

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Strategic Review of Advice, Information, Guidance and Advocacy

**REPORT OF:** Sheena Ramsey, Chief Executive Officer

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### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To report the findings of the review of advice, information, guidance and advocacy provision in Gateshead

### **Background**

2. In recognition of the critical role of advice, information, guidance and advocacy in maximising household income and narrowing Gateshead's equality gap, in October 2018 the Council began a strategic review of advice, information, guidance and advocacy spanning:
  - services delivered directly by the Council and The Gateshead Housing Company;
  - services commissioned from external organisations; and
  - and, as far as possible, sources of information available to residents that fall outside these more formalised structures.
3. The Review does not include services offered by private businesses such as solicitors or debt management companies, nor the legal and wellbeing services which are sometimes offered, typically over the telephone, by employers, insurance companies or unions. Neither does it include a review of the advice, information, guidance or advocacy commissioned by the Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group.

### **Proposal**

4. The findings of the review are outlined in the attached report, a Strategic Review of Advice, Information, Guidance and Advocacy. The report proposes several recommendations which Cabinet are asked to endorse, as an important step towards narrowing inequality in Gateshead and to ensure residents can access appropriate advice, guidance and support when they require it.

### **Recommendations**

5. It is recommended that Cabinet endorses the implementation of the recommendations arising from the strategic review which are detailed in the attached report.

For the following reasons:

- (i) To achieve the aims set out in the Thrive Policy Framework, we must provide Gateshead residents with good quality, accessible advice, information, guidance and advocacy, this is essential to enabling Gateshead residents to tackle the problems they are facing and preventing those problems from escalating.
- (ii) Data shows that people's problems including those in poor health, mental illness, obesity, drug addiction, unequal opportunities, poorer wellbeing for children, violence and imprisonment are more common in unequal societies.
- (iii) National and international research shows that narrowing the gap of inequality would result in people living longer, healthier and happier lives, it will help Gateshead people to Thrive. When we get it right, advice, information, guidance and advocacy can be a powerful antidote to inequality.
- (iv) The difference advice, information, advocacy and guidance can make on individual lives also impacts positively on the whole of society as well as the public purse. For example, 60% of people who receive advice report finding it easier to manage day to day, nearly 50% describe having better relationships, 40% have secure housing and 80% say advice improved their lives.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Policy Context

1. The driver for this work is the Thrive Policy Framework, which is:
  - Put people and families at the heart of everything we do
  - Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
  - Support our communities to support themselves and each other
  - Invest in our economy to provide opportunities for employment, innovation and growth
  - Work together to fight for a better future for Gateshead people
2. The provision of good quality advice, information, guidance and advocacy (AIGA) is identified in the Advice Review as an antidote to inequality. AIGA undeniably adds value to all five pledges, but adds most obvious value to our efforts to tackle inequality, support communities to help themselves, and in our fight for a better future for Gateshead.

### Background

3. In recognition of the critical role of advice, information, guidance and advocacy in maximising household income and narrowing Gateshead's equality gap, in October 2018 the Council began a strategic review of advice, information, guidance and advocacy spanning:
  - services delivered directly by the council and The Gateshead Housing Company;
  - services commissioned from external organisations;
  - and, as far as possible, sources of information available to residents that fall outside these more formalised structures.
4. The Review does not include services offered by private businesses such as solicitors or debt management companies, nor the legal and wellbeing services which are sometimes offered, typically over the telephone, by employers, insurance companies or unions. Neither does it include a review of the advice, information, guidance or advocacy commissioned by the Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group.
5. The methodology for the Review included a light touch questionnaire sent to all Service Directors within Gateshead Council and The Gateshead Housing Company - this identified 38 potential sources of advice, information, guidance and advocacy activity, 24 internal and 14 external. These services each received a deep dive questionnaire reduced this to 16 internal and 13 external.
6. Visits offered to all eligible services both internal and external. Services chose their own timetable for this, how much or how little time they used and the aspects of their services they wanted to showcase. Some used this for a 1-2-1 conversation, others offered time with their service users or shadowing with key personnel.
7. Questionnaire circulated to the voluntary sector with the help of Connected Voice, Blue Stone Consortium and the Gateshead Council Neighbourhood Management

Team to seek VCSE views on the current advice, information, guidance and advocacy landscape. The review received 32 responses. Some survey participants followed up with requests for 1-2-1 conversations and visits to services, all such requests were honoured.

8. Hosted provider engagement event to discuss initial findings and to collaborate on key questions emerging from the consultation. This prompted some follow up conversations both face-to-face and email dialogue.
9. Consideration of intelligence gathered and comparison with findings from the Public Service Reform and Customer Experience work streams.
10. Grey literature review exploring best practice elsewhere, understanding the landscape, policy and legislative demands.
11. Voice of the client taken from service provider testimony, from case studies, local literature, from the poverty truth commission and from the author's own experience. External consultation sought from Collaborate and Lankelly Chase to support the ideas and concepts we are developing around commissioning for complexity.

### **Consultation**

12. In conducting this review, we have consulted with the VCSE through face to face meetings, on-line surveys and via a provider engagement event. We have also taken initial feedback from Connected Voice (formerly known as Newcastle Council Voluntary Service).
13. Internally, various stakeholder and workshop sessions were held with councillors and officers. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Whilst there were no deletions from the report circulated for consultation, there were multiple suggestions for additional anecdotes and evidence, all of which have been included in the report presented to Cabinet.
14. One person offered feedback which said "...it's focus is too intensive on external partners rather than the whole system [and the] strategic change required to transform Council information, advice & advocacy services alongside them". This has been addressed in the conclusion which now contains a summary of the implications for any Council service that delivers or may wish to deliver AIG in the future.
15. Finally, we have consulted with Janice Barclay, Service Director, Human Resources and Workforce Development on the HR implications of the Advice Review and with Jill Bradley, Group Finance Manager on the financial implications.

### **Alternative Options**

16. Do nothing and continue as we are, commissioning multiple VCSE providers, to deliver advice, information, guidance and advocacy measured quantitatively rather than qualitatively.

## Implications of Recommended Option

### 17. Resources:

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director Resources and Digital confirms that several of the recommendations within the advice review will have financial implications. These will be subject to a further report to agree the level of investment required over the medium term to support thrive priorities and enable a longer term approach to working with VCSE partners.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – The Advice Review recommends that where the Council determines any internal Gateshead Council advice, information, guidance and advocacy services wish to scale-up existing activity or to develop new service provision they should look first to the VCSE to provide such services. This includes commissioning VCSE services as an alternative to filling vacant posts in the Council’s advice, information, guidance and advocacy existing services.
- c) **Property Implications** - There are no obvious property implications identified at this time, however the Advice Review recommends co-location between the VCSE and the Council wherever possible, this may lead to future property implications but these are unquantifiable at this time.

18. **Risk Management Implication** - The Advice Review suggests we aim for a very different relationship with our VCSE colleagues, moving away from a paymaster – supplier relationship to one with greater parity and collaboration, creating a human learning system whereby we learn together, adapt and transform our services to achieve maximum impact for Gateshead residents.

This requires a period of reconciliation and resetting which may result in some long-standing providers no longer receiving funding from the Council and/or it may open up new marketplaces, new providers and ways of working. Decommissioning any long-standing service and/or or creating something radically new like a human learning system, carries a reputational risk and we will need to be very transparent with our partners in the way we engage, consult and implement this new way of working together.

19. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - The Thrive Policy Framework pledges to “Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance”. Data shows that people’s problems including those in poor health, mental illness, obesity, drug addiction, unequal opportunities, poorer wellbeing for children, violence and imprisonment are more common in unequal societies. National and international research shows that narrowing the gap of inequality would result in people living longer, healthier and happier lives, it will help Gateshead people to Thrive. When we get it right, advice, information, guidance and advocacy can be a powerful antidote to inequality.

20. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – None identified

21. **Health Implications** - Data shows that people’s problems including those in poor health, mental illness, obesity, drug addiction, unequal opportunities, poorer wellbeing for children, violence and imprisonment are more common in unequal

societies. National and international research shows that narrowing the gap of inequality would result in people living longer, healthier and happier lives, it will help Gateshead people to Thrive. The benefits and the delivery of good quality financial and welfare advice is identified within the refresh of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy<sup>1</sup> as an essential service for the wellbeing of Gateshead residents.

**22. Sustainability Implications** - The Thrive Policy Framework pledges to “support our communities to support themselves and each other”. The provision of universal advice, information, guidance and advocacy is key to this, but it will always require Council funding; there may be opportunities to secure funding from third parties for niche areas of advice like immigration or street homelessness, but the universal offer of social welfare advice to Gateshead residents (regardless of financial means or personal characteristics) will never be sustainable without financial support from the Council. Having said that, the difference advice, information, advocacy and guidance can make on individual lives also impacts positively on the whole of society as well as the public purse. For example, 60% of people who receive advice report finding it easier to manage day to day, nearly 50% describe having better relationships, 40% have secure housing and 80% say advice improved their lives.

### **23. Human Rights Implications -**

23.1 The Thrive Policy Framework pledges to “... fight for a better future for Gateshead residents”. The provision of advice, information, guidance and advocacy, to include “economic and social rights [which] are the rights of everyday life, for everyday people”<sup>2</sup> enable us to deliver this pledge. This includes the right to work and workers’ rights, social security, health, education, food, water, housing and the right to healthy environment.

23.2 Human rights are recognised in international treaties that the UK was instrumental in bringing to life. One of these treaties is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The ICESCR is an international human rights treaty that was ratified by the UK in 1976. ICESCR establishes that we are all entitled to certain human rights: right to social security, right to food and housing as part of an adequate standard of living, labour rights, the right to health, education and participation in cultural life. These rights have equal status in international law with civil and political rights, such as freedom of expression or the right to a fair trial<sup>3</sup>.

23.3 The provision of good quality advice, information, advice and advocacy supports human rights, holding public bodies and others to account by ensuring the law, policy and practice comply with not just good practice but with human rights obligations.

**24. Area and Ward Implications** - The Advice Review suggests a move away from the centralisation of advice and advocacy services, recommending a return to communities and neighbourhoods, using the trusted venues and services people already recognise and engage with (like community centres and VCSE

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<sup>1</sup> Alice Wiseman, Director of Public Health for Gateshead Council is currently consulting with a wide range of partners on the refresh and development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

<sup>2</sup> <http://justfair.org.uk/economic-and-social-rights/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://justfair.org.uk/economic-and-social-rights/>

organisations) to build relationships and help people Thrive. This will likely result in an increase in area and ward activity.