

**Derbyshire County Council
Improvement and Scrutiny Committee
Safe and Sustainable Communities**

**Review of Advice Services in
Derbyshire**

March 2008

**Report of the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee
Working Group**

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Improvement and Scrutiny Committee was asked by Councillor Bob Janes to undertake a review of advice services in Derbyshire. It was agreed by the Committee that this review would be two fold in that it would consider the provision of advice services offered by the County Council through its Welfare Rights team, and secondly, the Review would examine the synergy between advice-giving agencies in the County such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (herein CAB) and other voluntary sector advice centres.

1.2 With regard to the first element of this Review, the working group met with the Welfare Rights Manager and had ongoing consultations with WRS throughout. A great deal of data was collected and examined in order to establish the current role, remit and work programme of the WRS. This data included budget information, service user information and specific information regarding WRS provision in GP practices.

Consultations with other County Councils were undertaken to gather information on similar services run in other Counties. A survey was developed and sent to a random sample of County Councils with the intention of establishing whether these Councils operate a Welfare Rights Service and, if so, how this was structured. This exercise illustrated variances in how, and indeed if, County Councils operate a Welfare Rights Service but it should be noted that only a small number of responses were received during this exercise.

Section 4 below gives more detail on the results of the WRS consultation, together with detailed information on the Review findings in relation to WRS. It is important to note in reading this report, that the conclusions and recommendations regarding the Welfare Rights Service should be viewed as a blueprint for the future of this service *subject to* sufficient management capacity being identified within the remit of the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety.

A number of recommendations were identified for part 1 of this Review; these are:

1. That a new post, Head of Advice Services, should be created in order to fully implement all of the recommendations in this report. This post would have strategic responsibility for advice provision in Derbyshire and would report directly to the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety.

2. On the appointment of a Head of Advice Services, the Welfare Rights Service should be relocated to the Chief Executives Office under the overall management of the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety.

3. That the Welfare Rights Service be subject to an audit, review and potential restructure once it has transferred to Chief Executives

recognizing that management capacity would need to be strengthened, as per recommendation 1, and that significant changes to the service would be required to implement, in full, all of the recommendations in this report.

4. That the WRS structure be reviewed upon transfer to identify potential efficiencies which could then be used to improve the opportunities for implementing the other recommendations contained within this report.

Subject to strengthened management capacity as per the recommendations above:

5. A Derbyshire Advice Strategy should be developed, led by the Head of Advice Services and developed with our partners¹ as per the recommendation of the Best Value Review of WRS, 2002.

6. An advice services directory should be developed, led by the Head of Advice Services, in partnership with all other advice providers in Derbyshire.

7. In undertaking the WRS review, the Head of Advice Services should examine the opportunities for the potential external commissioning of some of the advice services currently provided by WRS.

8. As part of the recommended review into WRS, the Head of Advice Services should examine the opportunities to utilize 'Call Derbyshire' more effectively as a one-stop gateway to a wide-range of advice and information.

1.3 In relation to the second part of the Review the working group agreed a work programme in a number of key areas in order to examine advice service provision thoroughly. First and foremost the Group agreed that a mapping exercise was critical to this Review and therefore advice services were identified and mapped in order to illustrate which areas of Derbyshire were served well by advice services and which areas, if any, had little or no service at all. It was also the intention of this exercise to identify areas of duplication and overlap between advice agencies, if these existed. The mapping of advice services was overlaid against the Indices of Multiple Deprivation in order to identify those areas of Derbyshire which may have the greatest need for advice.

This work highlighted the uneven distribution of advice services across Derbyshire with a greater range of advice services available in the north east of the County. This area of the County does have the highest concentration of areas in the top 10% most deprived but nevertheless the Group noted a significant difference in access to advice services across the County. Some

¹ Partners should include CAB, Unemployed Workers Centre, Chesterfield Law Centre, Connexions, the Library Service and any other agency involved in advice provision across Derbyshire.

areas of duplication were also identified within this exercise; these are outlined at section 3 below.

1.4 The working group held several meetings with representatives of various advice services and also visited some of these services as part of this Review. The information gathered during these meetings has been essential in coming to conclusions about advice services and has fed into the Review process throughout.

1.5 A questionnaire was developed by the working group in order to survey a wide-range of organisations and elected Members who refer clients to advice services. The survey asked for a response to a series of questions which rated advice services across the County. This consultation exercise showed that whilst there are relatively high levels of satisfaction and referrals to both CAB and WRS, there are a number of areas where improvements could be made and duplication minimized. The results of this consultation are detailed in section 4 below.

1.6 As a result of the work detailed above, the working group identified a vision for advice services across Derbyshire which would see advice provision in a range of settings including every GP practice, each Children's Centre and improved access to agencies such as the Chesterfield Law Centre and Unemployed Workers Centre for all residents of Derbyshire. The opportunities to utilize 'Call Derbyshire' as a one-stop gateway to a wide-range of services were acknowledged in the Review, particularly in light of the Putting People First agenda. Call Derbyshire could potentially become the over-arching strategic approach to advice-provision, with the various access points highlighted above (GP surgeries, Children's Centres etc.) operating within a coordinated strategy for advice in Derbyshire. The working group noted that resources are limited and therefore the realization of this vision may not be achievable in the short term; however it does help to set down ambitions and goals to work towards.

The Review found that it would be feasible to extend advice provision in GP practices at relatively small costs through partnership work with Derbyshire County and Tameside and Glossop PCTs, and through cost-savings within the WRS budget (see 4.6). It is worthy of note that high-quality advice does produce cost-savings across a breadth of areas; for example currently it costs over £130,000 to keep a child in care for a year, where access to the right advice, at the right time may prevent a child being taken into care in the first place (i.e. in a domestic violence, eviction or parental criminal justice situation). Advice in relation to benefits will also increase income for some people and this in turn plays a part in regeneration and, in some cases, prevention of crime where an individual may well have turned to acquisitional crime to increase their household income.

1.7 A number of recommendations have been developed by the working group which aim to improve consistency in access to advice across the County, provide better value for money, and ensure that effective partnership working is achieved, these are:

- 1. Consideration should be given to the potential to utilize the library service, including the mobile library, more effectively.**
- 2. Following the transfer of WRS to the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety and strengthened management capacity, DCC and Derbyshire County and Tameside and Glossop PCTS to explore the expansion of GP practice-based advice surgeries, through joint commissioning of the CAB within the Health and Well-Being framework (DoH 2007).**
- 3. Elected members to be given the opportunity to be trained in the 'First Contact' checklist which would enable them to assess the needs of residents, with their permission, for services such as fire safety checks, benefits, and health concerns. This training should be offered to each new Councillor.**
- 4. The Review supports the request that CAYA has made to Central Government for continued and increased funding for the signposting and service.**
- 5. Wherever possible, the commissioning of all advice services should be coordinated to ensure value for money and consistency. DCC to link into the 'Advice Derbyshire' Consortium once it is established.**
- 6. The Derbyshire County Council website should increase information available on advice services and include links to national advice websites.**
- 7. The potential to offer satellite services across Derbyshire from both the Unemployed Workers Centre and the Chesterfield Law Centre should be investigated.**
- 8. A report to be brought to the Sustainable and Safe Communities Committee in six months time to review progress.**

2. Policy Framework and Context

2.1 The role of advice services in improving quality of life and addressing social and health inequalities is recognized in several Government policies and other research/publications. For example, the Government is aiming to halve the number of children in poverty between 1997 and 2010 and poverty will be a key issue in the forthcoming Derbyshire Children and Young People's Plan. Currently, one in three children is living in poverty (CPAG 2007).

The Department of Health published *The Implementation Plan for Reducing Health Inequalities in Infant Mortality* in December 2007 which clearly underlines the need to address child poverty if we are to successfully reduce health inequalities. The LPSA target to reduce by 10%, by 2010, the inequalities in health outcomes is underpinned by an objective to meet the child poverty target to half the number of children in relative low-income households between 1998-99 and 2010-11, by increasing the income in the routine and manual groups. The provision of advice, which is one of the five mandatory services comprising the core services offered at all of our Children's Centres, will help to achieve this aim.

In *Choosing Health: Making Healthier Choices Easier* (DoH 2004), recognition is given to the need to tackle the socio-economic conditions of the UK's most disadvantaged groups if health inequalities across all groups are to be addressed. Research, including studies published by Abbott and Hobby (2002) and Paris and Player (1993), provide evidence of how generic advice in GP surgeries improves the physical and mental health of beneficiaries. This review has seen that the right advice, at the right time, can increase income within our poorest households. These reports are discussed in more detail at 4.6.

The Review also quickly identified that debt is a major issue, both in Derbyshire and at a national level. The discussions held with a wide-range of advice services suggest that this issue is likely to increase over the coming years.

2.2 The Derbyshire County Council Plan identifies 9 strategic goals within the overall vision 'to improve life for local people'. The provision of high-quality advice is a key tool in achieving many of these goals, for example:

- Create an environment where all children can be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing
- Strengthen the local economy and tackle deprivation within the county.
- Improve the health, wellbeing and choices of older people and vulnerable adults, and support them to live independently.
- Improve access and encourage participation in leisure, recreation, information, lifelong learning and culture

The Review notes that the local implementation of various national initiatives will benefit significantly from high-quality, accessible advice. For example, the Children's Trust, Local Area Agreement and Children's Centres are all mechanisms/services intended to improve the quality of life for our residents and, whilst the Review acknowledges that there is no direct reference to advice services within the new national indicator set, we have found that high-quality advice services will undoubtedly have a beneficial impact of achieving a number of these indicators.

DCC have mainstreamed some advice provision through our WRS and funding allocations to domestic violence advice and time-limited funding to agencies such as the Chesterfield Law Centre and the Unemployed Workers Centre.

2.2 Early within this Review process it became clear that there is a significant link between advice and health/wellbeing and as such, the Review considered the recommendations of publications such as the *Commissioning Framework for Health and Well-Being* (DoH, 2007) and the White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (2006). The Commissioning Framework recognizes that the National Health Service, together with its partners, and in particular Local Authorities should:

"keep the focus on people – not just people who are ill...we need to look further than just physical health problems, to promote well-being, which includes social care, work, housing and all the other elements that build a sustainable community"

The relevance of this acknowledgment to this Review of advice services became apparent as most, if not all, of the elements that build a sustainable community are areas in which advice services in Derbyshire provide support, guidance, training and advocacy.

2.3 Partnership working with, and commissioning within, the voluntary sector has also been a key area of consideration during this Review. The Department for Communities and Local Government's White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities* (2006) identifies the need to increase the involvement of, and, where appropriate, commissioning of services to, the voluntary sector as does the recent Audit Commission paper (2007) *Hearts and Minds: Commissioning from the Voluntary Sector*. This paper highlights Central Government's aspiration:

"to develop the voluntary sector's role in delivering public services".

2.4 This Review has therefore considered the outcomes of good advice services and examined how advice is currently administered across Derbyshire. It was identified during the Review that a number of key advice-giving agencies are undertaking excellent work across Derbyshire, with each service having its own particular area of expertise. However, it was also noted that duplication does exist and in order to ensure the most efficient and

equitable service across Derbyshire there is considerable room for improvement in how these services are synchronized.

2.5 The Review found that a number of local advice services were established as a direct result of the problems encountered locally through the closure of the mining industry in North Derbyshire. Whilst the social context has changed significantly over the past 25 years, with new industries and diversification, the need for access to high quality advice is still very apparent. The Review acknowledges that residents encounter a number of issues such as employment problems, disabilities, and lack of access to free legal advice; this is particularly evident in many of our rural areas.

3. Mapping of Advice Services

3.1 In order to examine access to advice across Derbyshire, all advice services were mapped using GIS technology. This exercise demonstrated that Derbyshire has a vast array of advice-providing agencies and considerable variances in access to advice across the County were noted; the north east of the County has by far the greatest number of advice services and outlets, which is perhaps unsurprising given the relative deprivation in this area of the County when compared with the whole of Derbyshire.

3.2 However, we found evidence of need for advice services across the whole County and this issue has led to much discussion during the course of the Review. Resources are a key limiting factor in achieving a more equitable spread of advice across the County. However the Review has identified some areas of duplication which, if addressed, could result in a greater spread of advice services across Derbyshire. Currently, CAB and the Welfare Rights Service operate advice sessions in some GP practices. This has been undertaken through partnership working and has proven to be both a high-demand and successful service in improving access to benefits and a range of other advantages (i.e. the correct advice which has led to an individual successfully protecting his/her right to stay in their own home). However, given the limited resources, the Review concludes that the placement of two agencies within one GP practice is a luxury which can be ill-afforded as many residents have no service within their practice. If, through close partnership working, *one* agency was identified to work across a greater range of practices, the access to advice services would be significantly improved without any need for additional resources. This issue is discussed in detail in 4.6

3.3 A small version of the map produced during this exercise is attached as Appendix 1, however it is difficult to see in A4 format and for this reason it is useful to list the advice service providers identified during the course of this review; the main providers are:

- Welfare Rights Service – outlets across Derbyshire
- 6 Citizens Advice Bureaux across Derbyshire with over 70 outreach services
- GP practice-based advice surgeries (WRS and CAB) – limited to specific GP practices
- Unemployed Workers Centre, Chesterfield with some limited outreach in the north of the County
- Chesterfield Law Centre – Opportunities for access to legal advice are largely limited geographically to the north of the County
- Connexions – outlets across Derbyshire
- Children's Centres – 42 in total opened or opening shortly

4. Consultations (meetings and user surveys)

4.1 During the course of the Review the working group has spoken to a number of key agencies and individuals in order to gather detailed information about advice services in Derbyshire. This information was crucial to the Review process and the key issues to come out of these meetings are discussed in this section of the report. WRS is given particular attention as this is the only in-house advice service considered in this Review.

Derbyshire residents have been consulted at every opportunity by Members involved in the working group of this Review, and this has enabled the Review to consider residents' experiences and opinions on the various advice services in the County.

In collating information about advice services the Review noted the absence of a single source of information about advice in Derbyshire.

Recommendation: An advice services directory should be developed, led by WRS, in partnership with all other advice providers in Derbyshire.

The Review also considered the notion of a 'benefits culture' which describes the dependency on benefits which, for some individuals, can become a significant issue. Without access to a wide-range of advice services, some problems or issues are not dealt with (i.e. drink dependency, domestic violence etc.) and this leads to an ongoing dependency on benefits; effectively this equates to treating the symptoms not the cause. This provides a sound rationale for effective, co-ordinated services which address all areas of advice.

4.2 **WRS** – The Review found that our WRS has particular strengths in:

- Their advocacy role and representation at tribunals
- The provision of training to other DCC staff in identifying access to benefits (WRS did identify some issues in the implementation of this training 'in the field')
- Working closely with the Public Relations team, WRS have had considerable success with a number of awareness-raising campaigns such as 'Quids In' (although it was noted that these campaigns produce a large volume of work for other agencies, without which the impressive increases in access to benefits could not be realized)

and noted the considerable resource allocation to this service (some £1.2 million).

The working group also notes the research by Wiggan and Talbot (2006) which identifies a:

“strong, continuing demand for effective, accurate and authoritative...welfare rights advice service”

However some concerns were highlighted during the course of the Review; in particular the absence of a Derbyshire Advice Strategy which the Best Value Review of WRS (2002) recommended should be developed. The working group found that the absence of a strategic document of this nature is a considerable cause for concern as such a document would improve partnership working and decrease duplication. Furthermore, consultations with service users highlighted the danger of 'signpost fatigue' whereby inaccurate information and lack of co-ordination between the various advice services, can lead to individuals giving up and not getting access to the advice they require. Upon further investigation, the working group found that the management structure of the WRS has not been conducive to strategic-level work, and this has had implications for the production of an Advice Strategy and partnership-working at a strategic level. The creation of a Head of Advice Service post would strengthen current strategic management capacity and would help to ensure that all of the recommendations in this report can be met.

Recommendation: A Derbyshire Advice Strategy should be developed, led by the Head of Advice Services, and developed with our partners as per the recommendation of the Best Value Review of WRS, 2002.

Furthermore, there was some difficulty in comparing our WRS cost per client/per enquiry to the costs of other agencies as agencies' data are collected differently. The data made available for the Review by WRS was detailed, however some queries arose from these figures. In particular the data which details client numbers accessing WRS through GP surgeries appears to illustrate that in some cases (Holmewood Medical Centre and Barrow Hill Medical Centre) clients are receiving a 7-8 minute appointment on average. These data were verified and this raises concerns about the quality of service given. It also illustrates the high demand for services of this type.

The Review also identified the need to establish greater links between the work of the Welfare Rights Service and the health and regeneration strands of the Local Area Agreement. Whilst there are some valid reasons for WRS to be based within Adult Social Services, the Review found that the need to build greater links with our partners across the health and regeneration agendas is paramount. Furthermore, following interviews with both WRS staff and senior officers in Adult Social Services, the working group identified challenges which would be faced in implementing the recommendations contained in this Review. Specifically, the culture of the WRS was noted as a challenging factor as, whilst the service undoubtedly produces some excellent advocacy and training work, WRS has not moved forward sufficiently in areas such as strategic partnership-working and strategy/policy development. The overriding need for a 'fresh' start came out of many of the interviews the group conducted and this, coupled with the need to strengthen health and regeneration links, led to discussions regarding the potential to relocate the WRS. A transfer to Cultural and Community Services was discussed but given the health, policy, regeneration and partnership (both statutory and third sector) links it was concluded that the most appropriate department for relocation fell within the remit of the Strategic Director for Policy and

Community Safety. This would enable WRS to tie into corporate partnership working more effectively.

The Review identifies that the transfer of a Service the size and complexity of WRS would undoubtedly have significant implications for the management capacity and resources for the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety. For example the number of staff working within WRS is more than double the number in the current Regeneration team. On this basis the WRS recommendations contained within this Review should be viewed as a blueprint for the future and are subject to the necessary resources and management capacity being identified by the Strategic Director. The group agreed that the most suitable management structure would include the creation of a 'Head of Advice Services' post which would have strategic responsibility for the WRS, and DCC's involvement in all other advice provision. This post would oversee the recommendations contained in this report. The post would need to be established at a sufficient level to recognize the strategic nature of the post and to ensure an appropriate 'fit' within the overall structure of the Policy and Community Safety team.

The Review notes the significant budget allocated to the WRS (some £1.2 million) and has identified, through discussions with the County Manager Operations (Older People and Mental Health), the potential to fund the Head of Advice Services post through a review of currently vacant posts and money which is currently allocated to creating a Deputy WRS Manager position. The Review notes that some of this budget is time-limited, however the work group concluded that the need to establish a Head of Advice Services position is fundamental in implementing the other recommendations in this report. Therefore, it is recommended that efficiencies need to be identified in the WRS budget to establish this critical role.

Moreover, the working group was surprised at the salary ranges of the WRS staff, with a number of posts spanning several pay scales. Work already undertaken by the WRS has identified the potential to make efficiencies within the WRS budget, particularly as they have also identified that there is not sufficient work at the higher-end of the pay scales to share amongst all of the staff currently employed at this level. This review therefore recommends that the WRS structure is reviewed in order to deliver the service changes proposed and establish a clear career structure for WRS staff. The current job evaluation procedure will also contribute to this process.

Recommendation: That a new post, Head of Advice Services, should be created in order to fully implement all of the recommendations in this report. This post would have strategic responsibility for advice provision in Derbyshire and would report directly to the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety.

Recommendation: On the appointment of a Head of Advice Services, the Welfare Rights Service should be relocated to the Chief Executives Office under the overall management of the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety.

Recommendation: That the WRS structure be reviewed upon transfer to identify potential efficiencies which could then be used to improve the opportunities for implementing the other recommendations contained within this report.

Furthermore the Review found that there is a need to conduct an audit, review and potential restructure of the WRS once the service has been transferred. The need to consider a restructure has already been identified by the WRS Manager and was put on hold pending the outcome of this Scrutiny Review. This review should consider the areas of work which are unique to WRS and aim to concentrate resources on these areas, whilst ensuring close partnership working, and potential commissioning of services from other advice-giving agencies.

Recommendation: That the Welfare Rights Service be subject to an audit, review and potential restructure once it has transferred to Chief Executives recognizing that management capacity would need to be strengthened, as per the recommendation above, and that significant changes to the service would be required to implement, in full, all of the recommendations in this report.

4.3 Citizens Advice Bureau – The Review, having gathered the views of the Regional CAB, and spoken to an individual CAB, found that the CAB offer a wide range of advice to our residents and also noted that this agency was highly-rated by all of the other agencies we met through the review. Their services are limited by resources and, in particular, the short-term nature of various funding streams, which has a bearing on the availability of services (both drop-in and appointment-based). When clients do access their services the outcomes are impressive and client satisfaction levels are high (see 4.9 below). The working group was surprised to discover that Derbyshire County Council is the only Council in both the East and West Midlands not to provide mainstream funding for the CAB. The Review supports the current work by all 6 CABs, together with the Chesterfield Law Centre, to establish an **Advice Consortium** in Derbyshire. A body of this type will improve partnership working opportunities for DCC, as well as improving the consistency of advice provision across Derbyshire.

Recommendation: Wherever possible, the commissioning of all advice services to be coordinated to ensure value for money and consistency. DCC to link into the ‘Advice Derbyshire’ Consortium once it is established.

4.4 Chesterfield Law Centre and the Unemployed Workers Centre –

Both of these agencies offer very specialist, clearly defined services, and appear to have their own particular niche in the advice-giving market. The working group found that both of these services achieve significant outcomes for individuals but noted the geographical limitations of these services in that they are very much confined to the north-east of the County. That said, the Review found that Chesterfield Law Centre is now undertaking County-wide work in relation to immigration,

and some of the other project-based work carried out by CLC does provide a County-wide service.

Both services are keen to work in partnership and effective cross-referral is a key tool in ensuring that all clients receive the specialist advice they need. DCC currently provide funding for both the Chesterfield Law Centre and the Unemployed Workers Centre which the Review fully supports. It is important to bear in mind that this investment by DCC does bring in other substantial funding; CLC brings in on average £5 of other funding for every £1 of local authority funding invested in the service.

The Law Centre were keen to highlight the importance of volunteers in advice provision; this point also came out of our meetings with High Peak CAB and the Unemployed Workers Centre where volunteers make a significant and valuable contribution to these organisations and play an important role in regeneration as many go on to use their volunteering experience as a route into paid work and/or education.

As highlighted in 1.6, this Review identified a vision for advice provision across Derbyshire which would include expanding the geographical area covered by the CLC and UWC through satellite advice services across the County. Whilst recognizing the limited resources available, the Review recommends that the potential to offer satellite services in the south of the County are explored as part of the monitoring process involved in the allocation of this funding.

Recommendation: The potential to offer satellite services across Derbyshire from both the Unemployed Workers Centre and the Chesterfield Law Centre should be investigated.

4.5 **The Library Service** was found to offer an excellent service to Derbyshire residents and provided a number of examples of strong partnership working. It was noted that, in almost all cases, the role of the Library Service is to give information, not advice, however the potential to utilize the mobile library for outreach work in our rural communities was noted by the working group. Furthermore the working group noted the value of the Library Service in open access and signposting to other agencies, an important role given the changing nature of our communities as some services are retracted (i.e. post offices etc.). The working group was impressed by the Library Service's use of I.T. and noted that the Authority as a whole could make more effective use of our website to signpost web visitors to appropriate advice-providing agencies.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to the potential to utilize the library service, including the mobile library, more effectively.

Recommendation: The Derbyshire County Council website should increase information available on advice services and include links to national advice websites.

4.6 Derbyshire County PCT – The Review found that there is a need to maintain and expand, the current provision of advice surgeries in GP practices, so the working group met with Dr. David Black, Director of Public Health at Derbyshire County PCT. The PCT is keen to explore the potential for partnership working in relation to the advice in GP practices and therefore a recommendation to this effect is included in this report.

This example of the potential gains which could be established through improved synergy of advice services would involve a degree of culture change in the approach to partnership work across key agencies including DCC. We would be focusing on the needs of our residents firstly (rather than seeing needs through the boundaries of our organisations) and taking a ‘bottom-up’ approach to identify the most suitable service, and indeed, service provider. For this reason, the Review noted that this gear change in partnership working may take some time to achieve. Given the broad range of areas on which the CAB provide advice, the Review team considers this agency as the most appropriate advice provider within GP practices. This has implications for our Welfare Rights Service which currently provides advice in 28 GP surgeries (this figure includes both main and branch surgeries).

This is a challenging issue but given the weight of evidence (see below), which highlights the outcomes of GP-based advice services, it is worthy of further consideration, particularly as Derbyshire County PCT has expressed a commitment to discuss potential partnership working arrangements in this area.

The Review found a significant need for access to advice on a range of topics through outlets such as GP practices. Research has been undertaken to examine the outcomes of GP-based advice services with the study by Paris and Player (1993) emphasizing an important point:

*‘The provision of CAB sessions in general practice is an effective way of providing advice on life problems and securing proper payment of benefits, particularly to patients with health problems. **This service complements rather than detracts from other CAB activities**’*

This view is supported through this Review as we found that choice is an extremely important factor when residents decide when and how to access advice services. Many clients accessing CAB in GP surgeries were unlikely to use CAB mainstream services, due to access problems and/or low levels of self-esteem/personal confidence.

The working group was impressed by the high quality and wide-range of advice offered by the CAB within GP practices. Mid Derbyshire CAB, which provides services in Derbyshire Dales and Amber Valley, has been delivering services in GP practices for over 8 years and was recently placed in the top 10% in the UK (as were High Peak CAB in their last audit) following an external Quality of Advice Assessment.

The Liverpool University Study by Abbott and Hobby (2002) interviewed patients across 7 sites (including High Peak) just after receiving advice in GP practices, and again at 6 and 12 months. This study found that at 6 and 12 months patients who received additional benefits as a result of advice had statistically significant improvements in physical and mental health.

The working group viewed a presentation on the costs and benefits of GP-based advice provision in Derbyshire and noted that:

- Some 3547 clients per annum access the current advice-provision by CAB in GP practices, with an average of just over 2 enquiries per client
- £882,455 pa (average) was gained in benefits which had previously not been accessed by clients
- Cost of service for 2006/07 was £110,946 which amounts to £31.28 per client or £14.64 per enquiry
- Since 1995, this service has generated over £5 million in the High Peak and Dales
- The cost per practice is £8500 based on full cost recovery for the CAB
- Total cost to provide this service in all 98 GP practices would be £833,000 per annum but would **generate £5,279,200 per annum²** for local people and advise 21,241 clients.

Given the regeneration, quality of life and health outcomes which access to high-quality advice can achieve, the working group were keen to discuss the potential for partnership funding between DCC and the Derbyshire County PCT to put this service into 98 GP practices across the County. This would equate to an annual cost of £416,500 per organisation. Given the potential to commission some of the work currently undertaken by the WRS in GP practices, the Review has found that a significant proportion of this cost could be met if money currently allocated to the WRS in salaries and revenue from individual GP practices were to be redirected to extend CAB advice provision in GP practices. Very recently, Tameside and Glossop PCT has expressed an interest in developing this service in the Glossopdale areas and is currently in discussion with High Peak CAB and DCC officers about how to take this forward.

Recommendation: Following the transfer of WRS to the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety and strengthened management capacity, DCC and Derbyshire County and Tameside and Glossop PCTs to explore the expansion of GP practice-based advice surgeries, through joint commissioning to the CAB within the Health and Well-Being framework (DoH 2007).

² This figure is based on the average figure recorded per annum across the current provision of CAB in GP practices.

Recommendation: In undertaking the WRS review, the Head of Advice Services should examine the opportunities for the potential external commissioning of some of the advice services currently provided by WRS.

4.7 The working group also met with DCC staff to discuss and gather information on advice-related initiatives. Jem Brown, Project Manager, detailed the 50+ Forums, First Contact pilot scheme and other relevant advice-related projects, whilst Phil Rogers, Social Inclusion Manager, provided information on how DCC work with families who do not meet the threshold of Social Service provision and the signposting service funded through the Children's Fund.

Recommendation: Elected members to be given the opportunity to be trained in the 'First Contact' checklist which would enable them to assess the needs of residents, with their permission, for services such as fire safety checks, benefits, and health concerns. This training should be offered to each new Councillor.

Recommendation: The Review supports the request that CAYA has made to Central Government for continued and increased funding for the signposting and service.

4.8 Through discussions with the Head of Partnership Development Commissioning the Review identified the need for DCC to adopt a coordinated approach to commissioning to all its advice work. This includes commissioning through external funding streams where appropriate. It was found that various organisations had been commissioned by different Children's Centres and this could lead to inconsistency in the advice available. A coordinated approach could potentially reduce the costs per Centre and ensure consistency.

Recommendation: Wherever possible, the commissioning of all advice services to be coordinated to ensure value for money and consistency.

4.9 **Consultation** - The Review included consultation with a wide-range of agencies and elected Members to establish their views and experiences of the various advice-giving agencies. The working group noted the importance of consulting with organisations and agencies who act as 'signposters' to the various advice services, particularly as, in a crisis situation, an individual resident often relies on proactive signposting in order to ensure timely access to the right advice. Therefore 197 questionnaires were sent out to a wide-range of agencies, with a return rate of 32%. Key findings include:

- The overwhelming majority of respondents do refer people to both WRS (94%) and CAB (94%).
- Availability – 92% of respondents felt that CAB was available to them, with 86% indicating WRS was also available and 40% and 37%

respectively for the Unemployed Workers Centre (UWC) and Chesterfield Law Centre (CLC)

- The timeliness of advice availability was identified as an area of concern with only 70% noting that WRS is available when needed, 63% from CAB, 29% from CLC and 35% from UWC
- The frequency of referral to the agencies showed that 65% refer at least on a monthly basis to CAB, 49% to WRS, 21% to UWC and 15% to CLC
- High levels of satisfaction were recorded with CAB and WRS (81% and 77% respectively). Given the small numbers involved, it is difficult to assess satisfaction with geographically-specific agencies such as the Chesterfield Law Centre, although in many cases these agencies undertake their own research and the CLC, for example, have research which indicates satisfaction levels of 86%.
- 53% of respondents felt that WRS could be better integrated with other advice agencies, a similar figure to CAB with 55% of respondents believing that better integration could be achieved.
- 26% of respondents felt that duplication exists and when asked to specify many stated 'benefits' advice as a key area of duplication.
- When asked to specify how these services could be improved a wide-range of responses were received with a number of respondents identifying longer opening hours, reduction of waiting times for appointments, more satellite/outreach services and well-staffed phone lines as areas for improvement.
- The returned questionnaires from GP practices which currently have a WRS surgery in place identified strong support for this service and highlighted the need to keep these services locally-run in order to allow for local need to be met.

4.10 The Review identified the need to improve access to these services during the course of the various meetings and consultations. Different services apply different techniques; some operate drop-in sessions, whilst others use an appointment-based system, and some operate a mixture of both drop-ins and appointments. It is clear from the consultation that there are issues with both drop-in sessions (long queues in particular) and appointment-based systems (long waiting times and the difficulties encountered when an individual finds themselves in an urgent situation where the correct advice is crucial).

The need to operate both drop-in and appointment-based sessions is acknowledged by this Review however there is scope to increase accessibility through joint working. Many of the agencies operate help lines and there is a potential to merge these help lines and improve opening hours.

Furthermore, the opportunities to make greater use of Call Derbyshire were discussed by the group. This helpline could potentially become the one-stop number for a range of services, not just those provided by DCC, and the working group believe that this should be explored once the new Head of Service post is established. The Putting People First agenda requires public bodies to offer accessible, joined-up services to all of our communities (both geographic and communities of interest) and the Call Derbyshire facility provides a sound foundation on which to develop our access to services and information. It is clear that the new Head of Advice Services would need to examine this opportunity through close working with both our PR team as well as our partners, in order to realize the potential that Call Derbyshire could present in improving access to advice for our residents.

Recommendation: As part of the recommended review into WRS, the Head of Advice Services should examine the opportunities to utilize ‘Call Derbyshire’ more effectively as a one-stop gateway to a wide-range of advice and information.

4.11 Derbyshire Community Legal Services Partnership – The Review looked at the remit of the DCLSP as this body potentially has a significant input into advice provision, through partnership, in Derbyshire. It was initially intended that the working group would talk to DCLSP however we found that, due to funding issues, this body does not exist in the same format as it once did and had not met for some time. DCLSP has previously attempted to undertake some of the work discussed in the report; it has, for example, tried to develop a strategy for advice and to ensure better value for money through partnership-working. However, due to the short-term nature of the funding to support CLSPs, much of this work has not been successfully implemented on the ground. This issue provides further support to the recommendation contained within this report for the creation of a senior, permanent post to lead, on behalf of DCC, on the future of advice provision across the County.

5. Benchmarking

5.1 The working group agreed that it is important to identify a method of benchmarking advice services and it was agreed that Quality Marks would be an effective method for identifying areas of expertise. The Review found that the Quality Marks awarded by the Legal Services Commission are a recognised method of assessing the quality of advice in various areas. The Quality Mark has three levels: information, general help and specialist help

The CAB visited by the working group (High Peak CAB) has the generalist Quality Mark for all of its advice and the specialist level for welfare benefits and debt. WRS holds the specialist mark for Welfare Benefits, Chesterfield Law Centre holds specialist Marks in Community Care, Debt, Employment, Housing and Immigration, whilst the Unemployed Workers Centre have a Quality Mark for general help in casework.

6. Conclusions

This Review concludes that access to high quality advice services, at the right time and in the right format, can have a significant impact on quality of life and an individual's mental and physical health, as well as improving the quality of life for families and communities. Therefore it is important that high-quality advice is available across Derbyshire, particularly if we are to promote well-being and address social and health inequalities.

We have seen good examples of advice provision, in a variety of formats and offered by a variety of agencies but have identified a need to increase synergy between these agencies in order to improve access to advice. Not only will improved synergy aid access to advice services for our residents, it will also improve value for money as advice provision becomes more efficient.

The provision of excellent advice services will help DCC in achieving at least 4³ of the 9 strategic aims contained within our Council Plan and fits into the place-shaping role for local authorities as we are increasingly expected to improve the lives of our residents and impact on social, economic and individual issues and concerns.

In relation to DCC's main advice service, the Welfare Rights Service, this Review has identified a need to realign WRS in order to ensure improved links with health, regeneration and partnership-working, and look at all advice we offer and who best fits the bill to be commissioned. This may be a challenging issue but, if addressed correctly, it could reap rewards in improved access to services and better value for money. It is interesting to note that in the Bolsover District CPA report (Bolsover have recently been awarded 'Excellent' status), the Authority's work with the CAB is used to provide a good example of social inclusion and the promotion of fairness, equality and lifelong learning:

'The Council has made good progress on its social inclusion priority, with the Council taking a sound strategic approach to equality issues, and with councillors taking an active role in leading on diversity issues, for example by hosting outreach events. For example, its work with the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to set up an advice and outreach service in the district in 2005 has resulted in significantly improved access for local people to both benefits and to debt advice. Over 650 new benefits claims have been made as a result of the service, amounting to £1.2 million of additional annual payments and over £2 million of debt was rescheduled in the CAB's first year of operation. This not only helps support people on low incomes but also brings additional spending power into the district'.

³ These are: Create an environment where all children can be healthy, stay safe, enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing; Strengthen the local economy and tackle deprivation within the county; Improve the health, wellbeing and choices of older people and vulnerable adults, and support them to live independently; Improve access and encourage participation in leisure, recreation, information, lifelong learning and culture

The need to establish, with our partners, an advice strategy for Derbyshire is important in order to set out a vision for these services to provide a framework for the commissioning of services. DCC have a key role to play in the development and implementation of such a Strategy.

The report notes that many of these recommendations are not necessarily new ideas and many have been attempted in the past. The work of this Review has considered *why* some of the Best Value Recommendations have failed to be implemented, and why the Derbyshire Community Legal Services Partnership Strategy also encountered problems in implementation. The Review concludes that, whilst the operational, day-to-day management of the WRS has ensured that the service continues to provide a good service in a number of areas, the strategic management and culture of the WRS must be addressed if the recommendations of this Review are to be implemented in full. The Review has found that the creation of a Head of Advice Services would build sufficient strategic management capacity to address these issues and will prove pivotal in ensuring that an Advice Strategy is created with our partners to lead the way forward in advice-provision across Derbyshire.

This report therefore recommends the creation of a 'Head of Advice Services' post, which could be funded through the money already identified to create a Deputy Manager's position within WRS, coupled with savings that could be made if the money allocated for current WRS vacancies was to be redirected.

This report sets out a blueprint for the future which, subject to capacity, will improve advice provision across Derbyshire.

In summary, this Review has proved to be an interesting study of local services and has identified a range of good practice and a number of areas for improvement, together with some practical recommendations for achieving these goals.

7. Recommendations

1. That a new post, Head of Advice Services, should be created in order to fully implement all of the recommendations in this report. This post would have strategic responsibility for advice provision in Derbyshire and would report directly to the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety.

2. On the appointment of a Head of Advice Services, the Welfare Rights Service should be relocated to the Chief Executives Office under the overall management of the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety.

3. That the Welfare Rights Service be subject to an audit, review and potential restructure once it has transferred to Chief Executives recognizing that management capacity would need to be strengthened, as per recommendation 1, and that significant changes to the service would be required to implement, in full, all of the recommendations in this report.

4. That the WRS structure be reviewed upon transfer to identify potential efficiencies which could then be used to improve the opportunities for implementing the other recommendations contained within this report.

Subject to strengthened management capacity as the recommendations above:

5. A Derbyshire Advice Strategy should be developed, led by the Head of Advice Services and developed with our partners⁴ as per the recommendation of the Best Value Review of WRS, 2002.

6. An advice services directory should be developed, led by the Head of Advice Services, in partnership with all other advice providers in Derbyshire.

7. In undertaking the above WRS review, the Head of Advice Services should examine the opportunities for the potential external commissioning of some of the advice services currently provided by WRS.

8. As part of the recommended review into WRS, the Head of Advice Services should examine the opportunities to utilize 'Call Derbyshire' more effectively as a one-stop gateway to a wide-range of advice and information.

9. Consideration should be given to the potential to utilize the library service, including the mobile library, more effectively.

⁴ Partners should include CAB, Unemployed Workers Centre, Chesterfield Law Centre, Connexions, the Library Service and any other agency involved in advice provision across Derbyshire.

- 10. Following the transfer of WRS to the Strategic Director for Policy and Community Safety and strengthened management capacity, DCC and Derbyshire County and Tameside and Glossop PCTs to explore the expansion of GP practice-based advice surgeries, through joint commissioning to the CAB within the Health and Well-Being framework (DoH 2007).**
- 11. Elected members to be given the opportunity to be trained in the 'First Contact' checklist which would enable them to assess the needs of residents, with their permission, for services such as fire safety checks, benefits, and health concerns. This training should be offered to each new Councillor.**
- 12. The Review supports the request that CAYA has made to Central Government for continued and increased funding for the signposting and service.**
- 13. Wherever possible, the commissioning of all advice services to be coordinated to ensure value for money and consistency. DCC to link into the 'Advice Derbyshire' Consortium once it is established.**
- 14. The Derbyshire County Council website should increase information available on advice services and include links to national advice websites.**
- 15. The potential to offer satellite services across Derbyshire from both the Unemployed Workers Centre and the Chesterfield Law Centre should be investigated.**
- 16. A report to be brought to the Sustainable and Safe Committee in six months time to review progress.**

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9. Appendix

Map (see separate document)