

West Dunbartonshire Advice Partnership Strategy May 2011

Blake Stevenson Review of Advice Services

Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** We recommend that all three advice agencies involved in this review (IRC, WDCAB, WRMAS) explore ways in which they could work more closely together in partnership as part of some kind of 'West Dunbartonshire Advice Network'. At a meeting at West Dunbartonshire CPP on 2 August 2010, representative of all three agencies agreed to begin discussions to explore the principle of closer partnership working. We make some suggestions and recommendations for closer partnership working in the remainder of this chapter.

**Recommendation 2:** We recommend that the three advice agencies in consultation with the main funders develop a strategy for a collaborative approach to delivering advice services in West Dunbartonshire. All three agencies should be involved in the development of this strategy, which should identify communities where need for advice is greatest (taking into account the findings of our need analysis in Chapter 3), identify which services are needed and how, where and by whom these should be delivered. The other recommendations we make in this chapter explore these issues in detail; and the strategy that the agencies develop should address these recommendations.

**Recommendation 3:** We recommend that West Dunbartonshire Council and the CPP appoint a facilitator to help the three agencies develop the strategy referred to in recommendation 2. This facilitator could be an individual from the Council or CPP or from an external agency.

**Recommendation 4:** We recommend that, as part of the strategic development process, consideration is given to how best to involve other providers in the area, such as Y-Sort-It, Carers of West Dunbartonshire and Dalmuir Credit Union, plus potentially other advice providers such as those with a focus on employability.

**Recommendation 5:** We are aware that the advice agencies already undertake some preventative work but recommend that the strategy addresses how further financial education work can be implemented.

**Recommendation 6:** We suggest that the strategy development process considers the provision of training for frontline staff outwith advice agencies to increase their ability to offer basic advice to their clients and their awareness of when and how to refer/signpost clients to advice agencies.

**Recommendation 7:** When developing a strategy for advice services in West Dunbartonshire, the advice agencies must consider which services are needed and which agency(ies) are best placed to provide those services based on their different capacities and strengths. We anticipate that the role of the facilitator will be particularly important at this stage.

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**Recommendation 8:** We recommend that, as part of the new strategic approach, the three agencies introduce a consistent performance management and monitoring process, perhaps using a system similar to CAIS, which is used by local authority and voluntary sector advice providers in Glasgow and North Ayrshire. As part of this, the agencies might consider introducing a shared referral form and agreeing what demographic information is to be collected about each client the agencies work with, as well as introducing consistent approaches to measuring financial gains and soft outcomes. This will allow the agencies to provide robust evidence of the outcomes they achieve and the value of the service, which is particularly important as different public and voluntary sector services compete for reduced levels of funding.

**Recommendation 9:** We recommend that the three agencies agree to follow consistent quality assurance processes, possibly using the Public Service Improvement Framework as a basis. This would ensure consistency in service standards across the three agencies.

**Recommendation 10:** We recommend that IRC and WDCAB, along with WRMAS, consider gaining accreditation under the Scottish National Standards for Advice and Information Providers scheme. We understand that the Scottish Government is currently offering to conduct the audits required to gain accreditation for free.

**Recommendation 11:** We recommend that the three advice agencies consider ways in which they could develop a shared or standardised approach to training. This might involve, for example, sharing expertise among the three agencies through shared in-house training, or hiring external trainers to deliver training to all three agencies at the one time, thereby offering economies of scale.

**Recommendation 12:** We recommend that the agencies review the ways in which they currently offer their services to clients to assess whether there are more efficient ways in which to provide the services and, as part of this review, consider the increased use of new technology to ensure that advice is delivered in an appropriate and efficient way. In doing this, however, it is important not to duplicate advice services offered on a national basis by initiatives such as Citizens Advice Direct and National Debtline telephone helplines.

**Recommendation 13:** We recommend that the advice agencies explore further opportunities to work with other agencies to provide advice on an outreach basis in locations where people go regularly, such as schools, GP surgeries, Housing Associations and community centres, with a focus on communities of specific need.

**Recommendation 14:** Given the UK government's focus on moving people away from disability-related benefits and into work, we suggest that the advice agencies approach health and employability agencies and partnerships to explore how they could facilitate easier access to advice for their clients.

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**Recommendation 15:** We suggest that the advice agencies consider any opportunities for cross-authority work to provide further efficiencies. For example, South Lanarkshire Council has an agreement with Govan Law Centre in Glasgow to provide legal advice to South Lanarkshire Residents. If there is a need for it, West Dunbartonshire could benefit from a similar arrangement with other advice providers outside the area.

**Recommendation 16:** We recommend that the three advice agencies develop a joint marketing strategy, as part of the overall strategy for advice services in West Dunbartonshire, to ensure that marketing activities are undertaken in a strategic, consistent, effective and efficient way.

**Recommendation 17:** We suggest that the agencies consider introducing a shared brand under which to deliver advice services, while maintaining each agency's distinct nature. It is important not to lose each agency's distinct image, given that some clients prefer accessing organisations that are interdependent from the Council, while others prefer accessing Council services.

**Recommendation 18:** We recommend that the advice agencies submit their proposed strategy for their collaborative approach to delivering advice services to the Council and CPP for their consideration and approval by November 2010. If this is undertaken as part of a negotiated tendering process, after the agencies submit their proposed strategy to the Council and CPP there is likely to be a process of negotiation around possible alterations or additions to the strategy.

**Recommendation 19:** We recommend that the agencies discuss and agree the exact nature of their partnership, guided by the principle that each of the three agencies (plus any others that the existing agencies wish to include in the partnership) would retain their independence and a role in delivering advice, but there would be much closer strategic and operational joint working on issues like quality assurance, training, marketing and performance management than before.