

NETWORK MEETING - Eastern Region



Thursday 12th June 2008
The Meadows Community Centre, Cambridge

NOTES OF MEETING

1. Introductions and apologies

Present

Ryszard Opasiak	Harlow Welfare Rights and Advice Service
Gillie Sharp	Luton Law Centre
Jo Spiro	University of East Anglia – Student Union Advice Centre
Len Simkins	AdviceUK (Eastern Region Representative)
Anjila Sinah	AdviceUK (Consultant – Enhancing Frontline Advice)

Apologies

Keith Bennett	Advice for Life (Cambridge)
Ros Brown	Norfolk Community Law Service
Anna Castagliuolo	Compass - Step One (Peterborough)
Rumi Chowdhury	Luton Rights
Fiona Harvey	University of Essex - Students Union Advice Centre
Hayley Kendall	Ipswich Housing Action Group
Avinash Mandalia	Bedford Community Rights Centre
Liz Morgan	Disability Resource Centre (Dunstable)
Phil Jew	AdviceUK
Chilli Reid	AdviceUK

2. Update from last meeting (21st February 2008)

The notes of the last meeting were checked and agreed.

Gillie asked about the RADICAL project. A report on the project should be published soon.

All other items are on today's agenda.

3. Advice UK Board

Ryszard (Harlow WRA) reported on the last Board meeting held on 8th May.

The Board has recommended holding an Annual Conference to coincide with the normal AGM. This may be held during Advice Week in October, possibly at Warwick University. A suggested date is 8th October. Details will be confirmed soon.

The board also discussed:

- AdviceUK's **Business Plan**
- **Advice Pro** – there is a need for more user involvement. Further investment may be needed into the project as it is on the margins of profitability.
- **AdviceUK's national office** - the lease at London Bridge House ends next year. They are looking for new premises now with a view to moving out later in 2008.
- The LSC has published a list of new proposed **CLACs**
- **Feedback from ASA conference** - there seems to be a general state of depression in the advice sector – Steve Johnson (AdviceUK's Chief Executive) wants AdviceUK to look at combating this especially with targeted campaigns in the proposed new CLAC areas

Minutes of Board meetings are available from Ryszard.

Advice Pro was discussed in more detail. LLC and HWRA are using Advice Pro and UEASU are considering it. There are still lots of problems with the new system but it is getting better to use.

4. Growth of networks in the advice sector

The issue was initially discussed at the last network meeting.

There was further discussion on various networks across the country including: Barking and Dagenham, Nottingham, Tower Hamlets, Chesterfield, Derby and Leicester. Len distributed information on the networks in Tower Hamlets and Nottingham.

Gillie reported on developments in Luton. An Advice Plus bid has been submitted by LLC, Luton Rights and Luton CAB. It is possible that the new network could carry on even if the bid fails.

Ryszard reported that an Advice Plus bid had also been submitted in Harlow. This was for network development in West Essex, where they had obtained a new LSC contract

Jo reported that in Norfolk, Norfolk Community Law Service, Age Concern and the CABx were working together on different projects.

In the Bedfordshire, Len reported that Bedfordshire Advice Forum had formed a company (Advice Bedfordshire) to act as its trading arm. Len distributed a publicity leaflet about this.

It was agreed that there was increasing demand for advice services but very limited resources and staffing. Agencies in the sector may need to consider amalgamating in the future. The growth of more and more formal networks in different areas seemed to confirm this.

5. Community Legal Service

The CLS Quality Mark is not currently being audited. However, the LSC is planning to outsource auditing at the General Help level. This will be going out to tender.

However, as a separate development, as part of the Big Lottery Fund project (Working Together for Advice) a new Quality Mark will be produced for the advice sector.

Anjila Sinah reported that AdviceUK has responded to LSC and has complained that there has not been enough consultation about its plans and there has not been an equalities impact assessment. There are also concerns about the proposed charges for audits.

AdviceUK needs will be consulting with members about both the new advice sector Quality Mark and the current LSC Quality Mark.

6. Enhancing Frontline Advice

Anjila Sinah (AdviceUK's new Development Worker covering the Eastern Region) talked about her future work in the region on the Enhancing Frontline Advice theme in the Working Together for Advice Project.

She has been mapping services and networks in the region, and has also had a number of discussions with individual agencies.

Anjila distributed a handout with further details of her work. A key aim is to develop advice forums and other partnerships. Delivery on the project activities should start in July. She will be targeting the work in selected areas.

Various questions were put to Anjila:

Q. Can she provide direct support for new networks?

A. Anjila wants to work with different types of organisations e.g. rural/urban, BME and Lesbian BGT groups. Different levels of support can be provided. She can also work with existing networks.

Q. Which areas will be targeted?

A. Some identified areas will be targeted but Anjila would also welcome enquiries and contacts. She will be listing the different types of support available and this support will be time limited.

Q. Is Anjila conducting research on different networks.

A. Yes, she is currently gathering information.

Q. Will help be given to develop electronic referral networks?

A. Yes possibly.

The issue of electronic referral systems was discussed. This type of system was suggested in Leicester but it is not clear if it was this ever finalised. Ryssazrd reported that Harlow WRA is the using Appointments Plus referral system. Also the Nell Booker system used in parts of London.

It was agreed to discuss this issue further at a future meeting. Len will try to invite Michael Murray, from AdviceUK, to talk about the issue.

7. Advice Alliance East

Len gave an update on AAE.

AAE's main activity at the moment is the development of an Advice Proofing Toolkit. It is proposed that this toolkit can be used by local authorities, and other strategic bodies, that are developing policies and strategies. The system will be piloted with a couple of local authorities in the region.

Len distributed an excerpt from the draft toolkit document. Any comments on this should be passed to Len.

8. Information Exchange

Luton Law Centre

- LLC is part of a consortium of 6 agencies in the region for an LSC community care contract. However, they have had few enquires on this.
- Funding has been received for the Equalities and Human Rights Commission for an Equalities Advice Project. LLC can give advice, and take on casework, across the 6 themes of discrimination in employment and goods and services issues. The contract covers Luton, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Len distributed publicity leaflets about the new projects and its advice line number (01582 480745).

Harlow Welfare Rights Advice

- The local authority are conducting a funding review in Harlow.
- HWRA is looking at becoming a law centre.
- HWRA is also part of the regional community care contract. They have had a couple of cases.

University of East Anglia SUAC

- They are in the lucky position of being very well resourced by the Student Union. Funding is therefore not a major concern.

9. AOB

- (a) Len reported on the successful seminar that had been held in Bedfordshire on migrant workers in May.
- (b) Len gave out details of the proposed, new NVQ in Legal Advice. This qualification was being developed as a follow-up to the national NOS4Advice project.

10. Next meetings

The next two meetings will be on:

- 23rd October 2008
- 12th February 2009

The meetings will be held at 10.30am in Cambridge at the Meadows Community Centre.

AdviceUK will be reviewing the future arrangements for the network meetings in the Eastern Region in 2009.

Meeting Facilitator: *Len Simkins (advice^{UK} – Eastern Region Representative) (Tel. 01234-360607)*
Eastern Region network meetings are funded by *advice^{UK} (National)*