

**BASELINE AND CHALLENGE INFORMATION**

Introduction

The Council is undertaking a series of “EIT” (Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation) Reviews to identify options for future strategy/policy/service provision that will deliver efficiency savings and sustain or improve high quality outcomes for residents. One of these reviews is considering the provision of advice and information services across the borough.

This report describes the scope and objectives of the review and presents the baseline and challenge information that has been compiled, to date, by the review team. A future report will present opportunities for efficiency and improvement and an evaluation of the available options, based on the findings and conclusions presented in this report.

The baseline information examines:

- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council services that fall within the scope of the review and whose core purpose is the provision of advice and information;
- Contracts and other financial arrangements that the Council has with external organisations that provide advice and information services;
- Provision of advice and information services by partners and other organisations (eg voluntary sector);
- Demand for advice and information services;
- Customer perceptions of advice and information services in terms of accessibility and service quality.

The challenge phase asks questions around five themes:

- Customers (for example are there customers that could use the service but don't, are there customers using the service who shouldn't be, what do complaints/compliments tell us about the service?)
- Financial and Resource Considerations (is the service cost effective overall, do external contracts offer value for money?)
- Service drivers (does the service need to change and what are the main drivers of change?)
- Aims and Objectives (is the service needed, what would happen if the service was not provided, either in whole or in part, how would the service react to new pressures?)
- Service Delivery (Could the service be provided through a different mechanism, is the service being delivered at a higher level/standard than the statutory minimum or than customers require?)

At the completion of the baseline and challenge stage a number of options have been identified for further, more detailed investigation:

- Consolidation of all the advice and information services that the Council commissions from external organisations into a single specification that could then be tendered, including the advice and information services that are currently included in the Core Funding Agreements that accompany allocations of grant from the Voluntary Sector Support Fund;
- Discussions with the Community Legal Services organisation to understand their capacity for taking on additional cases and how the Council could best promote the national telephone advice line;

- Further investigation to understand the reasons for the duplication of welfare benefits advice between the Council's Welfare Rights service and external advice and information agencies and whether this could be eliminated via an alternative service delivery model;
- Consider a model for future delivery that ensures more joined up working between all the different parties involved in advice and information giving across the borough.

## **DETAIL**

### Scope of the Review

1. This EIT review includes advice and information services that are provided directly by Council officers and by external advice agencies (such as Stockton District Advice and Information Service). The range of advice and information services provided across the borough is extensive and varies greatly in terms of complexity and the skills/knowledge of those providing the advice and information. It is important that the range of services included in the review is clearly defined in order to avoid scope drift, duplication with other reviews and ensure that the project can be completed within the tight time constraints.
2. The "hierarchy of advice and information" diagram at Appendix 1 depicts the different types and levels of advice and information that might apply within a local authority and was used to define the scope. The review focuses on levels 2 and 3 - the more "personal" types of advice and information services provided to residents of the borough and relating to the following themes:
  - Children and Young People;
  - Housing (rented housing, homelessness, grants and adaptations);
  - Economic (money advice, debt, benefits and employment)
  - Health, well-being and social care;
  - Asylum Seekers
3. Basic (level 1) advice and information, such as when/how can I pay my Council Tax, advice and information services provided to businesses or relating to services that are included in the EIT Review of Regulatory Services, and specialist advice and information services such as those provided by the Registration Service have all been excluded from the scope of this EIT review.

### The Objectives of the Review

4. The review will seek to make recommendations to ensure that those who need advice and information, both now and in the future, have access to suitable services and that the available resources are targeted so that these services are delivered in a way that is of value to customers and best meets their needs and expectations.
5. There is currently no clear picture of advice and information provision across the borough. An understanding of provision (direct, commissioned and by the voluntary sector), current funding arrangements and demand for services that will be achieved by undertaking the review may lead to:
  - Elimination of duplication;
  - Improved signposting to advice and information services;
  - Identification of opportunities for the Council to signpost to external advice and information services provided by the Voluntary Sector, rather than provide them direct;

- Comparison between direct and commissioned advice and information service delivery and the identification and implementation of the most efficient and effective service delivery model;
- Rationalisation of the sums paid to external organisations that deliver advice and information services on behalf of the Council

## **Baseline Information**

### Internal (SBC) Services that Provide Advice and Information

6. An initial, high-level review identified 24 SBC services that provide advice and information falling into the categories described in paragraph 2, above. This number was far too great to analyse each service in detail and, in addition, some of these services are scheduled for their own EIT reviews in years 2 and 3 of the programme. In other cases advice and information giving represented only a small part of the work of the service or was secondary, but inherent to the main purpose of the service (for example the core purpose of the Benefit Service is to assess claims, make awards of Housing and Council Tax Benefit and promote the Benefits scheme, but advice and information giving in relation to specific claims is built-in to this work). It was therefore decided to focus the review on internal services whose core purpose is giving advice and information and services/teams within a service that spend 70% or more of their time giving advice and information. These areas are:
- Welfare Rights
  - IAG (Information, Advice and Guidance) workers in the Children’s Centres
  - Families Information Service
  - Connexions Personal Advisors
7. The importance of signposting has been recognised. This happens extensively across the Council where services are unable to offer the appropriate advice and guidance themselves and refer the customer on to an alternative internal service or external agency/partner for help. It is essential that front-line staff are equipped with accurate and up-to-date information to enable them to signpost effectively. This will be addressed as part of the review.

### Welfare Rights

8. SBC’s Welfare Rights Unit is based at Billingham Council Offices. This is a team of 7 – the Team Manager, 4 Welfare Rights Officers, a “First Contact” officer and a temporary specialist Independent Living Fund Officer. Local authority Welfare Rights Units themselves are not a statutory requirement. They were established in recognition that many families and individuals do not receive the help to which they are entitled because they do not know of its existence, they consider themselves ineligible or are reluctant to ask for help, through pride or tradition. It is viewed as a social services duty to see that people are encouraged to obtain the help to which they are entitled.
9. The service contributes to the Council’s core aim of “Promoting Achievement, Tackling Disadvantage” by addressing anti-poverty, social and financial inclusion agendas:
- Children & Young People – Seek to reduce the impact of poverty on families;
  - Health & well-being – Improve access to information and advice services to support those facing financial difficulties;
  - Older Adults – Work with the Pension service and other partners to improve the uptake of Benefits.

10. The objective of Welfare Rights is, "to ensure that all of the residents of the Borough have equal access to the benefits system in order that they may receive those benefits to which they are entitled by law." This is achieved by providing advice, information and representation, encouraging benefit take-up campaigns and providing input into Council policy. The service is open to all residents of the borough and is not means tested (unlike some other agencies where clients have to meet Legal Aid funding criteria). The service does not hold details of the split between its clients that are/are not entitled to CLS funding.
11. During 2008/2009 Welfare Rights dealt with 1450 enquiries, of which 1201 involved detailed casework, where the officer spent more than 20 minutes dealing with the case. The majority of cases are referrals from colleagues within social care and self-referrals from previous clients, or following benefit take-up campaigns. A smaller number of referrals come from the Benefits Service, Tristar Homes, DWP or through word of mouth (friends and family). The service also holds surgeries aimed at BME residents – 85 such surgeries were held during 2008/2009, dealing with enquiries from 676 residents, in excess of 90% of these from a BME community.
12. The service promotes itself through Stockton News articles, its take-up campaigns, posters and leaflets in GP surgeries, community centres etc, the SBC website and by attending internal team meetings and giving talks about the service to voluntary organisations. Notification letters issued by the Benefits Service refer clients to Welfare Rights for independent advice and information.
13. In terms of performance, the amount of annual benefit entitlement secured for clients has increased significantly over the last three financial years:
- 2006/2007 - £614,157
  - 2007/2008 - £709,286
  - 2008/2009 - £919,537
14. Officers also represent clients at Tribunal Hearings:

	Tribunals Attended	Tribunals Won
• 2006/2007	76	62
• 2007/2008	58	45
• 2008/2009	45	35

15. Customers are asked to comment about the quality of service received once their case is complete. In 2008/2009, 23 commendations were received and no complaints.

#### 16. Finance

<u>Cost Centre 30200</u>	Initial Costs (£)	<u>Welfare Rights</u> Pro Rata (7 staff out of 7) (£)	Time Spent	Cost (£)
Direct Salaries	217,222		100%	217,222
Indirect Salaries	3,136	3,136	100%	3,136
Running Costs	18,438	18,438	100%	<u>18,438</u>
				238,795
Income Grant		0		<u>0</u>
<b>Net Cost</b>				<b>238,795</b>

17. Although not part of the Welfare Rights service (and not part of this review because advice and information makes up less than 70% of their work), Client Financial Services (within CESC) also have a role in maximising the benefits paid to their 3,000 clients. When conducting financial assessments in connection with residents' contribution towards the cost of care they receive from the Council, the team ensure that the client is receiving all the benefit to which they are entitled (any additional income can then be put towards the cost of paying for care). The service collaborates with the Pension Service to ensure that clients are receiving their full entitlement. When assessing claims for Housing and Council Tax Benefit, the Benefits Service also looks to identify where residents may be entitled to a type of benefit they are not claiming.

#### IAG (Information, Advice & Guidance) Workers in the Children's Centre

18. This service meets a statutory duty placed on the Council to provide advice and information which supports and guides parents as they move into learning and employment, including engaging with learners who face significant barriers to learning. The Council provides these services in-house but they could be delivered via alternative channels. There are two Guidance Advisors, based in the Children's Centres, each covering 2 ISAs. Guidance Advisors must be qualified to NVQ Level 4 in information, advice and guidance.
19. Section 12 Childcare Act 2006 places a duty on the Authority to provide information, advice and assistance to parents and prospective parents. The service must be established and maintained to facilitate access by people who may benefit from it, in particular, those who might otherwise have difficulty in taking advantage of the service. Section 13 of the Act places a duty on the Authority to provide information, advice and training to childcare providers (for which a "reasonable" charge may be imposed, although SBC do not charge at the moment).
20. Customers are parents of children aged 0-5 and childcare practitioners within the private, voluntary and independent childcare sector and Children's Centres. Over the last 12 months the Guidance Advisors have undertaken 460 Intensive Guidance support sessions with parents and 22 with childcare practitioners. A target of 5 new parents per month to participate in guidance sessions enabling readiness for further learning activity, plus 10 additional sessions per month is in place for each IAG worker for 2009/2010. It is looking likely that this target will be achieved and possibly surpassed.
21. Parents and carers of children aged 0-5 can self-refer. Alternatively parents and carers are referred to the service by other Children's Centre team members (such as health visitors, midwives or customer care workers) and Job Centre Plus refer parents or carers for "Intensive Guidance Support Sessions". The service also provides advice and information on learning pathways to childcare practitioners.
22. The service promotes itself through a range of channels including leaflets and posters in the Children's Centres, through the Job Centre Plus Lone Parent Advisors and the Children's Information Service, at parents evenings and forums, through leaflets, newsletters and the SBC website and with internal services through team meetings.
23. Services include skills and careers matching, action planning and signposting to relevant and appropriate services, both internal and external to the Council. The advisors also advise clients in relation to interview skills, CV/application form writing and how to acquire knowledge and skills that will help to secure employment.
24. The service contributes to a number of priorities and key performance measures:

- Surestart – decrease number of families in workless households and increase number of parents on training opportunities. This feeds into key Government targets around child poverty and helping lone parents back into work.
- Council Plan 2009-2012, Children & Young People Themes “Make a positive contribution” and “Achieve economic well-being”.
- SBC Children’s and Young People Plan:
  - Reduce levels of obesity in children and young people (Guidance Advisors encourage participation and signpost parents to appropriate courses and children’s activities);
  - Reduce health inequalities for children and young people and reduce level of infant mortality (Guidance Advisors encourage participation and signpost parents to various services within the Children’s Centres such as smoking cessation, baby massage groups);
  - Develop the involvement and participation of children and young people, parents and carers in developing services that more closely meet their needs;
  - Seek to reduce poverty and the impact of poverty on children, young people and their families (by directing parents on to learning and work programmes, or into voluntary work where they gain employability skills and confidence and helping parents to source funding or learning opportunities);
  - Continue to address issues of equality, diversity and community cohesion (through close liaison with Adult Education and further education services in relation to literacy, numeracy and ESOL programmes for parents.)
- Information Advice & Guidance for Adults – The National Policy Framework and Action Plan (DfES 2003), describes the “pivotal” role of information, advice and guidance services in delivering the Government’s Skills Strategy by “promoting the benefits of learning, helping individuals to address and overcome the barriers to learning and supporting them in making realistic and well informed choices.”

## 25. Financial Information

<u>Cost Centre 20279</u>	Initial Costs (£)	<u>Children’s Centre IAG</u>		Cost (£)
		Pro Rata (2 staff out of 39) (£)	Time Spent	
Direct Salaries	66,124		70%	46,287
Indirect Salaries	27,766	1,424	70%	997
Running Costs	387,565	19,875	70%	<u>13,913</u>
				61,196
Income Grant (pro rata) (Sure Start grant)		60,345		<u>60,345</u>
<b>Net Cost</b>				<b>851</b>

### Families Information Service (FIS)

26. This service was originally formed in 2000 to meet a statutory duty place on the Council to provide advice and information on childcare. The service includes a brokerage service, and advice and information on careers in childcare. The Childcare Act 2006 extended the Council’s duty to provide a range of easily accessible information, advice and assistance (prescribed by regulations), which parents may need to make informed choices on services for their families and support their children through to their 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, or up to the age of 25 if the child has learning difficulties or a disability. The responsibilities, objectives and outcomes of the service are set at a national level by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The Council delivers the service through an in-house team, but it could be delivered via alternative channels.

27. There are 7.5 FTE posts in the organisation structure, service with 1.5 of these currently vacant. For the purposes of this review 5 staff have been taken into account as their role is primarily giving (or supporting the giving of) advice and information. The team is based at Bayheath House. All FIS staff are required to be qualified to NVQ Level 3 in Information, Advice and Guidance. The service is provided by telephone, e-mail, face-to-face by appointment, outreach (for example drop-in sessions at Children's Centres, events at Schools or Job Fairs) and via website. Parents and carers can contact the service direct, or may be referred from the Children's Centre, other professionals (such as social workers or health visitors), or Jobcentre Plus (when parents need help finding childcare or information on financial support towards the costs of childcare in order to get into work).
28. Customers are parents/carers of children and young people up to the age of 20 (25 for young people with disabilities / complex or additional educational needs), prospective parents/carers, childcare practitioners within the private, voluntary and independent childcare sector and the Children's Centres, people wishing to work in the childcare sector and people wishing to set up a business in the childcare sector. Over the last 12 months the service has dealt with 3,454 contacts.
29. Families Information Services are promoted nationally by DCSF through television, radio and magazines. At a local level the service promotes itself through a wide variety of media, primarily adverts in relevant newsletters and magazines, posters, leaflets and internet.
30. The service contributes to a number of priorities and key performance measures:
- NI118 – Take up of formal childcare by low income families. This is measured by the number of families receiving the Childcare element of Working Tax Credit as a percentage of the number of working families receiving more than the family element of Child Tax Credit.. The last reported figures are for 2006/2007 and show Stockton as 17%, which was the same as the national average.
  - DCSF target of 96 contacts per week for 2007/2008 was exceeded with an achievement of an average of 108 contact per week;
  - DCSF have been working on a new set of standards for the FIS, which reflect the enhanced duties under the Childcare Act 2006. These new standards were published in May 2009 and it has been suggested that FIS' that have completed the National Families Information service (NAFIS) "Families First" quality award will be deemed to be meeting the Section 12 duty. Stockton FIS envisage undertaking the award process in September / October 2009.
  - Council Plan 2009-2012, Children and Young People Themes "Make a positive contribution" and "Achieve economic well-being".
  - SBC Children's and Young People Plan:
    - Reduce levels of obesity in children and young people (FIS staff encourage and direct parents to appropriate Children's Centre courses and children's activities)
    - Reduce health inequalities for children and young people and reduce level of infant mortality (FIS staff encourage parents to access appropriate Children's Centre services)
    - Increase range of accessible culture/leisure/sporting activities for children and young people by developing services across statutory, voluntary and independent sectors (FIS staff collate information about such activities for the Families Information Zone (FIZ) website and promote the website).

- Continue to develop the involvement and participation of children and young people, parents and carers in developing services that more closely meet their needs (working to identify gaps in service provision and access to activities for children and young people with disabilities and complex and special educational needs;
- Seek to reduce poverty and the impact of poverty on children, young people and their families (provision of information on financial support for families for example Working & Child Tax Credits, uniform grants)
- Improve access to integrated services, with a focus on early intervention and support (links to Children's Centres and knowledge of services provided).

### 31. Financial Information

<u>Cost Centre 20899</u>	Initial Costs (£)	<u>Children &amp; families Information Service</u>		
		Pro Rata (£)	Time Spent	Cost (£)
<i>Admin</i>		<i>1 out of 7.5</i>		
Direct Salaries	18,289		60%	10,973
Indirect Salaries	8,055	1,074	60%	644
Running Costs	36,560	4,875	60%	2,925
<i>IAG</i>		<i>4 out of 7.5</i>		
Direct Salaries	89,393		70%	62,575
Indirect Salaries	8,055	4,296	70%	3,007
Running Costs	36,560	19,499	70%	<u>13,649</u>
				93,774
Income Grant (pro rata) (Sure Start grant)		84,991		<u>84,991</u>
<b>Net Cost</b>				<b>8,783</b>

### Connexions Personal Advisors

32. This is a service which a statutory duty placed on the Council to provide information, advice and guidance on a range of opportunities and issues that affect young people aged 11 to 19 and up to 25 for those who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Topics on which advice and information is given include education, employment, training, healthy lifestyles, relationships, personal development, housing and benefits.
33. The service is located at the Connexions One Stop Shop, 16 Bishopton Lane, Stockton and is also delivered from outreach locations in schools, colleges, work-based learning providers, Jobcentre Plus and Community settings. The Connexions function was disaggregated to the four Integrated Service Areas (ISAs) and an Integrated Youth Support Service (IYSS) borough wide team on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. Advice and information services are provided by Personal Advisors and Keeping in Touch (KIT) Workers who are allocated to one of the four integrated service areas – 3.6 FTE in the Billingham ISA, 4.8 FTE in the Central ISA, 4.0 FTE in the North ISA and 6.2 FTE in the South ISA. Although the service is provided through an in-house team it could be delivered via alternative means.
34. The service currently serves in excess of 14,000 young people, broken down as 9,600 children of secondary school age, 3600 young people in sixth form or further education, 500 taking part in work-based learning and 600 NEET (not in education, employment or training).



35. In addition to working with young people, the service also works with their parents and carers, schools colleges and work-based learning providers and partner agencies.
36. Section 114 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 places a duty on the Authority to provide services that will encourage, enable or assist effective participation by young persons (aged 13 to 19) in education or training. Section 10 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 places a duty on the Authority to ensure that its functions are exercised so as to promote the effective participation of young people in education or training.
37. Advice, guidance and information services are provided direct at individual and group levels and by signposting to partner organisations. Advice, guidance and information is also distributed through leaflets, books, DVDs and on the internet.
38. The service consults extensively with its users via comments forms, questionnaires, telephone surveys, mystery shopping and its “Young Inspectors” feedback process. It is promoted by the Personal Advisors, through advertising and marketing campaigns including letters, leaflets, posters, events, telephone, text, e-mail and internet and also through its work with schools and other partners.
39. The service contributes to a number of priorities and key performance measures:
- The Local Area Agreement includes a target for young people (aged 16 – 18) not in education, employment or training. This is also a national indicator. SBC’s 2008/2009 NEET target for the three month average (Nov – Jan) was 9.2%. In terms of actuals, SBC’s NEET average increased from 9.5% in 2007/2008 to 10.5% in 2008/2009. This represents a 10.6% increase against a national 0.4% decrease in NEET.
  - Its work links to the Children and Young People’s Plan and the Every Child Matters agenda in particular the, “Enjoy and Achieve”, “Make a Positive Contribution” and “Achieve Economic Wellbeing” themes.

**40. Financial Information**

	Initial Costs (£)	Time Spent	Cost (£)	Net Cost (£)
<i>Cost Centre 20985 Billingham</i>				
Direct Salaries	107,374	90%	96,637	
Indirect Salaries	1,886	90%	1,698	
Running Costs	13,518	90%	12,166	
Income Grant (area based – pro rata)	(109,558)		(109,558)	
				942
<i>Cost Centre 20986 Central</i>				
Direct Salaries	136,010	90%	122,409	
Indirect Salaries	3,472	90%	3,125	
Running Costs	17,202	90%	15,482	
Income Grant (area based – pro rata)	(140,591)		(140,591)	
				424
<i>Cost Centre 20987 North</i>				
Direct Salaries	107,024	90%	96,322	
Indirect Salaries	2,427	90%	2,185	
Running Costs	15,435	90%	13,892	
Income Grant (area based – pro rata)	(112,398)		(112,398)	
				0

<i>Cost Centre 20988 South</i>			
Direct Salaries	188,735	90%	169,862
Indirect Salaries	4,178	90%	3,760
Running Costs	28,568	90%	25,711
Income Grant (area based – pro rata)	(197,913)		(197,913)
			1,420
<b>Total Net Cost</b>			<b>2,786</b>

### Signposting Services

41. An important aspect of work in the advice and information sector is signposting - giving information or referring customers to other organisations that can help them (as opposed to providing specific advice, information and guidance about a technical subject). The Library Service is a good example of a signposting service. Library staff hold information or know how to access information about all the types of advice and information services covered by this review. The staff do not give advice themselves, they signpost customers to other agencies and make every effort to keep up to date with the variety of organisations offering advice within the borough. Referrals are made to other council services, partner organisations and established advice centres.
42. Signposting is undertaken without comparison or comment to the customer on any particular service. Instead a range of advice services may be suggested through informing what council services are available and what partners or external agencies can provide, including opening times, locations and telephone contact numbers. It is then up to the customer to decide which route they want to take.
43. Research conducted during this baseline stage has revealed an extensive amount of signposting carried out by the 20+ services that initially identified themselves as giving advice and information. This highlights the importance of having a central, easily accessible, comprehensive and up to date information bank to which staff can refer when they need to refer customers on to another part of the Council or another organisation. Such a store does not exist at the moment, some smaller directories are available on the SBC website such as the supporting people directory, homeless directory, the extended schools services directory, the anti-social behaviour directory but they are not easy to find and general staff awareness of these information sources is limited.
44. In many cases staff rely on their personal knowledge of “what’s out there” or tap into colleagues’ knowledge when signposting. This can mean that information given to customers is not always the most reliable or up to date or that referrals are always made to one organisation when in fact there are several options for the customer.

### Contracts and other Arrangements with External Organisations for the Provision of Advice and Information Services

45. The scope of this review includes payments made by the Council to external organisations for providing advice and information. Some of these are payments under contract, others relate to core funding (from the Council’s Voluntary Sector Support Fund) and some are grants.

46. A review of the contracts register and payments made to voluntary sector organisations during 2007/2008, 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 year to date identified 28 possible contracts (or other financial arrangements) relating to advice and information. Eleven of these are with Stockton District Advice and Information Service; four are with Newtown Community Resource Centre; 2 are with Five Lamps and the rest are with different organisations and for different types of advice and information.
47. Many of our contracts with voluntary sector organisations are for a wide range of services, an element of which may involve the organisation giving advice and information. An example is the five new contracts that the Council entered into in April 2009 for delivery of the Employability & Skills for the Communities Fund, at a total estimated annual value of £2.4m – it is estimated that 10% of each contract relates to advice and information giving. In practical terms it would not be possible to isolate the advice and information elements of these contracts for separate investigation as part of this review. A decision was taken (in line with the analysis of internal advice and information services) to concentrate on contracts/grants etc where over 70% of the work undertaken relates to advice and information. This amounted to 9 contracts, 6 of which are with SDAIS.
48. An analysis of all payments made to SDAIS over recent years shows:
- 2007/2008 - £321,288
  - 2008/2009 - £377,801
  - 2009/2010 - £148,205 (April – July 2009 only)
- The main contracts / core funding payments that make up the monies paid to SDAIS for provision of advice and information services are summarised at Appendix 2.

#### *SDAIS Core Funding*

49. The largest payment to SDAIS is not contractual – it relates to core funding through the Voluntary Sector Support Fund. The level of funding for 2009/2010 is £152,679. Funding is based on a service level agreement which includes:
- Outreach advice surgeries in Central Stockton, Billingham, Clarendons, Albany, Ragworth, Thornaby and Norton
  - Deal with a minimum of 16,000 enquiries
  - Deliver a minimum of 600 hours of training to volunteers
  - Recruit and train a minimum of 12 volunteer advisors.
50. The advice and information services provided by SDAIS to the Council's residents are wide ranging and include general help level services covering welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment, community care, consumer advice, tax, family, health and education; specialist help level advice covering welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment and community care; representation of clients at tribunals, court and other formal hearings in welfare benefits, debt, housing and employment matters. Services are provided face-to-face by appointment or drop-in, through a telephone advice line and by letter or e-mail. As well as providing responsive services based on client contacts, SDAIS act proactively by delivering preventative work/training around employment rights and financial/budgeting skills and through its social policy work. The services provided by SDAIS contribute to a number of the Council's key policy priorities including Economic Regeneration, Liveability, Safer Communities, Healthier Communities and Children & Young People.
51. SDAIS' performance against the VSSF service level agreement is monitored on a 6 monthly basis. SDAIS is performing above the standard.

52. The allocation of core funding via the VSSF is being reviewed – currently part of a separate review, consultation and communication exercise agreed by Cabinet on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2009.

#### *SDAIS Youth Advice Service and Early Years Children's Centres Advice Sessions*

53. The Council has a formal contract with SDAIS to provide a Youth Advice (Outreach) Service and Early Years Children's Centres Advice sessions. Although the service has been in existence for a number of years, this, most recent contract was entered into in 2007 and has since been extended on a year-to-year basis, currently due to expire in March 2010. The annual cost is £52,780 funded through a combination of CESC and Connexions funding streams. Although this type of outreach service is not a statutory requirement, the contract does enable the Council to fulfil some of its obligations under the Children Act.

54. The outreach service is delivered from various "young-people friendly" venues across the borough and advice sessions are held at the SDAIS Youth Advice Service, "The Cabin" at Nelson Terrace, Stockton. The service is available by appointment or drop-in. Telephone and e-mail advice, home visits and written advice and information publications are also available. The Cabin was developed as a direct result of feedback from young people visiting the SDAIS Bath Lane office who expressed a wish for a separate venue to meet.

55. The contract specification contains a range of targets, standards and expected outcomes which are monitored on a quarterly basis. These are built around the number of enquiries that are expected to be dealt with and training young people as volunteer advice workers. SDAIS are required to demonstrate engagement and consultation with parents, carers and young people. The service is also expected to contribute to the Every Child Matters key outcomes and support key outcomes and priorities in the Council's Children & Young People's Plan:

- **Achieve Economic Well-being**

- (5.1) Improve the proportion of young people leaving school who access further education, employment or training
- (5.2) Reduce the level of homelessness of young people
- (5.3) Seek to reduce poverty and the impact of poverty on children, young people and their families

- **Cross-cutting priorities**

- (6.1) Improve access to integrated services with a focus on early intervention and support.

56. The service is available to young people aged 25 and under. Detailed records are kept of the numbers and types of enquiries and customer diversity and demographic information. The latest monitoring shows that in the first quarter of 2009/2010 the Cabin saw 374 individual clients (363 of whom were aged 17 – 24) and dealt with 1602 client enquiries on social welfare law. The subject areas generating the most queries were Benefits (632), Debt (328), Housing (287) and employment (160).

#### *Self Advocacy Service*

57. An annual payment of £23,278 funds a part-time worker, employed by SDAIS. The service focuses on developing people with learning disabilities so that they can self-advocate rather than depend on others to advocate for them. Funding is through the Learning Disabilities Development Fund. There is no formal contract in place for this service, however annual business plans have been drawn up which define targets and desired outcomes. There is an intention to produce a formal specification for Self Advocacy Services and seek tenders from potential suppliers, with a view to entering into a contract with the successful supplier to commence in April 2010.

### *Representational Advocacy Service*

58. An annual payment of £34,284 (£10,000 of which is funded by PCT) funds a full-time worker employed by SDAIS to provide an independent advice and casework service for people with health and social care problems. The service links into the health & social care complaints process and occasionally includes mediation services to try to avoid the escalation of complaints. The service is based at Ragworth Neighbourhood Centre. There is no formal contract in place for the service, however targets and desired outcomes have been agreed on a more informal basis. There is an intention to produce a formal specification for the Representational Advocacy Service and seek tenders from potential suppliers, with a view to entering into a contract with the successful supplier to commence in April 2010.

### *SDAIS - Eastern Area Partnership – Debt Advice and Support*

59. The Council also makes payment by way of grant to SDAIS for the provision of debt advice and support. SDAIS are leading a partnership between themselves, the Credit Union and Five Lamps – these organisations coming together to fill a gap in current service provision within the Eastern Area Partnership boundaries. They provide easily accessible specialist debt resource and integrate immediate debt crisis management with longer term training and support to develop people's financial skills. The service contributes towards the Financial Inclusion and Stronger Communities themes within the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy. Although it was set up to address the Eastern Area Partnership's priority of financial inclusion, it is also supported by the Borough's InterAgency Financial Inclusion Forum and has been recognised as best practice by the Regional DWP Financial Inclusion Champions initiative

60. This is a time limited project, funded by the Eastern Area Partnership from their allocation of the Communities Fund. The partnership's funding allocation was approved by Cabinet to allow local people to commission interventions to deliver against locally identified priorities. The grant to SDAIS for 2009/2010 is £14,999.

61. The project started on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008 and runs to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010. Services provided include:

- Crisis management by an experienced debt caseworker. The full-time caseworker is based in a community venue within the Eastern Area Partnership boundaries and receives referrals from partner and other agencies;
- Individual action plans to manage personal debt;
- Information and training to improve financial capability, such as running a bank account, saving, energy efficiency, debt prevention;
- Information and access to training from the Five Lamps to improve employability;
- Information and access to the service of the Credit Union and Five Lamps to promote financial capability and access to savings accounts.

62. Between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2008 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009, sixty one clients attended debt advice sessions at South Thornaby Community Centre and twenty six new credit union accounts were set up.

## *Housing Advice*

63. The review of payments made to SDAIS highlighted a contract for independent housing advice, which is funded until 31.03.10, when funding expires. The contract was originally funded through NRF but is currently funded through Supporting People funding, overseen by Housing Options at a cost of £42,000 per annum. This is the only source of free independent housing advice for residents that are not entitled to Legal Aid and once the funding expires at the end of 2009/2010 there will be a significant gap in advice and information services for residents at a time of increasing demand due to the economic downturn which is causing marked increases in homelessness in the borough. Timely interventions of the kind delivered under this contract are key to preventing homelessness situations.
64. In addition to contracts with SDAIS, the review has identified 3 contracts that the Council has with other organisations where in excess of 70% of the contract relates to advice and information giving. These are contracts with:
- Tees Credit Union (the “New You” Programme). A partnership to provide an access point for residents of the Western Area Partnership to services that will assist them into financial inclusion, improve their health and enable them to access job opportunities. This is a time limited project funded by the Western Area Partnership from their allocation of the Communities Fund. Payments are by way of grant rather than under a contract. 2009/2010 funding is £18,000.
  - George Hardwick Foundation – for provision of advice and information to carers including benefits and services available to carers, and help and assistance with carers’ assessments. Costs for 2009/2010 are £87,000. Services are delivered on a face-to-face basis at the Stockton Carers’ Centre and North Tees Hospital Offices. There is a statutory duty for the Council to provide carers’ services as per the Carers (Recognition & Services) Act 1995, Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 and the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000. The Council has chosen to commission these statutory services through this contract. The contract is funded through Carers Grant, which is ringfenced. The current contract expires in March 2010.
  - A Way Out – for provision of a Youth Alcohol Service – a targeted community and school based health promotion and alcohol prevention programme involving education, prevention and community development. Funding for this service is split between the Council (contribution of £15,600 per annum) and North Tees PCT LDP (contribution of £30,000 per annum). Funding was originally secured for the 2008-2009 financial year but was extended for a further year. This non-statutory service is delivered through various outreach activities such as detached street work and centre based youth projects. Preventative activities include diversionary activities such as sport, dance and creative art as well as educational (healthy lifestyle) topics. The service is targeted at at-risk young people, aged 18 years and under. Although the service is mainly a proactive one aiming to prevent alcohol misuse, it also operates a screening and alcohol referral service tailored to individual needs. The contract is monitored through quarterly review meetings which currently confirm that A Way Out is achieving the outcomes set within the specification. A Way out communicates closely with other substance misuse advice and information providers to ensure joined up working and try to avoid duplication. The service contributes to the Council’s Children & Young People’s Plan – 1.2 “Be Healthy” (reduce substance misuses) and 3.4 “Enjoy & Achieve” (increase the range of accessible culture/leisure/ sporting activities for children).

Further details of these contracts, including costs are at Appendix 2.

## Service Demand

### *Current/Recent demand*

65. The collection of data relating to the number of customers that have sought advice and information from internal services is patchy, however most services have observed increasing demand due to the effects of the current economic downturn.
66. Calls to Welfare Rights' advice line have been consistent in number over the last three full financial years:
- a. 2006/2007 – 1359
  - b. 2007/2008 – 1304
  - c. 2008/2009 – 1345

However the service is experiencing increased demand during 2009/2010, as a result of the recession and has noted a 25% increase in Advice Line enquiries in the first quarter of the year. Changes in sickness benefit legislation and the impact of personalisation are also expected to generate increased workload in the future. The number of cases that the service can deal with and the scope of work undertaken, is constrained by the available resources ie size of the team, however there is flexibility to shift resources from pro-active, campaign work to re-active work, when demand necessitates.

67. The Children's Centres' Guidance Advisors have noted increasing demand for services over recent months and appointment waiting times are getting longer. This is likely to be due to the effects of the credit crunch, with residents coping with redundancy and/or seeking to change skills or career pathways. However, the impact of the credit crunch has been a reduction in demand for information on childcare places dealt with by the FIS. Changes to Income Support regulations which are affecting benefit payments to lone parents impact on both Children's Centre Guidance Advisors and the FIS and are expected to increase workload in the longer term.
68. Demand for Connexions advice and information services is linked to the quality and quantity of careers education in schools, the amount of education, employment or training opportunities for young people and the number of young people not in education, employment and training. The recession is impacting on demand for services, with demand going up.
69. The results of a National Youth Survey published in June 2009 suggest that young people wanting a professional career feel they are not given the careers advice they need, with nearly two-thirds of the respondents to the survey commissioned by the Panel on Fair Access to the Professions wanting more careers support. In responding to the survey 70% of under 14s said they had had no careers advice and 45% of over 14s said they had had no or very poor/limited advice. These national results contrast sharply with the positive feedback received from Stockton's young people as part of a separate, independent survey (see paras 81, 82 and 83).
70. On 12<sup>th</sup> August 2009, the Audit Commission released a new publication, "When it comes to the crunch ..... how councils are responding to the recession." This publication reports that 94% of the 193 councils that responded to a survey, reported an increased demand for benefits, debt and welfare advice from residents and a further 3% anticipated increased demand for these services. The report suggests that the role of councils will become increasingly important as the recession spreads from businesses into communities. The report gives the example of the London Borough of Lambeth, which has expanded capacity in its advice centres to provide more financial and debt advice to residents and in contrast reports the case of a district council,

struggling to balance its budget, which has introduced a wide-ranging efficiency programme that includes ceasing financial support to a number of voluntary groups including victim support and a women's refuge.

### SDAIS

71. During 2008/2009 SDAIS dealt with 23,365 new enquiries (against an SLA target of 16,000). This represents an 18% increase over the 19,836 new enquiries dealt with during 2007/2008. More specifically SDAIS:

- Helped residents with debt problems totalling £14.3m;
- Dealt with 8,189 new debt enquiries;
- Secured welfare benefits entitlement of £1.2m for local residents;
- Dealt with 7,631 new welfare benefits enquiries;
- Dealt with 1,647 new employment enquiries;
- Dealt with 2,516 new housing enquiries.

72. During the last year there have been significant increases in demand for SDAIS advice and information services and demand for services is greater than the current available supply. Most recent monitoring shows:

<b>SDAIS – approaches by enquiry type</b>	<b>Q1 2008/2009</b>	<b>Q1 2009/2010</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Welfare Benefits	1450	2327	+60%
Debt	1748	3198	+83%
Employment	297	517	+74%
Housing	340	680	+100%
Family	128	200	+56%
All Enquiries	4589	7956	+73%

73. SDAIS report a waiting list of over 30 people seeking an appointment with a specialist debt caseworker. The current waiting time is 2 – 3 weeks. Monitoring of incoming to telephone calls to SDAIS Advice Line show an average of 12,867 incoming calls per month.

### *General Demand*

74. More generally it might be expected that demand for advice and information is linked to the number of "vulnerable" people living in the borough. The Office of Fair Trading (1998) published a list of seven vulnerable consumer groups, defining these as people who, "..... may have greater difficulty than others in obtaining or assimilating the information needed to make decisions about which goods and services, if any, to buy (or) ....may be exposed to a greater loss of welfare than other consumers as a result of buying inappropriate goods or services." The seven vulnerable groups are:

- a. Children and Young People
- b. Older people
- c. Unemployed
- d. Those with a limiting longstanding illness
- e. Low income households
- f. Ethnic minority population
- g. Those without any formal qualifications

The OFT paper goes on to suggest that only 30.3% of the total population of Great Britain featured in none of the seven identified groups.



75. JSU data relating to the number of SBC residents falling into one (or more) of these groups shows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>No in SBC</u>	<u>% in SBC</u>	<u>% in Great Britain</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Young people under 5 yrs	11,500	6%		Source ONS mid-year estimates 2008
Young people aged 5 – 15 years	25,700	13.4%		
14 – 19 age range (ie agenda for young people)	15,800	8.3%		
Retirement – 74 yrs	21,100	11.0%		
Aged 75+	13,300	6.9%		
Ethnic minority population	8,939	4.7%		Source ONS based on 2007 population
Unemployed (claimant count)	6,208	5.2%	4.1%	April 2009 Source Job Seekers Allowance claimants (ONS)
Low income households - % working age receiving key benefits		15.8%	14.0%	Source DWP Aug 08
% Working age with no qualifications		11.1%	13.1%	Source – Annual Population Survey 2007
			<u>In England &amp; Wales</u>	
Population with limiting long term illness		19.9%	17.9%	Includes residents in care and medical establishments. Source 2001 Census
Working age with limiting long term illness		14.7%	12.8%	
People needing care		8.9%	9.1%	% of total population in receipt of attendance allowance / disability living allowance. Source DSS/IDeA/JSU May 2008
People incapable of work		8.1%	6.9%	% of working-age population in receipt of Incapacity Benefit / Severe Disability Allowance. Source DSS/IDeA/JSU May 2008.

#### *Future Demand*

76. The population of Stockton and the age profile of the local population is predicted to change significantly over the next twelve years (source JSU):

	<u>2006</u>	<u>2009</u>	<u>2011</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>Increase over next 12 years</u>
Population	189,100	191,500	198,800	202,900	209,800	9.6%
Age 0-15 yrs	37,600	37,200	37,300	38,400	40,000	7.5%
Age 16 – retirement	118,600	119,800	121,800	123,000	123,100	2.8%

Retirement ie 74+	33,000	34,400	36,900	41,500	46,500	35.2%
Households	79,000	79,100	84,000	89,000	93,000	17.6%

77. The Legal Services Commission (LSC) developed a predictive needs model designed to identify the likely need for different categories of legal services by people who are eligible for legal aid. The data is available at Ward level, however the model was developed in 2004 and therefore presents predictions based on SBC's old ward boundaries. The model does not count the number of individuals in need of help – it describes the percentage of residents that at any one point in time may have a problem.

78. The table below provides a summary of the results from running this model using Stockton-on-Tees data. It should be noted that these represent the minimum percentages of the population, because they do not include residents that are not entitled to legal aid. The table has been ordered according to 2004 IMD (index of multiple deprivation) rankings, with the most deprived wards first. The table confirms that the highest needs are concentrated in the most deprived wards.

Ward 2004	IMD2004	Population aged 18-90	Probability of any family problem (1)	Probability of any welfare problem (2)	Probability of any money problem (3)
Portrack and Tilery	26	4061	6%	14%	24%
Parkfield	107	4322	5%	14%	24%
Newtown	179	4002	6%	12%	23%
Hardwick	252	3197	8%	11%	22%
Blue Hall	370	4456	6%	11%	22%
Charltons	480	3486	6%	10%	22%
Victoria	551	4255	5%	12%	23%
Roseworth	628	3873	6%	10%	22%
Stainsby	630	4129	6%	11%	22%
Grange	656	2885	5%	10%	21%
Mile House	677	4240	5%	10%	21%
Mandale	729	4715	6%	10%	21%
St. Aidan's	928	3626	5%	10%	21%
Village	1171	4027	4%	9%	21%
St. Cuthbert's	1514	4326	5%	10%	22%
Norton	1565	5571	5%	10%	21%
Grangefield	1750	3735	4%	10%	21%
Marsh House	2853	5967	5%	9%	21%
Elm Tree	3148	3710	4%	8%	20%
Whitton	4024	3524	6%	9%	20%
Bishopsgarth	4182	5922	4%	9%	21%
Fairfield	4405	3806	4%	8%	20%
Wolviston	4409	2681	5%	10%	22%
Preston	4637	2341	4%	9%	21%
Glebe	5014	5026	3%	7%	19%
Northfield	5142	3702	3%	7%	18%
Yarm	5850	6709	4%	9%	21%
Hartburn	5997	5262	3%	7%	19%
Egglescliffe	6378	6213	4%	8%	20%
Ingleby Barwick	6894	11777	5%	10%	22%

- (1) The proportion of people expected to report any family problem (divorce, ancillary to relationship breakdown, domestic violence, children)
- (2) The proportion of people expected to report any welfare benefits, rented housing, homelessness, discrimination, or employment problems
- (3) The proportion of people expected to report any consumer, money/debt, employment or neighbour problems.

79. Whilst Welfare Rights and Benefit maximisation services clearly have a significant impact on the lives of individual clients, increased benefit take-up also has a positive impact on the local economy and community because much of the additional benefit income is spent on local goods and services. Research conducted by Strathclyde University found that for every £1 million raised through benefit take-up amongst the lowest income households, 38 full time equivalent jobs were created and sustained (McNicoll (1992) "Extended Scottish Input – Output Systems", Strathclyde University & Scottish Enterprise).

80. Local Authorities have an incentive to promote benefit take-up as there is a relationship between the numbers of people in receipt of certain benefits and the expected demand for services and grant allocation reflects the numbers in receipt of benefit. The current system for allocating grant takes account of the number of benefit claimants in local authority areas from several years ago (generally over a period between 2002 and 2006). The system of linking grant to number of benefits claimants is currently being reviewed with an aspiration that more up to date benefit figures will be used in the future. Increasing take-up also can also reduce pressure on other public services, for example education, health and social services.

### Customer Perceptions

81. Customer feedback can provide valuable insight into the accessibility and quality of advice and information services across the borough. The internal services that form part of this review have all completed the Council's Customer First Programme and have therefore conducted customer consultation exercises or gathered feedback through the corporate commendations, comments and complaints process. In addition a Viewpoint survey has been undertaken to establish residents' views about advice and information provided directly by the Council and by external advice agencies in particular:

- What type of advice and information residents have sought;
- How easy it was to access that advice and information
- How residents would prefer to access and receive advice and information.

### *Feedback gathered by SBC Services*

82. Users of FIS are regularly consulted about the service and their views are used to shape future service delivery. A freepost evaluation form is issued for all childcare/brokerage contacts. Face-to-face feedback is sought when staff attend outreach sessions. Some of the improvements introduced as a result of customer feedback include information packs tailored to specific needs, rather than generic; the introduction of a rolling programme to check that details of childcare providers held are still up to date and the introduction of a "matching" service rather than sending lists of potential providers for the customer to contact.

83. In a mystery shopping exercise carried out for DCSF Stockton's FIS was scored at 73% for call handling (ie speed of answer, greeting, call details, politeness etc) against a national average of 69%. The service has also had positive feedback from Customer First mystery shopping exercises and the results from consultation with clients show:

- 62% rating the service as Excellent

- 30% rating the service as Very Good
- 6% rating the service as Good
- 2% rating the service as Satisfactory

84. In April 2008 “Information by Design” conducted an independent survey of Connexion’s clients to examine levels of customer satisfaction amongst young people who had been in contact with the service. Awareness of Connexions was high amongst the 559 young people that responded to the survey, and 74% of them reported having talked to a Personal Advisor or someone else from Connexions. Jobs and careers was the main topic discussed with 96% finding the advice they were given on jobs or careers very or fairly useful.

85. Over half (55%) of young people who had contact with Connexions reported that the service had “definitely” helped them to decide what they want to do in the future. The proportion of young people who said that contact with Connexions had helped increase their confidence was high at around 70% and 20% said they had done something they hadn’t thought of doing before as a result of their contact with the service.

86. A very high proportion of respondents (97%) who expressed a view thought that “Connexions has a lot to offer young people” and 88% thought that the staff of connexions were very friendly.

87. The Children’s Centres Guidance Advisors have not conducted any customer satisfaction surveys recently, however there are numerous commendations and positive comments on record from parents stating how the service has made a difference to their lives. There is also evidence that the service listens and acts on feedback from clients, for example by introducing free crèche places to make it easier for parents to access guidance sessions.

88. SDAIS also gathers feedback from its clients. Results of the 2008/2009 client satisfaction survey showed:

General casework

- Satisfied/very satisfied with the service 99%

Specialist casework

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
• Good/satisfactory	98%	2%
• Information explained	100%	
• Diligent and concerned staff	98%	2%
• Competent case management	98%	2%
• Approachable / friendly staff	98%	2%
• Kept informed of case progress	98%	2%

*Viewpoint Survey*

89. Two hundred and seventy six residents responded to the Viewpoint Survey (a response rate of 23%). Of these 123 had sought, or sought and received advice and information services of the type considered within this review and of these:

- 66 people (54%) had sought advice and information on Adult Social Care matters (eg for people with a disability, for elderly people, independent living);
- 51 people (41%) had sought advice and information on Education (eg early years education, free school meals, school admissions, grants);
- 50 people (41%) had sought advice and information on Housing matters (eg homelessness, rented housing, grants and adaptations);
- 45 people (37%) had sought advice and information on Benefits;

- e. 34 people (28%) had sought advice and information on employment / training;
- f. 25 people (20%) had sought money/debt advice;
- g. 23 people (19%) had sought advice and information on children and family matters (eg social care, child care);
- h. 2 people (2%) had sought advice and information for asylum seekers.

90. In terms of the organisations that residents had approached for advice and information, the Council was the most popular for all categories, except money/debt advice, where the preference was to seek advice from an external agency:

<i>Who did you approach for advice and information on .....</i>	<u>SBC</u>	<u>External Advice Agency</u>	<u>Both</u>
Adult Social Care	<b>48 (73%)</b>	8 (12%)	10 (15%)
Education	<b>46 (90%)</b>	1 (2%)	4 (8%)
Housing	<b>41 (82%)</b>	3 (6%)	6 (12%)
Benefits	<b>23 (51%)</b>	10 (22%)	12 (27%)
Employment/training	<b>16 (47%)</b>	14 (41%)	4 (12%)
Money/debt advice	9 (36%)	<b>12 (48%)</b>	4 (16%)
Children & Families	<b>13 (56%)</b>	6 (26%)	4 (17%)
Asylum seekers	1 (50%)	0	1 (50%)

91. Residents that had accessed or tried to access advice and information services from the Council were asked how easy or difficult they had found it:

<i>How easy did you find it to access advice and information from SBC?</i>	<u>Very Easy</u>	<u>Quite Easy</u>	<u>Neither Easy nor Difficult</u>	<u>Quite Difficult</u>	<u>Very Difficult</u>
Adult Social Care	19%	39%	19%	10%	13%
Education	17%	60%	8%	9%	6%
Housing	20%	36%	29%	9%	7%
Benefits	17%	39%	20%	12%	12%
Employment/training	22%	35%	26%	9%	9%
Money/debt advice	5%	50%	40%	5%	0%
Children & Families	23%	41%	18%	9%	9%
Asylum seekers	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%

92. Residents that had accessed or tried to access advice and information services from external advice agencies were asked how easy or difficult they had found it:

<i>How easy did you find it to access advice and information from an external advice agency?</i>	<u>Very Easy</u>	<u>Quite Easy</u>	<u>Neither Easy nor Difficult</u>	<u>Quite Difficult</u>	<u>Very Difficult</u>
Adult Social Care	22%	39%	29%	5%	5%
Education	38%	31%	19%	6%	6%
Housing	29%	42%	17%	8%	4%
Benefits	24%	38%	17%	10%	10%
Employment/training	30%	30%	35%	5%	0%
Money/debt advice	21%	46%	21%	4%	8%
Children & Families	27%	45%	18%	0%	9%
Asylum seekers	50%	0%	50%	0%	0%

93. Residents were asked how they would prefer to access advice and information services and, excluding those that said they didn't think they would need to access such services, the responses were:

<i>How would you prefer to access the following types of advice and information?</i>	<u>Telephone</u>	<u>Internet</u>	<u>Face-to-face meeting with an Advisor</u>	<u>Don't know</u>
Adult Social Care	29%	21%	<b>49%</b>	1%
Education	28%	33%	<b>39%</b>	1%
Housing	25%	23%	<b>50%</b>	2%
Benefits	24%	22%	<b>53%</b>	2%
Employment/training	15%	34%	<b>49%</b>	1%
Money/debt advice	16%	26%	<b>56%</b>	1%
Children & Families	25%	33%	<b>42%</b>	1%
Asylum Seekers	14%	27%	<b>51%</b>	8%

Most residents would prefer to have a face-to-face meeting with an advisor if they wanted information and/or advice about any of the subjects.

94. In terms of age there was a difference in the preferred way that residents would like to access advice and information, with residents aged between 25 – 34 stating that they would prefer access to services via the Internet.

95. Residents were asked how they had become aware of the advice and information services that they accessed or tried to access:

- 50 people said that they had telephoned the Council;
- 37 said they had heard through word of mouth;
- 34 said they had read about the services in Stockton News
- 27 said they had looked at the Council's website;
- 23 had used the service before;
- 21 were referred by another organisation;
- 16 had read about the service in the local press;

96. Residents were asked to express their general views about the quality of the Council's advice and information services (where they had used them)

- Overall satisfaction with advice and information received:
  - Satisfied 75%
  - Dissatisfied 12%
  - *Net Satisfaction* 63%
- Satisfied with waiting time for an appointment:
  - Satisfied 76%
  - Dissatisfied 3%
  - *Net Satisfaction* 73%
- Satisfied with the service received:
  - Satisfied 70%
  - Dissatisfied 11%
  - *Net Satisfaction* 59%
- Were the staff helpful?
  - Helpful 73%
  - Unhelpful 7%
  - *Net* 66%
- Were the staff knowledgeable?
  - Knowledgeable 67%
  - Unknowledgeable 12%
  - *Net* 55%

- Were the staff efficient?
  - Efficient 65%
  - Inefficient 12%
  - Net 53%
- Were the staff able to deal with your enquiry?
  - Able 64%
  - Unable 12%
  - Net 52%

### External Service Providers

97. The role of external advice agencies, particularly the voluntary sector, in the provision of advice and information across the borough is important and needs to be taken into account in this review, for example to identify where there might be duplication. The Council has direct contractual relationships for the supply of advice and information with some of these organisations, and supports others through grants (eg Voluntary Sector Support Fund) and other financial assistance (such as discretionary rate relief). In other cases our partners are providing advice and information, or there is no relationship between the Council and the external organisation.

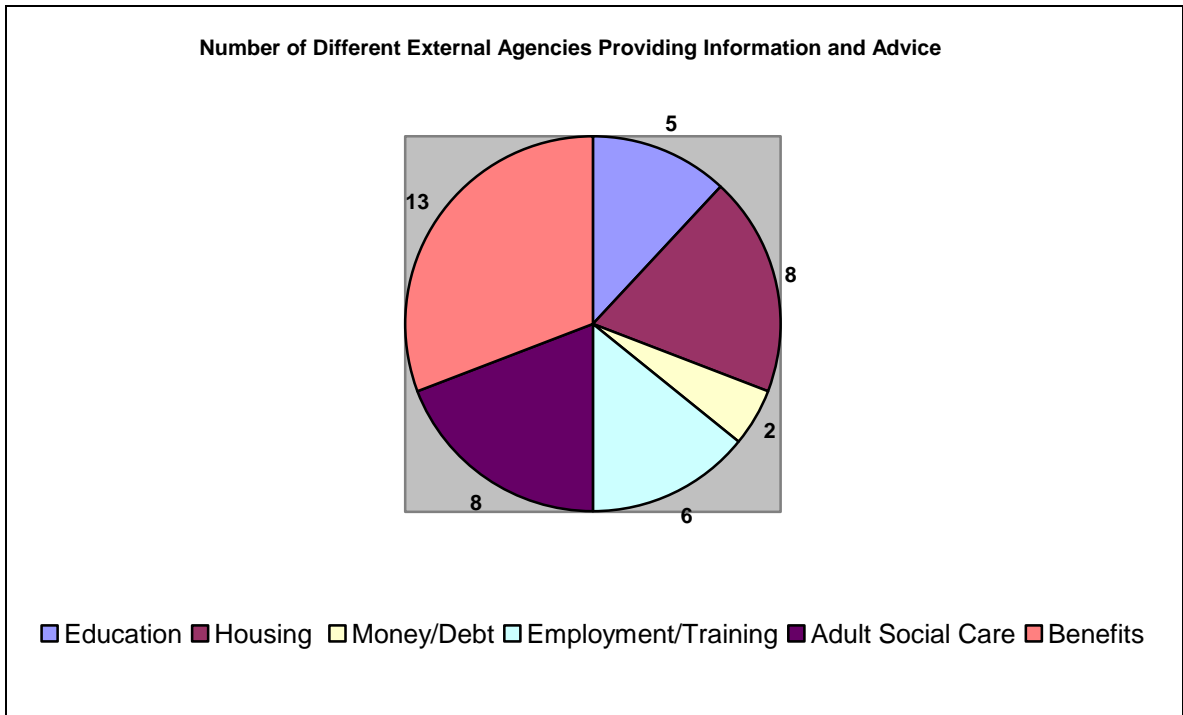
98. It has not been possible to draw up a definitive list of all the providers of advice and information however information has been pulled together from a number of sources.

### Viewpoint Survey

99. Respondents were asked to identify which external agencies they had approached for advice and information. In total 138 respondents answered this question and the table below identifies the different external agencies that were used by respondents for each different type of advice and information.

<b>Type of Information and Advice</b>	<b>External Agencies Providing Information and Advice</b>	
Children and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None identified</li> </ul>	
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet (eg via 'direct.gov.uk')</li> <li>• Local Education providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of Parliament</li> <li>• Student Loan Company</li> <li>• University grants</li> </ul>
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Housing Associations</li> <li>• Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)</li> <li>• Go Warm – Dyson Insulations Ltd</li> <li>• Muscular Dystrophy Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handyman Service (provided by the Council)</li> <li>• Help the Aged</li> <li>• Age Concern</li> <li>• Mortgage companies</li> </ul>
Money/Debt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internet</li> </ul>
Employment/Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)</li> <li>• Connexions</li> <li>• Job Centre Plus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Department of Work and Pensions</li> <li>• NETA Training</li> <li>• Employer</li> </ul>

Adult Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age Concern</li> <li>• Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)</li> <li>• Domiciliary care company</li> <li>• Help the Aged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saga</li> <li>• Hospital</li> <li>• Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)</li> <li>• Stockton Independent Living Centre</li> </ul>
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age Concern</li> <li>• Benefits Agency</li> <li>• Help the Aged</li> <li>• Housing Associations</li> <li>• George Hardwick Foundations</li> <li>• Job Centre Plus</li> <li>• Stockton Independent Living Centre</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)</li> <li>• Doctor</li> <li>• Department for Work and Pensions</li> <li>• Internet (via eg 'entitledto.co.uk')</li> <li>• Stockton Carers Centre</li> <li>• The Pension Service</li> </ul>
(Information and advice for) Asylum Seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None identified</li> </ul>	



100. The chart above shows that residents use a large number of different external agencies for information and advice about benefits than any other type of information/ advice service. The table above identifies that some external agencies are used by residents for more than one type of information advice. These are summarised in the table below.

External Agency/ Provider	Number of different types of Information and Advice Provided	Specific Types of Information and Advice Provided
The Citizens' Advice Bureau (CAB)	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Adult Social Care</li> <li>• Employment/Training</li> <li>• Money/Debt</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>



Age Concern	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Adult Social Care</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>
The Internet	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Money/Debt</li> <li>• Education</li> </ul>
Help the Aged	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>
Stockton Independent Living Centre	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>
Job Centre Plus	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Employment/Training</li> </ul>
Housing Associations	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benefits</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>

### *Catalyst Survey*

101. Catalyst sent a questionnaire out to its members asking for information about the types of advice and information services they supply, the demand for these services and what resources are used to deliver the services. Responses were received from:

- Informnorth – a regional self-development magazine
- SDAIS
- Tees Valley Rural Community Council
- The George Hardwick Foundation
- Tristar Homes.

102. Feedback from these completed questionnaires of relevance to this review includes:

- The George Hardwick Foundation have two dedicated advice and information workers based at their centres in Stockton and North Tees Hospital, one of which deals specifically with cancer patients or patients suffering from other long-term or life threatening illness and their carers (a Macmillan Advice and Information specialist) and the other is provided through SDAIS to provide more general advice and information. The workers provide economic advice such as money advice, debt, benefits and employment and general advice and information about health, well-being and social care. They also offer counselling and bereavement support. Demand for services is high and there is a waiting time of 2-3 weeks for an appointment. Services are provided Monday – Friday (9am – 3.30pm in Stockton and 9am – 6pm at North Tees hospital).
- As well as providing advice and information on a range of housing issues Tristar Homes employs a money advice officer to assist tenants with money management, money advice and benefit entitlement issues. The money advice officer deals with 4 appointments per day.
- Information about SDAIS is included elsewhere in the report (paras 71 – 73 & 88) . SDAIS have also provided details of their 2008/2009 funding estimates, which show:

<u>Source of Funding</u>	<u>2008/2009 (£)</u>
SBC Core Funding	152,000
SBC/PCT	57,000
SBC Sure Start/Childrens Trust	52,000
SBC (re housing advice)	42,000
Northern Rock / NOMS	47,000
Legal Services Commission*	324,000
Big Lottery Fund	60,000
Lloyds TSB	57,000
Barclaycard	51,000
Carers' Centre	13,000
NACAB/various	50,000 (approx)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£905,000</b>

Legal Services Commission funding is based on a fixed fee cost per case and is dependent on the number of cases completed in the year, but there is a maximum number of cases that can be opened and closed and paid for in the year, for example debt cases are limited to 784 cases per year which are paid for on completion. If only 700 cases were opened and closed SDAIS would only be paid for the 700 (@ £200 per case), but if 800 cases were opened and closed, payment would only be made for 784 of them.

- SDAIS operate advice services from 16 locations throughout the borough. Opening times vary depending on the venue, but generally are Monday – Friday, Saturday morning and Thursday evening. The service comprises of approximately 50 paid staff (including part-time and admin staff) and 30 volunteers.
- Tees Valley Rural Community Council are based at Riverside Park, Middlesbrough and offer advice and information services to client groups that live and work in rural areas of the Tees Valley. No specific activity levels were provided in respect of their Stockton borough customer base. The organisation employs 0.5 FTE to provide advice and information services or signpost clients to other organisations for the appropriate help. Main funding is from DEFRA, Big lottery Fund and Capacity Builders (a non-departmental public body (NDPB) which aims to build the capacity of the third sector).

### *Community Legal Advice*

103. Community Legal Advice is an organisation that provides confidential and independent advice for residents of England and Wales on a range of legal issues through its website [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk) or its national telephone helpline. Initial advice and signposting is available to anyone free of charge, detailed advice and/or representation for individual cases *is only available to residents that qualify for legal aid*. The range of advice and information services provided by Community Legal Advice is wide:

- Debt, money and tax (debt, credit cards, mortgage)
- Benefits & tax credits (
- Employment (redundancy, unfair dismissal, discrimination)
- Housing & homelessness (renting, repossession, disrepair)
- Family & Personal (Children, divorce, domestic abuse)
- Education & training (bullying, exclusion, attendance)
- Immigration & nationality
- Health & social care
- Consumer affairs
- Police & crime

104. Legal aid is available for many types of civil legal problems. Whether a resident will qualify for legal aid depends on their “financial eligibility” (household disposable income and capital), the type of legal problem, whether there is a reasonable chance of winning the case and whether it is worth the time and money needed to win. Generally, someone will not be financially eligible if their gross income is more than £2,425 per month or they have more than £8,000 disposable capital.

#### *Job Centre Plus & the Pension Service*

105. Job Centre Plus offer advice and information about benefits that are available to working age people and how to apply for them, in line with their service objectives which include, “To ensure people receiving working age benefits ...are offered high quality help and support appropriate to their needs,” and “To pay people of working age the correct amount of benefit to which they are entitled at the right time and throughout the period of their claim.” Information is available by telephone, face-to-face and on-line.
106. Similarly, the Pension Service provide advice and information about state and private pensions and general support available from the Government for retired people (eg Winter Fuel Payments). Queries can be made by telephone, e-mail, letter or fax. The Pension Service is proactive in ensuring that people receive the benefits to which they are entitled – the DWP Business Plan for 2009-2010 sets out a national target to increase take-up through at least 255,000 successful new Pension Credit applications.
107. On-line information and services about a range of subjects and services from Government and Local Government can be found on the Directgov website.

#### *The National Debtline*

108. The National Debtline (part of the Money Advice Trust, a registered charity) provides free, confidential and independent advice on how to deal with debt problems. The service is available electronically (e-mail or website) and by telephone

### CONCLUSIONS

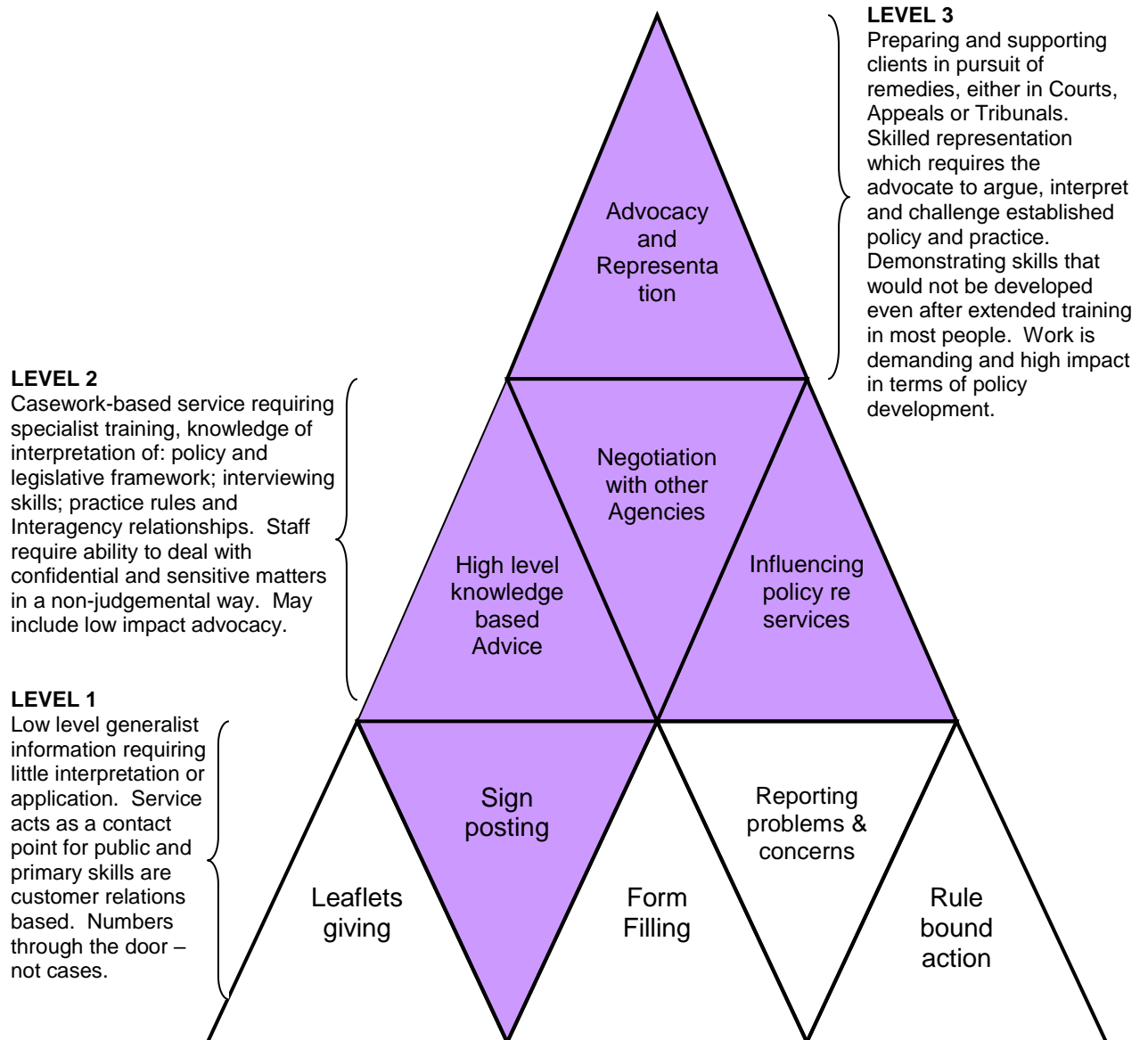
109. The current economic climate is resulting in an increase in demand for advice and information services, which is proving difficult to meet. At a time when the Council needs to support vulnerable households and seek to minimise the impact of the recession on local communities, it may not be appropriate to seek to make efficiencies that will reduce service provision, even though a number of the advice and information services provided by the Council are non-statutory. This review should therefore seek for ways of making better use of the existing resources that are expended on providing advice and information and how to join existing services together most effectively, whilst recognising that the higher than usual demand driven by the recession should reduce in the medium to longer term.
110. Legal Services Commission (LSC) funding is available in cases, such as welfare benefits and debt advice, where the person seeking advice and information is entitled to legal aid. The Council could do more to encourage residents to approach organisations such as Community Legal Advice that would be able to help these residents through LSC funding. This could then free up Council resources to support those residents that don't qualify for legal aid. Promoting the Community Legal Advice telephone service might also ease the demand for SDAIS services.

111. The table at appendix 4 summarises the different organisations and the types of advice and information they provide. There is considerable duplication of service provision around welfare benefits and maximisation of benefit income, with services available from the Council's own Welfare Rights Service (and to a lesser degree other internal advice and information providers), SDAIS, Community Legal Services and the Carers' Centre. There are also many sources of debt advice, but these are external to the Council. The Council is not under any statutory obligation to provide either of these services.
112. There is currently no comparator information for the cost of providing welfare benefits services in-house as opposed to commissioning them from the voluntary sector. Benchmark data is difficult to collect as the models of service delivery are quite different ie some centralised office and home visits (eg Welfare Rights) and others provided from a network of points across the borough (SDAIS) – this meets customer demand for face-to-face services. Also the time taken to deal with cases can vary widely depending upon the complexity of the case making it difficult to assess a "cost per case" amount.
113. There is a need for a comprehensive store of information about the availability of advice and information services across the borough to assist those who are regularly required to signpost residents to an appropriate service. A web-based directory of services, accessible to both residents and staff would be welcome.
114. Approximately one third of SDAIS annual income comes from the Council. In addition to core funding there are a number of other "arrangements" for services provided by SDAIS, funded from different budgets. Many of these are yearly agreements sometimes due to funding uncertainties. The services provided under these arrangements are non-statutory. These short term arrangements lead to uncertainties for SDAIS staff (resulting in staff turnover). There may be economies for the Council and more funding certainty for any external organisation delivering the services, if all these different arrangements were pulled together to be tendered and managed as a single contract.

### **OPTIONS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION**

115. Consolidation of all the advice and information services that the Council commissions from external organisations into a single specification that could then be tendered. (Will require an understanding of all the different funding streams). This would include the advice and information services that are currently included in the Core Funding Agreements that accompany allocations of grant from the Voluntary Sector Support Fund.
116. Discussions with Community Legal Services to understand their capacity for taking on additional cases and how the Council could best promote the national telephone advice line.
117. Further investigation to understand the reasons for the duplication of welfare benefits advice between the Council's Welfare Rights service and external advice and information agencies and whether this could be eliminated via an alternative service delivery model.
118. Consider a model for future delivery that ensures more joined up working between all the different parties involved in advice and information giving across the borough.

**Hierarchy of Advice & Information – Appendix 1**



**APPENDIX 2**

**CONTRACTS/PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITH STOCKTON DISTRICT ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICE**

<u>Description</u>	<u>Start Date</u>	<u>End Date</u>	<u>Option to Extend</u>	<u>Estimated Annual Value</u>	<u>Estimated Total Contract Value</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Core funding via Voluntary Sector Support Fund	Not a contract – distribution of VSSF is determined annually by the Council			2009 – 2010 core funding is £152,679		Non-statutory service
Youth Advice (Outreach) and Early Years Children’s Centres Advice Sessions	01.04.09	31.03.10	Currently arranging annual extensions to a contract that was implemented in 2007	£52,780	£98,780	Non statutory service available to young people aged 25 and under
Self Advocacy Services	No formal contract at the moment – annual arrangement. Existing arrangement due to expire 31.03.10			£23,278	N/A	Tender exercise to be undertaken before 31.03.10, with a view to entering into a formal contract with successful supplier wef 01.04.10. Funded through Learning Disabilities Development Fund
Representational Advocacy Service	No formal contract at the moment – annual arrangement. Existing arrangement due to expire 31.03.10			£34,284 (of which £10,000 funded by PCT)	N/A	Tender exercise to be undertaken before 31.03.10, with a view to entering into a formal contract with successful supplier wef 01.04.10.

Grant funded by Eastern Area Partnership for full time caseworker to provide debt advice and support	01.12.08	31.03.10	No	£14,999	£14,999	Non-statutory service. Time limited project funded from area partnership's allocation of the Communities Fund (SDAIS are lead partner with Credit Union & Five Lamps) Actual costs of the project are £23,079 of which £14,999 is funded thro' grant and shortfall met by third sector
Housing (homelessness) advice	01.04.09	31.03.10	No	£42,000	£42,000	Originally funded through NRF – current mainstream funding expires 31.03.10
TOTAL				£310,020		

**CONTRACTS/PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITH OTHER ORGANISAIONS FOR PROVISION OF ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICES**

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Start Date</u>	<u>End Date</u>	<u>Option to Extend</u>	<u>Estimated Annual Value</u>	<u>Estimated Total Contract Value</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Tees Credit Union (lead partner with SDAIS & Five Lamps)	Grant funded by Western Area Partnership for services that will assist residents into financial inclusion, improve their health and enable them to access job opportunities	01.03.09	31.03.10	12 months subject to performance and P'ship board agreement	£18,000	£18,000	Non-statutory service. Time limited project funded from area partnership's allocation of the Communities Fund. Actual costs of the project are £26,672 of which £18,000 is funded thro'

							grant and shortfall met by third sector.
George Hardwick Foundation	Advice and information for carers (ie benefits, services available, assistance with carers' assessments)	01.04.07	01.03.10		£87,000	£157,000	Statutory service. Funded through carers' grant (ringfenced)
A Way Out	Information, advice and guidance on alcohol issues to Young People in targeted schools and communities	01.04.08	31.03.10	Currently operating on a 1 year extension	£45,600	£84,916	Non statutory Funded £30,000 per annum by North Tees PCT LDP and £15,600 per annum by SBC
TOTAL					£150,600		



**Appendix 3 COST OF INTERNAL ADVICE AND INFORMATION SERVICES - SUMMARY**

<b>Cost Centre</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Direct Salaries £</b>	<b>Indirect Salaries £</b>	<b>Running Costs £</b>	<b>Total Expenditure £</b>	<b>Income £</b>	<b>Net Expenditure £</b>
20279	Childrens Centre IAG	46,287	997	13,913	61,196	60,345	851
20899	Children & Families Info Service	73,549	3,652	16,574	93,774	84,991	8,783
20985	ISA Billingham – Connexions	96,637	1,698	12,166	110,500	109,558	942
20986	ISA Central – Connexions	122,409	3,125	15,482	141,015	140,591	424
20987	ISA North – Connexions	96,322	2,185	13,892	112,398	112,398	0
20988	ISA South – Connexions	169,862	3,760	25,711	199,333	197,913	1,420
30200	Welfare Rights	217,222	3,136	18,438	238,795	0	238,795
	<b>Total</b>	<b>822,286</b>	<b>18,552</b>	<b>116,175</b>	<b>957,013</b>	<b>705,797</b>	<b>251,216</b>

## Organisations and the types of advice and information they provide

<b>ADVICE &amp; INFORMATION PROVIDER</b>	<b>THEME</b>						
	<b>Children's Services</b>	<b>Housing (rented homelessness, grants, adaptations)</b>	<b>Economic - Money advice &amp; debt advice</b>	<b>Economic - Welfare benefits Benefit maximisation</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Training</b>	<b>Health, Well-being &amp; Social Care</b>
<b><u>Internal SBC</u></b>							
Welfare Rights				√			
IAG Workers					√ (for parents)	√ (for parents)	
Family Information Service	√			√ (minimal for parents)			
Connexions					√ (for young people)	√ (for young people)	√ (for young people)
Client Financial Services				√ (minimal)			
Benefits Service				√ (minimal)			
<b><u>External Organisations</u></b>							
SDAIS (both as independent organisation and through contracts with SBC)		√	√	√	√ (employment rights)		√
Job Centre Plus				√	√	√	
Pensions Service				√			
Tees Credit Union			√				
George Hardwick Foundation				√ (for carers)			√ (for carers)
A Way Out							√ (for young people)
Tristar Homes		√	√ (for its tenants)				
Community Legal Advice	√	√	√	√	√ (employment rights)		√
The National Debtline			√				