



ADVICE STRATEGY

2011 - 2014

A strategy for social welfare
information, advice and advocacy services
in **Central Bedfordshire**

Draft - June 2011

Foreword

By **Janet Ridge**
Chair of Central Bedfordshire's
Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership



I am very happy to introduce our first Advice Strategy for Central Bedfordshire.

This document proposes a strategic approach to the planning, funding and delivery of social welfare advice services in Central Bedfordshire. These services, which are essential for our community, are currently provided by a wide variety of organisations in both the voluntary and community sector and the statutory sector. This is the first attempt to provide a strategic framework in which they can operate.

There is no doubting the importance of information, advice and advocacy for people and their communities – especially during these very difficult economic times. There is a good deal of evidence to show that effective advice can have beneficial effects on a wide range of **personal issues** such as income and financial management, legal rights, health, confidence and general well-being. Further details can be found in the report that we have produced on the development of this Advice Strategy, available from www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk.

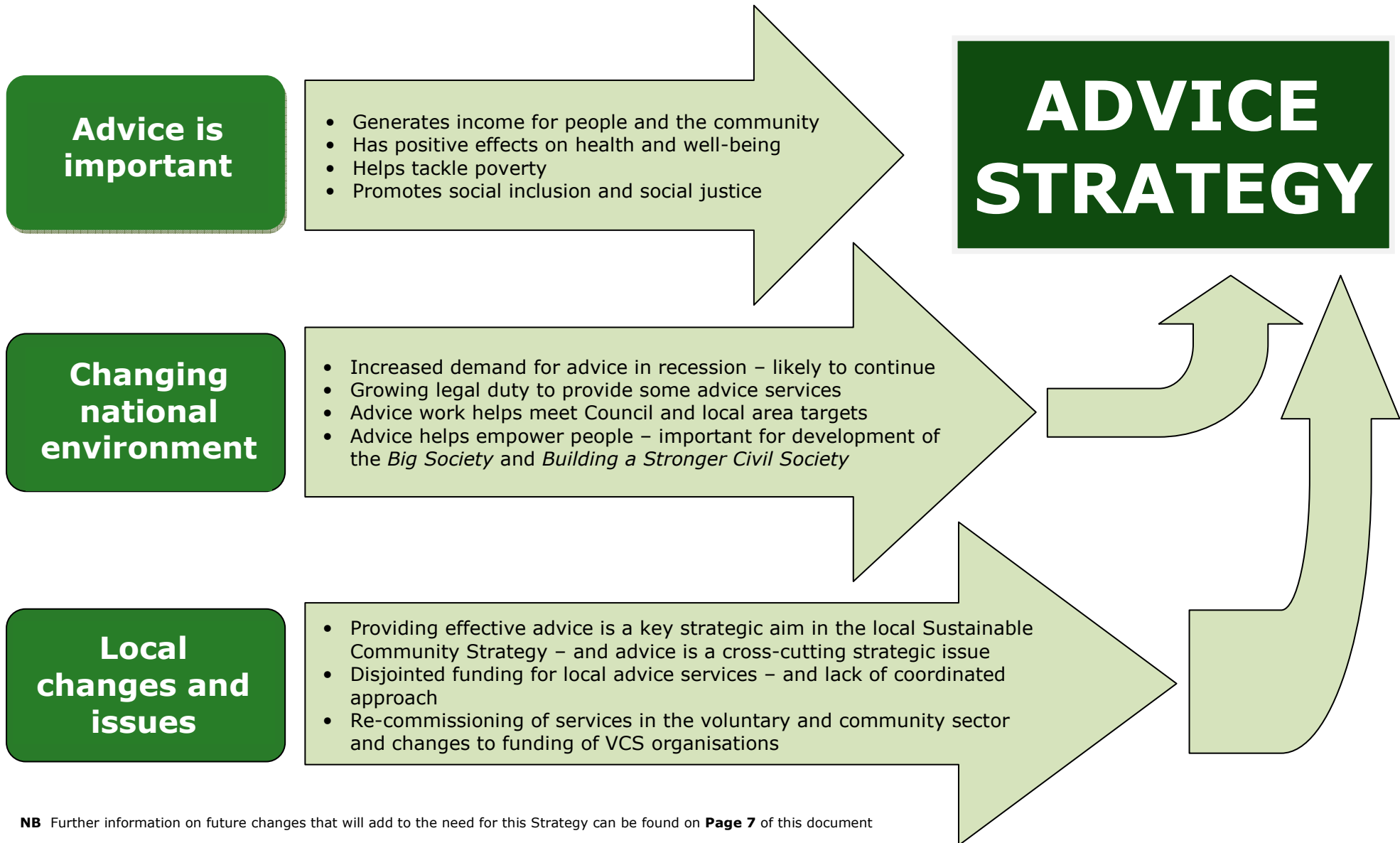
In addition, having this strategy will help us to meet some of our wider **community priorities** by supporting vulnerable people, tackling poverty, promoting social inclusion and community cohesion, and empowering local people.

It is therefore not surprising that “providing easily accessible, high quality welfare advice and information services” has been agreed as a key aim in the Sustainable Community Strategy produced by the Board of Central Bedfordshire Together (the Local Strategic Partnership). The development of this Advice Strategy was commissioned by the Board, through the Stronger Communities Partnership; it will now act as the delivery mechanism for this key aim.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped in the development of the strategy, including members of the Advice Strategy Planning Group from Bedfordshire Advice Forum and Central Bedfordshire Council; Advice Bedfordshire and Infotrain who have managed the project; and Voluntary Works and Capacitybuilders who have provided funding for the development work.



Why do we need an Advice Strategy in Central Bedfordshire?



NB Further information on future changes that will add to the need for this Strategy can be found on **Page 7** of this document

What does this Advice Strategy cover?

This Advice Strategy is a strategy for social welfare information, advice and advocacy services in Central Bedfordshire. The **key terms used in the Strategy** are explained below and the overall **scope of the Strategy** is explained overleaf.

Social welfare

Advice on legal matters such as debt and money advice, employment, housing, and welfare benefits can have a significant impact on individuals' lives and their ability to participate in social and economic life.

"At any time, but particularly now in difficult economic times, the provision of social welfare law is of prime importance. Legal advice, in the fields of housing, debt, and welfare benefits, can solve people's legal problems, with the result that their lives and lives of their families are improved. It can literally change people's lives."

Lord Bach (in Foreword of Study of Legal Advice at a Local Level, 2009)

Information

Information provision is the giving of basic factual details that are provided without any personal context. This may be in the form of verbal information but is often backed up by written information in leaflets, factsheets and websites.

Information providers can act as an initial point of contact and then often refer or signpost clients elsewhere for advice specific to the client's circumstances.

Advice

A **basic advice** service involves:

- a diagnosis of the client's enquiry and the legal issues involved
- giving information and explaining options
- identifying further action the client can take
- some assistance eg contacting third parties to seek information, filling in forms etc.

Some advice providers give a more enhanced service that involves **advice with casework**, which includes all the elements of an advice service given above but also involves taking action on behalf of the client to move the case on.

A few advice providers also provide **representation** services to clients. These agencies are able to deal with specialised casework requiring the presentation of complex legal arguments at tribunal and court hearings.

Advocacy

Agencies providing advocacy services give support which enables people to have a direct say in the issues that affect their lives. Everyone has rights and needs. Most of us can speak for ourselves or have friends and family to support us. Some people, however, are isolated and vulnerable and may be unable to give voice to their wishes and interests.

Advocates do not give advice but will work with a client to help them have their voice heard, and to make their own choices.

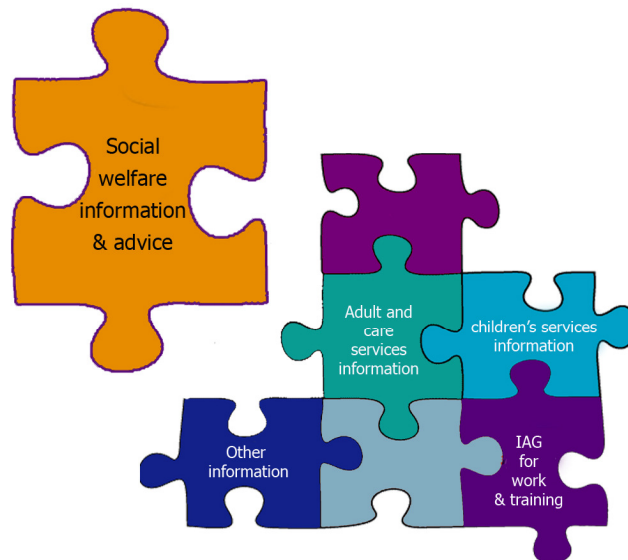
Scope of this Advice Strategy

This Advice Strategy covers **social welfare information, advice and advocacy services** that come under the definitions given on the previous page.

It is recognised, however, that there are **other types of information, advice and advocacy** that are needed by the community including:

- Information, advice and guidance (IAG) to help people find learning or work
- Information, advice and guidance on volunteering opportunities
- Information on adult care and health services
- Information on services for children and families
- Information on general local facilities or services eg sports facilities, cultural facilities, local clubs and societies
- Safety information and advice eg on fire alarms, personal safety
- Medical advice - provided by doctors and health professionals
- Financial advice - provided by accountants, financial advisers, tax advisers
- Other legal advice (eg criminal law, commercial civil law) - provided by solicitors

It is therefore acknowledged that production of this Advice Strategy (on social welfare issues) may just be the first step in developing a wider information and advice strategy for Central Bedfordshire.



Advice and information needs in Central Bedfordshire

It is recommended that an important next step, after the launch of this strategy, will be to bring together some of the above elements of information and advice to **develop a fully comprehensive community information and advice strategy for Central Bedfordshire.**

To do this it will be important to make sure that this Advice Strategy is closely **linked with other relevant community strategies**, that either already exist or are being developed, in the area – including the Sustainable Community Strategy; the Child Poverty Strategy; the Universal Information and Advice Strategy (for adult social care); the Homelessness Strategy; the Healthier Communities Strategy; the Health and Well-Being Strategy; and the Volunteering Strategy.

What is in the Advice Strategy?

The **vision, principles and strategic aims** of the Advice Strategy are given below.

The identified **drivers of change** that will affect the provision of social welfare advice over the next few years are then given on **Page 7**.

Pages 8-18 of the document then look at each of the **strategic aims** in more detail – outlining what we know already, what we need to do, and our recommended action.

Once this Advice Strategy is adopted, we will then produce a more detailed **Action Plan** to begin taking some of the recommended action forward in 2011/12. The amount of recommended action that can actually be implemented will obviously depend on the **resources** available.

Vision

Central Bedfordshire will be an area where people experience less poverty and social exclusion, because their needs are being met effectively through easily accessible, well-publicised and high-quality social welfare information, advice and advocacy services across the voluntary and community and statutory sectors

Principles

Information, advice and advocacy services in Central Bedfordshire should be:

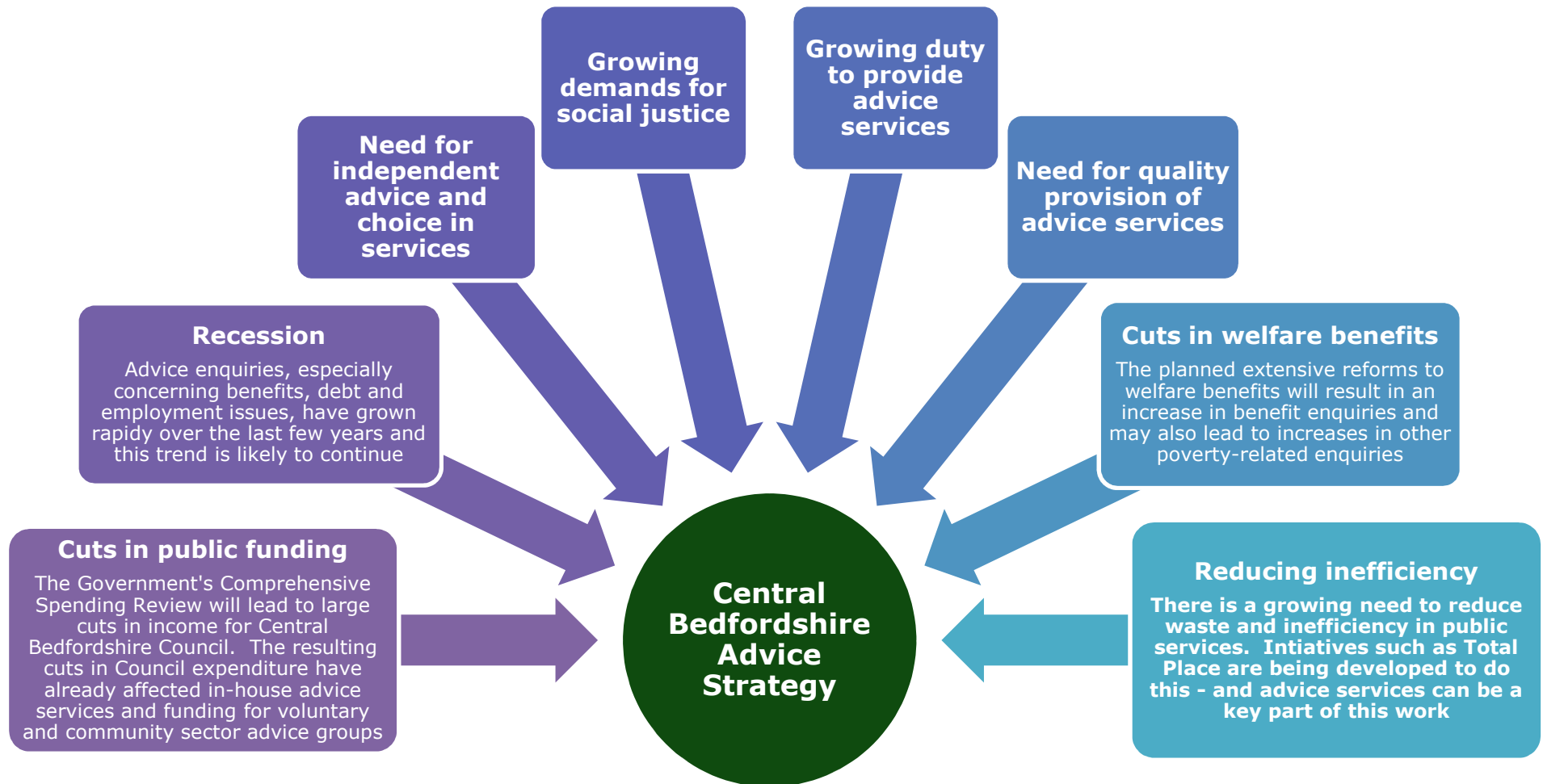
- Planned in a coordinated manner to meet local needs, using collaboration and partnership working across the voluntary and community and statutory sectors
- Available to the whole community and, underpinned by a commitment to equality of opportunity, should also be used to support vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged people and communities
- Provided free at the point of delivery
- Provided at different levels, using a diversity of well publicised, easy accessible delivery methods to meet the diverse needs in the community
- Quality services that local people will have confidence to use

Strategic Aims

1. To develop a strategic framework for the planning, funding and provision of information, advice and advocacy services in Central Bedfordshire
2. To respond effectively to the changing needs for information, advice and advocacy in Central Bedfordshire
3. To enhance collaboration between agencies in the information, advice and advocacy sector in Central Bedfordshire
4. To ensure the quality of advice services by supporting the development of quality marked advice provision across Central Bedfordshire
5. To improve access to information, advice and advocacy services in Central Bedfordshire

Drivers of change for social welfare advice

There are a number of factors and changes which will have an impact on the provision of social welfare advice over the next few years, many of which will make the successful implementation of the Strategy even more important. Further details on these drivers can be found in the report on the development of this Advice Strategy. You can get a copy of the report at: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk



NB The list of drivers given above is not exhaustive. The current pace of change, with new Government policy initiatives being announced on a regular basis, is likely to also bring other, **unforeseen changes** that will lead to an increase in demand for advice and a growing need for advisers to keep-up-to-date with changes in social welfare legislation

AIM 1

To develop a strategic framework for the planning, funding and provision of information, advice and advocacy services in Central Bedfordshire

What we know

Up until now there has been **limited strategic planning** in Central Bedfordshire regarding the provision of information and advice, and advice services in the local area have developed in an ad hoc manner.

The **importance of advice services** is well evidenced and it is clear that information and advice provision is an issue that cuts across various community sectors such as health, adult services and children's services – as well as being an important tool in tackling poverty and social exclusion, and promoting economic well-being.

In October 2010 we undertook some **mapping of current services** based on survey responses from 9 organisations that provide social welfare information or advice services in Central Bedfordshire. These organisations vary considerably in size, type and purpose. Most of these services are in the voluntary and community sector. Some organisations provide general advice/information on a range of issues to the general public whereas others only provide advice/information on specific issues and sometimes only to specific clients groups.

Our mapping showed that, in Central Bedfordshire, there are **12 paid staff** working in organisations that provide advice/information services and an estimated **115 volunteers**, who provide real added value to the sector. The organisations responding to the survey dealt with **over 13,000 advice enquiries** in 2009/10 and opened over **650 advice cases**.

In terms of **funding for advice**, again there has been no strategic approach. Advice work is currently funded from a variety of sources including: Central Bedfordshire Council, Equality and Human Rights Commission, local trusts, and Town and Parish Councils.

From the recent mapping that was undertaken, various **gaps in advice provision** were identified in Central Bedfordshire. The main gaps were:

- **Access to advice** – all of the main providers are based in towns and some are even based outside Central Bedfordshire. Few agencies provide specific outreach services in the rural areas. People living in the rural wards either have to travel into a town (or outside the area to Bedford or Luton) or have to use the limited telephone or home visiting services for advice.
- **Capacity / resource issues** – many of the agencies providing advice in Central Bedfordshire have limited capacity and resources, including limited office space and interviewing capacity
- **Lack of specialist level advice** – very few agencies in Central Bedfordshire provide specialist level advice in the key advice areas – benefits, debt, housing, employment, immigration. None of the organisations responding to the survey received any funding from the Legal Services Commission for the provision of civil legal advice. And the only agency with a CLS Quality Mark at the Specialist Level (Central Bedfordshire Council's Welfare Rights Service) closed at the end of March 2011

Further details on the above can be found in the report on the development of this Advice Strategy. You can get a copy of the report at: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

What we need to do

Suggestions for future action are:

- Develop a robust **planning framework** for local advice provision
- Develop a **collaborative approach to the funding** and resourcing of local advice services
- Ensure that there are strong **links between the Advice Strategy and other relevant community strategies**

Recommended action

Planning framework

1. Set up an Advice Planning Board for Central Bedfordshire

This Board would be responsible for implementing the Advice Strategy, and its Action Plan, and overseeing advice provision in Central Bedfordshire. It would consist of members from the local advice sector, Central Bedfordshire Council and other key partners and stakeholders.

2. Appoint a "Champion for Advice"

This person would chair the Advice Planning Board and would be the "voice" for advice services in Central Bedfordshire. This person could report back to Central Bedfordshire Together through its Stronger Communities Thematic Partnership.

Collaborative approach to funding

3. Develop a collaborative funding plan for advice provision in Central Bedfordshire

This plan will map the current funding of advice services in Central Bedfordshire and look at ways of improving funding – through optimising funding streams and collaborative funding, and maximising the impact of funding. This funding plan should address the priority advice needs for Central Bedfordshire (see **Action Point 10**).

4. Develop a plan for sharing resources between advice providers in Central Bedfordshire

This plan will map the current use of resources by advice services in Central Bedfordshire and will look at ways of reducing costs by the effective sharing of resources.

Links with other relevant strategies

5. Develop methods for linking advice work and the Advice Strategy to other relevant community strategies

Central Bedfordshire Council and other public bodies should be encouraged to "advice proof" new strategies and plans to assess the impact on advice needs/services. A matrix could also be developed to show, and enhance, the links with strategies such as the Sustainable Community Strategy, Child Poverty Strategy, Homelessness Strategy and Universal Information and Advice Strategy.

6. Support the development of a comprehensive information and advice strategy for Central Bedfordshire

This wider Strategy would link together the various components of information and advice needs in Central Bedfordshire.

AIM 2

To effectively respond to the changing needs for information, advice and advocacy in Central Bedfordshire

What we know

Although all sections of the population can experience problems, those who are vulnerable to social exclusion are especially vulnerable to civil justice problems. People from poorer neighbourhoods, and from groups experiencing discrimination and disadvantage, are more likely to access independent advice services, and advice agencies help a disproportionate number of disabled people and people from a BME background.

There are **considerable advice needs in Central Bedfordshire**. Key issues are:

- Over the next 10 years the population is expected to rise by 40,000 to over 292,000, and there will be increases in the numbers of older people and the numbers living in the larger towns.
- Three areas (in parts of Houghton Regis and Dunstable Downs wards) are among the 10% most deprived areas in the East of England.
- There are pockets of deprivation in some rural areas, and a key issue is the lack of access to essential services.
- There are 5 wards with child poverty rates LSOAs of over 20%, and 6,865 children are living in households considered to be in poverty in the area.
- Part of Sandy is in the 10% most deprived in England in terms of income deprivation affecting pensioners, and 7,850 pensioners in Central Bedfordshire were receiving Pension Credit – the main means-tested benefit for older people (August 2010).
- There were 4,198 people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance in Central Bedfordshire (February 2011). This was 2.5% of the working age population.
- There is over 4% unemployment in the wards of Houghton Regis, Dunstable Downs and Northfields.
- 15,450 people of working age were claiming out-of-work benefits (August 2010).
- The latest NEET rate (ie young people not in education, employment or training) is 5.4% for Central Bedfordshire.
- There are an estimated 21,400 unpaid carers in Central Bedfordshire
- 107 households were accepted as homeless in Central Bedfordshire (2010)
- There were 322 Gypsy and Traveller caravans in Central Bedfordshire (July 2009)
- Almost 5,000 migrant workers entered Central Bedfordshire in the period 2002-2008
- 13.1% of residents in Central Bedfordshire indicated that they had a limiting long-term illness or disability (2001) and over 13,000 are disabled and claiming disability benefits (August 2010).

Further details on the above can be found in the report on the development of this Advice Strategy. Go to: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

What we need to do

Suggestions for future action are:

- Regularly **collect and analyse evidence about changing advice needs** in Central Bedfordshire
- Regularly discuss and **analyse the effects of government policy and new legislation** on local advice needs
- Ensure that **priority advice needs** in Central Bedfordshire are met

Recommended action

Evidence on advice needs

7. Conduct a regular review of advice needs in Central Bedfordshire

This review would be undertaken for the Advice Planning Board. The review should take place annually, although additional reviews may be needed if urgent changes to advice needs need to be considered between annual reviews.

Government policy and legislation

8. Produce regular briefing papers on the effects of government policy and new legislation on advice needs and services in Central Bedfordshire

These briefing papers would need to be produced to estimate the effects on advice services of new policies or legislation before they are introduced. Update reports could also be issued to evaluate the effects after the introduction of the new policy or legislation. Evidence on these effects could be provided by BAF members. The briefing papers would be considered by the Advice Planning Board.

9. Provide responses to proposed central and local government changes that will affect the advice sector

For example, the Government is planning major changes to the benefits system over the next few years. Various training courses will need to be arranged to help keep benefit advisers up-to-date with the changes. Local benefit advisers will also need to be brought together to discuss these changes and the effects on their clients. This could be done by setting up a new network for local benefit advisers. Another possible initiative would be to organise benefit take-up campaigns to make sure that residents were claiming their correct entitlement to benefits.

Priority advice needs

10. Ensure that local advice services are planned to meet the priority advice needs in Central Bedfordshire

This Advice Planning Board will need to make sure that the funding plan for advice provision (see **Action Point 3**) links with the agreed advice priorities for the area and with the priorities for funders

AIM 3

To enhance collaboration between agencies in the information, advice and advocacy sector in Central Bedfordshire

What we know

Most information and advice providers in Central Bedfordshire are members of **Bedfordshire Advice Forum (BAF)**, and there are currently 19 members of BAF that deliver social welfare information and advice services in Central Bedfordshire. These members are:



- Age Concern Bedfordshire
- Ampthill and Biggleswade CAB
- Aragon Housing Association – Money Advice
- Bedford Credit Union
- Bedfordshire Race and Equalities Council
- Bedfordshire Police – Welfare Department
- Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support
- Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity – Carers Support Bureau
- Central Bedfordshire Council – Libraries
- Central Bedfordshire Council – Trading Standards
- Dunstable CAB
- Hospice at Home Volunteers (Leighton Buzzard)
- Leighton Linlade CAB
- Luton Law Centre
- Luton Rights
- Polish-British Integration Centre
- Sight Concern Bedfordshire
- The Disability Resource Centre
- Voices for All (Advocacy Alliance)

Further information and contact details of BAF members can be found in the online **Bedfordshire Advice Directory**.

BAF provides a variety of infrastructure support services for its members including arranging forum meetings and training courses.

Although networking between BAF members is generally good, there has been little in the way of direct collaboration between agencies - apart from between the three Citizens Advice Bureaux in the area.

Further details on BAF can be found at: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

Bedfordshire Advice Directory
Promoting and supporting advice and information services in Bedfordshire

Helping you get access to advice and information services in Bedfordshire

www.bedsadvisedirectory.org.uk

Bedfordshire Advice Forum is pleased to announce the launch of the new online **Bedfordshire Advice Directory**

You can use this Directory to:

- Signpost or refer clients to local advice agencies in Bedford Borough or Central Bedfordshire
- Find out more about the services provided by BAF members
- Find links to other useful contacts

Action to take

- 1) Bookmark the Directory www.bedsadvisedirectory.org.uk
- 2) Use the Directory
- 3) Tell other people about the Directory

Want an entry in the Directory? Contact ba@infotrain.co.uk

We will be continually improving and updating the Directory and your feedback regarding accessibility and usefulness is appreciated. Please contact BAF with any comments you may have.

What we need to do

Suggestions for future action are:

- Develop ideas for **collaborative working between local providers** in the information, advice and advocacy sector
- Support the provision of **infrastructure support services** to local information, advice and advocacy providers

Recommended action

Collaborative working

11. Provide ongoing opportunities for local advice providers to discuss ideas for collaborative working

For example, an event could be organised to consider how local providers could work more effectively together. Issues that could be discussed include: sharing of resources; joint purchasing of supplies; improving signposting and referral procedures; joint training; peer review of casework. Another possibility would be the appointment of a facilitator to support local advice agencies to develop collaborative ideas.

12. Develop closer links between the not-for-profit advice sector and other advice providers

One obvious group where closer links are needed is with solicitors. It will be important to look at ways of increasing awareness of local not-for-profit advice services with solicitors and developing better cross-referrals.

Infrastructure support services

13. Maintain the Bedfordshire Advice Directory

Support should be provided to help maintain the online Directory which gives contact and service details of BAF members.

14. Provide support for Bedfordshire Advice Forum

BAF is the network of local not-for-profit information and advice providers. Support for BAF would enable it to continue to organise forum meetings, represent the advice sector in strategic meetings, and provide training courses for BAF members.

15. Increase the membership of Bedfordshire Advice Forum

To help develop quality in the sector, all information and providers in Central Bedfordshire should be encouraged to join BAF to take advantage of the infrastructure support services that are provided – especially in terms of networking, training and quality development.

AIM 4

To ensure the quality of advice services by supporting the development of quality marked advice provision across Central Bedfordshire

What we know

There is a growing need, especially amongst funders, for organisations to show that they are providing **quality services**. From the recent mapping of current advice services in Central Bedfordshire we discovered that 6 organisations (out of 9 survey responses) had a quality mark for their advice or information service. These were:

- Ampthill and Biggleswade CAB
- Bedfordshire Race and Equalities Council
- Bedfordshire Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support
- Central Bedfordshire Council – Welfare Rights Service
NB This service closed at the end of March 2011
- Dunstable CAB
- Leighton Linlade CAB

There is also evidence that there are a large number of community groups that are providing information and advice to users that are not part of BAF. These agencies are unlikely to have any form of quality mark and may need support to develop their capacity.

The Government developed a quality mark system through its Community Legal Service (CLS) which was launched in 2000. Under this system CLS Quality Marks were available at three main levels - Information Help, General Help, and Specialist Help. Although the Legal Service Commission will continue to provide audits for the Specialist Help level of the Quality Mark for agencies that have legal contracts with the LSC, the other levels of the Quality Mark are being phased out. Although the national advice sector should be launching a new quality mark at the General Help level in 2011, there is no such replacement planned at the Information Help level.

Because of the lack of an effective quality mark for agencies providing information and basic levels of advice, BAF has worked in partnership with Bedfordshire Race and Equalities Council to develop a local quality system that focuses on small community advice organisations. This local quality system is called **Q-cas**.



Q-cas was launched in 2008 and so far 6 agencies in Bedfordshire have been awarded a Q-cas award.

Further details on the above can be found in the report on the development of this Advice Strategy. You can get a copy of the report at: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

What we need to do

Suggestions for future action are:

- Provide support to local providers to ensure that high **quality information and advice** is provided in Central Bedfordshire

Recommended action

Quality of advice

16. Identify information and advice providers in Central Bedfordshire that need support to enhance the quality of their service

This will help identify agencies that need support, and the type of support required, to develop consistent quality services across Central Bedfordshire.

17. Provide training programmes to help agencies develop quality systems

Training could be provided on a variety of issues including: developing policies; advice recording; confidentiality; equal opportunities etc. Training for advisers is also needed to help develop skills and maintain knowledge on social welfare issues.

18. Increase the number of local information and advice providers that have a quality mark for their services

All local providers should be encouraged to obtain an appropriate quality mark for their information and advice services. Small community groups should be encouraged to use Q-cas as their quality system. This would ensure a consistent approach to advice provision across Central Bedfordshire.

AIM 5

To improve access to information, advice and advocacy services in Central Bedfordshire

What we know

National evidence shows that those most at risk of developing legal problems are also the least able to deal with them. Vulnerable people need greater levels of support to resolve their problems, and express a high preference for advice which is face-to-face or on the telephone.

Research also shows that people who are unable to access advice to resolve their problems end up in a vicious cycle of decline which can result in loss of jobs and income, stress related illness and relationship break downs. Unresolved problems and disputes have negative effects on people's lives and can result in significant costs to public services.

In Central Bedfordshire **we need an effective mix of services** that meet the needs of local citizens. This means having services at different levels, in different locations, and with a good choice of providers in the voluntary and statutory sectors. However, there is not an effective mix of services at present and there are threats to certain services in the future.

Our local **mapping of current providers** in October 2010 showed that, there were gaps in services in Central Bedfordshire causing access problems for many citizens. The gaps identified included:

- A very thin spread of specialist advice provision – especially in debt provision in rural communities in the north of the area
- A lack of home visiting provision
- Not enough advocacy services
- Inadequate access to representation at tribunals and court
- Insufficient provision of face-to-face advice provision in rural areas
- Limited access to civil legal aid.

The mapping also showed that, in terms of location, all of the main providers are based in towns and some are even based outside Central Bedfordshire. Few agencies provide specific outreach services in the rural areas. People living in the rural wards either have to travel into a town (or outside the area to Bedford or Luton) or have to use the limited telephone or home visiting services for advice.

Further details on the above can be found in the report on the development of this Advice Strategy. Go to: www.bedsadviceforum.org.uk

What we need to do

Suggestions for future action are:

- Ensure that there is a good mix of **“face-to-face” advice services**, at different levels, and in different geographical areas, to meet the needs of local citizens
- Develop better **telephone access** to advice for clients
- Develop effective **access to written information** in Central Bedfordshire

Recommended action

Face-to-face advice

19. Promote the need for a balanced mix of “face-to-face” information and advice services at different levels in Central Bedfordshire

Citizens in Central Bedfordshire, especially the most vulnerable, need to have access to a range of providers giving “face to face” services including:

- A variety of information providers in their local community
- A generalist advice agency in their local area
- Some specialist level support (in key areas such as benefits, debt and employment) in Central Bedfordshire as a whole.

(See **Page 18** for a diagram showing the different levels of advice).

Provision of “face-to-face” advice services could be linked in with any pilot work relating to Total Place or developing a Community Hub.

20. Promote the need for advice services both in urban and rural areas in Central Bedfordshire

As well as ensuring that generalist advice services are available in the main towns (in Ampthill, Biggleswade, Dunstable, Flitwick, Houghton Regis and Leighton Buzzard), it is important to provide effective services for citizens living in rural areas. This could be done by things like outreach sessions, home visiting services, mobile advice services and developing links with existing networks/services.

Telephone advice

21. Consider the feasibility of developing a central access point for telephone advice in Central Bedfordshire

A centralised telephone number for advice would simplify and improve access for many local citizens. A central helpline could help provide basic information to callers but would primarily signpost callers to the most appropriate source for the information or advice required. Consideration of such a helpline could be undertaken as part of any pilot work relating to Total Place or developing a Community Hub.

Written information

22. Develop a plan to improve access to written information in Central Bedfordshire

This would help effectively plan, and avoid duplication in, the provision of leaflets and other written material on social welfare legal issues in Central Bedfordshire. It would also be very useful to have a single internet access point for advice. A central website would contain clear links to local information and advice providers, and would provide links to websites for information on social welfare issues. The Bedfordshire Advice Directory website could be developed to become this central internet access point.

Promote the need for a balanced mix of information and advice services at different levels

Specialist level

Representation and complex casework services

Current example

Very limited provision in Central Bedfordshire
- no advice agencies have a specialist level quality mark

General level

General advice and casework services
- and referring clients for representation

Current example

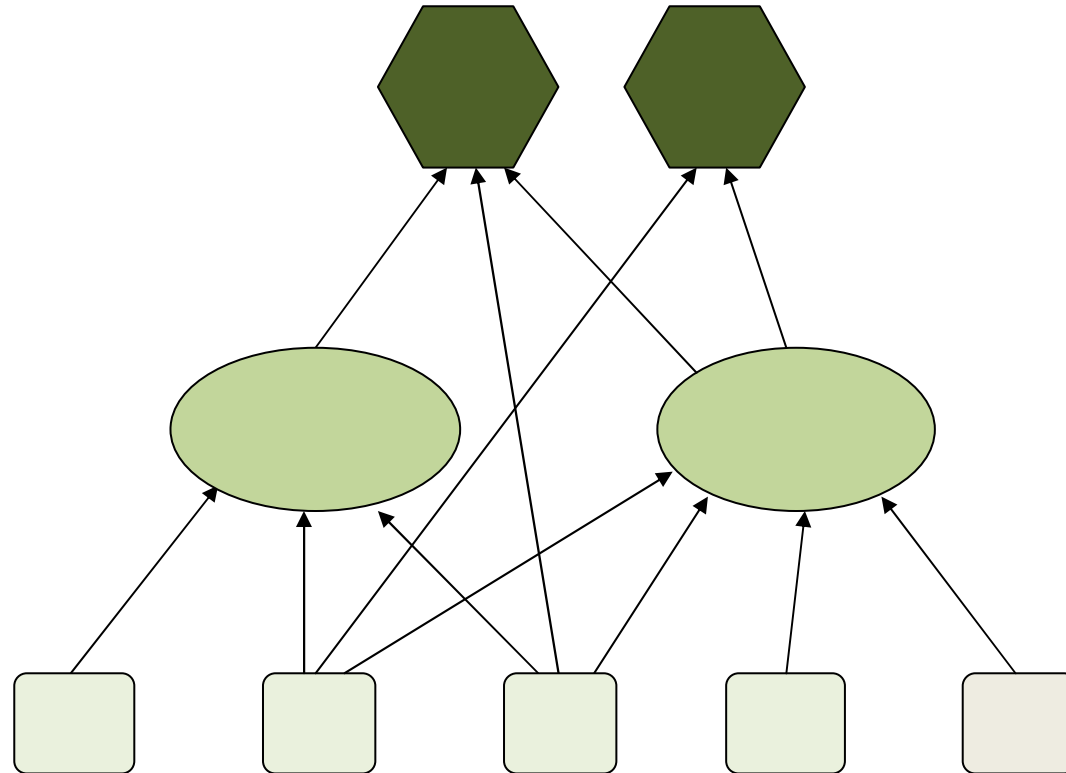
Amphill Citizens Advice Bureau

Information level

Information and basic advice services
- and signposting or referring clients for general advice or representation

Current example

Age Concern Bedfordshire



The different levels of advice provision

Notes

- Many organisations provide services at just at one level – but some provide services at different levels
- Some organisations provide services to the general public – but others only work with certain client groups
- Some organisations provide **advocacy services**, which help users access other organisations that provide information or advice