

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DRAFT Advice & Information Strategy 2014 – 2017

Contents

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Definitions**
- 3. Scope**
- 4. Needs Analysis**
- 5. The aims of our strategy**
- 6. Outcomes**
- 7. How will we achieve this?**
- 8. How will we know when we've got there?**
- 9. Where are we now?**
- 10. Managing the strategy**
- 11. What are we going to do next?**

Section 1.

Introduction

Information and advice services are essential for all people who need, or may need, services and support in order to manage their day to day lives. Most people, at some point in their life will need to access advice services, regardless of their financial circumstances. In particular, information and advice are necessary to enable people to have control of their lives, make choices and access services relevant to their current situation.

The Government places increasing emphasis on the provision of targeted advice services to support and develop the range of welfare and social care reforms introduced by the current and previous administration. The Council is committed to promoting and enhancing the quality of local people's lives through the commitments set out in the joint Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

In Bath & North East Somerset our customers, staff and partner providers have indicated that although there are a wealth of information and advice available locally, it is not always provided in ways people need or can access it. Bath & North East Somerset is committed to improving our customers' experience of information and advice. Over the past twelve months we have made good progress in reviewing current advice provision and listening to people's views. However, we recognise that we will need to continually review this strategy to ensure that all those who need it can access high quality, local and targeted advice in a timely manner.

Bath & North East Somerset Council is committed to supporting the provision of information and advice that is universal to all although we also recognise that in times of need we must focus our resources on providing targeted services which have the greatest impact on local communities.

Our strategy aligns with the 'One Council' approach to customer care and access. The delivery of the strategy will rely on strong partnership arrangements with internal and external partners to ensure that the different strands of our approach are co-ordinated in a clear and meaningful way for our local population. We have made good progress on this already, as evidenced by the popularity of the Council's One Stop Shops. Being strategically located across Bath and North East Somerset, the One Stop Shops provide a hub for a wide range of services which enables the local authority and partners to make best use of limited financial resources.

We have used the principles set out by [Think Local, Act Personal](#) in the development of this strategy, which are:

- Involve people who use services and carers in determining what is needed and how it is provided
- Be available at the right time for people who need it, in a range of formats and through a range of channels
- Be clear, comprehensive and impartial
- Be consistent, accurate and up-to-date
- Meet quality standards
- Be based on a detailed analysis of the needs of the local population served by the Council
- Avoid reinventing the wheel
- Signpost people to sources of further information
- Be used to inform future planning

Section 2.

Definitions

Advice can be described as 'Offering guidance and direction on a particular course of actions which needs to be undertaken in order to realise a need, access a service or realise individual entitlements.' (Source: Margiotta et al). Information in this context can be described as either self-help resources (websites, leaflets) easily accessed and freely available or resources developed and shared by providers of advice and support for the benefit of service users. The effective provision of advice and information to a local population must accurately reflect the range of issues and needs present in that population, so it is crucial that these are well understood by both commissioners and providers.

The means through which advice and information are made available or delivered are critical in delivering improved services. They include different types of services provided by a range of organisations including websites, call centres, one-stop shops, floating support services, social care professionals, libraries, community information and advice centres, health centres or practitioners and outreach services. Diagrammatically this can be represented as:

Section 3.

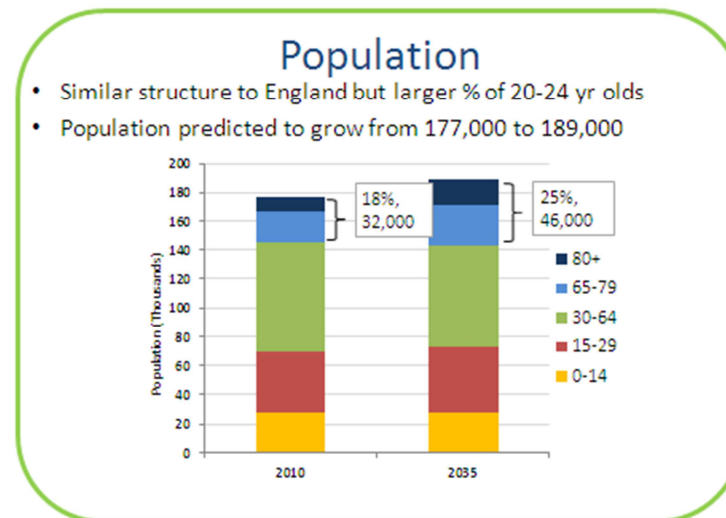
Scope

Key Facts About Our Residents and their Needs

The [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA) for Bath & North East Somerset provides extensive data on a wide range of aspects of the local population. Most of the following data represents relevant highlights from the JSNA.

Population

We know that our population is increasing. The 2011 Census estimated that there were 176,900 people living in Bath & North East Somerset, an increase of 4% since the last Census in 2001.



The projected population increase in Bath & North East Somerset between now and 2035 is significant and this is expected to mainly be in older age groups; in particular the 65+ age group is expected to increase by 50% and the 85+ age group by 110% in the same time period.

There are 114,6222 people of working age resident in B&NES according to the 2011 Census, with a peak of 79% economically active over the last financial year and the highest for B&NES since 2005. This is in line with the South West as a whole and higher than the national average of 77%. The Economic Activity rate in B&NES has increased by nearly 1% over the last quarter and by almost 5% in the last year, with a greater increase than any other of its comparators. There has also been a corresponding decrease in economic inactivity over the same period - mostly composed of students but with a moderate increase in those looking after a family home.

Factors affecting our population

Economic Wellbeing and Employment

Bath and North East Somerset is one of the least deprived authorities in the country, ranking 247 out of 326 English authorities. Despite these relatively low levels of social inequality, there are small geographical areas with notable issues. Five areas are within the most notable 20% of the country across a range of data for deprivation:

- Twerton West
- Whiteway
- Twerton
- Fox Hill North
- Whiteway West

7,428 residents live in these areas, representing 4.35% of the total population.

Whilst unemployment rates are lower than national and regional figures, the impact within the more deprived areas is acute and disproportionate to population levels. At October 2013, there were 8,200 working age people in receipt of out of work benefits. Of these, 1,400 were likely to be found fit to work and have their welfare benefit reduced or removed. 11,000 people were receiving

Council Tax Support. Analysis of some of the lowest-income households in Bath and North East Somerset suggests that between 8% (Chew Valley South) and 18% (Bathavon West) of residents in wards outside the city of Bath and the Market Towns are in receipt of income related support or tax credits. Curo, the area's largest social landlord, reported that 770 households were deemed to be under-occupying their homes and at risk of increased financial pressure due to changes to Housing Benefit.

Welfare Reform

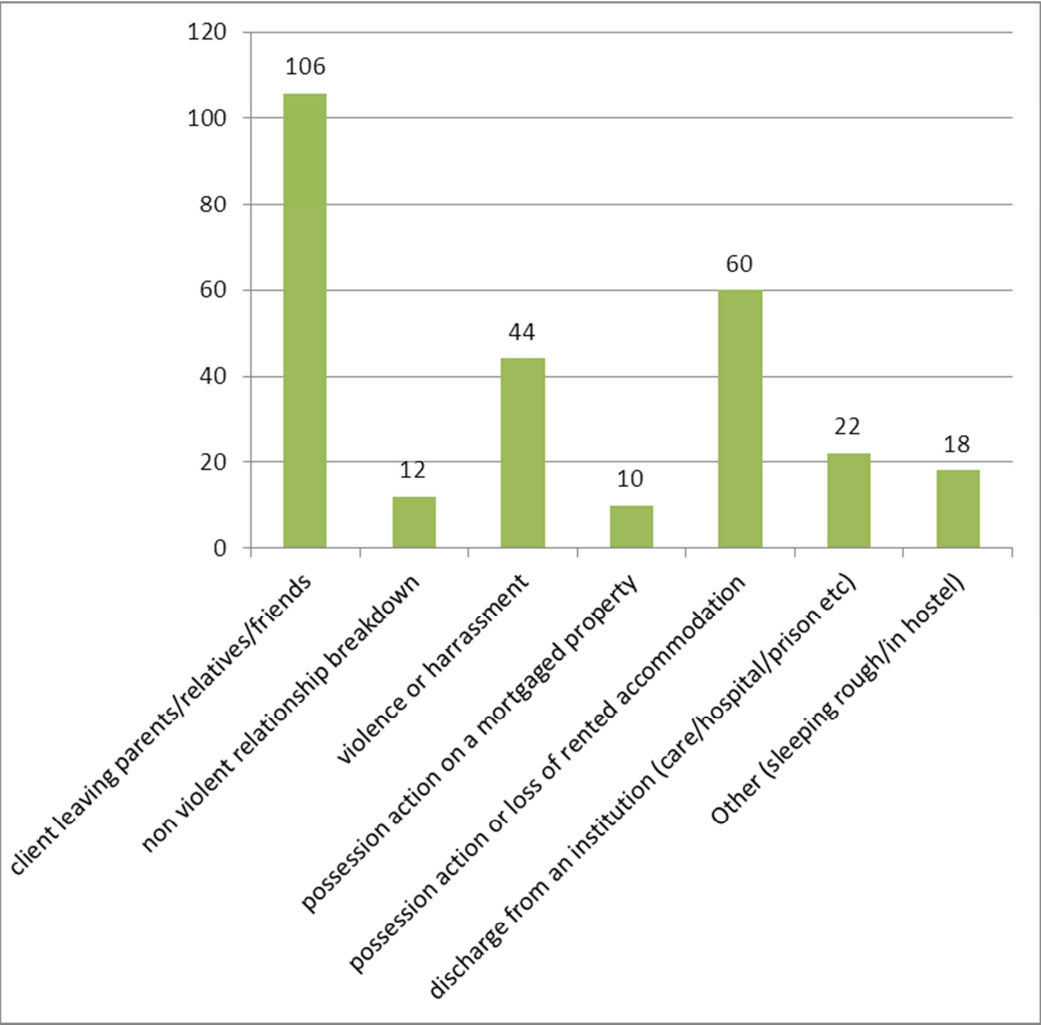
The Welfare Reform Act 2012 is the governments' legislative framework for the biggest change to the welfare system for over 60 years. The intention of the Act is to give people on benefit increased personal responsibility for money management and improved incentives to work. These changes will have a significant impact on individuals and the implications are set out below in *Section 3 –Scope*. The changes will also require a new approach by the Council and DWP to customer interfaces, as responsibility for administering welfare benefits shifts and the need for better co-ordination and easier access increases. **Adult Social Care Needs** In recent years the way we provide 'Social Services' in Bath & North East Somerset has changed dramatically. Personal Budgets have been available to service users for several years now. Since October 2012 our social work service has been provided by Sirona Care & Health CIC. Social services and social care mean different things for different people depending on their age, and depending on the type of advice, care or support they need. Many individuals benefit from preventative services that help them continue to manage independently at home, with informal support from friends and their local community, whilst others need to access more supportive services such as domiciliary care or residential/nursing care.

The number of people seeking assistance from social services has changed over the past five years. Local analysis of social services contact activity (via Sirona) between April 2012 and February 2013 highlights that more than 4,200 individuals made more than 6,000 separate contacts to request assistance of some kind. In 27% of cases contact resulted in no action being taken by social services as the request related to another Council department or local service provider. Of the remaining 73% some further action was taken which might include the provision of advice and information, signposting or referral to other services or the offer of a social care or occupational therapy assessment.

Assessments were offered to more than 2,300 individuals with around 69% of these resulting in a social care services or equipment being offered. Further analysis would be needed to confirm every case, but it is likely that the remaining 31% were not eligible for social care services based on either presenting need or financial circumstances.

Housing & Homelessness

Between 2010 and 2013, 450 households presented to the Council as homeless. Of these, 272 families and single people were assessed as being entitled to a 'main housing duty'. This means that the Council had to make sure that they were provided with settled housing. These households became homeless for a variety of reasons. The main three are leaving the home of parents/relatives or friends, loss of a rented accommodation and violence or harassment as shown below:

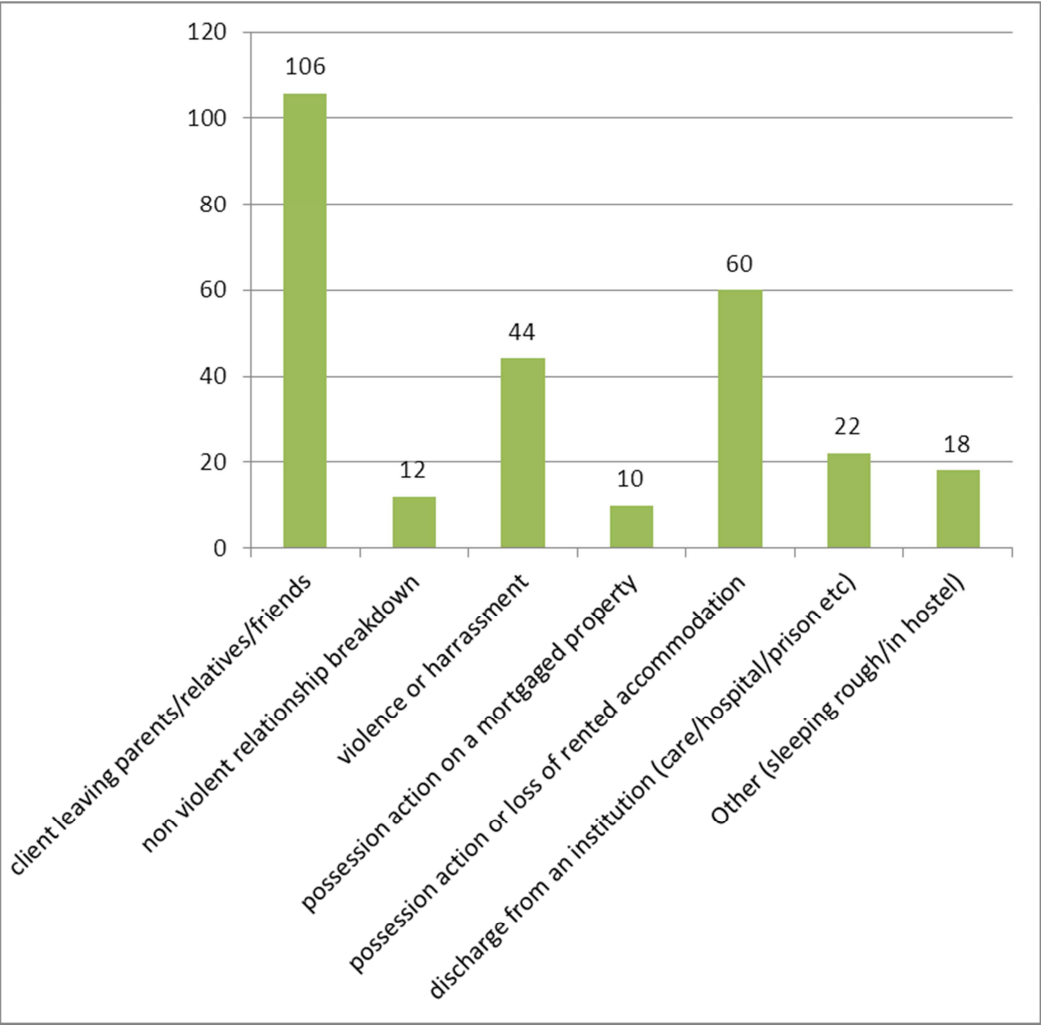


Main reasons for Homelessness April 2010 – April 2013

Homeless people with a 'priority need' are entitled to the 'main housing duty'. The three main reasons for having priority need amongst those entitled to the main housing duty were having dependent children or being pregnant, having a mental or physical disability and being a young person aged 16 or 17 or a care leaver. The rate of homeless households in temporary accommodation was halved in 2010 and is lower in Bath and North East Somerset than in other West of England Authorities and nationally.

Not all applicants' needs can be met through an application as homeless. For those households who have made a homeless application and the Council has decided it does not have a duty to secure accommodation for (approximately 50 households in 2012/3), alternative solutions will have been offered. These include help to stay put through advice on tenancy rights; negotiation or reconciliation with family or friends so they can return or stay longer; access to supported accommodation; and assistance with moving into the private rented sector via the Council's Homefinders Scheme (including loans available via Bristol Credit Union). Applicants may also have found their own solutions, securing private rented accommodation by using the Deposit Bond Scheme or Bristol Credit Union to secure a bond or deposit. A number will have lost contact with the Housing Options Team.

Over the last 3 years, an average of 69 private sector tenancies have been facilitated annually.



Main reasons for Homelessness April 2010 – April 2013

As well as discharging its statutory duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, the Council also commissions supported housing services for clients who have accommodation and support needs.

Debt

Bath & North East Somerset CAB data for 2012-13 shows that their advisors worked with 1,211 clients coming directly to their service regarding debt. Of these 156 were over 60, 108 described themselves as disabled, another 276 as having long term health problems. 714 stated they were not disabled. In the same year, a further 154 clients were referred through other agencies or projects such as Children's Centres and the CAB service delivered at Hillview Lodge for people with a mental health problem. Client profile information on these cases is not available at the time of writing.

Analysis of CAB data from the first eight months of operation in 2013-14 show that 846 people directly sought assistance with debt. Of these 88 were aged over 60; 64 described themselves as disabled; 216 reported long term health problems; and 518 stated they were not disabled. A further 173 people came to the CAB via other projects as above.

Bath & North East Somerset Citizen's Advice Bureau data for 2011/12 shows that their advisors worked with 7,969 clients regarding debt and/or benefits issues. Of these, 3,984 were identified as either disabled or over the age of 60.

For 2012/13, the CAB advises that:

- Their advisors enabled on-going benefit gain for 740 households, generating an average additional £7,268 per claimant per annum.
- 131 clients had one or more debts written off, averaging £14,000 per client.
- 83 clients were assisted to manage debts averaging £5,486 per client.

In 2012/13, outcome returns from providers funded from the Supporting People & Communities commissioning budget indicated that 215 Supporting People service users identified 'Managing Debt' as a support need, and that 163 of these successfully tackled this with the support of their SP&C service.

Other key facts:

- The Council's Connecting Families team is targeting 215 families assessed as having complex needs for enhanced support.
- In 2011 between 10 and 14% of all households were experiencing fuel poverty. Of these, 71% had incomes of under £10,000 per annum.
- Between June 2012 and June 2013, the numbers of households resorting to the Food Bank increased threefold to 660.

Section 4.

Needs Analysis

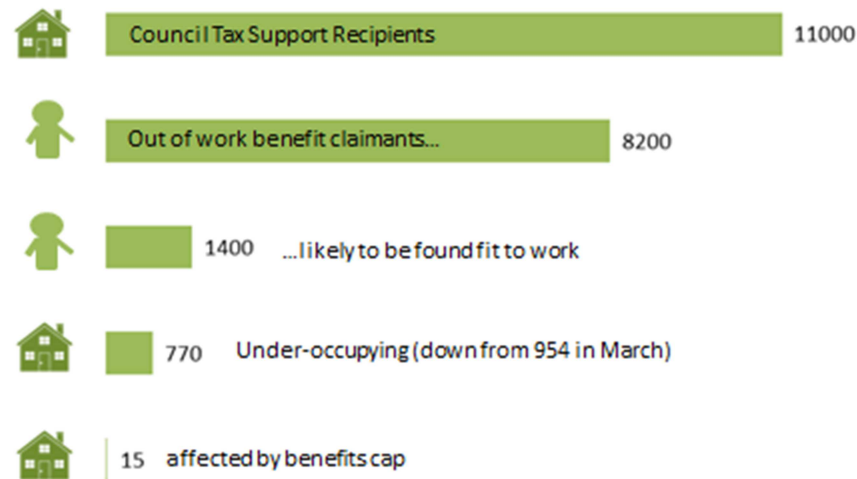
People need Advice and Information on a range of topics that are relevant and helpful to their current situation. This often means information that crosses public sector boundaries and could include:

- Health (including specific conditions)
- Social care and support (including safeguarding)
- Housing
- Finances
- Welfare benefits and rights
- Employment
- Education
- Leisure activities
- Community activities and opportunities
- Transport and access

As already stated, when we consider the advice and information needs of our local population in B&NES, this must accurately reflect the issues of relevance to local people. A number of key advice themes and 'target populations' within the wider community begin to emerge:

- **Older People** – Require easily accessible, local advice and information in order to age well and to maintain health and wellbeing. This is likely to include advice on appropriate housing options, financial advice and information about preventative and social care services as well as advice and support for carers.
- **Adults of Working Age** – Require timely, easily accessible (in terms of working patterns) advice and information that is accurately targeted to the specific needs they are encountering. This is likely to include advice on access to employment, benefit entitlements and managing debt as well as information and help to access family and childcare support services.
- **Vulnerable Adults** – Require sensitively delivered, clear and skilled advice provision that is targeted at maintaining independence and promoting recovery and rehabilitation. This is likely to include housing and homelessness advice to vulnerable young people and adults, people with mental illness or problematic substance use as well as debt advice, benefits advice and support and information to access statutory social services.

The JSNA has highlighted some of the likely impacts of welfare reform on vulnerable people. These impacts relate to individuals and families who may already be known to public services, or who are coming to our notice for the first time. The illustration below provides some indication of the volume of individuals and families affected as at April 2013.



Commissioned Services Sector Review

The services commissioned under the Supporting People & Communities programme aim to help vulnerable people improve their quality of life by enabling them to access support that promotes social inclusion, independence and wellbeing. This in turn leads to lower hospital admissions, a reduction in homelessness and a reduction in reliance on mainstream social services. These services are developed, procured and managed through strategic commissioning processes, and as such are demonstrably cost effective, reliable and of high quality.

Services focus on empowering people to achieve their aspirations of independence and fall broadly into four categories:

- Housing Related Support
- Advice, Advocacy and Information Services
- Day Services (centre-based)
- Community based services

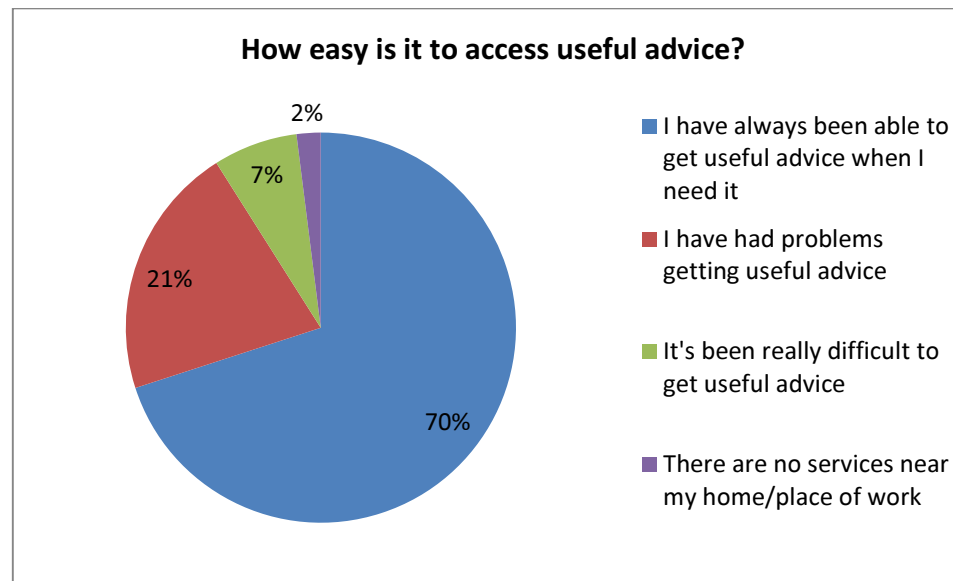
In the first half of 2013 commissioners conducted a series of sector reviews, themed according to the above categories, to find out more about the effectiveness of services both individually and across sectors. In particular the reviews aimed to assess what contribution the services make to delivery of the aims set out in the joint [Health and Well Being Strategy](#) Full details of the information gained from the sector reviews are [available here](#).

The Advice, Advocacy & Information Sector Review looked at the following themes:

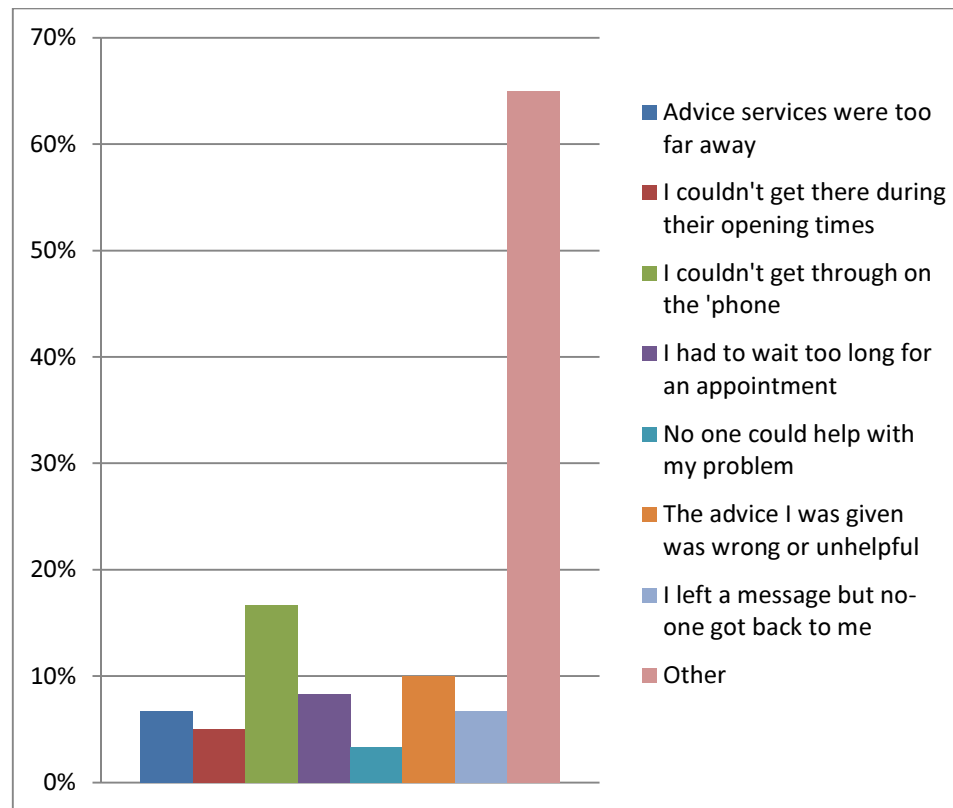
- Provision of advice and information
- Provision of advocacy
- Access to housing, employment and training
- Effectiveness of partnership working

Some services covered by the review are open to all e.g. CAB generalist advice whilst others are more targeted at people who have higher support needs e.g. Curo Choices Time 2 Talk (young people) or Age UK (older people).

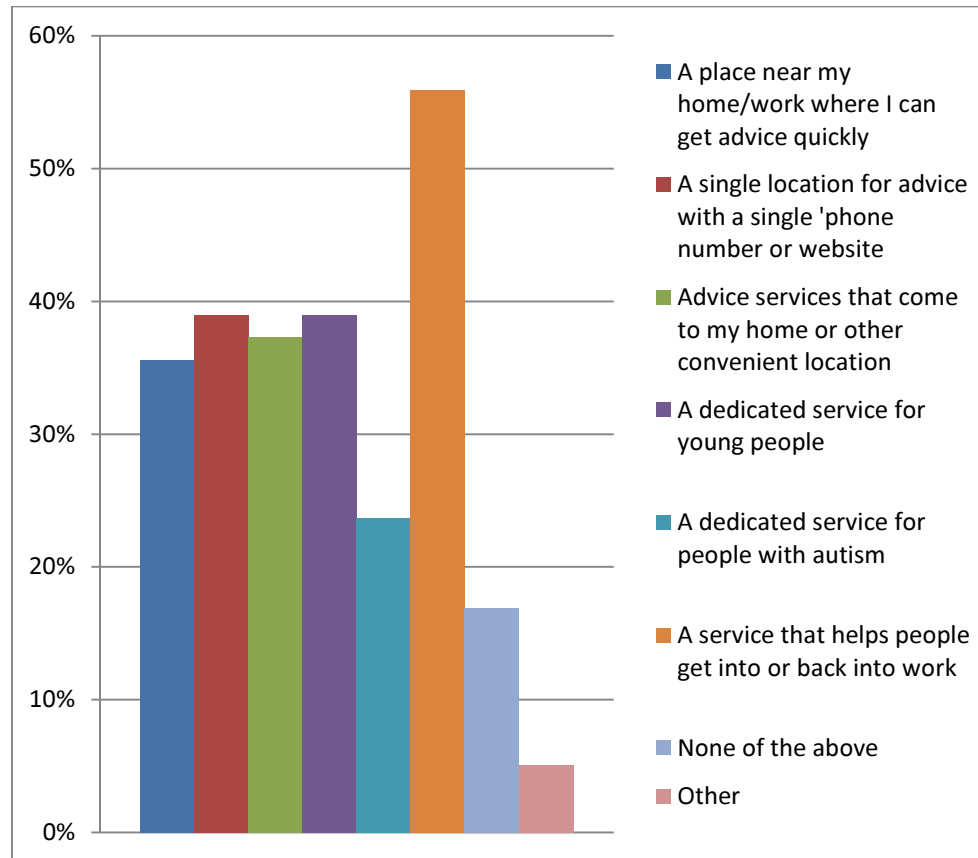
Service users were invited to contribute to the sector review by completing a survey either on-line or via paper copy. A total of 444 responses were received across the 4 sectors, with 60 of these coming from advice service users. The charts below provide an overview of the responses received from advice service users.



When asked what difficulties were encountered when trying to access advice and information, respondents gave several answers, as set out below.



When asked how services could be improved or if there were any specific areas that needed to be covered, a range of responses were received.



Adult Social Care

As stated in Section 3 – Scope, there is high demand for advice, information and assistance from our adult social care service, currently delivered under contract by Sirona Care & Health.

Between April 2012 and February 2013 4,221 people initiated 6,427 separate contacts with the Sirona adult social care duty desk to request assistance of some kind. Whilst a high proportion of these contacts resulted in a formal assessment being offered, a significant proportion (27% of contacts) were deemed 'inappropriate' in that no follow up action was taken, the most common reason for this being that the caller was actually seeking advice and information relating to other Council or external services. This tells us that there is further scope for communicating more clearly where people need to go for specific types of advice in order to make best use of our resources.

During the same period 73% of contacts, where the caller appeared to be in need of social services (as per statutory requirements) resulted in further action being taken which for many individuals will have included the provision of advice, information, signposting or referral to other services. For example many callers wish to access community meals or equipment or wish to find out more information about the provision of care services locally. Again, the development of this strategy has highlighted the need to target advice and information towards particular sectors of our community so that our more costly statutory social services are employed to support only eligible adult social care users.

Statutory social care assessment is offered to the most vulnerable callers to establish their eligibility for services. Eligibility is based both on presenting need and on the financial circumstances of the individual and our analysis shows that with further targeted financial advice the number of people undergoing statutory assessment who do not qualify for services on the basis of their financial circumstances could be reduced.

Section 5.

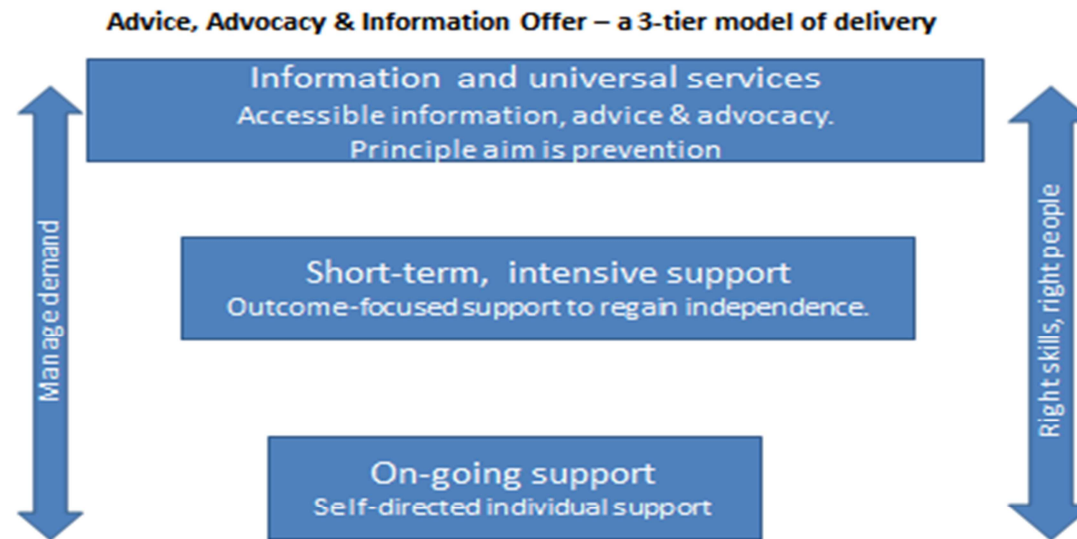
The aim of the strategy

At the heart of all Supporting People & Communities commissioned services must be an approach (or way of working) that is:

- Person Centred – services should be centred on the needs of the individual
- Outcomes focused – services should contribute to the key outcomes of prevention, maximise independence and focus on recovery.
- Preventative and Enabling – services should aim to prevent service users falling into higher level services and enable independence at most basic level
- 'Just Enough Support' – services should be recovery focused and strengths based..

- Accessible – services should ensure fair access across tenures, delivered across the Authority in communities where people live.
- Partnerships – services should share good practice, resources, premises etc. They should link into community events and activities as well as mainstream provision.
- Quality and choice

The model for future advice provision below has been extensively consulted on with current providers and other stakeholders and has met with broad approval and support.



Section 6.

Outcomes

We will be satisfied that our strategy is successful in Bath & North East Somerset if:

- People know how and where to get the information and advice that they need
- People tell us that they get the same quality of information and advice wherever they choose to access it and it is tailored to their specific needs
- People are able to use the advice and information we provide to maximise their independence and delay their need for higher intensity support
- People get the right information and advice the first time they seek it
- People can choose how and where they get advice and information and have options which suit how and where they live their lives
- People who don't usually seek advice and information are more likely to do so

Section 7.

How will we achieve this?

In order to achieve the aims and outcomes of the strategy, we have identified six key priority themes that will help us to deliver better information and advice for our customers.

Theme 1: Improving our infrastructure and delivery models

We want to make sure that no door is the wrong door. We want to offer a range of information and advice support to suit the needs and preferences of the range of people that may need it.

Theme 2: Improving our co-ordination

We want to make sure that the co-ordination, signposting and referral between information providers and across professional / organisational boundaries are improved and unhelpful barriers to information provision are removed.

Theme 3: Improving our message

We want all information and advice to be given in everyday language that does not institutionalise or professionalise social care. Our information and advice will be given a way that stresses the importance of people staying connected and part of local community, emphasises a person's ability to have choice and control, avoids negative connotations around burden and gives out a positive message about feeling respected for what you can do, rather than being labelled for what you can't.

Theme 4: Increasing general awareness of information and advice

We want all people that need information and advice to know that there is information and advice available and to know how to get this.

Theme 5: Improving things for 'unengaged' and socially excluded groups

We want to make information and advice attractive to everyone, including those that will fund their own care. We want our information and advice to be accessible to, and useful for all groups, and for information and advice giving / finding to be a positive, non-stigmatising experience. If people need support to use the information and advice that is provided, we want to offer support for them to be able to do so.

Theme 6: Improving the quality and consistency of information and advice

We want people to find that they get the right information, first time. We want our information and advice to be up to date and relevant and we want it to be adapted as we learn more about what people are interested in.

Section 8.

How will we know when we've got there?

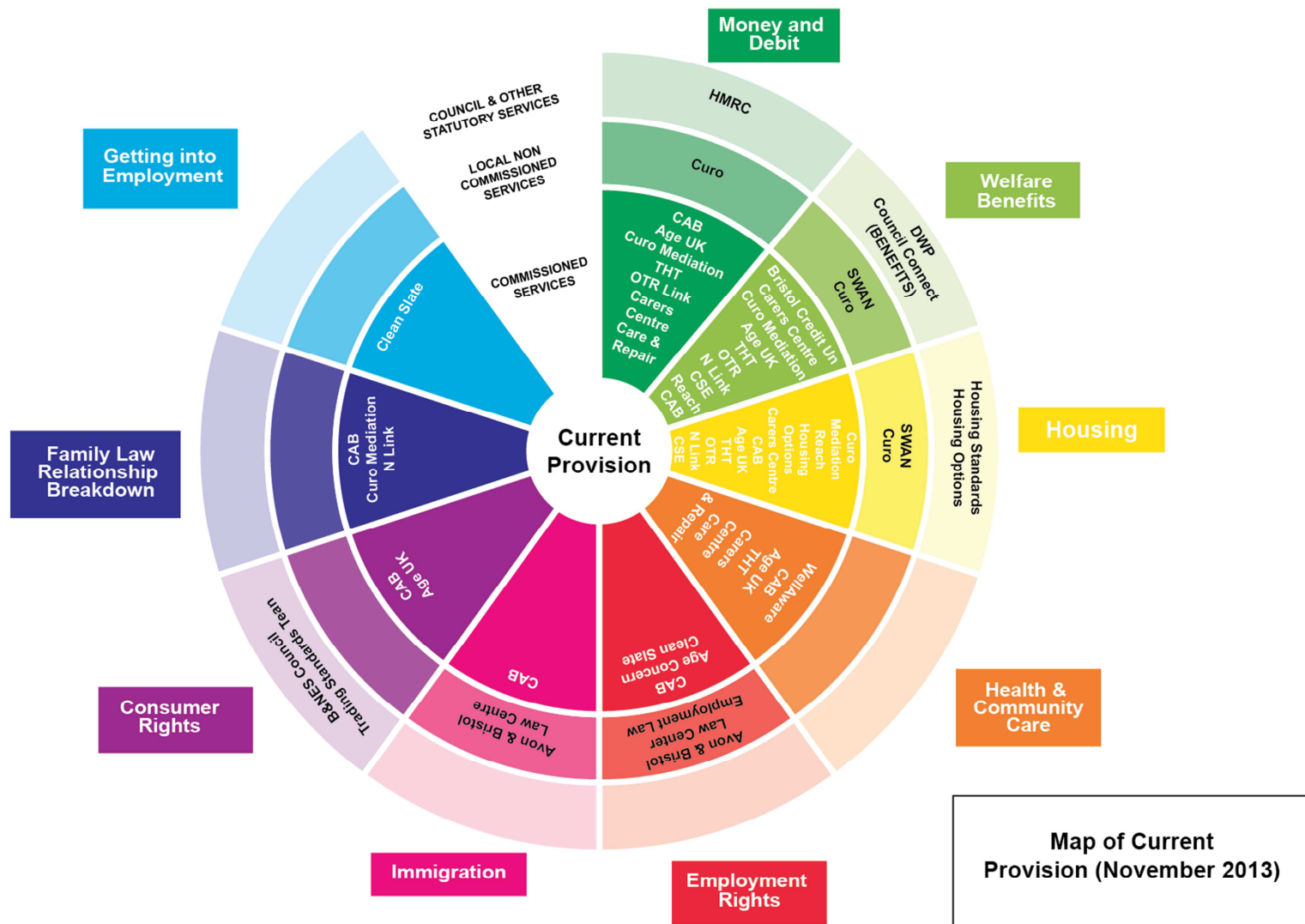
We will use a range of methods to measure progress towards making our strategy a reality for people in Bath & North East Somerset. These can be broadly summarised under three main headings as follows:

- **Monitoring and Managing Quality** – We will review and revise the key performance indicators included in all existing advice and information contracts to ensure they are focussed and targeted towards delivering the outcomes we have set. Any newly commissioned services will be specifically targeted with filling gaps in provision for particular individuals or communities and we will place greater emphasis on the timely and accurate provision of quality monitoring data by all contracted providers
- **Facilitating a Sector Voice** – We will develop a forum for advice and information provider organisations to facilitate a 'do and review' approach to delivering our strategy. Through the forum, commissioned service providers will be tasked with helping us develop and deliver a coherent offer to local people who need advice and information services
- **Service User Voice** – We will actively and regularly seek feedback from service users through case studies, on-going sector review, mystery shopping and direct reporting where this relates to Council provided advice and information

Section 9.

Where are we now?

The diagram below gives a visual representation of the diversity and overlaps in current advice provision.



The table below sets out further provision by services that are not commissioned by the Council but who provide advice on some of the areas covered by the commissioned services:

Family Law	Immigration	Employment Rights	Housing	Welfare Benefit	Debt & Money Management
LOCAL NON COMMISSIONED SERVICES					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAB • Men's Advice Line 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avon & Bristol Law Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment Law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWAN Advice • Shelter (Bristol) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWAN Advice • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christians Against Poverty •
NATIONAL, NON COMMISSIONED SERVICES					
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money Advice Trust • Shelter • Women's Aid • Citizens Advice • Men's Advice Line 	

Family Law	Immigration	Employment Rights	Housing	Welfare Benefit	Debt & Money Management
TELEPHONE, WEB-BASED & SELF-HELP SERVICES					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's Aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens Advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ACAS • Citizens Advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shelter • Women's Aid • Citizens Advice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens Advice • Shelter • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens Advice • Money Advice Trust • Pay Plan • Step Change • Women's Aid

Partnership Working

Partnership working by advice agencies in Bath & North East Somerset is under-developed. Following an earlier allocation of funding to build partnerships and infrastructures, a second partnership initiative was awarded Big Lottery funding of £291,000 in May 2012. Advice Partnership for Excellence (APEX) has the following membership:

- Age UK (B&NES)
- B&NES Carers Centre
- B&NES Family Information Service
- Bath Employment Law
- CAB BANES
- Developing Health & Independence
- Off the Record
- Stone King Solicitors
- SWAN Advice Network

The bid submitted is based on the following aim:

(APEX will enable the advice sector to) “transform and adapt to a new funding environment by renewing its service models to reduce duplication, measure the difference services can make to people’s lives, and bring providers together to be more efficient and effective. In order to thrive and secure its future sustainability, the independent advice sector will also need to be more enterprising and business-minded.”

APEX has the potential to deliver significant improvements for vulnerable people in need of advice by creating the infra-structure for multi-agency partnership working provided it is aligned with the priorities set out in this strategy and proposed model of advice and information, with membership that reflects this multi-agency partnership model.

In tandem with the development of this strategy we have recognised the need to review and revise the way people access our adult social care service which is currently delivered under contract by Sirona Care & Health. Think Local Act Personal tells us, and our local analysis supports the view, that one of the best ways to delay or reduce people’s need for long term social care is to provide high quality, professional advice, information, signposting and referral to preventative and community based services. This enables organisations to clearly identify at an early stage those individuals who are eligible for social services. We have identified that we need to re-model the way in which we deliver the ‘front end’ of adult social care to boost capacity in this area and we are working closely with Sirona Care & Health to agree how the new model will operate.

Section 10.

Managing the strategy

It is critical that the impact of this strategy is considered within a wider context. In order to ensure this, the following steps will be taken:

- Cabinet and Wellbeing PDS Panel will receive regular updates on implementation of the strategy.
- The Supporting People & Communities Commissioning Body will, as with all other commissioned services, receive regular reports on performance, including delivery against outcomes and the findings of specific contract reviews.
- The Cabinet Member Update to each Wellbeing PDS Panel meeting includes a section on performance and any exceptional performance, either poor or excellent, will be reported to Wellbeing PDS Panel through this mechanism.

Section 11.

What are we going to do next?

Our next steps will be to:

1. Procure a financial wellbeing advice service for Bath & North East Somerset
2. Begin negotiations with continuing contracted advice providers to ensure that overlaps and gaps are reduced or removed
3. Establish a provider forum for the advice sector
4. Consult more broadly on the overarching model for future provision
5. Continue to work with partners on the redesign of the adult social care pathway
6. Continue to work with internal and external partners to define how the government's welfare reform programme will be delivered locally and look at how the advice sector can respond to this.