seek help soon enough.

Barriers to Accessing Services

People with advice needs may:

- Not be aware that they have those needs, i.e. that they have rights and entitlements that they are not exercising/ receiving.
- Not be aware of the agencies who can provide help, either not seeking help, or presenting at the 'wrong door'.
- Physically not be able to access services.
- Feel that advice services are not appropriate to their needs, or will not serve 'people like them' well.
- Feel that advice services are stigmatised.
- Be reluctant to admit that they need support, or be unaware of the risks that they face in not dealing with their problems.
- Be more focused on, or be overwhelmed by, other problems in their life, not realising that the provision of advice may help them deal with those problems.
- Rely on potentially erroneous informal or informal sources of advice.

Two Laws of Advice Provision

The inverse care law for advice suggests that those most in need of a service are often those least likely to access it. What might be termed the 'crisis response law' suggests that many people will not seek help or support from the advice sector until they have reached a crisis point in their lives, which may be sometime after the actual event that triggered the crisis. Some groups may be identifiable as being particularly vulnerable to not accessing services at all, or to not seeking support at an appropriate time.

Both laws suggest that people may fall through the 'advice net', missing out on advice that could make a major contribution to improving their quality of life, or prevent them from experiencing particular problems.

Tackling the consequences of these laws involves:

- Getting better at reaching people most in need of advice, and doing so earlier in the evolution of their problems.
- Assisting them more effectively once they are engaged by services.

Reaching the people most in need, and reaching people earlier, requires:

- Taking action to overcome the barriers to people using services.
- Responding earlier and more effectively to events that may trigger a need for advice, for example the loss of employment, bereavement, relationship breakdown, or onset of a medical condition.
- Developing a 'no wrong door approach to services' and other forms of outreach.

Assisting people more effectively once they have been engaged by services requires the sector to deliver interventions that are appropriately tailored to the needs of service users, and to the highest standards of customer care.

A 'No Wrong Door Approach' to Services

Creating a 'no wrong door approach' to the delivery of advice services seeks to ensure that where people are in contact with public and voluntary sector agencies, their advice needs are, where possible, identified by those engaging with them, and they are referred on to appropriate support. In this aspect of their roles, those working with public and voluntary sector organisations effectively become the *front line* of outreach work for the advice sector. The approach may also involve the advice sector in delivering services on the premises of partner agencies.

Several challenges face work to create a no wrong door approach:

- Agencies involved in identifying people with advice needs must:
 - Be effective in identifying potential advice needs, requiring them to have basic knowledge of the issues covered by advice services, triggers for advice need, and signs that need for advice might exist.
 - Have accurate and up to date information about the availability of advice services.
 - Be committed to identifying and referring their service users, based on an understanding of the positive outcomes both for their service users, and their agency.
- Effective referrals require at least some form of formal system and agreement between referrer and recipient agency.
- There must be trust between agencies identifying advice needs and those delivering advice- the former must be confident that their service users will receive high quality advice from those they refer to, commitment from the latter will depend on referrals being accurate and appropriate.
- Agencies delivering advice must be clear and realistic about the extent of the support that they can offer people, and situations in which others might be better placed to support their service users.

The Need for Triage

There is a real capacity challenge involved in doing better outreach work with those in need of advice. Such success implies that already overstretched services will be getting to greater numbers of service users and therefore placed under greater pressure, the challenges for capacity are created that are likely to be far from fully covered by any efficiency gains achieved by better early intervention.

In the current funding climate, there are unlikely to be substantial resources forthcoming to deal with these capacity challenges. The advice sector must therefore consider how it can better use its existing resources differently, how it can prioritise the needs of some service users within the services it delivers.

This implies that the advice sector should 'triage' its service users, with service users being offered more or less intensive interventions dependent on an assessment of their need.

Operating in this way challenges advice organisations both practically, to create effective triage processes that do not allow people in need of support to slip through the net, and attitudinally, as it marks a considerable shift in the way that organisations think about the services that they deliver.

Tension between Early Intervention and Targeting Those Most in Need

There is also a degree of tension between the concept of early intervention and that of targeting the most intensive support at those most in need of advice, those whose problems have yet to become more serious may be seen as having less need for intensive advice. At its worst, advice agencies can be tempted to only engage with people in crisis.

This tension is, however, resolvable:

- Early intervention may still require intensive support.
- Triage systems can take account of potential future need for intervention when prioritising.

Current Situation.

This section sets out:

- How referrals are currently managed between agencies delivering advice.
- An overview of relationships between the advice sector and agencies who are in contact with their service users.
- How referrals between agencies are tracked.
- Existing resources to support referrals.
- Issues relating to the accessibility of services.
- Triage and capacity management.
- Links with other services.

Referrals within the Advice Sector

ESAP is rolling out the Nellbooker system to manage referrals between organisations within the sector, and to an increasing extent between ESAP partners and other agencies.

The system enables advice agencies to:

- Refer service users to other agencies.
- Directly book appointments in the diaries of advisers, and search for the next available appointment, where permission has been granted to do so.

- Provide a tool for monitoring referrals, enabling the identification of the source of inappropriate referrals.
- Feedback to referring agencies in respect of outcomes for service users.
- Capture basic information about the service user of use to an adviser at initial contact.

The system has been a major success thus far, both directly and indirectly. Directly, around 1,000 referrals per quarter are managed through the system, ensuring that people do not fall through the net of agencies there to support them. Indirectly, there are spin offs for better co-ordination of services and improved mutual understanding from the training and development work required to engage agencies in using Nellbooker.

Even prior to the setting up of Nellbooker, effective referral relationships had been developed between organisations across the advice sector. The Legal Services Commission contract in particular requires a number of ESAP member organisations to focus on their particular areas of expertise, and refer on to other agencies where they are better placed to resolve the issues facing a service user.

Referral Relationships with Other Agencies.

There is a mixed picture in terms of the relationships between advice agencies and organisations outside the advice sector. In some areas the relationships are very close, in others there is the potential for existing relationships to become much more effective, in others still relationships are lacking where they could offer a particularly important route for service users into appropriate advice.

The health sector is often identified as having a critical role in the identification and referral of people in need of advice:

- A number of the triggers for heightened need for advice, for example the loss of job as a result of illness, are health related, and health professionals are well placed to respond to them.
- The trust placed in health professionals by the general public can have a legitimising effect on the offer of advice, for example older people reluctant to seek support may be more prepared to do so after a recommendation from a health worker.
- Some health professionals are in the homes of potential service users in a way replicated by few other public organisations, and have the opportunity to identify issues at that point which indicate that a need for advice exists.

Advice organisations report that:

- Relationships with GPs are highly variable, some being very willing to involved in making referrals, most focusing their attention elsewhere.
- Relationships can be better with other health professionals, for example GP practice nurses, mental health nurses, and health visitors. However, even amongst these groups, the extent to which staff take a holistic view of the health of their patients, and therefore potentially concern themselves with their need for advice, is limited.
- It is often the case that it is easier to build effective links with secondary rather than primary care services.

- The provision of inappropriate advice outside their immediate field of competence by health professionals remains a problem.

Relationships with social care professionals are similarly mixed. Some social care staff do make referrals of service users for advice, or deal effectively with people's issues themselves. There are increasing challenges in this field resulting from the expansion of the personalisation agenda and the increased need for support in the brokerage or planning of health services.

Families are identified as being a population group that may face particular challenges and have specific needs for advice as a result. Those working with young families may also be well placed to identify those in need of advice and respond with an appropriate referral.

Advice organisations report:

- Effective working relationships with children's centres across East Sussex, under a contract with those centres.
- Some success at communicating messages about the advice sector through parent information contacts in local schools.
- Patchy engagement with adult social care and children's services outside of this.
- The potential for work to engage with a wider range of professionals working with families with young children, for example with community midwives.

Advice organisations further report:

- Mixed success in building strong relationships with local social landlords.
- Some frontline staff from non specialist agencies 'dabbling' in the provision of advice. Sometimes the advice provided will be accurate, on other occasions less so, and there is the risk that service users are left with the impression that they have received comprehensive support on issues such as benefit entitlement when this is not in fact the case.

Tracking Referrals.

Tracking referrals is essential to the effective delivery of an effective 'no wrong door approach', enabling those involved to:

- Measure the number of referrals (and levels of follow through on referrals) between agencies, and respond where patterns and performance are not as expected/desired.
- Build, alongside the use of other information, a case to referring agencies for their ongoing investment of time in making referrals, and potentially for the investment of resources.

ESAP partners suggest that referrals outside the Nellbooker system are not always tracked as well as they would like. They also reflect that there are methodological difficulties with the tracking of referrals. In particular, some service users who indicate that they are self referring to a service, may in fact be responding to signposting from another agency.

Resources.

A number of information resources exist which support the referral of people to the advice sector.

- East Sussex Community Information Service is a website managed by East Sussex County Council which carries information about the services delivered by the advice

sector and a range of other organisations in the public and voluntary sectors, including information relating to service opening times etc. Individual agencies take responsibility for updating their own information.

- Numerous leaflets targeted at service users are circulated round the advice sector and beyond that are also used by staff from a variety of agencies looking to signpost and refer on to support.
- Information about the services provided by advice sector organisations is accessible through their own websites, and through a variety of other local websites, for example those of local social landlords.
- ESAP's own website carries a variety of up to date information on advice services.

The challenge for the advice sector in respect of all of these resources is the same, to keep them up to date in the light of changes to the services they deliver, particularly in the context of the potential impact of cuts to services resulting in the scaling down of, or pulling back from, particular commitments.

Accessibility.

Accessibility concerns the ability of people to actually use the buildings in which services are delivered, their ability to travel to services, and the extent to which services are open, welcoming, and tailored to the needs of all service users.

Advice services across the county are delivered in premises that are to some extent compliant with access requirements. A range of more subtle barriers to the use of services may remain, busy waiting rooms may be a deterrent to people with specific mental health challenges.

There are a number of initiatives currently being developed to ensure that advice services are delivered in more appropriate locations, which also focus on co-location of services. These include work by NCDAs in Hailsham and Newhaven, and the Renaissance House Project in Hastings, involving Hastings CAB, HARC and Brighton Housing Trust.

The rurality of the population in much of East Sussex remains a challenge. Services are inevitably concentrated in the county's towns, leaving many of those in rural areas who may lack their own transport facing access difficulties that are not entirely resolved by initiatives such as outreach surgeries from the CABx. Further problems may arise because of the close knit nature of some rural communities creating a risk of stigma for those being seen using advice services.

The commitment of the advice sector to ensuring that all parts of the East Sussex community can access advice services is demonstrated by the fact that all staff and volunteers receive a degree of equalities training as part of their induction and ongoing development. However, they may lack knowledge of specific issues, and the needs of service user groups facing particular challenges. The particular role of reception staff in facilitating access should also be recognised.

It is also possible that some aspects of economic and social disadvantage receive less attention than others. Whilst many organisations will work to respond at least to some extent to the needs of people who do not have English as a first language, broader issues

of literacy and numeracy may on occasion be neglected, for example the sector is clear that not all its communications are in plain English.

Triage and Capacity Management.

Experience of involvement in capacity management through triage varies across the advice sector.

- CABx are now delivering their initial contact with service users through a gateway process, which involves initial contact from the service user being used to triage them to the most appropriate level of support. The implementation has been supported by the development of scripts for advisers delivering the process.
- Other agencies such as ESDA have seen their capacity reduce, and have consciously moved towards a model which focuses on empowering service users to help themselves.

Implementing triage systems and switching to encouraging people to help themselves have presented attitudinal challenges to staff and volunteers, who may feel that these changes undercut their role, which they see as to deliver in depth advice, and conflict with part of their satisfaction they get from their role, which is to resolve problems for people.

One response that has been seen in some agencies is the attempt by some staff and volunteers delivering the gateway process to entirely resolve a problem during the first triage interview, something that is neither possible nor appropriate.

User satisfaction survey data suggests that there has also been something of a mixed response to the shift to a triage model from service users. Whilst some have welcomed the phone based initial assessment, the expectation of many service users, from personal past experience or hearing from the experience of others, has been that the service they receive will be based around face to face appointments and letter writing on their behalf which will resolve their problems will be resolved. There is a reputational risk to the sector involved in confounding these expectations.

Responding to These Challenges.

Objective 1: To identify and engage key partner organisations within and external to the advice sector with a critical role to play in developing a 'no wrong door approach', and lead partners from ESAP responsible for the engagement of these organisations.

As a first step to building a 'no wrong door' approach to services, ESAP will work with its members to identify:

- Where referral relationships within the sector might be improved.
- Those external agencies who are most important in the delivery of such an approach. In the first instance this is likely to involve a focus on health, adult social care, homelessness and housing partners.

ESAP partners will look to take the lead in engaging with external partners with the aim of ensuring their commitment to the approach. Partners who are already engaging with external partners, for example through taking forward recommendations within the financial inclusion strategy, will seek to place such engagement in the context of 'a no wrong door approach'.

Key to engagement will be developing a joint understanding within the advice sector, and between the advice sector and potential partners about the issues on which their service users might need advice; the potential positive impact of advice interventions on their organisation; the ways in which they can play their role in a no wrong door approach; and the services on offer within the advice sector.

ESAP partners will develop a programme of engagement with each other and with partners from outside the sector as appropriate, focused on creating effective personal links between frontline and strategic staff and including activities such as work shadowing and information sessions.

This will also involve learning for both the advice sector and its partners. ESAP partners will therefore develop a two pronged approach to achieving this objective, the first focused on developing the existing understanding and knowledge within the sector relating to these issues, the second focused on developing the understanding and knowledge of partner agencies.

ESAP partners will review the need for members to offer each other training/ awareness sessions related to their specific areas of expertise/ their specific service offers, developing training in response. Those ESAP partners identified as having responsibility for developing engagement with external agencies will take the lead in developing a training/ awareness raising offer to those partners as part of that process.

Better engagement within the advice sector and with external agencies will also depend on the development of trust. The process of developing this strategy is a key part of promoting the former, this strategy, and the work being taken forward on the financial inclusion strategy, communicate and embody clear messages about the way forward for joint working. ESAP partners will continue to communicate with each other, and with partners and potential partners on the basis of honesty about their strengths, achievements and the challenges that they face.

Objective 2: To increase the number of agencies able to make formal referrals through the Nellbooker system.

Only a limited number of agencies currently have the ability to make referrals through this system. Increasing this number will be a key focus of work to develop a 'no wrong door approach'.

ESAP partners will seek to increase the numbers of agencies involved in Nellbooker over the course of the next year, focusing on the key partners identified under the exercise highlighted under objective 1. The potential for a demonstration project focused on those delivering family support funded by/ provided by East Sussex County Council will be explored over the coming year.

Objective 3: To continue to deliver outreach work in partnership with other agencies, and expand, where possible, the range of agencies and people with whom outreach work is carried out.

It is not necessary or possible to seek to deliver outreach services with every potential partner agency. The approach pays particular dividends in situations where there are real issues of trust and access for service users, where an intermediary agency can have a

legitimizing function by also hosting outreach work, and in situations in which a group of service users may, for reasons of age, or lack of access to transport (for example for many people on low incomes living in rural areas) be less mobile.

ESAP will work with the advice sector to continue to identify particular groups/ geographical areas that may be best served by outreach work and support the delivery of such initiatives. For specific groups, the focus may be on home visiting services rather than outreach work based within another agency.

Objective 4: To ensure that services delivered by the sector are as accessible as possible to all members of the community.

The commitment alone of organisations in the advice sector to the value of equal access to services is not in itself enough to achieve that aim. The sector will:

- Monitor its success in being accessed by all members of the community.
- Ensure that staff and volunteers receive ongoing training relating to the specific issues faced by particular groups in terms of both accessing and using services.
- Ensure that its delivery locations, and the information that it produces, are appropriately designed to be accessed by all members of the community.
- Review current outreach work, possibly considering how shifting to focusing on outreach work with partner organisations, may assist in encouraging broader access.

The East Sussex advice sector contains a number of organisations with a whole or partial focus on equality groups. Partnership working within the sector can therefore be an effective mechanism to increase the capacity of the sector to meet the specific needs of equality groups. In relation to some equality groups, such expertise will exist elsewhere in the voluntary and statutory sectors.

Such work will not focus solely on training, but will also include a number of other ways of developing skills and expertise including work shadowing, equality auditing, and user involvement.

These partner links will be at the heart of work to ensure that:

- Premises are suitable to meet the access requirements of all members of the community.
- Information is produced in different formats and where appropriate in different languages.
- Services accord a genuine welcome to, and engage effectively with service users, who may present with a whole range of problems that are not easily recognised.
- Written communication with service users considers not only language and format issues, but also takes into account the facts that high numbers of people locally have literacy and numeracy problems and that people with these problems will be over-represented amongst those needing advice.

Objective 5: The sector will continue to refine its triage systems ensuring that service users receive the minimum appropriate intervention commensurate with the effective resolution of the problems that they face.

Delivery of this objective requires a commitment to service delivery in accordance with a number of clear principles, clear understanding of the criteria that will guide triage, and a number of practical actions.

The sector commits to the delivery of services in accordance with the following principles:

- Minimum appropriate intervention commensurate with the effective resolution of the problems that service users face.
- Flexible and effective ongoing triage systems to ensure that service user vulnerability identified later in the engagement process is responded to effectively, and that those who are empowered by the service are, where appropriate, transitioned to self help support, at least by the time of any future contact with the service.
- Service user empowerment. The aim should, where possible, be to build the capacity of the service user to take more of a role in resolving the issues that they face, over the course of current or future engagement.

The advice sector must be clear on the criteria it will use to triage service users. These criteria will vary from organisation to organisation, dependent on the extent of the organisation's specialisation. Criteria should take account both of the vulnerability of the client, for example in respect of their being from particular equality groups, or living lives that are in some way chaotic, and the complexity of the issue at hand.

These principles embody a certain degree of culture and practice change required of the advice sector, its staff and volunteers. Achieving that culture and practice change will involve a number of the following actions:

- The provision of training to staff and volunteers in the delivery of effective triage processes in accordance with the agreed criteria.
- The complementing of this work by the design of tools, such as checklists, and other materials to assist staff and volunteers in their work.

Organisations across the sector will be working to implement triage systems at the same time. ESAP will play a key role in facilitating practice sharing between organisations within the sector as they move forward, ensuring that lessons learnt over the course of delivery are shared.

As suggested above, it is not only expectations of advice providers that are challenged by the move to a service based around triage, but also the expectations of service users. The advice sector will consider how it can balance the need to encourage service users to seek support, with the need to be realistic about the level of support it can offer, when it communicates with potential service users.

Furthermore, over the course of communication with service users, the intervention will be couched in the language of empowerment, and the focus of the worker will genuinely be on building the capacity of service users. It will be made clear to service users that they are not being abandoned, or in any way 'fobbed off' with a lesser service.

Section 4: Service User Involvement

Overarching Objective: To increase the advice sector's engagement in service user involvement as a driver for improving the quality and design of its services.

Key Issues.

Investment in service user involvement is a key part of the commitment of the advice sector to delivering a quality service, being used to ensure that services are effective in meeting the needs of service users, and the sector responds to needs of service users as those needs change.

Furthermore, funders and commissioners are rightly increasingly expecting service user involvement to have been a key part of the work of applicants in the design of new services, and a standard part of the process of managing service delivery once they are up and running.

Beyond the immediate practical reasons for engaging in service user involvement, the advice sector remains committed to the value of the principle of empowering its service users. Engagement in seeking the views of service users reflects that commitment, particularly at higher levels of involvement, when individuals engaged may receive a substantial personal benefit through the development of their skills.

Delivering effective service user involvement requires being clear about a number of issues.

- Practically, involvement requires resourcing at a time when resources within the sector are scarce, investment in service user involvement must deliver results.
- The precise results that particular types of involvement are expected to deliver. Service user involvement may vary in terms of both the immediate objectives of involvement and in terms of its intensity, and a variety of different tools may be used as a result; for example, customer satisfaction surveys are designed to achieve very different outcomes from the appointment of board members who are service users.

The advice sector must take into account issues around:

- Representativeness- being aware of the extent that the views expressed by service users through involvement processes are representative of service users as a whole.
- Control- avoiding controlling the outcomes of involvement, whilst acknowledging that involvement processes and service user perspectives are as subject to limitations as any other aspect of the way that organisations make decisions.

Meeting these challenges requires care, and a high degree of openness to the issues that are raised by service users. It also suggests that no one method of involving service users is likely to be effective in isolation.

Finally, service user involvement is only really valuable to the extent that organisations commit to applying the lessons that are learnt from it. Consideration and use of the outcomes of service involvement must be built in to the quality assurance and decision making processes of the advice sector, if it is to be an area to which more than lip service is paid.

Current Situation

This section looks at:

- The use of customer feedback by advice sector organisations.
- Involvement of service users in governance.
- Involvement of service users in project development.

All the advice sector organisations involved in the development of this strategy are committed to service user involvement.

For the majority, customer feedback surveys are at the heart of their involvement processes.

- Citizens Advice Bureaux are required to survey clients under CitA membership requirements.
- CABx, HARC and Brighton Housing Trust use customer surveys as part of their fulfilment of LSC funding requirements.
- Age UK (formerly Age Concern East Sussex) use a postal based questionnaire to get feedback from service users, and now carries out in depth 1-2-1 interviews as part of its processes.
- Age Concern Eastbourne carry out postal surveys.
- Money Advice Plus indicate using similar approaches involving postal and telephone surveys.

ESAP partners have recently revised their customer satisfaction questionnaire with the aim of eliciting more critical feedback, essential if they are to effectively identify where problems exist with their services. Critical feedback can sometimes be difficult to obtain on a variety of grounds, including:

- Clients who have had a negative experience from a service not wishing to engage with/ not responding to the survey exercise.
- Some service users being reluctant to criticise aspects of a service they have received where that experience has been positive overall, and where they often feel a sense of gratitude for the support received.

Some organisations have clearly embedded customer service feedback in their organisational development and performance management processes. In particular, a number of organisations use customer service feedback information as part of their performance management and appraisal processes with individual staff.

There is more limited involvement of service users in the governance of advice sector organisations.

- The main exception to this is East Sussex Disability Association which is a user led organisation; 75% of its board have to be disabled people, and the strategic direction of the organisation is set by disabled people.
- Other advice organisations do have a small number of clients on their board.
- A small number have involved service users in work such as the selection of staff.
- Some advice organisations indicate that members of their boards are recruited largely for the specific skills that they bring, rather than with the purpose of bringing to the table a service user perspective.

Responding to these Challenges

Challenges that have been experienced seeking a greater involvement of service users in governance include:

- The transience of the engagement of many service users with advice agencies, many of whom receive a short term intervention/ one off support and then have no further involvement.
- The need to properly support the engagement of service users who are involved on boards of management.
- The need over time to refresh the service user perspective, to ensure that the same users' voices do not predominate over a long period of time.
- Giving service users a voice on boards of management requires other members to cede a degree of control.
- Doubts from other board members that service users have a valuable perspective to bring to governance.

ESDA reported one further aspect of their work in which they had involved service users. Development of new services by the organisation always involves a range of forms of service user involvement, which may include focus groups to identify needs and reality test ideas, or longer term involvement on user panels, reference or development groups, particularly of people with particular skills or interest in an area.

Objective 1: To develop a pilot aimed at increasing the understanding of local agencies in relation to the range of consultation methods usable within the advice sector.

As discussed above, service user involvement comes in many forms. In addition to customer feedback surveys, involvement in governance and with specific project developments, service users may also be involved through expert user panels and through mystery shopper exercises.

Many agencies within the sector have less experience working with the full range of these techniques, and may also not be completely aware of the particular benefits that they can bring.

It is therefore proposed that two agencies from within the sector, one CAB and one other agency, take part in a pilot user involvement project. This would be designed to explore:

- A variety of different ways of working with service users over and above the basic levels of involvement currently supported.
- The most effective ways of incorporating such feedback into performance and quality management processes.
- The value of service user involvement in supporting the development of new services, projects and ideas.

Those undertaking the pilot would seek advice and support from other organisations in the advice sector and broader voluntary sector. Regular meetings would be held with other advice sector members to share ongoing experience. The pilot would be evaluated and conclude with a practice sharing event.

Objective 2: To increase the mutual support that the advice sector offers each other in relation to the more effective delivery of service user involvement processes.

The focus of this objective is on three aspects:

- Over and above the proposed pilot project, to promote better sharing of existing experience relating to service user involvement within the advice sector, and between the advice sector and the broader voluntary sector.
- The practical support of particular aspects of service user involvement within one advice sector organisation by another.
- Better use of informal service user feedback in relation to the service provided by one advice organisation, by the service users of another.

Some organisations within the sector have particularly in depth experience of promoting and delivering service user involvement. ESDA have developed a tool kit for user led organisations and have provided electronic copies to advice organisations, they also have a participation development course which other organisations can tap into.

The advice sector is plugged into the broader range of infrastructure and representative organisations for the voluntary sector in East Sussex and its districts. Through those links, it should work to identify other organisations with experience in this field, and seek their support and advice in developing its work.

Consideration needs to be given to the aspects of service user involvement that are most effectively delivered through independent organisations. ESAP has played a critical and independent role in supporting some of its members' service user involvement work, for example through carrying out customer satisfaction surveys on behalf of its members.

Going forward the sector needs to consider whether there is an ongoing requirement for an ESAP type structure, or whether tasks such as these are sharable between organisations, for example with staff from one organisation carrying out customer satisfaction surveys on behalf of another and vice versa.

A significant number of service users are in contact with more than one service within the advice sector. Most commonly this is through referral between agencies as they seek more appropriate support. Sometimes, however, it can reflect dissatisfaction with the service that they received at their earlier port of call. The agency that they engage with later in the process will often be aware of such dissatisfaction where it exists. Given the comments made earlier about the difficulties in accessing sufficient negative feedback to support the reshaping of services, the sharing of such information by the recipient agency may be one way in which this challenge can be met.

Section 5: Measuring the Impact of Services.

Overarching Objective:

To ensure that the advice sector is able to clearly demonstrate the impact and effectiveness of the work it delivers, both for its service users and for its stakeholders.

Key Issues

The future of the advice sector depends on its ability to demonstrate the impact of what it does:

- As recipients of public or charitable funding, organisations within the sector have a clear responsibility to demonstrate the effective use of the resources they have received.
- Continuous improvement of the services that it delivers requires the sector to reflect on its own performance, and to have access to the information required to enable it to do so.
- If the sector is to survive, or in the future expand, by diversifying the sources from which it receives funding, it must be able to demonstrate that the work it does can achieve the objectives of its funders.
- Faced with potential cuts, the sector must be able to demonstrate the potential impact that might result from the loss of their services.

However, the advice sector, in common with other voluntary organisations, may have mixed feelings about what is involved in demonstrating its impact. Monitoring and evaluation is burdensome, can seem a distraction from the delivery of services, may appear to be usable as a weapon against the sector, and may be just one part of relationships with funders that are not always positive. Operating in an environment in which there is increased requirement to demonstrate outcomes can be a challenge.

Finally, it is impossible to fulfil the 'social policy' role of the advice sector, through which it attempts to influence the policies, procedures and practices of the advice sector, without effective monitoring and evaluation of outputs and outcomes.

Current Situation

This section looks at issues in relation to:

- Output measurement.
- Outcome measurement.
- The demonstration of broader impact.

Output Measurement

Advice organisations have developed effective mechanisms for capturing their outputs and some of their activities; the number of their service users, the number of service users receiving different types of advice, and the range of stakeholders engaged.

Recording of activities is less effective on a range of process issues, for example (apart from referrals through the Nellbooker system) the routes through which people reach services. This type of information is essential for effective service planning, in particular for reviewing the effectiveness of particular partnerships, or of initiatives to improve access.

Outcome Measurement

The advice sector has considerable expertise in reporting on the outcomes that it achieves for its service users in some of its key areas of operation, in particular for welfare rights advice in relation to benefits newly claimed, and for debt advice, in relation, for example, to debts that are written off and debts for which better repayment terms are negotiated.

Other areas of advice work do not generate such clear outcomes as those of welfare rights and debt advice. For example, judgement calls may be involved in determining the achievement of success for a housing or employment advice intervention, which are not required in relation to the submission of a claim for a particular benefit. Furthermore, successful advice in these areas may involve the prevention of the occurrence of an event, something more difficult to measure robustly than the actual occurrence of an event.

There is often inconsistency or uncertainty amongst funders in relation to the performance indicators on which they wish advice agencies to report, both illustrating that the value of the work of the sector is not fully understood by some funders, and creating a lack of clarity within the sector.

Funders of East Sussex's advice sector will, when reviewing performance, inevitably compare the performance of organisations within the sector. Accurate reporting of performance, with figures collated on a standardised basis across organisations, is essential. If organisations under-report the outcomes they achieve, they reduce their own ability, and the ability of the sector corporately to make its case. If organisations inadvertently over-claim in relation to their outcomes, they may create a false impression that others within the sector are not delivering as effectively as they might.

Where advice organisations receive funding from more than one public sector source, the potential exists for them to be asked for different outcome (and output) information, or to be asked for the same or similar information in different ways or over different timescales. This is an inefficient use of the sector's resources. As importantly, it generates frustration within the advice sector, and reduces their commitment to monitoring and evaluation.

Demonstrating Broader Impact

Advice services do not only deliver direct impacts for service users. Debt advice, for example, does not just impact on the manageability of debt, but may have broader impacts ranging from increased ability to sustain a tenancy, reduced stress and improved wellbeing, to improved family relationships.

The sector has made less progress in developing its work in the field of measuring broader impact. There are a number of reasons for this lack of progress.

- Neither the sector, nor its funders, have always fully grasped the range of broader impacts that advice services can deliver.
- It can be difficult to isolate the particular impact of an advice intervention in a situation in which a whole range of factors are changing.
- Many of the broader impacts of advice interventions involve the prevention of something from happening, or the prevention of the worsening of a situation, as noted above demonstrating a 'non-occurrence' is methodologically difficult.

Whilst some progress has been made in the development of case study information demonstrating the broader impact of advice services on service users, for example on their wellbeing, this has generally not been captured in a quantitative way.

There has been less progress still in capturing the impact on the 'business' of stakeholders, for example on their use of staff time, on the costs, or on the financial risks and burdens that they face. The failure to capture such information has made it much harder to build a case for sustained or additional investment in services at a time of massively restricted public spending.

There are a number of techniques which can be used to assess the broader impact of the work done by advice agencies, including social return on investment, social auditing and social accounting. Whilst these techniques are useful, applying them in full can be resource intensive, and their flaws, and their value are not always fully understood.

Responding to these Challenges

Objective 1: To develop a shared understanding within the sector of monitoring and evaluation as essential to work to strengthen and expand the work of the sector, rather than as a threat to it.

The sector commits to placing the demonstration of its impact at the heart of its work, with monitoring and evaluation underpinning all that it does. This commitment and understanding will be strengthened by the range of practical actions undertaken by the partners in pursuit of the objectives below.

Objective 2: To develop a common set of service user focused outcome indicators, and common guidelines for reporting on these indicators in the fields of welfare rights, money and debt, housing and employment advice that are accepted and used by both the advice sector, and by funders.

A review will be undertaken of the current client focused outcome indicators in the above advice areas on which the sector reports to funders. This will include a review of the methodologies by which outcome information is generated, as discrepancies in these methodologies will lead to inaccuracies in the outcomes reported.

A working group will be established which will:

- Identify any differences in the outcome indicators used, and methods used to calculate outcomes.
- Work with the advice sector to agree common indicators and methods used to calculate outcomes where there are currently no standard outcomes.
- Arrange training in the use of these indicators for organisations that may require it.

Advice sector organisations will commit to implementing the recommended changes within their organisations.

The sector will engage with funders early on in the review process to ensure that they develop a common understanding of the indicators on which advice providers should be reporting. The aim of this engagement will be to ensure that local funders of the advice sector ultimately change their own monitoring processes to focus on these indicators.

The development of common indicators will be limited to the areas identified above. The working group will not seek to engage with advice providers' work in other areas, for example it will not look at the work of organisations focused on work with older people in providing advice on access to community care assessments.

Objective 3.

To increase the capacity of organisations to effectively demonstrate the broader outcomes that they achieve.

Four areas of action will be taken forward under this objective:

- Better capturing of indirect outcomes for service users.
- Engagement with funders and stakeholders which emphasises the importance of capturing broader impacts and their role in assisting this.
- Better use of evaluations and evaluation processes.
- The provision of direct training on relevant evaluation techniques to key staff within advice agencies.

Advice sector organisations have begun to explore how their customer satisfaction and client follow up surveys can be adapted to capture broader outcomes, whether those be on well being etc, or relating to the prevention of problems from arising/ worsening, for example the prevention of rent arrears turning into an eviction. Surveys now ask respondents to answer questions in relation to the difference that the service has made to them, and the impact that not using the service would have had on their lives.

The financial inclusion strategy focuses heavily on the opportunities that are open to the sector through working in partnership, often based on the business case for investment by its stakeholders. The advice sector will work with funders to identify potential business gains from their investment in the service, highlighting areas in which their contribution is required to collate relevant information.

Most of the evaluation work carried out in the advice sector is delivered internally, although there is limited commissioning of external consultancy support. Service evaluations are often not circulated outside the organisation involved in the delivery of the service, or the service funder. It is critical that organisations within the sector are able to learn from the successes and failures of their colleagues.

With acknowledgement of the potential need for redaction of sensitive aspects of reports, the advice sector will commit to:

- Making accessible to other advice organisations any service evaluations that they commission or carry out.
- Being prepared to present the results of the evaluations to their colleagues.

Organisations within the sector may not be confident in their ability to carry out effective evaluations, particularly of broader outcomes. Capacity can be built by the provision of training to key people within advice organisations in relation to relevant techniques. The possibility of commissioning joint training, or bulk commissioning relevant training for individual organisations should be considered. Actions under this objective should also link with work being taken forward by Speak Up around assessing the social impact of services.