

AN ADVICE STRATEGY - FOR CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

- PROPOSAL

Introduction

The **Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership** has suggested that "*Providing easily accessible, high quality social welfare advice and information services*" should be included as a key deliverable in the draft Sustainable Community Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.

At its meeting on 2nd December 2009, the Thematic Partnership also agreed that, to support the above deliverable and to ensure that appropriate and sufficient advice services are provided for the local community, it will be important to develop an **Advice Strategy for Central Bedfordshire**.

This proposal is also supported by:

- **Bedfordshire Advice Forum** - the network for local independent advice providers
- **Voluntary Works** - the consortium of voluntary and community sector infrastructure networks in Bedfordshire and Luton
- **AdviceUK** - the national network of independent advice providers

The proposal has been drawn up following two meetings of a newly formed Advice Strategy Group which consists of representatives from the above organisations / networks.

Developing an Advice Strategy

Why is advice work important?

Good quality advice can make a real difference to people's lives as it can help increase incomes, resolve problems and generally improve life circumstances and chances. This can:

- Help reduce poverty, inequality and social exclusion
- Have a positive effect on health
- Improve social cohesion, and the general well-being, in communities

Why do we need an Advice Strategy?

- To ensure that essential advice services are provided for local residents
- The current provision, and funding, of advice services is disjointed and uncoordinated
- Advice is a cross-cutting issue and influences a number of strategic themes

Why is important to develop an Advice Strategy now?

- The need for advice services is acknowledged in the draft **Sustainable Community Strategy** for Central Bedfordshire, which is currently being produced
- Advice work is an essential tool during a **recession** with high levels of unemployment
- Advice work can influence indicators in the **Local Area Agreement** - such as NI 116 (Proportion of children in poverty)
- Tackling inequality is an important part of the **Comprehensive Area Agreement**
- The proposed **Child Poverty Act** will require partnership action to tackle child poverty
- The Advice Strategy can feed into the proposed **funding review of the third sector**
- Following **LGR** this is an ideal time for this cross-cutting strategy to be developed
- An Advice Strategy can link in the work being undertaken under **Total Place**

Who should be responsible for the Strategy?

As the proposed Strategy would cover Central Bedfordshire as a whole, overall responsibility should be in the hands of the Local Strategic Partnership. However, ongoing responsibility should lie with the Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership.

The Thematic Partnership could instruct the Advice Strategy Group (which would consist of representatives from the advice sector, Central Bedfordshire Council and other key partners) to manage the work in developing the strategy.

When should the Strategy be developed?

The proposal is to develop an Advice Strategy, and an initial action plan, in 2010.

It will be important to update the action plan on an annual basis and to review the overall Strategy every 3 years. The dates of future reviews of the Strategy could be linked to the dates of reviews of the Local Area Agreement or the Sustainable Community Strategy.

What resources are needed?

Some initial resources have been provided through Voluntary Works (from its Capacitybuilders funding) for the preparatory work that has taken place so far.

Some extra funding can also be provided by Voluntary Works to pay for further developmental work (including a consultation event) up to March 2010.

Further resources will then be required after March 2010 to continue the work on developing the Strategy. Resources will also be needed to undertake future monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy.

It is therefore hoped that the Central Bedfordshire Local Strategic Partnership will be able to commit its support for the development of the Advice Strategy.

What would the Strategy look like?

Suggestions for the basic structure for an initial Advice Strategy are given in the Appendix to this document. However, it is important that the Strategy should develop over time, as local needs change, rather than being a one-off document.

Also included in the Appendix are suggestions for the key initial elements of the Strategy.

This Proposal has been written by the **Advice Strategy Group** and endorsed by the **Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership** (December 2009)

For further information, contact Len Simkins (BAF Secretary)

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Or visit the BAF website: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

BEDFORDSHIRE ADVICE FORUM

Promoting and supporting the provision of
advice and information services in Bedfordshire

Supported by



APPENDIX

Key aspects of an Advice Strategy

Structure

The basic structure for the Strategy would be:

1. **Executive summary**
2. **Introduction**
 - Background - and details of how Strategy was developed
 - Summary - including vision, principles and strategic aims
 - Definitions of key terms - including "social welfare", "information services", "advice", "quality of service"
 - Rationale for the Strategy
 - Current environment - and effects on advice needs and services
3. **Strategy**
 - Current provision - including mapping of current advice services and funding, and identification of gaps in services and funding
 - Drivers for change
 - Needs analysis - details of local advice needs
 - Proposals for future provision of advice services
 - Resources required
 - Strategic arrangements for management, commissioning and funding of local advice services
 - Monitoring and evaluation arrangements
4. **Action Plan**
 - Details of specific objectives, costs, responsibilities and timescales
5. **Appendices**
 - Results from mapping exercise
 - Details and membership of Bedfordshire Advice Forum
 - Details of consultation in developing the Strategy

Vision and principles

The proposed vision and principles are:

Our vision is to have easily accessible, well publicised, and high quality social welfare advice and information services which meet the needs of the citizens of Central Bedfordshire

These advice and information services should be:

- Available to the whole community and underpinned by a commitment to equality of opportunity
- Planned in a coordinated manner to meet local needs, using collaboration and partnership working across the voluntary and statutory sectors
- Used to support vulnerable, marginalized or disadvantaged people and communities
- Provided at different levels, using a diversity of well publicised, easy accessible delivery methods to meet the diverse needs in the community - taking account of the rural nature of much of the area
- Quality services that local people will have confidence in

This Advice Strategy aims to make a real difference to people's lives and contribute to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion in Central Bedfordshire.

Strategic aims

The proposed strategic aims of the Strategy are:

1. Identify the advice and information needs in Central Bedfordshire
2. Develop co-ordinated advice and information services across the voluntary and statutory advice sector to ensure that all available resources are effectively used to meet the identified needs in Central Bedfordshire
3. Support continual improvement in the quality of advice-giving by encouraging the development of quality marked advice provision across Central Bedfordshire
4. Develop a strategic approach to the management, commissioning and funding of advice and information services in Central Bedfordshire