

STATE OF THE ADVICE SECTOR IN BOURNEMOUTH, DORSET AND POOLE

Introduction from the Chair

Dr Tina Barton, Independent Strategic Business Consultant

Firstly, welcome to the first issue of our State of the Advice Sector report which I hope you find informative and interesting. The Advice Dorset Partnership provides an overarching conduit for advice; and aims to bring together providers and statutory agencies, to agree a strategic vision, and to plan and support the effective delivery of advice services seamlessly.



The Dorset Advice Strategy 2016-2021 looks to establish this partnership and in return the partnership wants to ensure that we are actively engaged with Dorset County Council in their plans for a sustainable future for all required services. This is a major challenge in these ever-changing times and requires innovation and collaboration at the highest level. As the recently appointed Chair to the Strategic Steering Group for the partnership, I see a high level of commitment and willingness to support the people of Dorset, this is the key driver of our five strategic activity outcomes.

What is 'advice'?

In the context of this report, advice is help given to a client in response to a situation that needs resolving. It covers a range of support, including signposting to information which can help them resolve things themselves, identifying and explaining options, undertaking limited action on behalf of a client or providing a full casework service.

For some organisations, the term 'guidance' is used to describe how clients are enabled to apply the advice and information they have received.

Advice is often given around the key issues: welfare benefits, debt, housing, education and employment, but can cover any topic related to social welfare law. Complex cases often involve multiple issues.

What is the Dorset Advice Strategy 2016-2021?

In 2015, Citizens Advice in Dorset were commissioned by Dorset County Council to produce an Advice Strategy looking at the best way to meet people's information and advice needs over the next 5 years. Key to delivering quality advice 'at the right time, in the right place, and in a way that best meets a person's needs' is building a strong advice sector that works together effectively.

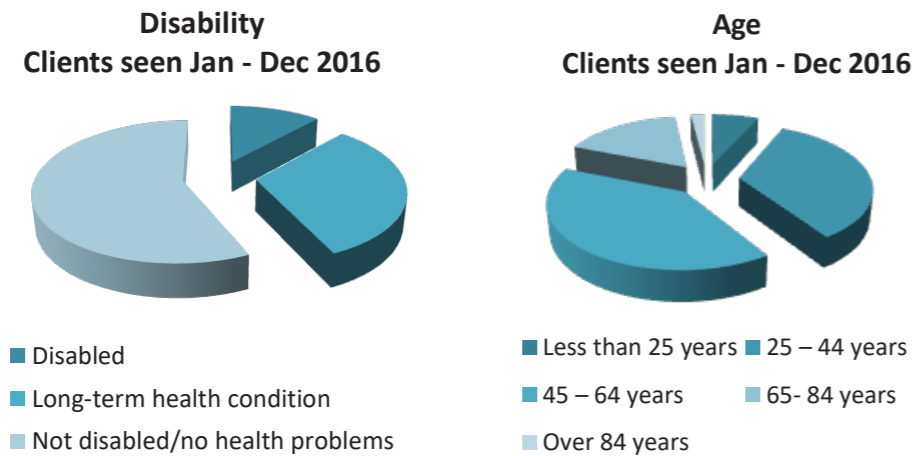
The full strategy and accompanying papers can be seen on the Citizens Advice in Dorset website (<https://citizensadvisedorset.org.uk/news/dorset-advice-strategy>).

How is the Advice Dorset Partnership managed?

The partnership is managed by Citizens Advice in Dorset, supported by Dorset County Council and is directed by a steering group which includes wide representation from other agencies.

The Advice Sector

There are over 50 organisations in Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole providing advice to residents. In the period April to June 2016, over 10,000 people were seen by just 13 of these organisations*. That relates to over 40,000 people per year who need advice on their rights and responsibilities.



Often, our clients are particularly vulnerable, with physical disabilities or long term health conditions, or with mental health problems. People are seen in a range of settings including local offices, GP practices or in their own home, or they may have the enquiry dealt with over the phone or by email.

Advice agencies are funded from a variety of sources, and whilst the statutory sector provides some advice services, most are in the voluntary sector and are funded by local authority funding, health funding, charitable trusts or individual donations. Many are delivering their service within a context of threatened or actual reductions in funding whilst the demand for advice continues to grow. The case for working together, sharing resources and identifying opportunities for more efficient working is imperative.

**Information provided by: Ansbury Guidance, Local Citizens Advice offices x 9, Dorset Race Equality Council, Help & Care and Shelter*

What are the main advice topics?

From the data available to Advice Dorset Partnership, the most common issues raised by clients are related to welfare benefits (around 36%), particularly around claims for Personal Independence Payment and Employment Support Allowance which have increased significantly over the last year.

The next most common issue is debt (15%), followed by housing (9%) and employment issues (8%).

Enquiry issues - Local Citizens Advice April - December 2016)



Many advice agencies focus on a particular subject area or client group or cover a specific geographical area. Some of our agencies are very small, with one or two advisers, others are much larger and part of a national organisation.

Case Studies

These examples demonstrate how our advice agencies are helping to meet the Dorset County Council's four performance outcomes; safe, healthy, independent and prosperous.

	HEALTHY	INDEPENDENT
	<p>Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC)</p>  <p>Mr A was a white male of minority ethnic origin who moved to a housing association home due to the health deterioration of a family member.</p> <p>ISSUE He approached DREC after a dispute with his neighbour over a long period of time. Mr A felt unsupported by his Housing Association and the Police, and felt this was due to his ethnic background.</p> <p>RESOLUTION DREC worked with the Housing Association, the Police, Mr A and his neighbour. They supported Mr A throughout the process and identified additional mental health needs of his neighbour.</p> <p>OUTCOME Both Mr A and his neighbour now feel safer and more supported. The reduction in ongoing stress has a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Help and Care</p>  <p>Mrs B was an elderly lady with a physical disability who had been recently widowed.</p> <p>ISSUE Mrs B was worried about how she will look after herself, in particular about her finances and about looking after her house and garden.</p> <p>RESOLUTION The adviser gave Mrs B information about Attendance Allowance and Care at Home and provided her with contact details for the Handiworks team.</p> <p>OUTCOME Mrs B now has support from local tradespeople, she receives weekly telephone support from Help and Care and feels safe and able to continue being independent.</p>
	<p>Shelter</p>  <p>Mr C was a middle-aged German man who had been working as a chef in England for over 20 years</p> <p>ISSUE Mr C was experiencing memory loss with associated depression and despair. As a result of his health problems, he had lost his job and could not afford to remain in his accommodation - he was street homeless.</p> <p>RESOLUTION Shelter worked with the local authority to show eligibility under the Homelessness legislation and helped him claim for benefits. They supported Mr C to attend appointments and to get new paperwork.</p> <p>OUTCOME Mr C was given temporary accommodation and, once he had his new passport, he was offered permanent supported housing. Mr C now feels safe and his mental wellbeing has improved significantly.</p>	<p>Local Citizens Advice</p>  <p>Miss D was a lone parent with three young children living in a privately rented home.</p> <p>ISSUE In November 2016, Miss D became subject to the 'benefit cap'; and faced having to find an extra £60 a week towards her rent.</p> <p>RESOLUTION The adviser helped her to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment, and applied for charitable help to have her car repaired and get her heating oil tank topped up and applied to Wessex Water for a lower tariff.</p> <p>OUTCOME Miss D was able to keep her home warm over the winter, and was able to manage her money better. She now feels less anxious about her financial situation.</p>
	SAFE	PROSPEROUS

What difference do we make?

There is clear evidence that early and effective welfare advice provision can have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of a client, helping them to feel less anxious and more confident. Providing such advice and support can reduce demand on the NHS by reducing the need for GP appointments, more effective use of medication and improved diet and physical activity.

Research also shows us that there is a direct correlation between debt and poor mental health - people with debt problems are twice as likely to develop major depression. Supporting people with their debt problems will improve their mental wellbeing and reduce the demand for health and social care.

Receiving advice can also have a positive impact on a client's finances. Last year, the Dorset Macmillan Benefits project run by three local Citizens Offices increased the income of their clients by over £2.5m.

Enabling people to resolve their problems as soon as possible, or preventing critical problems occurring, can often avoid more complex issues arising. The advice sector is clearly central to early intervention and prevention, helping residents of Dorset to be safe, healthy, independent and prosperous.

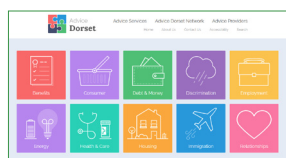
What are the key issues facing the sector and how will the Advice Dorset Partnership help?

The main issues facing advice agencies in 2017 are sustainability and capacity.

The local government reorganisation is likely to have a significant impact on voluntary sector organisations that often rely on local authority funding for their core service.



The Advice Dorset Partnership will have a key part to play in highlighting the advice needs of our residents and informing and influencing strategic decision-making.



It is essential that the public are able to access the help they need, when and where they need it. The [Advice Dorset website](#) is a searchable database of advice organisations in Dorset, enabling a member of the public to find the information they need. The Advice Dorset Partnership will be taking forward work to promote the advice available, and to ensure that the advice is accessible across the county.

The rollout of Universal Credit across Dorset (in the Autumn of 2017) is expected to increase demand for welfare benefits advice. The partnership offers training days on issues of critical importance to advice workers and will be arranging some sessions for front-line workers and working with local authorities and job centres to ease the transition for both organisations and clients.



Organisations are also reporting increased difficulties in recruiting volunteers and paid staff and the partnership will be working with the sector to tackle these challenges.

What is coming up in 2017/2018?

In 2017-18, The Advice Dorset Partnership will be organising a number of events to provide information, share good practice and provide networking opportunities for advice agencies.



Conferences

- Advice for people with Long Term Health conditions - Thursday 16th November 2017
- Accessible Advice - Thursday 8th February 2018

Welfare Benefit Forum

- Thursday 7th September 2017
- Thursday 8th March 2018

To find out more about the Advice Dorset Partnership, visit our website <http://advisedorset.org.uk/advice-dorset-partnership>

or contact Caroline Buxton,
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