

## **EIT REVIEW – ADVICE & INFORMATION**

### **EVALUATION OF OPTIONS**

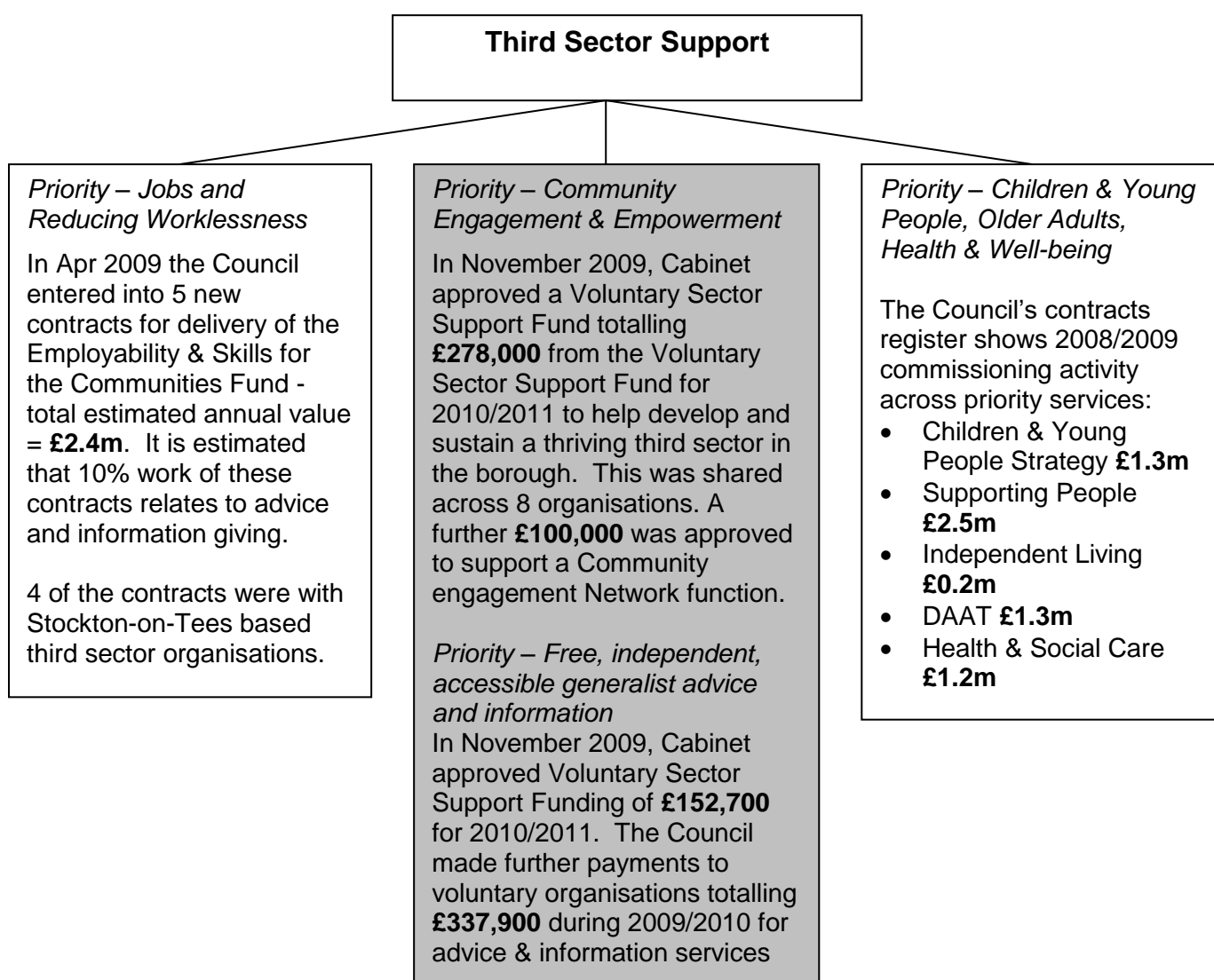
#### **Introduction**

1. 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.
2. The review includes advice and information services that are provided directly by Council officers and by external advice agencies (such as Stockton District Advice & 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.
3. The objectives of the review are to ensure that those who need advice and information, both now and in the future, have access to suitable services and that 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.
4. It was important that the range of services included in the review be clearly defined, in order to avoid scope drift, duplication with other reviews and ensure that the project could be completed within the time constraints. This review has therefore focussed on those services that provide more “personal” types of advice and information at a higher level than the basic, “what day is my bin emptied?”, “how can I pay my Council Tax?” type queries. An initial high-level review identified 24 SBC services that provide advice and information falling into these categories. This number was far too great to analyse each service in detail. 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 & Guidance) workers in the Children’s Centres
  - Families Information Service
  - Connexions Personal Advisers.

#### **Baseline Work**

5. Detailed baseline information was gathered for each of the above services, examining the type of advice and information given, workload, resources employed (staffing and financial), locations of service provision and customer perceptions.
6. During the baseline phase, the importance of signposting was 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.

7. With regard to arrangements between the Council and external agencies that provide advice and information on our behalf, research in the baselining phase revealed an extensive amount of advice and information being provided by external agencies and the voluntary sector across a wide range of service specific themes much of which relates to specific advice and information. In 2008-2009, the Council invested approximately £11m in commissioning activity from the third sector (this figure includes national, sub-regional and local third sector organisations), with approximately £2.4m targeted at skills/jobs/reducing worklessness and another £7m towards health and social care. The Council (through community empowerment initiatives) is also supporting the voluntary sector to provide more general advice and information for example relating to financial inclusion, welfare benefits, debt etc and this type of advice has been the focus of this EIT review. A decision was taken to concentrate on contracts and grants etc where over 70% of the work undertaken by the outside organisation relates to general advice and information. This amounted to 10 “contracts” with an annual value of £490,600 in 2009/2010 (see Appendix 1). Seven of these are with Stockton District Advice and Information Service (SDAIS), with an annual value of £340,000 - mainly one year arrangements, funded from a variety of sources. The diagram below illustrates the Council’s commissioning activities with the third sector, the shaded section being the focus of this EIT review.



8. The above diagram also illustrates the links between this EIT review and the Voluntary Sector Support Fund (VSSF) Review that was considered by Cabinet on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2009. The VSSF review highlighted the need for the fund to be targeted at a strategic approach to helping to develop and sustain a thriving third sector that is well placed to access commissioning opportunities and external grant funding, rather than being used to support service delivery, as some of the funding had been used in the past. Cabinet agreed that the same level of funding to support the giving of general advice and information via SDAIS (£152,700) be retained for 2010/2011 pending the outcome of the EIT review.
9. Other baseline work included:
  - A review of service demand;
  - A review of customer feedback;
  - A Viewpoint survey 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 ;
  - Looking at advice and information services provided by external organisations to identify if there is any duplication.

#### Initial Conclusions arising from the Baseline Exercise

10. The current economic climate is resulting in an increased demand for advice and information services that 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, at this time, to seek to make efficiencies that will reduce service provision, even though a number of 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 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.
11. 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 the Community Legal Advice national telephone helpline 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 demand for SDAIS services.
12. There is duplication of service provision around welfare benefits and maximisation of benefit income across the borough, 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.

13. 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. Benchmarking is difficult, as the models of service delivery are quite different i.e. some centralised (e.g. 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.
14. 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 required to signpost residents to an appropriate service. A web-based directory of services, accessible to both residents and staff would be welcome.
15. Approximately one third of SDAIS funding comes from the Council and from different Council budgets. Many of the payments to SDAIS are based on yearly agreements, sometimes due to funding uncertainties. 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

16. As a result of the baseline work, four options were drawn up for further investigation in the second phase of the review and the remainder of this report describes the analysis of each of these options and makes recommendations for the future
17. The four options investigated were:
  - 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.
  - Enter into discussion with A4e, the organisation that operates the Community Legal Advice Service on behalf of the Legal Services Commission, 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 co-ordination and joined up working between all the different parties involved in advice and information giving across the borough.

## **Options Appraisal**

*Option 1 - Consolidation of the advice and information services that the Council commissions from external organisations into a single specification that could be tendered.*

18. The review has identified 10 contracts (or similar arrangements) where the Council is paying voluntary sector organisations to give advice and information and where the advice and information giving represents more than 70% of the scope of the contract. These are summarised in the table at Appendix 1 and total annual expenditure of £490,600 in 2009/2010. This funding ensures that SBC residents can access independent, free advice and information services (of the type provided by SDAIS), even if they do not qualify for Legal Aid funding.
19. It is recommended that the £152,700 awarded to SDAIS for 2010/2011 relating to the direct delivery of advice and information services be assigned to be used to deliver specified key advice and information services that support the Council's priorities around financial inclusion.
20. The Council has a formal contract with SDAIS to provide a Youth Advice (Outreach) Service and Early Years Children's Centres Advice sessions. 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. 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. This type of outreach service is not a statutory requirement, however the contract does enable the Council to fulfil some of its obligations under the Children Act. It is proposed that these services be added to the specification for advice and information services described in paragraph (19) above and the funding currently used to support this specific service be added to the overall pot to pay for the contract.
21. The Council makes an annual payment of £23,278 to SDAIS to fund a part-time worker to provide a self advocacy service. The service focuses on developing people with learning disabilities so that they can self-advocate rather than depend on others to advocate for them. The payment is funded through the Adult Strategy team budget. Annual business plans have been drawn up which define targets and desired outcomes. It is proposed that self advocacy services be added to the specification for advice and information services described in paragraph (19) above and the funding currently used to support this specific service be added to the overall pot to pay for the contract.
22. In 2009/2010 the Council has paid £34,298 (£10,000 of which is funded by the PCT) to fund a worker employed by SDAIS to provide an independent advice and casework service for people with health and social care problems – a representational advocacy service. 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. Targets and desired outcomes have been agreed. It is proposed that representational advocacy services be added to the specification for advice and information services described in paragraph (19) above and the funding currently used to support this specific service be added to the overall pot to pay for the contract. The available funding amounts to £14,773 (the service is reporting an overspend for 2009/2010).

23. The Council pays a grant to SDAIS on behalf of the Eastern Area Partnership to fund a full-time caseworker to provide debt advice and support (cost in 2009/2010 = £14,999). This could not fall within the scope of an SBC tendering exercise as the Eastern Area Partnership Board determines how their grant should be spent to meet local priorities.
24. The Council has two contracts with SDAIS for the provision of free independent housing advice accessible to all residents regardless of their eligibility for legal aid funding. One, amounting to £42,000 in 2009/2010 is for generalist housing advice, expires on 31.03.10 and will not be renewed. The other relates to a specific mortgage repossession rescue service for any owner-occupier that is in fear of losing their home. Funding for 2009/2010 (£30,000) was provided by CLG and pays for an advice worker, based at Stratford House for 30 hours per week. Funding was for one year only and expires on 31.03.10. Given the current economic climate, there has been a high demand for this service and temporary funding has been secured from existing budgets to fund the service for a further two years and extend it to 37 hours per week. Although there is no on-going source of funding, it would seem reasonable to include a requirement for independent housing advice and information within the service specification described at (19) above, albeit at lower volumes in the longer term as the recession comes to an end. Timely interventions of the kind delivered under this contract are key to preventing homelessness situations.
25. The Council pays a grant to Tees Credit Union (lead partner with SDAIS and Five Lamps) on behalf of the Western Area Partnership for advice and information services that will assist residents into financial inclusion, improve their health and enable access to job opportunities (cost in 2009/2010 £18,000). This could not fall within the scope of an SBC tendering exercise as the Western Area Partnership Board determines how their grant should be spent to meet local priorities.
26. The Council has a contract with the 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 and these statutory services are commissioned through this contract. The contract is funded through Carers Grant, which is ringfenced. The current contract expires in March 2010. It would seem reasonable to include the generalist welfare benefits advice and information provided through this contract within the contract described in (19) above and include the funding in the overall pot.
27. Finally, the Council makes a payment to Away Out for provision of a Youth Alcohol Service (estimated cost in 2009/2010 = £45,600, of which £30,000 is funded by the PCT). It is not appropriate for this to be included in an overall

advice and information contract as the work is more specialist in nature and this contract comes to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 to be subsumed into a new substance misuse services contract that is about to be tendered.

28. Pooling together the resources that currently feed into the different contracts, gives a total pot of £330,500 per annum to fund a single contract for specified key advice and information services that support the Council's Community Strategy objectives, sourced as follows:

<u>Current Contract</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Annual Amount</u>
Voluntary Sector Support	VSSF	£152,700
Youth Advice (Outreach) Service and Early Years Children's Centres Advice sessions	Children & Young People Operational	£52,780
Self Advocacy Service	Adult Strategy Team	£23,278
Representational Advocacy Service	Adult Strategy Team	£14,773
Advice and Information to Carers	Carers' Grant (ringfenced)	£87,000
<b>Total</b>		<b>£330,531</b>

29. By consolidating the contracts and associated budgets and introducing a new contract covering a three-year period with option to extend for a further two years, there would be greater certainty for the provider and it would be possible to include some of those services such as housing/mortgage repossession advice where there is no longer funding provision in service specific budgets. It would be reasonable to expect economies of scale. The tendering exercise could place a cap on the amount the Council is prepared to pay for these services, say at £310,000 per annum, which would result in savings of £61,500 over a three-year contract, however it is suggested that the specification be worded in a way that gives the Council the option of re-investing these savings to expand the range of advice and information services provided under the contract, as the impact of the current economic climate becomes clearer. The proposed arrangements will balance potential savings with the service improvements that could arise from having a single contract, for example the inclusion of housing/homelessness advice, which under current circumstances cannot be funded beyond 2011/2012 and also provides flexibility given the uncertainties of requirements arising as a result of the recession. Efficiencies will also be realised in terms of tendering and contract management as we move from five contracts to one.
30. TUPE may apply where providers have appointed staff to undertake the work associated with existing contracts. The implications of this would be discussed with SDAIS and George Hardwick Foundation as the tender documentation and specification are being prepared.
31. **Recommendation** - that the five separate contracts described in paragraph (28) above and their associated budgets be pooled and the Council develop a new specification for advice and information services that meet residents' needs and the Council's strategic priorities, particularly around financial inclusion and also takes account of the impact of the current economic climate. That the Council

embark on a tendering exercise for a three-year contract, with option to extend for a further two-years, with a contract start date of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2011.

*Option 2 - Enter into discussion with the Community Legal Advice Service to understand their capacity for taking on additional cases and how the Council could best promote the national telephone advice line.*

32. A4e operate the Community Legal Advice service, a national free, confidential and independent advice service, funded by legal aid for residents of England and Wales. The service is independently assessed as operating to the Legal Services Commission specialist Quality Mark (SQM). The service is provided through a website [www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk) and a confidential telephone helpline 0845 345 4 345. 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

33. 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 £2,657 per month or they have more than £8,000 disposable capital.

34. A4e have provided statistics showing the take-up of their services from SBC residents:

<u>Area of Law</u>	<u>New cases</u>		
	<b>2007/2008</b>	<b>2008/2009</b>	<b>2009/2010</b> (9 months data scaled up to 12)
Housing	51	70	59
Debt	109	132	152
Welfare Benefits	20	66	119
Employment	83	93	100
Education	0	4	9
Family	54	77	105
<b>Total</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>544</b>

35. Whilst the volume of calls from SBC residents to the national helpline is increasing, A4e have confirmed that they have the capacity to take on more cases. They have been given additional LSC funding that has enabled a 25%



capacity increase and extended opening hours from April 2009 to include Saturday mornings and weekday evenings.

36. We already promote the telephone helpline service at the Thornaby multi-service centre; an advertisement plays on the TV information screen that plays to customers that are seated in the waiting area. Also staff have had some training about the services offered by the helpline so that, where appropriate, they can suggest the service to customers. This is seen a way of relieving pressure on SDAIS where customers can wait a number of days for an appointment to see an adviser face-to-face, and recognises that some customers prefer telephone interaction rather than face-to-face. However, more could be done to promote the service, for example leaflets and posters in other reception areas and libraries and awareness raising across more staff that come into contact with residents that might need the type of services provided through the Community Legal Advice Service.
37. **Recommendation** - That the availability of free, independent legal advice and information via the Community Legal Advice telephone helpline and website for people who are entitled to Legal Aid be promoted more widely across the Council by displaying posters and leaflets and raising staff awareness of the service so that more signposting takes place.

*Option 3 - 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.*

38. SBC Welfare Rights Service do not operate a time recording system, however estimates of the time the team spends on the different types of welfare benefits work undertaken are:
- Operating the welfare benefits advice line (ie responding to basic enquiries, taking details of incoming initial enquiries and referrals and making outgoing calls (usually a half-hour slot) in response to initial enquiries, which involves giving advice, carrying out basic benefit checks and follow-up work) – **29%**
  - Preparing cases and providing representation at Tribunals – **35%**
  - Take-up campaigns – **17%**
  - BME Surgeries – **10%** (in effect this represents 70% of the work of one member of the team)
  - Other work (such as talks/training/information sharing/attending meetings) – **9%**
39. Most of the clients dealt with by Welfare Rights are referred to the service from another source, rather than a direct approach from the client. For example during 2008/2009:

Internal Referrals from colleagues in SBC social care	415
Other internal SBC referrals	98
Referred from Housing Benefits	54
Referred from Tristar Homes	48
Referred from DWP	20
Previous client	262
Self referred in response to a Welfare Rights campaign	221
Recommended by friend/family	124

Not known  
TOTAL

68  
1310

40. Incoming referrals /enquiries come in through the advice line, which acts as a filter. Approximately 90% go on to receive advice and information that answers the query (through a telephone callback, e-mail or face-to-face appointment) or are taken on as a case. The remainder are signposted to another organisation to receive the appropriate help.
41. Clients are signposted to SDAIS where:
- They are asking for help with filling in forms;
  - They have already approached SDAIS for help with their case (except occasionally where the case has reached tribunal stage and the client needs representation)
42. Where it is likely that a client that qualifies for legal aid will incur costs eg in association with obtaining medical reports they will be signposted to a local legal aid solicitor that deals with welfare benefits (note - there is only one in the Stockton area).
43. In terms of the nature of the work, welfare rights services provided by SDAIS are generally the same as those provided by the Council's Welfare Rights service:
- Both take on casework;
  - Both represent clients at Tribunals (and up to Commissioner level in a small number of cases). SDAIS attended tribunals on behalf of 126 clients during 2008/2009 and Welfare Rights attended 45 tribunal hearings;
  - SBC Welfare Rights delivers BME outreach surgeries in Thornaby and Central Stockton, SDAIS delivers outreach advice and information services in Billingham, Clarendes, Albany, Ragworth, Thornaby and Norton.
  - Both carry out take-up campaigns.

Although the type of work is the same, the organisations have different sets of clients and are careful not to act for the same client. As indicated above, Welfare Rights clients tend to be referrals from other SBC services whereas SDAIS clients generally self-refer through awareness of the work of the CAB service.

44. There are also some additional aspects of Welfare Rights work that are more closely aligned to SBC services and agendas. These differentiate the SBC Welfare Rights and SDAIS (and the other local voluntary sector) services and there are several examples: SBC Welfare Rights service acts as a reference point for advice and referrals from Social Care staff and undertakes specific work linked to projects within CESC such as LD resettlement and extra care. The Welfare Rights team is recognised as a useful training and information resource, has links with other parts of the Council such as Housing Benefits and Tristar Homes that offer potential for data-matching and targeted take-up work and can be used to work to key local authority agendas such as financial inclusion and economic wellbeing. On the other hand, SDAIS has an effective local network of access points, is a well-known source of advice and information (as evidenced by the results of the Viewpoint survey that was conducted as part of the baseline

phase of this review), and holds the Legal Services Commission Specialist Quality Mark.

45. Capacity is an issue that was highlighted during the baseline phase of the review, with both SBC Welfare Rights and SDAIS reporting increase demand over the last year:

<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%

SDAIS were reporting waiting lists of over 30 people seeking an appointment with a specialist debt caseworker and waiting times of between 2-3 weeks.

In the same period, Welfare Rights reported a 25% increase in the number of enquiries to their Advice Line.

Whilst we have a situation where the same type of work is being carried out by Welfare Rights, SDAIS and to a lesser extent some other organisations, in the current economic climate there are issues balancing demand for services with supply which needs to be taken into account in the recommendations arising from the review whilst recognising that the higher than usual demand driven by the recession should reduce in the medium to longer term.

46. As part of the review, research was conducted into welfare rights delivery models within other local authority areas. The information was gathered mainly through a survey to members of NAWRA (National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers), follow-up telephone calls, and internet research. The main findings from this research were:

- The most common model is the same as that currently in existence at SBC ie conventional in-house welfare rights team operating in addition to the local voluntary organisations, particularly the CAB. There are varying degrees of joint working between in-house welfare rights and the local CAB, examples being the development of referral processes for particular types of cases, joint working, cross-training/sharing costs of training and co-ordination of take-up campaigns and other joint projects. There is no evidence of any joint working between the SBC welfare rights service and local voluntary sector, which means missed opportunities for efficiencies. This is a potential area for improvement.
- There are examples of in-house welfare rights teams forming partnerships and networks that have attracted external funding for example the Middlesbrough Advice Partnership enables agencies to work together to make best use of advice resources and jointly bid for external funding. Darlington Borough Council's Welfare Rights team partnered with Age Concern Darlington and Darlington's CAB to attract Big Lottery funding to improve access to advice for Darlington residents. Rochdale made a successful bid for a Big Lottery grant to develop a liaison network involving the local CAB and Law Centre.

- Some Welfare Rights services deliver advice surgeries in GP practices, reflecting good practice in delivering advice in convenient locations where demand for welfare benefits type advice and information is high. This arrangement attracts PCT funding towards the cost of the service.
- Some Welfare Rights services hold the Specialist Quality Mark quality assurance standard from the Legal Services Commission together with a Legal Services Commission contract, which enable them to secure LSC funding for the clients they represent that are entitled to Legal Aid. Darlington BC are the only local Welfare Rights service to hold the standard. The LSC funding received equates to approximately one post. Whilst this arrangement delivers a regular flow of income for the service (based on the number of cases dealt with), the audit process for the Specialist Quality Mark and criteria that have to be met to secure funding are rigorous. In addition, the LSC funding model changes in April 2010 and to secure a contract after this date, organisations will be required to provide legal advice and information across a range of categories meaning for example, that a council welfare rights service would have to partner with organisations that give housing and debt advice.
- Some Welfare Rights services (Nottinghamshire and Colchester) provide “second tier” services only ie they offer a consultancy service for social work clients. It is a service that supports organisations to support their clients. Those that provide this service occasionally have direct support with the clients where the case is particularly complex.
- Glasgow recently conducted a review of how advice and information services were delivered and have created a “split” of work – where the in-house Welfare Rights service focuses on social services clients with Council welfare rights staff and money advisers being based in one of five Community Health Care Partnerships along with social work and health staff to provide an holistic service for clients of social work. The voluntary sector is commissioned via a lead agency to deal with non-social work clients. A central welfare rights team also deals with welfare benefit appeals for any Glasgow resident.
- The set up in Hull follows a different model where the in-house team works as part of the “Hull Community Legal Advice Centre” (CLAC). Hull City Council ended all the separate contracts it had with external advice providers and re-commissioned a larger advice service, joint funded with the Legal Services Commission. The in-house welfare rights team are still employed by the Council, but work within the CLAC where customers can access the full range of integrated advice and information services at a single location.

47. The research identified a number of examples where in-house welfare rights services are able to achieve financial benefits for the Council by bringing money in, as well as securing additional income for residents as described in the following paragraphs.

#### *Independent Living Fund (ILF)*

48. The Independent Living fund is a national resource funded by central government, dedicated to delivering financial support to disabled people and advancing standards of independent living, enabling disabled people to choose to live in the community, rather than in residential care. It provides discretionary cash payments directly to disabled people so that they can purchase care from an agency or pay the wages of a privately employed personal assistant.

49. Identifying potential claimants for ILF and encouraging/assisting them to apply can result in positive outcomes for the individual and for the Council (which would not have to provide residential care). Within the SBC Welfare Rights Team there is one temporary post, "Independent Living Fund Officer", that was introduced some years ago to support the ILF process, however take-up of ILF within the borough is below average when compared to other authorities in the region:

	<u>No of residents in receipt of ILF</u>	<u>In receipt of ILF / 10,000 population</u>	<u>No of DLA (HC) recipients (required to qualify for ILF)</u>	<u>In receipt of ILF as %age of DLA (HC) recipients</u>
England Average		3.1		5.3%
Stockton BC	68	3.8	1260	5.6%
Darlington BC	62	6.2	720	8.6%
Hartlepool BC	55	6.2	690	7.8%
Middlesbrough BC	141	9.8	1260	11.0%
Redcar & Cleveland BC	46	3.3	1050	4.5%

Source ILF website "User Profile Analysis at 30.09.09" accessed 09.12.09

50. The above performance is not being attributed solely to the activities of the Welfare Rights Team. There were some delays in the ILF Officer taking up the new duties and there are also legal implications that have to be considered in that clients cannot be made to take up an offer of ILF. It is accepted that increasing ILF take-up should be the responsibility of all those that act on behalf of clients, ie including social workers, not just an individual within the welfare rights team. A proposal is being considered as part of the Council's Personalisation project to transfer the temporary ILF officer from welfare rights to become part of the temporary specialist support team that is being created under the Personalisation agenda to support the integration of self-directed support into the social work teams. This review supports such an approach and recommends the transfer take place as soon as possible.

51. **Recommendation** - That the temporary post of ILFO transfer from the in-house welfare rights team to the temporary Personalisation Support Team, followed by a further review to consider the optimum place within the organisation for this role, when the work of the Personalisation support team concludes.

#### *Linking in-house Welfare Rights and Client Financial Services teams*

52. A number of Councils have identified that close working between their in-house Welfare Rights service and Client Financial Services team (that carries out social services financial assessments) can create financial benefits for both clients and the Council. Effective communication and sharing of information can help to ensure that clients are getting the maximum benefits to which they are entitled. The additional income generated for clients can then contribute towards the costs of personal care, and is viewed as bringing money into the Council. Several authorities, for example Middlesbrough and Salford have integrated their welfare rights and client financial services teams into a single unit. At Walsall Council the in-house Welfare Rights team carry out home visits to complete financial assessments and as part of the process ensure that the household's income is fully maximised through checking entitlement to welfare benefits and other complimentary services.

53. In Stockton a different approach has been adopted and the two teams are in different locations and managed by different heads of service. This was a deliberate decision to avoid potential conflicts of interest though the scale of conflict has diminished recently in the light of changes to the way that financial assessment are carried out and the approach of the Pensions Service. It is also suggested that the fears of a conflict of interest could be overcome though the development of a protocol based around a priority to seek to maximise the client's income first, then consider charging arrangements and/or a procedure involving use of an advocate if a potential conflict arises. .
54. **Recommendation** – That, subject to consultation with staff and unions, an organisation restructure be undertaken within CESC to merge the rest of the in-house Welfare Rights team with the CESC Client Financial Services team and that the focus of the Welfare Rights team within this new structure be on (but not exclusively):
- supporting social care clients to maximise their income and access other services that might enhance their wellbeing (thereby bringing in additional income for the Council)
  - undertaking specific projects linked to other Council services and key Council agendas, particularly how to make use of internal information and customer insight to target campaign work
  - acting as a reference point for advice and referrals from Social Care staff
  - co-ordinating Advice and Information provision across the borough
  - developing referral protocols with the external provider selected to deliver the contract for advice and information services recommended at paragraph 31 in an attempt to cut down some of the task duplication and enable a more specialist approach to certain tasks (such as representation at Tribunals)

That the service enter into discussions with the PCT to seek to draw in funding by delivering advice sessions at GP practices, similar to models adopted by other local authorities.

*Option 4 - A model for future delivery that ensures more co-ordination and joined up working between all the different parties involved in advice and information giving across the borough.*

55. Before arrangements can be put in place to co-ordinate the activities of all the different parties involved in advice and information giving across the borough, a piece of work needs to be done to actually establish what activities are going on "out there". There are numerous different types of organisations that provide advice and information of the kind being considered by the review:
- The Council;
  - Voluntary Sector;
  - Government Departments (such as Job Centre Plus);
  - Private Companies (such as the firms of Solicitors that provide welfare benefits and housing advice under the Legal Aid Scheme).
56. As this review has progressed the need for a comprehensive database of providers of advice and information has become evident, both in terms of enhancing the ability of our staff to signpost residents to organisations that can

help them and in order to improve the co-ordination of advice and information activities across the borough.

### *Signposting*

57. 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). Staff do not have to give advice themselves, but they do need to hold information and know how to access information about the types of advice and information covered by this review in order to be able to signpost customers to other agencies. Referrals can be made to other council services, partner organisations and established advice centres.
58. 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.
59. Research conducted during the baseline stage revealed the 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 Families Information Service directory, homeless directory, the extended schools services directory, the anti-social behaviour directory but many of these are not easy to find and general staff awareness of these information sources is limited.
60. 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.
61. **Recommendation** – that the Web Development Team, part of the new Communications Team develop a specification and work with Xentrall ICT to create a directory of Advice and Information providers across the borough.
62. The directory would be web-based with comprehensive search facilities. Each organisation that has an entry in the directory would be responsible for maintaining their entry and keeping it up to date. The directory would be accessed via the SBC website and would therefore be available both to staff and for residents that would like to self-serve. Catalyst has offered to promote this idea and seek initial expressions of interest from third sector organisations that would like to appear in the directory.
63. **Recommendation** - that Customer Services and the Library Service promote the availability of the new directory and become points of contact for customers seeking sources of advice and information in face-to-face situations and over the telephone.

### *Co-ordination*

64. In 2000, the Community Legal Services Partnership CLSP was launched, “to create a network of quality providers of legal services, supported by co-ordinated funding that delivers services to local communities according to an understanding of local needs.” This included a network of advice and information providers from all the different sectors described in paragraph 56 above, co-ordinated by the Legal Services Commission. For several years, until the LSC support ended, the network met quarterly and enabled members to obtain information about national and local developments in their field, and work in partnership to improve the quality of advice and information services in the borough.
65. The demise of the CLSP left a gap and missed opportunities to develop joint campaigns and joint training events share plans, knowledge and expertise, avoid duplications and work in partnership to develop advice and information services that meet resident’s needs in the most efficient and effective way. The review has identified that improvements could be made for SBC residents if there was better planning, co-ordination of and partnership between the different providers of advice and information services.
66. Many authorities (see paragraph 46 above) have set up new networks, with similar objectives to those of the CLSP and some have been successful in securing Big Lottery grants to support their work. Big Lottery grants are available to support targeting and take-up campaigns around increasing the number of people that access advice and information, rather than directly funding advisers and caseworkers.
67. If a new advice providers’ network were to be created, the Council would have to lead the initiative, given the range of different organisations that would need to be involved. There would also be a position for Catalyst in its role as support and representation for third-sector organisations in the Borough.
68. **Recommendation** – That an advice providers’ network be created, with responsibility for setting up and leading this network sitting within the restructured Welfare Rights Team recommended at paragraph (54) above.
69. **Recommendation** – The newly formed advice providers network explore options of bidding for Big Lottery grant to support the activities of the network.



**APPENDIX 1****SBC CONTRACTS/PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR FOR 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>
Stockton District Advice & Information Service (SDAIS)	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
SDAIS	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
SDAIS	Self Advocacy Services	Annual arrangement. Existing arrangement due to expire 31.03.10			£23,278	N/A	Statutory service funded through Learning Disabilities Development Fund. Arrangement to continue for a further year through 2010/2011
SDAIS	Representational Advocacy Service	Annual arrangement. Existing arrangement due to expire 31.03.10			£24,298 (plus £10,000 funded by PCT)	N/A	Statutory service funded through Adult Strategy Team budget. Arrangement to continue for a further year through 2010/2011

<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>
SDAIS	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
SDAIS	Housing advice	01.04.09	31.03.10	No	£42,000	£42,000	Originally funded through NRF – current mainstream funding expires 31.03.10 and contract will end.
SDAIS	Mortgage repossession rescue service	01.04.09	31.03.10	Yes provided funding available	£30,000	£30,000	1 year government funding to help homeowners (regardless of their income) at risk of losing their home. Response to problems caused by the recession. Alternative (internal) source of funding identified to pay for the service to be extended for up to 2 more years.

<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					£490,634		