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Draft Advice & Information Strategy 2014/17

On-line Consultation Results

August 2014

There were 3 responses to the on-line survey. Only two of these were usable; the third was blank. The table below shows the aggregated responses:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The strategy is easy to read and understand (ie the language is clear, the layout is good etc.).	1			1	
The strategy covers the most important aspects of advice and information provision		2			
I think any advice needs my family, friends or service users I represent might have in the future would be met by the proposed new strategy.			1		1

The survey included an opportunity for respondents to submit their views in their own words. The following responses were received:

- I'm concerned that 'Childcare, education and training' is a separate sub-theme to 'employment'. As we're an employability organisation based in a children's centre, we commonly see parents struggling to work because childcare is not available. Parents in education often have good access to childcare and good availability of funding - I feel it would make more sense to have 'childcare' as a separate sub-theme, and keep the more common grouping of 'Education, training and employment'. I'm also not sure about the 80/20 self-help/personal support ratio - I think that it would be more like 60 - 40, as people often need help face-to-face when dealing with a new situation such as the ones identified in the strategy as examples. However, I think on the whole the strategy addresses holistic need well, is realistic and in touch with people's needs in advice and information in BANES.
- I find the diagrams pointless and rather poor at illustrating whatever it is they are supposed to be highlighting. It tends to read like a quasi-legal document and it's presentation is steeped in "management speak". When I finally

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managed to unpick what I thought was the general thrust of the document, my reaction was ; "well surely that's what they do now". For instance, I ring the council number and get put through to the correct department, or I look at the website and find the department that way. Failing that, I turn up at the council offices and ask for help. What is this "strategy" going to provide that isn't there already?

APEX (Advice Partnership for Excellence) is a local initiative aimed at improving advice provision through cohesive service planning and closer joint working. The group consists of the following advice service providers:

- CAB B&NES
- DHI
- The Carers Centre
- SWAN Advice Network
- Age UK
- Off the Record

Rather than provide feedback from each member-organisation, APEX chose to respond jointly, submitting the following response:

APEX partners Joint Response to Draft Advice and Information Strategy

We welcome the Council's recognition that a clear strategy for information and advice services is needed, and broadly agree with the definitions of Information, Advice and Support contained in the new draft strategy.

We applaud the recognition that the need for information and advice is universal, and that some individuals will be able to access what they need without assistance from the council or its partner agencies but others will have a greater need for these services. It would be helpful to provide some indication of how decisions are to be made, and by whom, about which people have the greatest need for services. To be effective, this will not be simply "customer-led" and will require assessment at the initial contact.

The strategy does address the question of targeting particular services at particular areas – Bath and NE Somerset covers a diverse area including urban and rural communities with specific needs in some parts. It is hoped that the detailed Action Plan will help service providers to share their experience of meeting the needs of hard to reach communities and individuals and overcoming challenges.

The claim in Section 2 that "experience shows" that 80% can access self-help and 20% need more targeted support may indeed be well-founded but there is no explanation in the paper as to what data has been used to arrive at these figures. Further explanation would be helpful. We assume that the council holds detailed empirical data of service users as well as non service users - those who need to access services but do not due to

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current barriers. The current strategy also lacks clear guidelines of who these 20% are. We need an understanding of not just why they are vulnerable but also if there are other significant characteristics. Are they young or old, men or women, those with long term health problems? This would allow services to deploy resources more efficiently and appropriately.

We agree wholeheartedly with the view that advice needs span a range of topic areas and are often linked to life events. We welcome the statements that services will be well-coordinated and high quality. Although Section 5 does make general statements about measuring performance, it would be helpful if the strategy were to define more clearly what constitutes “high quality” and what standards are expected to be used to measure this – for example, independent quality mark assessments, measurable outcomes and customer feedback are all ways of measuring aspects of performance. Furthermore it would be useful to know how the council will ensure that services that are not part of this particular commission will have their standards measured.

There remain a number of questions to be answered regarding the provision of partner services in One Stop Shops. These are an exciting and forward looking development which lends themselves to “joined up” services. However, some partners are finding issues around cost and space have prevented them making the fullest use of the One Stop Shop environment. These barriers of cost and space which prevent all relevant services being delivered under one roof indirectly cause barriers for service users. If customers are never ‘in the wrong place’, then the strategy needs to consider what should be delivered, and where.

While the outcomes are ambitious and promising there is no explanation of how they will be measured. The language used is also ambiguous. For example, one outcome states ‘People have choices in how they access advice and information appropriate to their needs.’ – Who will ultimately decide what ‘needs’ are?