



# ADVICE

Providing Accessible Advice & Information  
to Tackle Inequality



## Our Aim

A City with accessible, integrated and sustainable advice and information services that prevents Social Exclusion, Financial Exclusion, child poverty, Family breakdown & domestic abuse, housing need and homelessness through early intervention. We will empower residents to understand their rights and responsibilities and solve their problems and enable residents to advance, achieve their aspirations and realise their potential and maintain wellbeing. We will Tackle discrimination and promote positive change by evidencing the barriers residents face to equality, inclusion and employment

## Introduction

This chapter in the Sustainable Community Strategy reflects our belief that coordinated advice and information services and resources make a real difference to resident's lives and the city as a whole.

These services are important because they help people deal with their issues relating to:

- Employment & education
- Money
- Housing
- Health and well being
- Family and relationships

People often turn to these services for help when they are facing difficult times, for example when someone in the family has lost their job, when they are facing relationship breakdown, bereavement or perhaps when someone in the family has fallen ill.

Ensuring people have early access to the advice and information they need has huge benefits to the individual as it helps to stop problems from getting worse. This has wider benefits for the community and economy as it means individuals are less likely to need to depend on services further down the line and more likely to be able to make the most of the opportunities open to them.

## Current Position

- We know from feedback from residents and frontline workers that the range of services and access routes to advice can be confusing to navigate.

We also know that, whilst many services specialise in particular areas, residents don't experience problems in isolation -for example, problems with

debt are often related to problems with housing and may be related to problems with employment or discrimination.

We are concerned that simply signposting residents to multiple agencies that 'might be able to help' doesn't always work. We therefore need to work together to effectively simplify access routes and integrate provision.

Our priority, therefore, is that advice and information provision is organised around the needs of residents. It should be straightforward for residents to understand where, when and how they can access advice and information to help them resolve their problems.

- We know that the funding environment for local advice providers is becoming increasingly tough

Our concern is that we make the best use of the resources we have between us and we develop services that can survive and thrive into the future

- We know that local advice providers are consistently reporting that demand for their services is exceeding supply

We also know that many of our residents from particular communities and client groups face barriers to accessing existing advice services

Our priority is, therefore, that we direct residents to the most appropriate advice and information services – ensuring we reach the residents that are most in need, not just those that can queue the longest:

- We know that many residents face barriers to getting online

We are concerned that this will cause problems for residents as an increasing number of services will be accessed primarily via the internet.

Our priority is therefore to develop advice provision that will help residents overcome these barriers.

- We know that many residents try and fail to resolve their problems online before approaching local face to face services.

Our priority is therefore to develop our local online service offer to residents.

- We know that Advice services are well placed to identify trends in the problems that resident face.

Our priority, therefore, is to enable advice providers to help to stop things going wrong in future for residents by gathering evidence and highlighting particular issues to other partners this can help to positively change local policies and practices.

- We know some of the residents who seek out Advice with money and housing related issues have underlying issues relating to skills and education.

Our priority therefore, is to work with the residents who seek advice to help identify and address these issues and ensure they are keyed into services that will help build their resilience and skills.

## What has happened in the last 3 years

- The Council has led the development of the City's Financial Inclusion Strategy. Part of the aim of this is to develop a 'Community Banking Partnership Service' that integrates access to services that promote Financial Wellbeing including advice, basic banking, affordable credit, savings, financial education and support around fuel and food poverty.
- We have talked to residents through focus groups and events and listened to what they have said about their experiences of and preferences for accessing advice.
- Partners have developed a number of online directories including 'Health Information Prescriptions', 'It's Local Actually' and the 'advicebrighton-hove directory', ensuring that these join up and complement each other.
- Advice providers have improved cross referrals between agencies through the use of electronic shared calendars.
- The Way in which local advice services are resourced has changed significantly over the last three years with restrictions on some of the traditional funding streams, such as legal aid
- Local Volunteers have continued to play a key role in the provision of advice and information
- The Library has developed the Council Connect – a volunteer based service that supports residents to get online in local libraries
- We have promoted the use of online information and self-help resources alongside the online directories of services that we have developed
- 6 local advice agencies and over 30 frontline services worked in effectively in partnership to deliver Financial Healthchecks to financially residents as part of the Warm Homes Healthy People campaigns of 2012 and 2013.
- Advice providers have worked closely with the Council to help inform the development of the local Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Social Fund Schemes

## What we plan to do

- We will continue to involve residents in the development of new services and ensure we take their views and experiences into account.
- Advice providers will work with the council and other partners to develop a local Community Banking Partnership Service ensuring that advice in relation to money issues is effectively integrated into provision of financial education, measures to address food and fuel poverty and strategies that will ensure equal access for residents to appropriate financial products.
- Partners will improve access to advice for residents by continuing to develop online access routes by, for example, offering advice online or by ensuring online directories operate in 'real time' and highlight services that are currently open.
- Advice providers will work together to better join up their services and make the best use of available resources through, for example, colocation of provision.
- Local providers will work together to identify new ways of resourcing and funding provision advice.
- Local funders of advice will work together to minimise overlap in administration and to ensure public funding is effectively targeted
- Advice providers will work closely with Community Works to ensure residents are supported and encouraged into appropriate volunteering roles around advice and information provision.
- Partners will support residents to get online and access advice and information resources from a range of accessible community venues
- Partners will trial the provision of a locally provided online advice service for residents.
- Partners will work closely with frontline advisers from across the city to ensure we understand trends in the problems residents are facing
- Partners will proactively engage with partner from across the Brighton and Hove Strategic Partnership so that we can work together to find solutions to these problems
- Advice providers will ensure their services help build resilience in residents through effective links with appropriate education services and support that will help residents into sustained well paid employment.