

What are the advice needs of Gateshead residents, and how do we meet them?

A strategic review of advice, information, guidance and advocacy

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1 Introduction



Narrowing the inequality gap

In 2017 a new era for Gateshead commenced with the launch of the Thrive policy framework. The policy is aimed at making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives, by narrowing the inequality gap in Gateshead so people can live longer, healthier and happy lives. Five pledges were developed to help and guide decision-making, underpinned by a fundamental recognition that continuing to operate or maintain all existing services in the same way as they are currently provided would not be sustainable.

Our pledges

We pledge to:

- 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 sustainable opportunities for employment, innovation and growth across the borough
- Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead

This presents both a major challenge and a major opportunity for the council and its partners as we review how we tackle inequality - and the significant and increasing support needs that come with it - with continually diminishing resources. We know that over 50% of people and families in Gateshead are either managing or just coping and over 30% are in need or in vulnerable situations.



In response to the Thrive policy framework Gateshead Council's leadership team has taken a step back to reflect on the core purpose of the council, its spending priorities, and very importantly what matters most to the people of Gateshead. The key issue which has emerged without question is **tackling inequality**. Before we move on, let's take a moment to consider what it means to be "only just coping" and to be "vulnerable".

Only Just Coping

A single parent, 32, lives with her 11-year old daughter, in a two-bedroom flat rented from a social landlord for £100 per week. She works at a local supermarket at the weekend and is paid the National Living Wage. These are reduced hours, having recently been reduced from 30 to 10 and whilst she is looking for alternate employment she has a number of contracts – such as her internet connection and some hire purchase – that were made when she was paid more. She has adjusted her lifestyle as best she can, but she has to pay for a bus pass to travel to and from work and she really wants her daughter to continue with the few childhood treats she has, like swimming and a little pocket money. After paying for the family's costs, she is left with around £60 per month disposable income.



Her most pressing concern is her daughter's imminent move to high school and the costs associated with that, especially in terms of uniform. Even saving a small amount each month is difficult and she never knows if an unexpected bill will wipe those savings out.

Vulnerable

A Gateshead resident is 24, single, living in a 2-bedroom furnished flat rented from a private landlord for £110 a week. She has been unemployed for 9 months after redundancy and is claiming Universal Credit, which is reduced due to her under-occupied house. After all expenses she has £5.89 each month to pay for any unforeseen costs. What happens when her mobile phone breaks or a member of her family dies? She must have a phone to access her Universal Credit account so she will have to go without toiletries, clothes and half her budget for food for the month.



Attending a family funeral is simply beyond her budget and she will have to miss it. 'Vulnerable' means she has to sacrifice her personal hygiene to be able to maintain her claim, and cannot mourn her loved one without entering debt she has no way of repaying.

National and international research shows that narrowing the gap of inequality would result in people living longer, healthier and happier lives. Data shows that 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. **Health and social inequalities are preventable, unfair and unjust.**

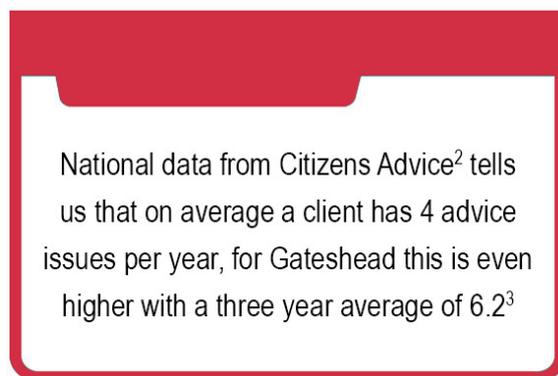
We want to change this picture, so people are not just getting by, surviving, subsisting and just about keeping their heads above water. Our aim, to make Gateshead a place where everyone thrives, will not only address the unacceptable inequalities experienced by some of our communities but it will also reduce the level of support needed. However before we can tip the scale, we need to be alive to the likelihood that a preventative approach will stimulate an increase in demand before there's any chance of it reducing. There'll undoubtedly be wins for individuals and households along the way but changing the statistics at a population level is a much longer-term game.

We know that individual vulnerability tends to drive the need for advice and support as opposed to, for example, the presence of a protected characteristic¹. Someone can be very capable one day and extremely vulnerable the next. The reason for this is not always obvious but can include significant life events like bereavement, redundancy or relationship breakdown. Similarly, a person with a protected characteristic, such as a disability, may not necessarily be vulnerable. When a significant adverse life event occurs even the most capable person can be thrown into turmoil, but let's be clear, it's not just a big change that can lead to a vulnerability, when income is so low, any small change can be a big problem. Whether it be a social welfare problem, a life changing or limiting event, or the persistence of poverty, these things all cause health and wellbeing to take a dive too.

- 4 in 5 people accessing advice and support from Citizens Advice Gateshead experienced a significant adverse life event before their problem arose.
- 9 in 10 Citizens Advice Gateshead clients said their problem negatively affected their lives, including causing anxiety and financial difficulty.

It is also rare for someone to experience a single problem in isolation. We know that problems, and their consequences, often appear in clusters.

The links between having a problem, experiencing stress, physical and mental ill health as well as homelessness is well established and accepted across all



National data from Citizens Advice² tells us that on average a client has 4 advice issues per year, for Gateshead this is even higher with a three year average of 6.2³

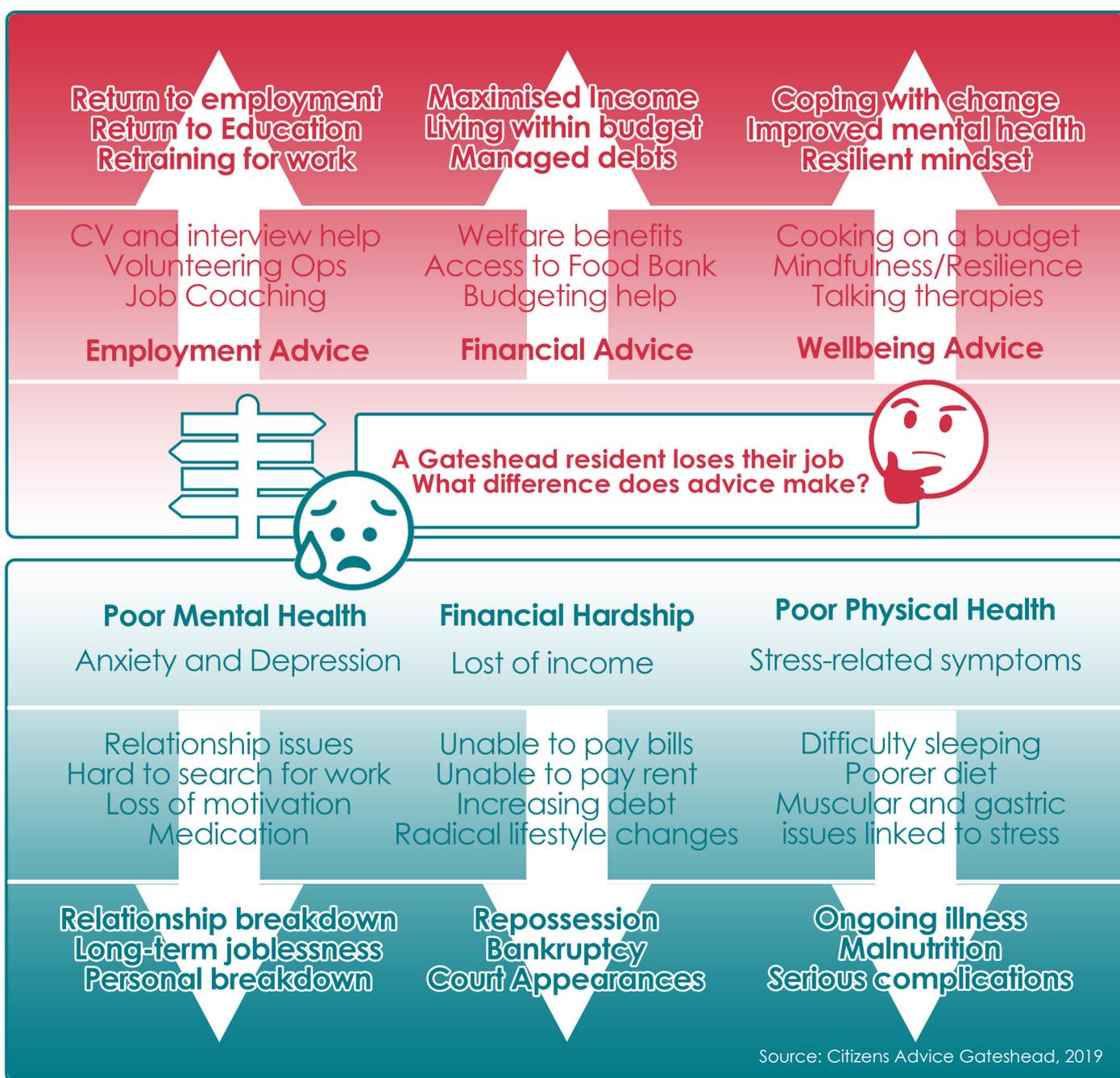
¹ A protected characteristic is described in the Equality Act 2010 as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

² Citizens Advice is a network of independent charities throughout the United Kingdom that give free, confidential information and advice to assist people with money, legal, consumer and other problems.

³ Average calculated using data from the last three full financial years

sectors. For example, worklessness can create a money problem which can threaten a home which can lead to a relationship breakdown; a single problem can lead to people having to face complex challenges that can spiral very quickly out of control. This is well articulated in the [Gateshead Council Health Needs Assessment, Homelessness and Multiple and Complex Needs](#)⁴ and, as you will read, is a theme in many of the case studies included throughout this report.

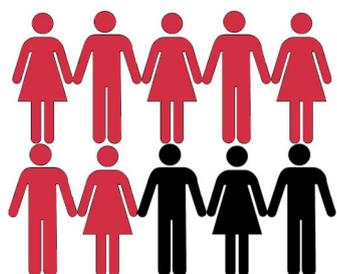
The clustering of problems, and the consequential cycle of deprivation, keeps too many of Gateshead's residents from achieving their full potential; they are unable to thrive. However we also know that if we can prevent problems escalating there are positive social, economic and health benefits for the individual, including mental health and living standards, as well as cost savings to the public purse.



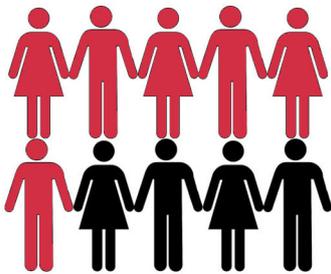
⁴ Report author Jill Harland

Advice as an antidote to inequality

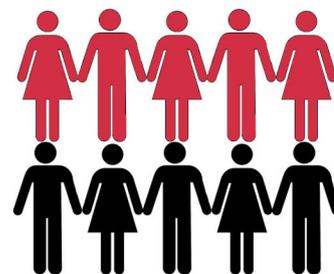
We know that advice, information and advocacy helps Gateshead residents to tackle the problems they are facing and prevent them from escalating. When we get it right, advice and advocacy can be a powerful antidote to inequality as the difference we can make to an individual's life also impacts positively on us as a whole society as well as the public purse.



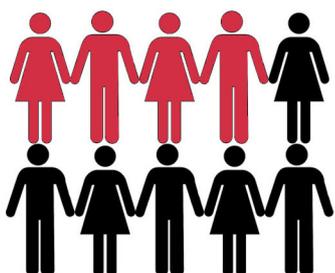
70% of people are helped to solve their problem



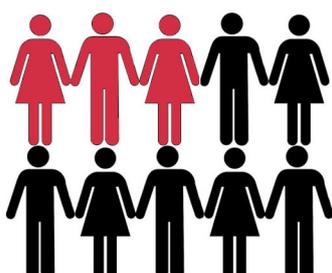
60% of people who receive advice found it easier to manage day-to-day



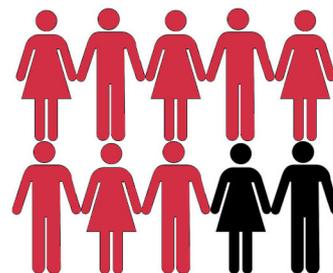
Nearly 50% felt they had better relationships with other people



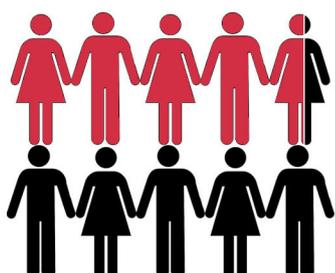
40% had a more secure housing situation



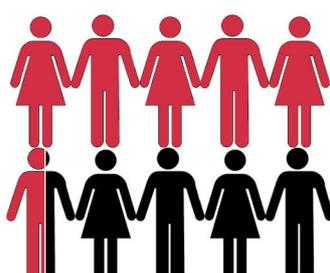
30% found it easier to do or find a job



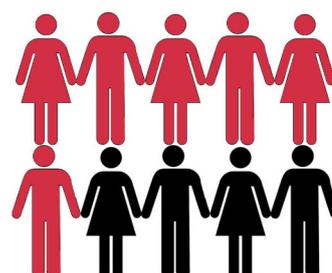
80% say advice improved their life



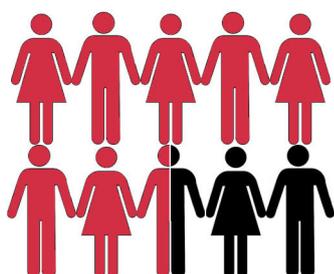
46% say their physical health improved



57% said they were better able to manage their health condition



60% of people said they had low confidence about acting to solve their problem before advice



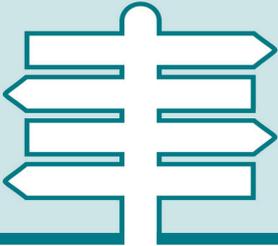
... but afterwards their resilience, skills, knowledge and confidence is improved with 66% saying they felt confident to handle a similar problem in the future and 75% feeling more knowledgeable regarding their rights.

Source: Citizens Advice Gateshead, 2019

THE RIGHT ADVICE AND ADVOCACY MAKES A TANGIBLE DIFFERENCE

VCSE example of advocacy

A Gateshead resident with autism and mild learning disabilities who, although residing in a specialist Independent supported living unit, was very anxious about expressing their own views for fear of conflict with family members or care providers. The advocate's focus was to enable and empower the person to express their own views and wishes without worrying about pleasing other people. The resident is now attending a work-training placement, which they enjoy greatly and is routinely travelling independently. The resident reports relationships with family members have improved considerably; self-esteem and confidence have increased to such an extent that the resident requested the local authority seek appointeeship for their personal finances. This has enabled the resident to have support with managing their finances and have more personal control over how the money is used.



VCSE example of advice

A Gateshead resident turned down for Personal Independence Payment even though they are registered partially sighted, have diabetic retinopathy, osteoporosis, diabetes, suffers with memory loss and has gone through a failed kidney transplant so attends hospital regularly for dialysis. The resident originally referred to VCSE agency for aids and adaptations and received a benefits check which identified an entitlement to Personal Independence Payment. The resident was reluctant to claim this benefit having been turned down on two previous occasions. The agency worked with the resident over three months and the resident was awarded with the enhanced rate of the daily living component and the enhanced rate of the mobility component, increasing their weekly income by £149. The additional income made taxis and socialising affordable, reducing isolation and enabling independence. The previous failed applications had led to anxiety and a sense of isolation – of 'not being disabled enough'. By having their conditions recognised they felt valued and empowered to take better care of themselves.



Strategic review of advice in Gateshead

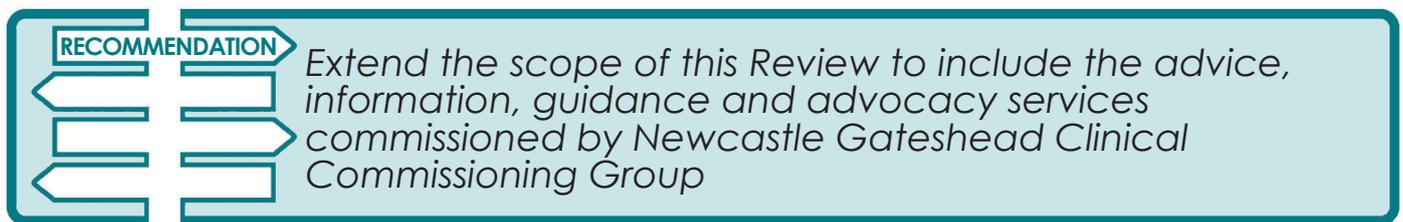
Advice, information, guidance and advocacy play a critical role in maximising household income⁵ and narrowing Gateshead's equality gap. In October 2018 Gateshead Council began a strategic review of advice, information, guidance and advocacy spanning:

- services delivered directly by the council and The Gateshead Housing Company;

⁵ Data from Citizens Advice Gateshead suggests a full time experienced welfare benefit adviser can secure income gains of £800,000 per annum. An income gain comes from successful benefit claims, tribunal awards, compensation and charitable payments to individuals.

- services commissioned from external organisations;
- and, as far as possible, sources of advice available to residents that fall outside these more formalised structures.

The Review does not include services offered by private businesses such as solicitor firms 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 or make any assumptions or judgements about Primary Care Networks⁶ and the role or impact of Link Workers.



The Review was instigated in light of the unprecedented challenges faced by advice and advocacy services (within both the Not for Profit sector and the public sector) as a result of cuts to local authorities budgets and funding decreases more generally across the system alongside rising demand due to the economic downturn, welfare reform, prolonged austerity and concerns about Brexit. These radical changes in government policies are destined to have a negative and disproportionate impact on the people of Gateshead where 1 in 5 of our children live in poverty, thousands of people rely on foodbanks and more than 10,000 people struggle to heat their homes.

When you combine all we know about our residents and the challenges many of them face, with a fierce determination to make Gateshead a place where everyone thrives, it makes absolute sense to review advice, information, guidance and advocacy; to understand the needs of our residents and how we can go about meeting those needs.

The Review, the detail of which is set out in this report, seeks to answer the question **What advice do Gateshead residents need to thrive, and how do we ensure they get it?** The methodology for the Review can be found at Annex 1.

⁶ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/primary-care/primary-care-networks/>

2

Advice services accessed by Gateshead residents



Current advice needs

It will always be difficult to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Gateshead residents' advice and advocacy needs. This is due in part to the disparate nature of the current advice infrastructure and the lack of a central knowledge bank within the council or elsewhere of advice-based activity.

However, through analysis of advice requests reported by Gateshead Council and a selection of provider agencies⁷, we are able to present a snapshot of the current advice priorities of Gateshead residents as illustrated below.

Debt <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Council tax debt makes up 18% of all money-related enquiries received by Citizens Advice Gateshead.• People with problem debt are three times more likely to consider suicide than those without problem debt.• Only 17% of North East people have savings, 51% are described as financially vulnerable.	
Universal Credit <ul style="list-style-type: none">• "Hitting people that can least afford it the hardest"⁸• Growing issue since its introduction October 2018• Approximately 80% of population not yet claiming UC so advice needs set to increase dramatically	
Benefits and Tax Credits <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Securing benefits is a big driver, but actually support to maintain benefit entitlement is a growing phenomena.• Not enough specialist advice capacity to support tribunal claims.	
Care & Local Services (Social Isolation and Dementia) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of affordable and appropriate care particularly day centre respite provision• Onus on the financial assessment process preventing client engagement• Demand outstripping support resource- utilised for accessing benefits and statutory provision.• Social isolation is not just affecting older people, a study from the Office for National Statistics, found that almost 10% of people aged 16 to 24 were "always or often" lonely - the highest proportion of any age group.	
Housing <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For many, housing tenure doesn't feel secure.• Insufficient supported housing available for those with additional needs.• Properties with two bedrooms or more - which are suitable for couples and single people - are unaffordable due to 'bedroom tax'.• The need to help people sustain welfare benefits plays into housing as well - it's very difficult for people to secure and maintain housing.	
Mental Health <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase in clients (and agency employees/volunteers) presenting with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and lack of confidence.• Clients who self-harm, are suicidal, those with personality disorders and dual diagnosis, and non-clinical agencies who help them, can be left adrift and vulnerable.• Long waiting lists and unhelpful eligibility criteria make referral to clinical services feel pointless or too far in the future to be useful.	

⁷ Gateshead Council currently commissions 12 organisations to deliver advice, information, guidance and advocacy services in Gateshead with a total annual investment of £838,120. See Annex 2 for an overview of all commissioned providers and the services they offer to Gateshead residents. Over and above the commissioned providers there are others in the public, private and VCSE provide who provide advice and advocacy without statutory funding. The cumulative spend on these services is unknown.

⁸ Mandy Cheetham, an embedded researcher with Gateshead Council's Public Health Team describes the impact of Universal Credit in her report, Cheetham M, Moffatt S, Addison M (2018). "It's hitting people that can least afford it the hardest" the impact of the roll out of Universal Credit in two North East England localities: a qualitative study. Final report. Gateshead Council, Teesside University and Newcastle University https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/10665/The-impact-of-the-roll-out-of-Universal-Credit-in-two-North-East-England-localities-a-qualitative-study-November-2018/pdf/Universal_Credit_Report.pdf?m=636782414862530000

As evidenced in the introduction to this report, problems rarely happen in isolation. Citizens Advice Gateshead report that for every client presenting to them with a problem, detailed exploration of the issue reveals a cluster of problems, on average 6.2 per issues per client for each enquiry they make. And they are not alone, this is a recurring theme throughout the consultation and testimony given to the Review.

Jill Harland in her report Homelessness and Multiple and Complex Needs states “*spending on multiple and complex needs is still largely reactive rather than tackling the root causes (structural, institutional, relational and personal)*”. This manifests in the cruellest of ways.



20% of children in Gateshead living in poverty, in our most deprived ward areas this can rise to 40%⁹



11% of households in Gateshead described as fuel poor due to low income, poor heating systems, inadequate thermal insulation and high fuel costs.



Increased use of foodbanks across Gateshead; its estimated as many as 7,000 Gateshead people had cause to use a foodbank last year.

There is a role here for the Gateshead Strategic Partnership to build on the work of the Health Needs Assessment for Homelessness and Multiple and Complex Needs. It is recommended that a strategic review of the work going on to address multiple and complex needs is undertaken, with the aim of streamlining across the criminal justice, health and social care, housing and social welfare system, with a view to agreeing a model to better support this group.

RECOMMENDATION

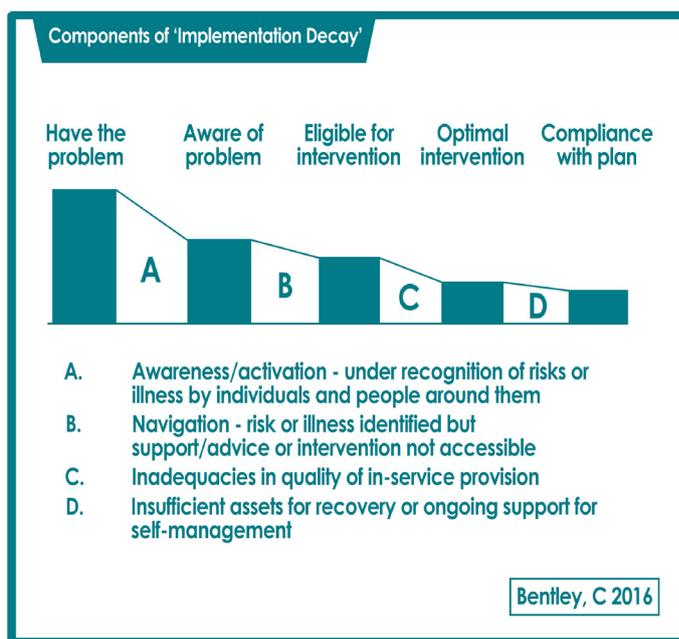
Conduct a Strategic Review of the work going on to address multiple and complex needs.

Supply and demand for advice services

NEED IS GREATER THAN DEMAND

Whilst demand continues to increase annually there is also evidence to suggest that only 30% of people who need advice, information, guidance and advocacy actually seek it; that leaves us with a whole lot of need that is not presenting in our demand statistics. This model¹⁰ is known as **implementation decay**, and is illustrated in the adjacent diagram, a phenomenon whereby a person knows they have a problem, but despite the risks, or perhaps because of them, they do not seek or cannot access the help they need. There

are any number of reasons for falling out, refusing help or struggling to engage with the system. Perhaps they do not have the emotional capital, digital skills or resilience to do it right now or they are put off by inadequacies in the quality or availability of service provision? Whatever the reason, their ability to implement a solution to their problem diminishes and less than 30% make it to the point of compliance with a plan.



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RECOMMENDATION

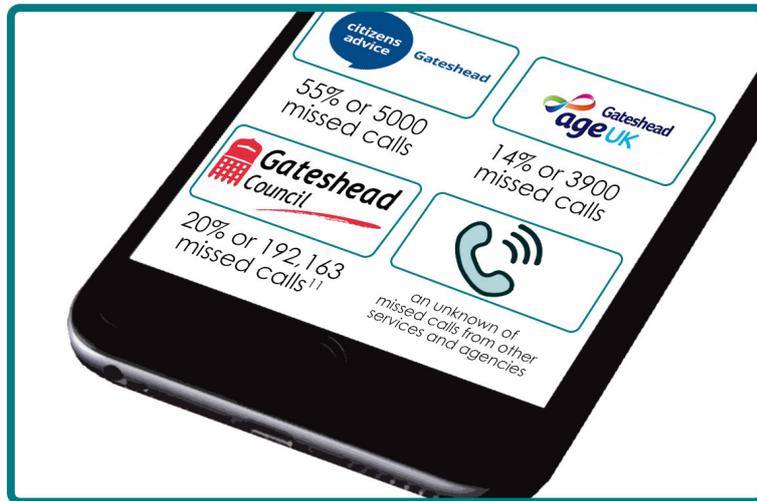
Proactively drive demand from those who need advice but aren't yet seeking help.

DEMAND IS ALREADY GREATER THAN SUPPLY

What we do know, however, is that **known demand for advice and advocacy services is already outstripping available supply in Gateshead.**

By way of a snapshot, in the last financial year, the percentage of unanswered calls made to just a small sample of advice service providers highlights an unmet demand of more than half a million calls. What is harder to establish is how many people are ringing again and again or ringing somewhere else because we don't get it right for them the first time round.

¹⁰ Implementation decay was proposed by Prof. Chris Bentley, Public Health Consultant and former Head of the Health Inequalities National Support Team,



UNKNOWN FUTURE DEMAND

The future advice infrastructure must therefore have the flexibility to grow its capacity to meet existing and future unknown demand. Predicting potential future demand is a challenge, as there is no universal method for forecasting demand for advice, information, guidance or advocacy, although there is universal agreement that demand will continue to increase. We know from the council's [Local Index of Need](#) data where demand might arise; we know where to find our vulnerable residents and those who are just coping, but we don't know how or when their need will manifest, nor do we yet know how to use the power of the [Local Index of Need](#) data to maximum affect.

And of course, we can try to understand demand from existing service delivery numbers but **demand can never be seen as an indicator of need**. We can never be sure how many people across the system fail to walk through our doors because they see a long queue; are met with a waiting list or an eligibility criteria they can't meet. For others, they don't get through on the telephone because the line is constantly engaged, or they are pushing on multiple doors, taking a little from each organisation, but never quite finding the solution to their problem.

RECOMMENDATION

Create **capacity to meet both existing demand and to up-scale** for additional demand that is as yet unquantified.

How people access advice services

Individuals seeking advice often access different advice channels through the journey to resolve their issue. This is dependent on why they are seeking advice, their current situation and their individual capacity. An advice seeker may initially access online information, and then move on to seek

¹¹ Source: Gateshead Council's Customer Experience Working Group

telephone or face-to-face advice and support in order to resolve their problem, moving from one channel to another throughout their journey.

DIGITAL SUPPORT

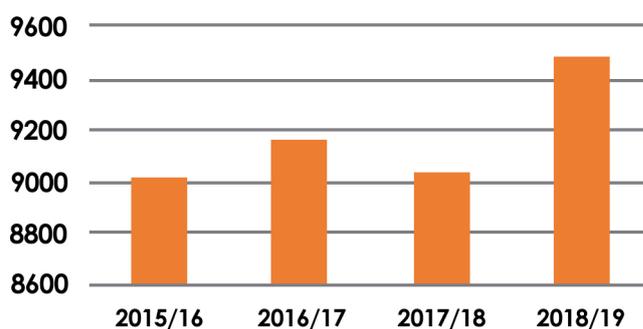
There is no doubt **demand for telephone and online advice like email, web-mail and on-line chat are increasing in Gateshead.** Citizens Advice Gateshead, for example, has experienced a significant increase in calls to their local Adviceline service yet, despite this, their capacity to respond has remained static. This means 5,000 calls to their local Adviceline service went unanswered last year. They expect this number to grow year on year.

This charity is not alone. Age UK Gateshead experienced a similar trend, with 3,900 unanswered calls during the same period. Although the numbers are smaller, email, web-mail and on-line chat are growing in popularity. Without the benefit of automated intelligence to help field the more routine questions asked on-line, consistently managing these digital services is very resource intensive for agencies; this can lead to unreliable and inconsistent delivery which undermines the integrity of the channel.

Despite increasing digital demand, there remains a cohort for whom digital advice is not suitable and never will be. This is due to issues such as access to the internet, computer literacy, user comprehension, confidence and cognitive functioning. In 2018 as many as 5.3 million UK households were still without access to the internet¹². The Office for National Statistics states that *“In an increasingly digital age, those who are not engaging effectively with the digital world are at risk of being left behind. Technological change means that digital skills are increasingly important for connecting with others, accessing information and services and meeting the changing demands of the workplace and economy. This is leading to a digital divide between those who have access to information and communications technology and those who do not, giving rise to inequalities*

2 in 3 people who have accessed advice services have said they had difficulty knowing who to contact or how systems work before they were able to access advice.

Gateshead Adviceline Call Demand



Citizens Advice Gateshead

Your Voice Counts report spending 13 hours to help a client with a learning disability submit an online claim for Universal Credit.

¹² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04>

in access to opportunities, knowledge, services and goods.”¹³ This group want and need face-to-face support.



RECOMMENDATION

Address unmet digital need, otherwise we risk escalating our residents' needs and the complexity of their problems, pushing them further down the Thrive pyramid of need.

It's important for us to recognise that just because you have a smart phone it does not mean you are digitally included. For example, it can take 90 minutes to complete the most basic online claim for Universal Credit, an impossible task on a mobile phone no matter how smart the user or the phone may be! Our local research tells us that, where there's a vulnerability, an online claim for Universal Credit is a trial of extraordinary endurance.



RECOMMENDATION

Access points across all channels – digital and face-to-face – must be more easily recognisable and accessible.

Online access to advice services

Another important dimension of digital support is online access to advice services. The quality of digital information to help those who are able either to self-help or find an agency that can help them in the public, VCSE, or private sectors, is currently poor.

The voluntary sector digital offer is not joined up, and the quality and consistency of online materials and information varies vastly between organisations.

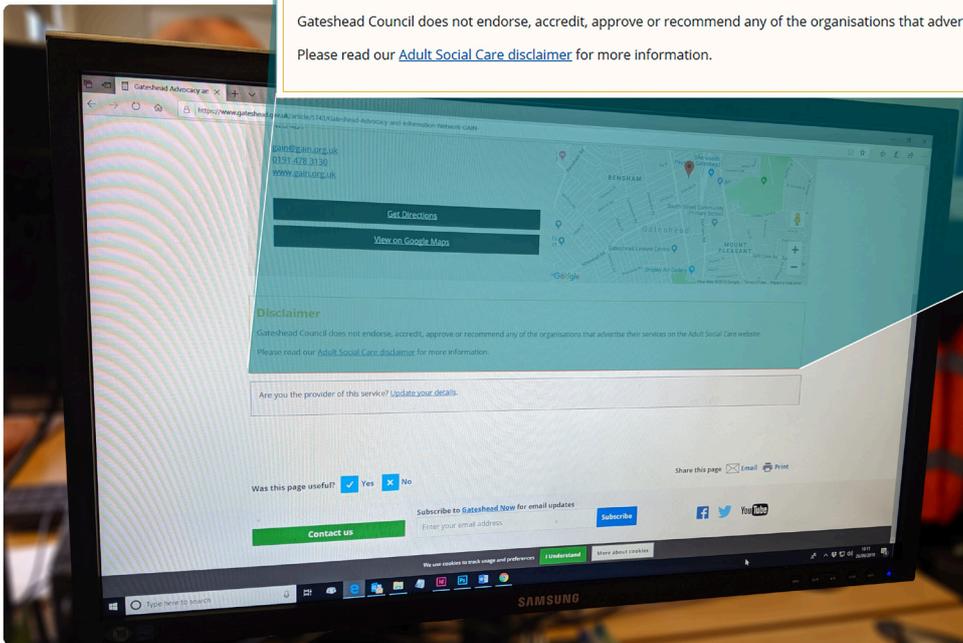
The council is currently working to improve its digital pages, but right now it offers only a list of providers but no clue about the category of information, or the capacity of the organisation to help. There is no way for advice seekers to self-refer to a third-party organisation using a webmail or to get reliable and accurate information to self-help.

The council site contains basic contact information only and a very large disclaimer at the bottom of each contact page which has the potential to weaken trust in the information and the credibility of the third-party organisation.

¹³ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/articles/exploringtheuksdigitaldivide/2019-03-04>

Disclaimer

Gateshead Council does not endorse, accredit, approve or recommend any of the organisations that advertise their services on the Adult Social Care website. Please read our [Adult Social Care disclaimer](#) for more information.



'OurGateshead' is a digital site where local people can find local information and learn about activities in their area. Whilst the word "advocacy" does appear in the site's drop-down box of searchable topics, the word "advice" does not, nor do "benefits", "welfare benefits", "tax credits", "universal credit" or any of the other top advice enquiries cited earlier in this report. General searchability on the site, beyond this drop-down menu, is based on keyword recognition rather than indexing, which means that potentially users are returned irrelevant entries (as well as relevant providers not coming up) because the appropriate keyword doesn't appear in their name.

The OurGateshead website does have a "help in a crisis" section on its home page which offers local information, but a need for advice, information, guidance and advocacy can arise, and be very important, without a crisis evolving. Positioning advice, information and guidance in this way creates a risk that residents may not recognise or relate to the term "help in a crisis" and may miss this information.

RECOMMENDATION

Review the Gateshead digital offer to ensure we are maximising this resource to promote and signpost advice, information, guidance and advocacy¹⁴.

SIGNPOSTING AND REFERRALS

Signposting is another issue which obscures our understanding of client need and how we meet existing demand.

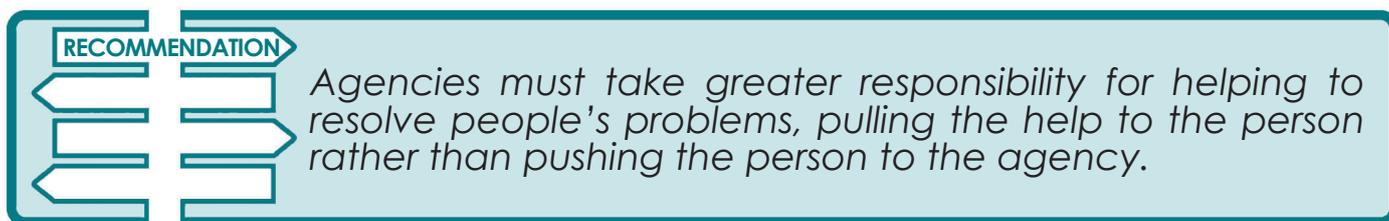
¹⁴ This includes exploring the use of artificial intelligence to enhance the self-help function

Advice UK describes signposting and referral as the “cornerstone of an effective advice network where a client can move from one agency to another receiving the service that best meets their needs and with the [agency] best qualified to deal.”

And yet, **providers rarely formally refer**. This is because a referral requires the provider working with the client to contact the referral agency directly on behalf of the client. When making a referral it is good practice for the provider to contact the alternative agency and make any necessary arrangements with them in order to ensure that the case is continued smoothly. This normally includes arranging an appointment for the client. Advice UK suggests when a referral takes place the referring provider has a “greater responsibility to ensure that the client continues to get the advice they need ... good practice to complete a referral form ... and to make sure you have done everything you can to make the referral successful”.

This approach is a **heavy burden** for the person making the referral. Amongst a transactional culture, which is often rewarded for the number of people pushed through services rather than the difference made to their lives, it is easy to see why a provider might wish to avoid a formal referral in favour of a lighter, less onerous method of signposting. Advice UK describe signposting as “the process of giving a client the details of other organisations that will be able to help them”.

The problem with signposting is this; it absolves the signposting agency of any responsibility to ensure the client arrives at the destination or gets the help they seek. The client must be motivated to self-serve, to go and tell their story again to someone they don't know at a place they've never visited before – to take a leap into the unknown. This increases inequalities as those who are able to will continue to navigate the system, and those who are less able will fall out. **Is it any wonder their need for help never shows up in our demand for service?** If we can get this right, if agencies increase their use of referrals and collaboration to take ownership of the outcome for the client, this can really mitigate the effect of implementation decay¹⁵ and increase the likelihood of a positive outcome for the client.



RECOMMENDATION

Agencies must take greater responsibility for helping to resolve people's problems, pulling the help to the person rather than pushing the person to the agency.

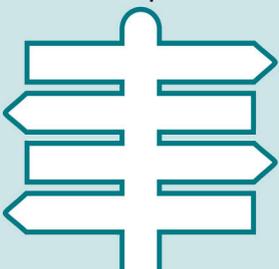
¹⁵ Refer to the implementation decay chart on page 14 above.

BESPOKE BY DEFAULT

For clients experiencing a vulnerability such as an unexpected adverse life event¹⁶, persistent low income, disadvantage and/or inequality, face-to-face advice and advocacy is essential. But it's not enough on its own. **Building trusting relationships** over an extended period, from services, venues and people they are comfortable with, is most likely to encourage the right conditions to enable them to thrive. If the advice and advocacy market has skills and capability but is not configured to operate in ways we are learning would be more helpful, it is the responsibility of both commissioners and providers to create an opportunity to operate differently.

Currently, people presenting with many problems that need information, advice and advocacy must navigate a series of organisations with their own criteria, thresholds and remits. Where problems are more than one-dimensional, it is likely that a **bespoke approach** would be more effective in understanding the context of a problem if it is going to be solved. This is ably demonstrated by the following two case studies.

Gateshead Council Public Service Reform Team



A Gateshead resident has health problems, is a hoarder, under-occupying so subject to bedroom tax, has high level of rent arrears and is facing eviction. Building trust allowed closer inspection of the resident's income, this revealed the real problem; two pensions paid at different times of the month, so whilst over the month the money was there, the resident never had enough at any one time to cover the rent. The answer was simple, pay half the rent each fortnight, £250 at the beginning and £250 at the end. We'd never taken the time to understand the resident or their money situation. The resident is paying regularly now, arrears are reducing, maybe if we'd done this earlier, threat of eviction and costs would be avoided, or at least reduced.

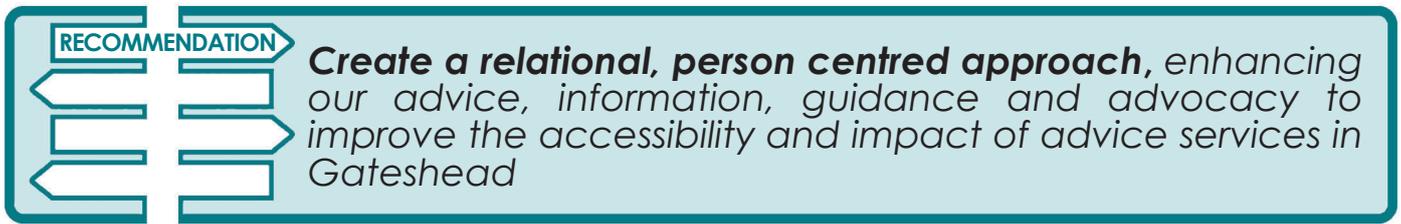
Basis, Gateshead



We're delivering multiple services under one roof so people with multiple problems don't have to visit multiple services. We've got clients, like Adam (not his real name), who have been accessing our service on and off for a number of years with numerous attempts to address homelessness, mental health and addiction. Historically these issues would be tackled in isolation of each other, seeking to complete one action before another could be started. When you deliver services like this, progress is rare and often short-lived, windows of opportunity slam shut before the services can mobilise and the cycle continues. With Adam, a prison sentence gave us a window of opportunity to plan; once released he visited us for practical support (use of laundry, shower and food) and we were able to link him with addiction services and the DWP to get vital processes in place. Crucially we were also able to place him in our Basis Beds, accommodation with intensive support to ensure that housing didn't become the end but the beginning of our work with Adam.

¹⁶ A life shock is something unexpected that turns your life upside down, examples include but are not limited to a bereavement, a relationship breakdown, redundancy, you are the victim of a crime, your home is threatened.

These case studies illustrate that simply assessing eligibility, looking at a specific issue in isolation and following a scripted process seldom works. Bespoke and holistic is hard to do within a specific remit (shaped by contracts and funding), so a new approach is needed.



RECOMMENDATION *Create a relational, person centred approach, enhancing our advice, information, guidance and advocacy to improve the accessibility and impact of advice services in Gateshead*

Additionally, there is a general model that reserves dedicated caseworkers, working long-term with people in need of more acute services. This is misleading as it is not the case that people whose problems aren't acute don't have situations that aren't complicated. Caseworkers operating at a lower level of acuity but who are empowered to both **advocate and problem solve** are central to being both helpful and effective.

Both the Review of information, advice and advocacy and the recent Public Service Reform prototypes have explored the notion of 'bespoke by default' being much more likely to be effective for residents, to have a role to play in preventing more expensive interventions and in reducing inequality of opportunity. To advance the learning from both exercises, **bespoke needs to be made normal**. We have identified several examples from sectors where this has worked well.

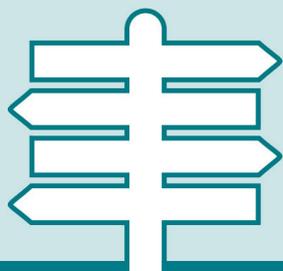


“It's not just any job, it's the right job”

The Employment Services Team employ Job Coaches to help people move closer to and into work. What's unique about this service is the way they tailor the support and match the client with the job coach, recognising the importance of relationships and trust. They know what works for one person to help them thrive may be different to what works for another, so their approach is person-centred, tackling challenges together with the client, supporting them to pursue opportunities that are right for them. This service is absolutely invested in helping their clients to thrive.

“It’s about making the small things big”

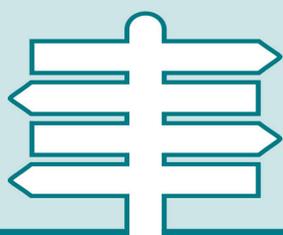
SEND Working in partnership, the Early Help Information, Advice and Guidance Team and Dryden School has done much to reflect on the Preparing for Adult Agenda for children and young people with special educational needs and disability, using their combined strengths in learner experience, transition planning and post-16 opportunities to engage families about their child’s journey through education, setting high aspirations and challenging limiting belief so every learner has the chance to achieve their potential. This approach ensures parents and young people are thinking about what the future holds for them early on in their



academic careers, particularly in relation to employment, independent living, community inclusion and being healthy, and over a period of years, having identified the young person’s strengths, attributes and aspirations, support is targeted to get the young person where they want to be. Key to all of this is the skill of building strong and trusting relationships. The team describe this as “making the small things big”.

“We’re flexing our resource to meet client needs”

Citizens Advice Gateshead has introduced a new model of delivery, creating social welfare advisers who can deliver multi-disciplinary¹⁷, multi-channel social welfare advice, everything from welfare benefits to money advice, immigration to community care, housing to employment advice. The aim of working in this way is to give the social welfare advisers a broad range of skills and the autonomy required to do the right thing for their client in the way that suits the



client best. With advisers no longer chained to a town centre office, They’ve set an expectation of multi-channel delivery, giving advisers the flexibility for digital delivery as well as a return to community, a home or hospital visit when needed. They are focussing on the difference they make, not the transaction, tool or channel.

It’s clear that for some clients the variety and complexity of their problem or personal circumstance is too great for a single organisation or sector. Attempts to manage this within and between organisations and sectors as they are currently designed and funded have not - and will not - succeed. For those people, an alternative approach would be to form a new arrangement, to try a different approach by forming a new entity that transcends organisational boundaries; a move away from commissioners and providers deploying a contractual, activity-based relationship.

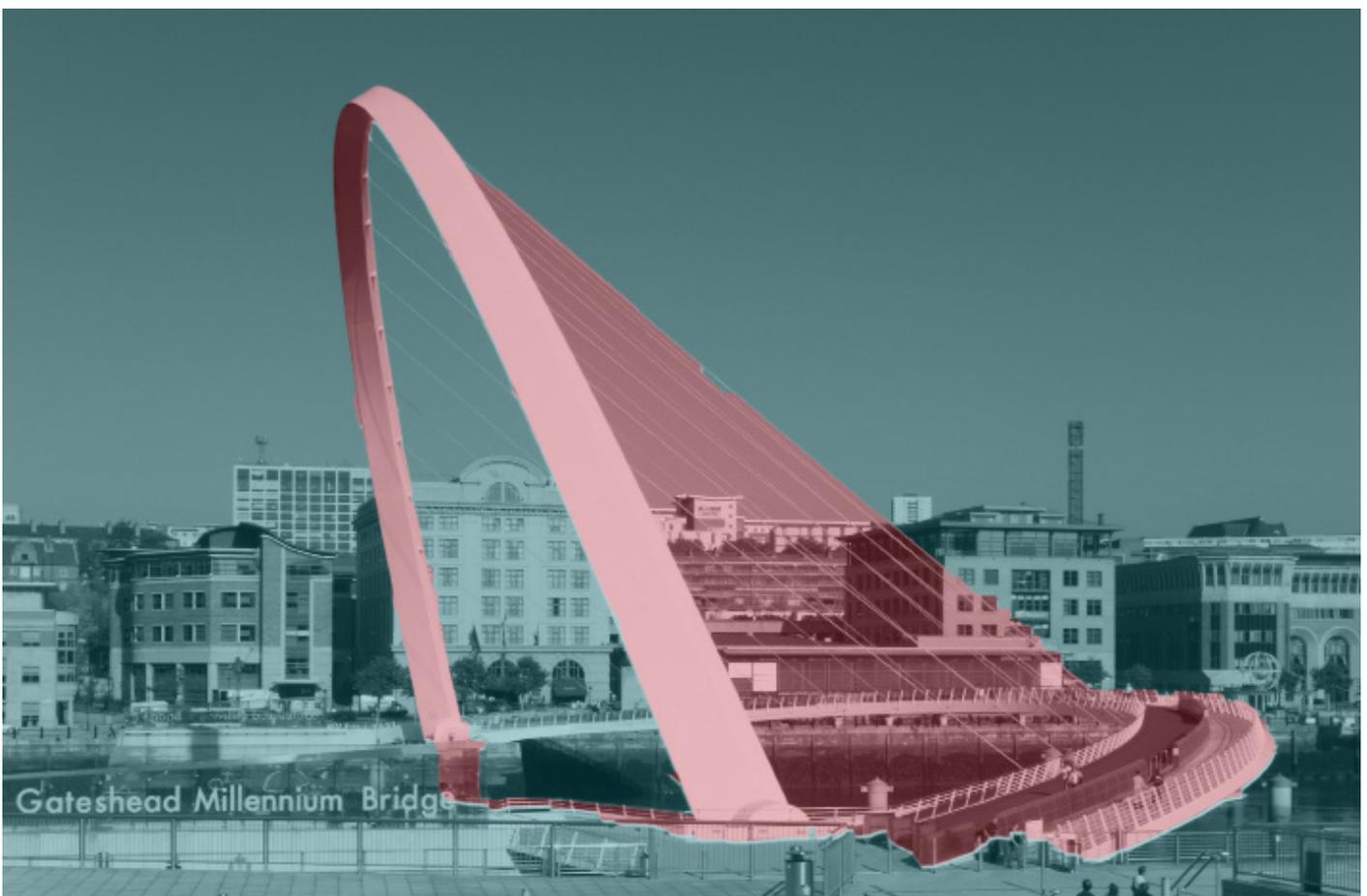
¹⁷ In this context multi-disciplinary means a single worker capable of delivering a range of social welfare advice topics rather than the more commonly used form of describing a multi-functional team where people are working together to solve a problem or handle a situation that requires capabilities, knowledge, and training not available from any one source.

This is a significant endeavour, it requires us to think beyond the limitation of the current organisations' remits and boundaries and so it would be prudent to test this approach.

The community-based prototype in Beacon Lough East, together with the learning from the Gateshead Advice Partnership and Gateshead Council's Public Service Reform and Customer Experience work strands, are all well placed to inform a broader model and commission that can meet the advice, information, guidance and advocacy needs of Gateshead people at scale, whilst remaining bespoke to the needs of individuals. The aim of such an endeavour is not only to help people find a solution to the problems they face, but also enhance and support health and wellbeing before the need requires the more acute, expensive and specialised services provided via the health and social care systems. To do this we need to shift our focus from "how many" people we help to "how well" we help them.

RECOMMENDATION

Create a new body that is communally invested in, and purposed to, understanding and helping people with issues that transcend current structures.



3 Current advice infrastructure



Commissioned advice services

Gateshead Council commissions multiple AIGA providers, 12 commissions¹⁸ over different timescales and using different methods. As was common practice when many of the commissions were instigated, we are **measuring the quantity of contacts** and not necessarily the quality of the outcomes in our service level agreements. Furthermore, they are all counting and measuring different things in different ways so it's hard to even compare the outputs.

RECOMMENDATION

Create an outcomes framework that offers a broader range of outcome measures to include qualitative and experience measures not just counting numbers.



The council's current spend for advice, information and guidance commissioned by the council is £414,435, and for advocacy is it is £423,685.¹⁹ As you can see from Annex 3, this figure has reduced year on year during the last five years, and overall by 47%.

It is important to note however, that advice, information, guidance and advocacy isn't always directly commissioned or delivered internally as a stand-alone service but also forms a discrete element of contract specifications or an **undefined "added value" element of broader service offers**. An example of this could be supported housing, day care services or support offered by The Gateshead Housing Company where advice, information, guidance or advocacy inevitably falls from the substantive activity. The monetary and social value of this activity is not included within the figures above and is almost impossible to quantify.

¹⁸ See Annex 2 for a list of commissioned providers of advice services in Gateshead

¹⁹ In addition to the advocacy the council commissions from the VCSE it provides some statutory advocacy internally and/or in partnership with other councils across the region.

In addition, occasionally what we commission is supplemented by **short term and/or themed funding**, for example the funding of five welfare benefit advisers from the Poverty Reserve Fund, two of whom are placed within the Council Benefit Teams, the other three within Citizens Advice Gateshead. Due to the short-term nature of this funding the value of these arrangements is not included in the headline figure above.

When we do commission, some governance documents and funding requirements run into many pages, others are sparse with greater reliance on the relationship and history of collaboration. The weight of contract documentation does not correlate to the value of the commission or the risk of the activity, nor does it reflect the value or mitigation of the external standards, accreditation and quality assurance held by providers. For example, the Advice Quality Standard is the quality mark for organisations that provide advice to the public on social welfare issues. Organisations that hold the standard have demonstrated that they are easily **accessible, effectively managed, and employ staff with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of their clients.**

You can search for organisations that hold the Advice Quality Mark using at <https://advicequalitystandard.org.uk/>



Some organisations the Local Authority commission have gone further, securing the Specialist Quality Mark²⁰ or accreditation from the ISO 9000²¹ family of quality management systems standards. Using external standards and accreditation as a method of ensuring greater consistency across the sector, as a way of mitigating risk, developing relationships based on trust, understanding and respect for different working practice, makes perfect sense. Where we see these **quality marks and accreditations**, as a commissioner we can take comfort these organisations are generally well run, fast-tracking them through the commissioning process and relaxing our risk management of them. Working in this way, avoiding annual commissioning, performance or auditing visits and the many other checks and processes we do will free up capacity for us to work with organisations that don't have these standards either to help them achieve them (if that's what they want) or to understand how else we can manage them and be assured of the quality of their activity.



There are also inconsistencies in the way we performance manage our providers. **Some commissions receive considerable scrutiny, others receive little.** Again, this does not reflect the value of the commission or the risk to the council of the activity; rather it tends to be led by the enthusiasm of the officer for the task and with little evidence it leads to better outcomes for the client, take care homes for example, these are often subject to stringent performance management yet rarely does this approach improve quality.



In consulting with the VCSE it is apparent they feel a **lack of parity in the commissioning relationships**; without careful stewardship both parties naturally lean toward a paymaster / supplier relationship, perpetuating an imbalance in the relationship which can make it difficult for the parties to recognise we often want the same thing i.e. a focus on improving outcomes for Gateshead residents. Lankelly Chase, in their work around improving systems, talk about the importance of “**equality of voice, actively promoted**”; we're some way from this.

²⁰ Specialist Quality Mark (SQM) is owned by the Legal Aid Agency and was developed to help ensure quality of advice and effective quality management processes.

²¹ ISO 9000 is designed to help organisations ensure that they meet the needs of customers and other stakeholders while meeting statutory and regulatory requirements related to a product or service.

Typically, we commission a service for 2 to 5 years. Funding and commissioning approaches that are **longer term learning and outcome-focused enable providers to plan more effectively**, invest in partnership working, and offer greater flexibility in how they manage their services. Providers working collaboratively together with funders over a period, to learn and course-correct, would offer a more dynamic, creative service capable of reflecting local needs and demand pressures. The concept of ensuring stability for the VCSE is enshrined in the Gateshead Compact, a document ripe for review, and which if done well, can set the tone for how public sector agencies and VCSE work together to agreed standards, values, principles and objectives. More is possible when there is greater security as it prevents the competition (and the cost) aspect of annual commissioning cycles.

RECOMMENDATION

Review the Gateshead Compact to better understand how the Council and the VCSE can work together better for the benefit of the people they serve.

When a commission approaches its conclusion, there is a tendency to “roll it over” rather than reviewing, re-tendering or ending an arrangement. This almost always happens at the last minute and in some instances happens retrospectively leaving both parties exposed to risk. When a roll-over occurs rarely do we review the desired outcomes. Whilst we may view a roll-over as a gift, **the way the VCSE organisation experiences it can be quite different**. For them it can be **de-stabilising**; they may be implementing their exit plan, running down the service in anticipation it will end, staff may have left the organisation or been moved on to other projects, and beneficiaries told the service is ending; the effort and disruption caused by a late reprieve to the service is disruptive and reputationally damaging to the provider.

RECOMMENDATION

*Increase provider resilience and create dynamic and creative services, capable of reflecting local needs and demand pressures by **commissioning for no less than 5 and up to 10 years**.*



Non-commissioned advice services

Gateshead Council commissions 13 advice, information, guidance and advocacy providers²² to deliver social welfare advice, statutory or community advocacy, however that's not the whole story. Connected Voice formerly known as Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service, in their report entitled [Canaries in the Coal Mine](#), state in Gateshead there are around 851 registered charities operating across, but not necessarily based in, Gateshead. In addition, there are 10 mutuels and co-operatives, 25 community interest companies and between 1,300 and 2,000 small, local groups, activities and organisations²³. For many of these organisations Gateshead Council is not their primary funder, many receive little or no funding from the Council.

For some of these VCSE organisations, their activity in relation to advice, information, guidance or advocacy is **driven by demand from a group with shared characteristics** (for example learning disabilities or mental health issues) rather than by a strategic approach or a desire to deliver these services. They describe feeling compelled, and unprepared; expressing a sense of worry about the demand and quality of their offer.

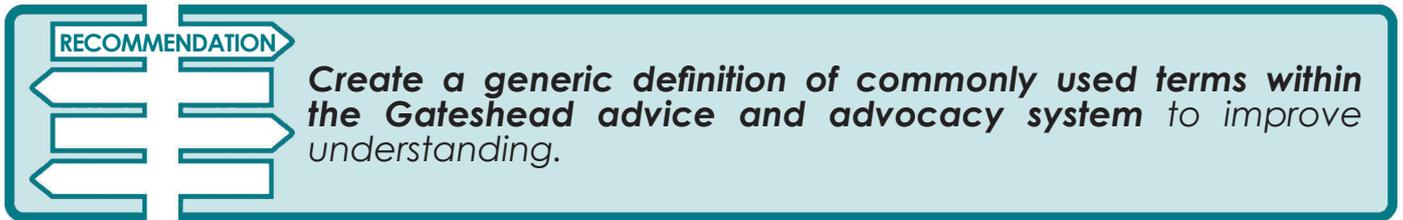


Despite valiant efforts over a prolonged period the Gateshead Advice Partnership, by its own admission, has been unable to change the way VCSE organisations collaborate to deliver advice, offering little evidence in support of a strategic or joined up approach to advice delivery. Yet, we know that promoting advice networks and collaborative working offers the opportunity for a more **strategic approach to delivery**, encouraging partnership, sharing of resources, with the aim of improving outcomes for advice seekers. There are good examples of this way of working in [Advice Plymouth](#) funded by Plymouth City Council, and more locally in Newcastle upon Tyne in the form of a [Active Inclusion Network](#).

²² See Annex 2

²³ Canaries in the coal mine, table 1, page 8

Even those providers who are commissioned to deliver advice services by Gateshead Council are not joined up as well as they could be. There appears to be a lack of awareness, consistency and co-operation between providers, even a mistrust which is not helped by **fundamental differences in stakeholder opinions** of what advice, information, guidance and advocacy represents, what each of these terms means and what good quality looks like. As a result, providers may think they are talking about the same thing, and delivering the same thing, but often they are comparing apples with pears.

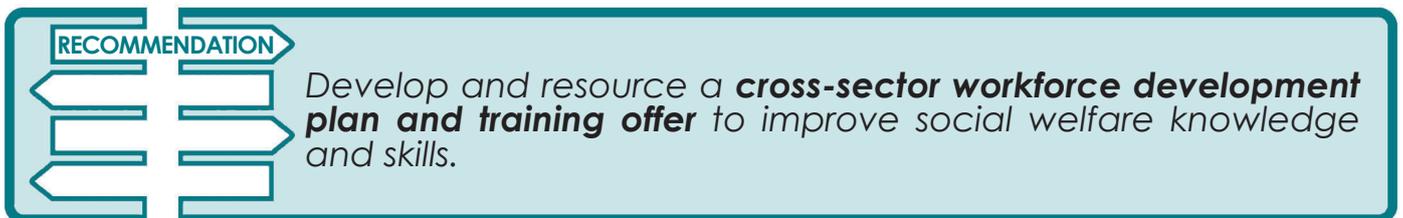


RECOMMENDATION

Create a generic definition of commonly used terms within the Gateshead advice and advocacy system to improve understanding.

Some non-commissioned providers of advice, information, guidance and advocacy describe feeling **vulnerable about their service offer**, cognisant it may not be delivering the right service or quality but doing so because they know there is insufficient commissioned community advocacy, money advice and welfare benefit resource to meet the demand they face. They feel obligated to provide something to their beneficiaries, even if it isn't a perfect solution.

We could do more to support these VCSE organisations, encouraging partnership, sharing skills, knowledge, resources, collective workforce development, mentoring and training opportunities, helping them to find clarity in establishing boundaries and referral mechanisms. There's a role here for Gateshead Council, Connected Voice and the agencies we commission moving forward, to identify and resource a workforce development strategy capable of developing social welfare knowledge and skills across all sectors, informing the specification of any emerging caseworker capability operating at pre-statutory intervention levels.



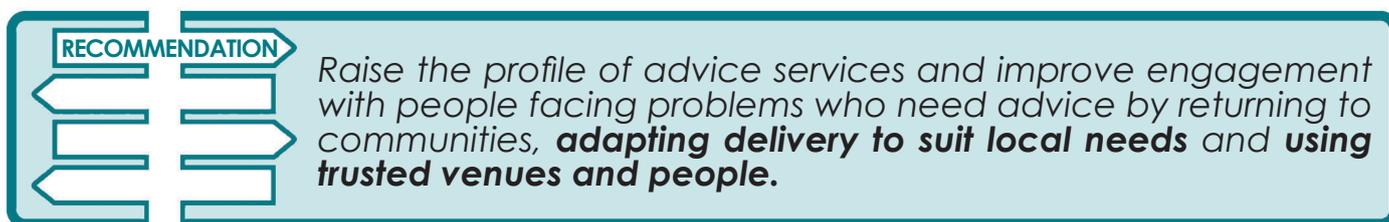
RECOMMENDATION

*Develop and resource a **cross-sector workforce development plan and training offer** to improve social welfare knowledge and skills.*

Developing working partnerships with VCSE organisations would also increase the localisation of advice service delivery for hard to reach communities. One consequence of austerity and the pursuit of a "more for less" agenda has been the centralisation of advice services which are predominantly, although not exclusively, delivered from Gateshead town centre. There's also the cost

and time associated with travel to a centralised service. If you are a single person in receipt of Universal Credit the cost of two return trips from Chopwell to Gateshead can be more than your monthly disposable income after payment of essential household expenses. **Advice and advocacy is not accessible for everyone.**

Everything we are learning from the review of advice, information, guidance and advocacy, from the Public Service Reform and Customer Experience work we are doing tells us a **return to community**, building trusting relationships over time and more sustainable outcomes is the way to go if we are to reduce implementation decay²⁴ and reach more people. Face-to-face advice delivered through outreach offers the advantage of widening access to advice for hard to reach communities not currently able to access centralised services.



RECOMMENDATION Raise the profile of advice services and improve engagement with people facing problems who need advice by returning to communities, **adapting delivery to suit local needs** and **using trusted venues and people.**

Council services

Gateshead Council is made up of councillors who are elected by the public in local elections. Councillors work with local people and partners, such as local businesses and other organisations, to agree and deliver on local priorities such as the Thrive agenda. The decisions are implemented by permanent council staff and council officers, who deliver services on a daily basis.

Gateshead Council has set out on an ambitious programme of public service reform, determined to deliver the Thrive agenda and recognising as resources diminish and demand grows, it cannot continue to deliver services, collaborate or spend money as it has done in the past. The public service reform programme seeks to learn how to work with all citizens and partner organisations across Gateshead to help everyone to thrive. The approach starts with people, their families and their communities and works outwards from there as opposed to a more standardised and centralised model. **The programme seeks to learn and change** rather than to impose an already established view of what better services would look like.

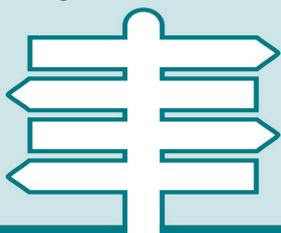
In some council services there is a lack of understanding about Public Service Reform; a belief the “PSR” or “Thrive Team”, offers an enhanced service provision - a short, sharp, high intensity response for complex issues and/or difficult clients. As a result, understanding of public sector reform and the learning from prototypes

²⁴ For an explanation of implementation decay see the chart on page 14 above.

as a mechanism to influence how the council might do things differently is lost. But that's also not the whole story. There are some tremendous examples of activity and services within the council which support the Thrive agenda, embracing the concept and many of the behaviours we seek from Public Service Reform. Some examples of these are set out below.

“Once you know your purpose, everything falls into place”

The Private Sector Housing Team within Gateshead Council approach involves recognising and tackling failure demand, i.e. the cases that they as an organisation know about but haven't 'fixed' in the past, or when working with a resident foreseeing a need that they haven't actually presented for, and replacing this with concerted effort to identify the root cause of behaviour and proactively acting to prevent escalation. To do this they've created better networks with other professionals and the third sector, but they refrain from 'referring on', instead they maintain professional ownership and pull the services they or the client need. What does this mean in reality? It means when they visit a home for (say) anti-social behaviour or disrepair, they're looking at the bigger picture, what else is going on for the resident, how's their health, who else are they dealing with, is the house cold, clean, safe? Food in the cupboards? Relationships with neighbours, friends and family strong? Isolation? Financial abuse? The whole gambit, it goes



way beyond the presenting problem of the bricks and mortar. Once they understand the client's situation, they are building relationships, gaining trust and supporting the client to navigate the system, brokering conversations and connecting them to the services and people that can make a difference

Guidepost is truly user led

People who use the Guidepost drop-in are not required to go, they are not assessed or sent, they go by choice, using their free will, like any other member of the public. Guidepost is fluid and responds to the needs and interests of the users, there is no obvious agenda, no pressure to join in or change as people may have experienced elsewhere. Key to its success, the fact that people with learning disabilities are part of this management team; this sends a clear and explicit message to the users that people with learning disabilities are valued here. The staff team subtly offer opportunities that will benefit those who attend and present these opportunities

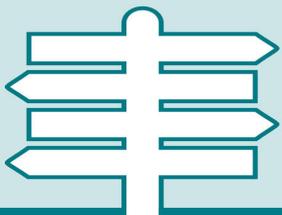


by wrapping them up into exciting projects and activities. Everybody connects on a level playing field and whilst support staff give advice, guidance and sometimes direct instruction, leadership shifts from person to person across staff, reps and Guidepost attendees, based on expertise in different areas and not on formal status.

Like their VCSE colleagues, staff in council services talk about increasing demand, complexity, reducing resource and the impact of uncertainty on morale, wellbeing and productivity. This concurs with findings published by Connected Voice in their report, [Canaries in the Coal Mine](#). Some employees demonstrated an awareness, and occasionally frustration that process, custom and practice leaned too heavily toward “screening out”, excluding clients from help rather than inviting them in. Further, in some cases where we purported to give advice and support, we only did so in so far as it furthered a **broader aim of collecting a debt**; the activity fell short of a holistic person-centred offer that helped a person to thrive. Sometimes we miss the point entirely, neglecting the opportunity to build trust by **focussing on what’s important to us and not what’s important to the client**.

“Its the small things...”

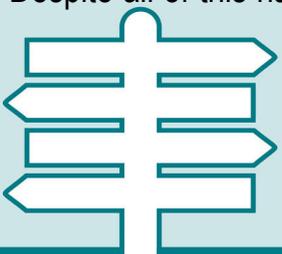
A Gateshead resident contacted the Council, as their housing provider, regarding a court letter from a bailiff threatening him with prison, he was very distressed and had attempted suicide. His poor mental health stopped him from leading a normal life. He misses appointments for his Universal Credit, he gets a benefit sanction, he requests a hardship payment to see him through, next time his Universal Credit is paid he has another deduction because the hardship payment must be paid back – it’s a vicious circle of desperation. He wants to sort it out, he wants a better life, but what’s bothering him right now? He wants to give his nephew a birthday card. That’s what’s important to him in the here and now. Why can’t we help him to give his nephew a birthday card and in doing so, free him up to get to the bigger stuff?



On occasion our actions, whilst within the parameters of council policy and accepted custom and practice, have aggravated an already tense or difficult situation, and in some cases what we do, or fail to do, can cause real harm. These case studies demonstrate the way the scenario can play out and how easy it would be for us to unlock the potential of a solution.

"I am struggling ... "

“I am struggling, trying best but no one seems like they want to help. I have severe depression, 3 boys and my washing machine is not working”. The response is “Are you wanting to do weekly or monthly payments?”. No acknowledgement of the personal circumstances, no attempt to signpost or refer, no offer of a listening ear. Had we probed a little more we would know this client has a mental health issue, is a victim of domestic violence, is managing stress with a cigarette habit they can’t afford (and don’t want); is working but remains persistently poor. Despite all of this hardship, what’s really bothering the client right now is a terrible neighbour but they can’t move whilst they have rent arrears, they can make an offer to repay the arrears but its money they haven’t got, if they promise to pay and don’t, it’s likely the debt collection process will escalate, that means more charges they can’t pay and more stress they can’t manage.

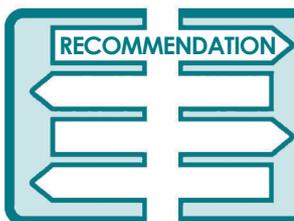




RECOMMENDATION Create and facilitate cross-sector small grants fund, free of bureaucracy, so advisors and caseworkers, have direct means to purchase those little things (without delay or permission) providing the small things that develop the trust required for the bigger conversations.

Feedback across both sectors

Without exception, staff and volunteers involved in high volume customer service activity, advice, information, guidance and advocacy felt their work (and the impact they could offer clients) would be enhanced if they had greater (and easier) access to money advice and welfare benefit advisers. This theme prevailed across both the Council and the VCSE, much the same as the increase in the number of clients displaying violent and aggressive behaviour towards frontline staff and volunteers appeared as a theme for both sectors.



RECOMMENDATION Significantly **Increase** the number of **welfare benefit and money advice specialists** in the system capable of doing higher level interventions needed for clients with multiple and/or complex needs.

Whilst admittedly not a quick fix, one way to do this is to consider how we use the migration from housing benefit to Universal Credit to resource additional social welfare support and co-location. Once the Department of Work and Pensions achieve a full roll-out of Universal Credit in Gateshead and all claimants are migrated onto the benefit, housing benefit will no longer be administered by the Local Authority. The Government expects all benefit claimants will be transferred to Universal Credit by March 2023. Currently there are approximately 20 people employed by the council to administer housing benefit. This provides **an opportunity for Gateshead Council to redirect this resource** (in full or in part) to increase the resourcing of advice, information, guidance and advocacy. We could use this existing resource to start testing the benefit of co-location between the public sector and independent advice and advocacy agencies. The obvious place to start testing an approach of co-location between the Council and the VCSE is with either Gateshead Housing Company's Advice and Support Team or with the Gateshead Council Revenue and Benefits Team. Both have a history of collaborative working with the VCSE, are committed to delivering the Thrive agenda and have contributed to the Public Service Reform prototypes in one way or another. Co-location has the potential to evolve in to sharing knowledge, duties, money and control.



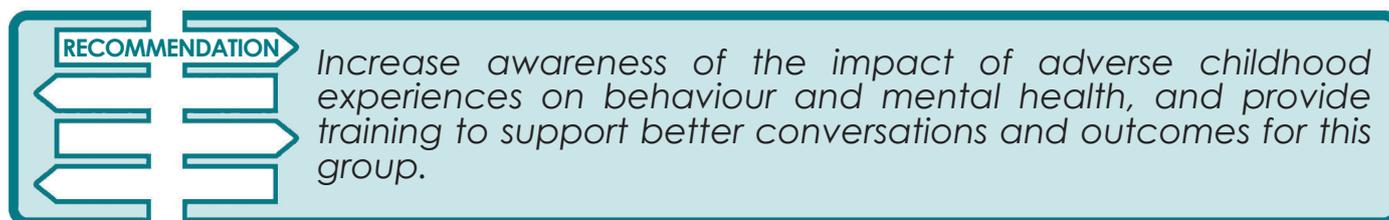
RECOMMENDATION

Test the benefits and impact for all stakeholders of co-location with independent advice and advocacy agencies.

The Review repeatedly received testimony describing an overwhelming concern about clients with mental ill-health, particularly those with significant and enduring mental illness, people presenting with personality disorders or dual diagnosis²⁵, as they are most in need of treatment services (substance abuse and mental health)²⁶ as well as advice, information, guidance and advocacy. And yet, there seems to be a lack of understanding around the impact of adverse childhood experiences and the legacy these children take into adulthood.

Darren McGarvey makes this point forcefully in his book 'Poverty Safari' when he talks about child abuse and neglect, writing,

“sanitised images used to portray child abuse and neglect without upsetting us, distort the true nature of the problem. These pictures create a false impression that the victims are perpetual children, frozen in time, just waiting for us to reach into the photograph and remove them from harm. As children, they receive unlimited sympathy and compassion. But the second these kids are legally culpable, our entire posture towards them changes. When the truth, whether we want to accept it or not, is that the neglected and abused kids, the unruly young people, the homeless, the albies, the junkies and the lousy, irresponsible, violent parents are often the same person at different stages of their lives. It’s almost a cliché to point out the correlation between poverty and nearly every other social problem you care to mention. Not just economic hardship, but poverty of the sort that fertilises cultures of abuse”.



RECOMMENDATION

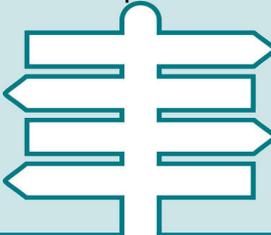
Increase awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on behaviour and mental health, and provide training to support better conversations and outcomes for this group.

²⁵ Dual diagnosis is the term usually used to describe patients with both severe mental illness (mainly psychotic disorders) and problematic drug and/or alcohol use. Personality disorder may also co-exist with psychiatric illness and/or substance misuse.

²⁶ <https://www.gatesheadjsna.org.uk/article/6042/What-the-data-tells-us>

Advice seekers who present with challenging behaviour and circumstances are particularly challenging for receptionists and customer service advisers to deal with. Whilst this group of employees and volunteers are undoubtedly highly experienced their training is rightly generic, giving them a broad range of skills to deal with a broad range of people, and most of the time it is enough, but not always. They describe having little to no autonomy to make decisions or compel services to respond to a client, even when that client is obviously in dire need and common-sense dictates an obvious and immediate course of action.

Disempowered



A client presented with a real and imminent fear of domestic violence, concerned the perpetrator could show up at any time and attack them. The employee was unable to give the client a private room, out of sight, for fear of criticism from the service who insisted the room was kept available, without exception, for drop in clients. The client felt so vulnerable she left, the employee felt disempowered and ashamed at being part of a system that failed to respond with kindness to a desperate plea for help.

What the staff and volunteers describe is a **feeling of hopelessness** in terms of the outcome for the client and a feeling of helplessness for themselves as they try to deliver a kind and empathetic service for the client before them. A focus upon eligibility, screening or a culture of “that’s how we do things around here” ignores the fact that people do not turn up in services unless they have exceeded the limits of self-help and/or care; they turn up in services because they know something more is needed. Front-line staff know when we are getting this wrong and this would sometimes lead to a conversation about dissatisfaction with the support they receive to manage, assess need and refer on to treatment options. For clients experiencing multiple disadvantage (for example social isolation, adult or childhood trauma, deprivation, poverty, physical or mental ill health and/or discrimination) we should consider additional support mechanisms delivered by the VCSE and people with the greatest lived experience.

There is lots of confusion, myth and mis-information about what people can and should expect in a difficult situation from agencies like the [mental health] Initial Response Team²⁷, the [council] Emergency Duty Team²⁸, safeguarding, social work teams, [NHS] health professionals and emergency services. In fact, often agencies working on the frontline still refer to one or more of these agencies as the “crisis team” or as “crisis support”, and in doing so, express wildly differing views about what this means. The reality is the “crisis team” no longer exists, and hasn’t for some time and the “crisis support” offer they reference, if indeed there is such a thing, consists of multiple local, regional and national agencies.

²⁷ <https://www.ourgateshead.org/initial-response-team>

²⁸ <https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/article/9330/Emergency-Duty-Team-EDT->

The dis-satisfaction felt in the response to people in need with a known mental health problem is driven by out-dated expectations about the role of these agencies, how their work has changed over the years and what agencies can now reasonably expect from adult social care, mental health services, primary and secondary. There is a real gap between the expectation agencies of this group of services can offer and the reality of what they can or should deliver. Nonetheless the problem is very real for these agencies and we have to do more to manage expectations and to provide the tools, knowledge, skills and training requires helping them manage challenging incidents better. This case study brings the problem alive demonstrating how this can play out for the voluntary sector, many of whom describe feeling overwhelmed, unprepared and unable to offer an adequate response to the distress, risk and uncertainty which is becoming ever present in their daily activities. A more empowered front line is central to reducing inequality and demand.

The Four Hour Window

A client with learning disabilities and enduring mental health problems attended a local advice service feeling distressed and anxious following bereavement. Benefits and housing linked to the partner stopped on death, leaving the client with no income and needing help to pay for the funeral and to complete Universal Credit and Personal Independent Payment forms and a need for alternative accommodation.

The client was distressed and extremely anxious due to the bereavement, bearing the wounds of recent self-harm and suicidal ideation, they had no money for a funeral, their benefit income and housing (linked to the partner) both unstable. The client reported having asked a GP about ending their life yet it seems no intervention was offered and they turned up at the advice service. The decision was made to contact the Mental Health Initial Response Team, a call was made at 4.30 pm, the call handler assessed the risk of harm was real but there was at least a 4 hour wait for their service, they recommended calling an ambulance. An ambulance was called at 5 pm and again on the hour every hour, it arrived at 9.10 pm. The staff felt they were the only thing between the client and a suicide attempt so the agency paid for staff time, an evening meal and taxis home so they could stay with the client until the ambulance arrived to take the client to the accident and emergency department at the local hospital.



RECOMMENDATION

Increase understanding of the role of the Mental Health Initial Response Team, safeguarding and social work teams and what agencies can reasonably expect from them.

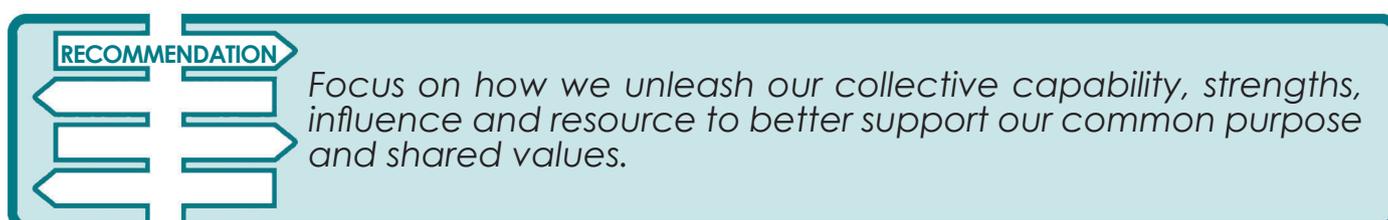
Feedback from the voluntary sector

The VCSE have wildly differing views about the quality of their interactions with the public sector.²⁹ Some described very positive relationships, they clearly viewed themselves as key strategic partners and important stakeholders. Others felt over-looked and without a voice. What seems to be at the bottom of this is the quality of the relationships they have been able to make with individuals within the public sector; if they've found a reliable way in, then they tend to have a better experience than those who have been unable to make a warm connection.



The VCSE are absolutely cognisant of the financial difficulties faced by their public sector colleagues across all areas, however *“funding and sustainability continues to be the most pressing issue for voluntary and community organisations in Gateshead, regardless of their size”³¹*. So, if grants to the VCSE are to continue to reduce, and it seems inevitable they will, how we work together to maximise our collective impact for Gateshead people is something we must get better at doing.

The Council may be unable to give grants to the extent it has done in the past, but it is still rich in skills, knowledge, contacts and resource. Likewise, the VCSE has enormous capability to add value, trusting relationships with the hardest to reach, people and vulnerable groups, experiencing greatest inequalities, challenges and hardship, an ability to scale-up quickly and at relatively low cost.



Like their council colleagues, the VCSE talked about increasing demand, complexity, reducing resource and the impact of uncertainty on morale, all of which can be evidenced through client data and staff surveys. The Gateshead Advice Partnership (GAP) published a report as recently as March 2019, entitled [“People’s Lives in our Hands”](#) which states “the impact of demand

²⁹ here when we use the term public sector we mean in the broadest possible sense for example council, criminal justice, education and health.

³⁰ in this context the term “role” denotes a function or task, it may be a funded post but not necessarily so it should be a senior person, someone with influence, willing and able to disrupt the status quo

³¹ as described by Connected Voice in their report, [Canaries in the Coal Mine](#).

on staff is both emotional and practical. For some of the partners' staff, they reported feeling overwhelmed by the number of clients they are supporting, and the intensity of support required ... they felt overstressed, frustrated, angry and very concerned".

The GAP report cites dissatisfaction with the Department of Work and Pensions stemming from "misrepresentation of clients' capabilities in benefit assessment ... withdrawal of benefits from people who are sick and disabled but found fit for work ... frequent assessment of clients with permanent or long-term health problems ... lack of hope of a positive outcome". This case study is hard hitting but it demonstrates the point perfectly.

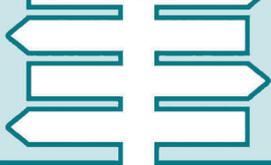
Gateshead and South Tyneside Sight Service



Gateshead and South Tyneside Sight Service report that during an assessment for Personal Independence Payment, a client who has no eyes, was asked about how much vision they had. When they explained, not for the first time, their eyes were artificial - they had had no sight whatsoever - they were then asked to read a passage from a word card. Reiterating again they could not read because they had no eyes, the card was held to the light and they were asked if they could read it now?

Mandy Cheetham and colleagues detail similar findings in the report "The impact of the roll out of Universal Credit in two North East England localities", describing "inconsistent and inaccurate advice from the UC helpline, and difficulties correcting mistakes ... arbitrary decision-making ... significant workload and additional costs for voluntary and community sector, local government and the wider health and social care system". Whilst the Review of advice and advocacy needs did not seek empirical evidence to support the anecdotal comments about reduced wellbeing and productivity in the workplace, it is reasonable to assume that increasing demand, complexity, reducing resource and low staff morale will have **an impact on the wellbeing and productivity of staff and volunteers.**

RECOMMENDATION



Explore the impact and responses required to support staff because of the changing nature of advice and the complexities of residents' needs on the people delivering the services.

Another problem for the VCSE, and to a lesser extent their public sector colleagues, is that agencies well known and well used by advice-seekers are frequently having to re-invent themselves due to funding cuts, policy, political and societal changes.. Despite the level of experience and expertise they bring to the table, they are constantly having to repurpose and redefine

themselves in accordance with the politics or philanthropic aims of their financial donors. Funding comes with specific and variable targets, outcomes and issues. At best, organisations find themselves shoe-horning their work into these opportunities, taking them away from their 'core activity'; the stuff they do really well and which often makes the most difference. At worst they parachute into a community and leave quickly, disrupting the status quo, eroding trust with little understanding of the difference - if any - they have made. This approach has little impact on the people we wish to serve and it propagates a **transactional relationship between the commissioner and the provider, and a competitive relationship between the providers**. None of this is helpful.



Short-term funding, especially if it is a forced re-invention on a whim, rarely has the impact we hope for. Money is in such short supply and we want to believe any money adds value but it doesn't. **How the Local Authority use budget under-spends, reserves, windfalls and matched funding needs a re-think.** Funding decisions, across the whole system and not just the council, need to be more strategic, more joined up and linked to spending priorities; capable of responding in a flexible and mature way to emerging need within the grant or contract term. **If it's not working, then stop doing it straight away.** This requires use of evidence in the design and ways to measure change that matters to local people.

If we can build a system where there's trust between the provider and the commissioner, and where we don't withdraw support from agencies (internally or externally) for being brave enough to admit a service isn't working as anticipated to meet the outcomes needed by clients, there's no need to wait until the commission or service ends; **we can and should course-correct within the contract term** and, if it's working, let's try to do more of it by generously sharing the learning.

RECOMMENDATION

Create an advice, information, guidance and advocacy strategy so there is **clarity about the council's spending priorities and what good looks like** for these services.

4 Future commissioning of advice services



In some instances, the information, advice and/or advocacy might have a supporting role in addressing a problem and is a valuable means to an end; an end which could involve subsequent and sustained interaction with specialist service delivery. In other instances, it may be the end in itself, with the information, advice or advocacy directly providing the solution to the problem. This variation is important because it frames the range of circumstances any commissioning of information, advice and advocacy must be able to cover.

Commissioning information, advice and advocacy that we can be sure is capable of adapting is made very difficult, because of the variety of situations it plays a part in understanding and resolving. Traditional procurement and commissioning are well suited to predictable, standardised and repeatable provision and organisations might find that such approaches makes it easier for them to plan and to win contracts. But such standardised approaches that might suit markets and contracts measured by activity are usually found wanting when held up against the variety of problems and contexts that we are all here to address. **Productivity at the expense of efficacy suits no one**, as people end up needing more and demand into services goes up when problems remain misunderstood and unsolved.

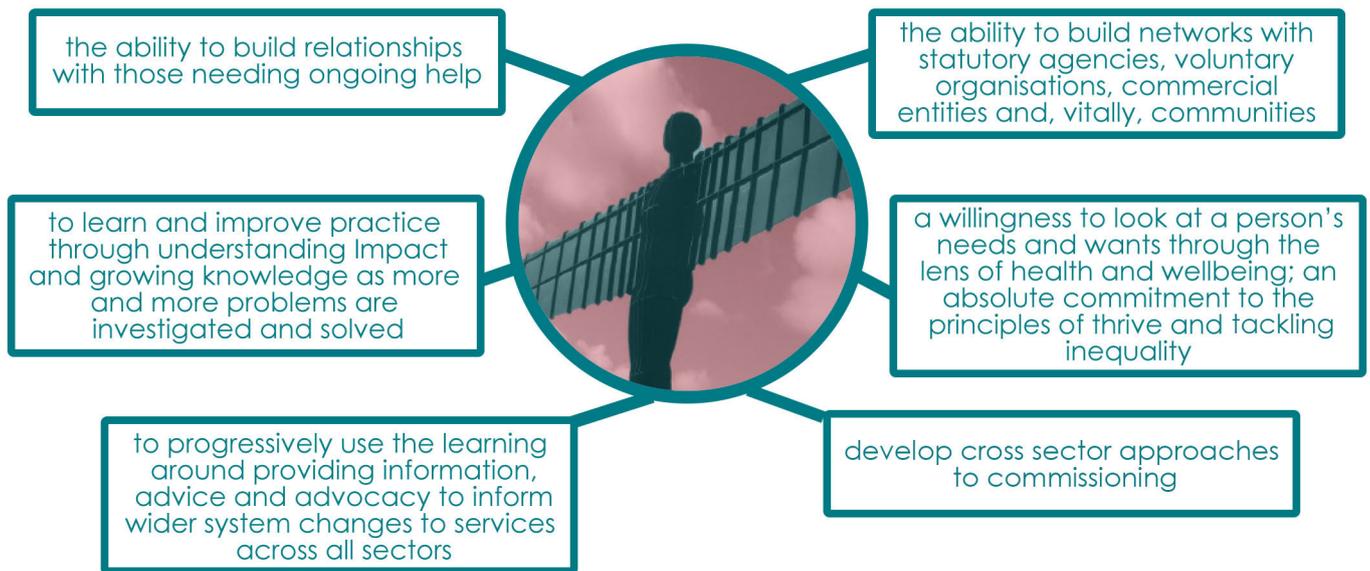
Consequently, there needs to be strategic planning with partners and service users to develop an **approach that supports (and goes on to commission) for capability and adaptability** rather than insisting upon demonstrating activity; a shift in focus from 'how many?' to 'how well?', a shift from quantitative outcomes to qualitative outcomes, commissioning capable of recognising complexity.

Toby Lowe, in partnership with Collaborate for Social Change articulates this perfectly when he says

“the job of commissioners is to nurture the eco system from which positive outcomes emerge”.

This is difficult, but its not impossible, solutions can be found. Commissioners are reasonable in wanting to demonstrate value and as efficacy is so hard to measure (and there are so many variables outside of our control that affect outcomes), activity provides a comforting proxy. If commissioners focus upon **relationships with providers that are cooperative first and contractual second**, progressive and effective approaches stand more chance of working out; Lankelly Chase describe this as **“equality of voice actively promoted”**. Rather than insisting upon predetermined amounts of activity, creating capacity is more likely to adapt to the variation we see every day in people and their situations.

The capabilities we want to see in the provision of information, advice and advocacy include:



Monitoring this is perhaps more difficult than monitoring activity, but it provides a deeper understanding of whether value is being achieved through a commission.

A considerable issue with this approach is that the market is not positioned to do it. Add to that the discomfort around commissioners not having extensively tried it and it would be easy to stick with what we know, but our limited experience cannot de-rail our aspiration to transform our services and reduce inequality. There are examples starting to emerge from other areas where the approach advocated by this Review is transforming services and relationships for example, [Advice Plymouth](#) funded by Plymouth City Council, and more locally in Newcastle upon Tyne in the form of the [Active Inclusion Network](#).

This isn't going to happen overnight, we know where we want to be, but we are some way from it. **We can't turn off that tap - tens of thousands of people rely on existing services**, but alongside this activity we need thought leaders capable of radical transformation working with us to imagine a different way, brave enough to try something new, to course correct if necessary, to challenge the status quo aligned to the broader transformation agenda of Public Service Reform.

RECOMMENDATION

*Develop cross sector leadership capability, providing sponsored **system leadership programmes.***

Our aim is to create an advice, information, guidance and advocacy service that helps people to solve the problems they face. Absolutely, but one which does so through the lens of health and wellbeing, using methods such as **Making Every Contact Count**³²; working more closely with wellbeing services like libraries and leisure centres, taking greater responsibility for reducing social isolation, and supporting people to find purpose in life. For some this may be securing a job or gaining new skills to help get a promotion at work. For others it may be volunteering, a hobby, re-connecting with family or making new friends.

Advice and advocacy services must learn to be more adept at supporting people's emotional life, specifically emotional stress, which plays a significant role in shaping how people think, feel and behave. The existence of emotional stress, how it affects us and what we do to manage it throughout our lives, is one of the most overlooked aspects of the poverty experience. Yet stress is often the engine room that fuels the lifestyle choices and behaviours that can lead to poor diet, addictions, mental health issues and chronic health conditions. People spend their whole lives trying to kick bad habits they know are killing them but fail because they have no insight into the role stress plays in sabotaging their good intentions³³. Embedding Making Every Contact Count in the way we deliver our services is a first small step toward this. Beyond this, for Gateshead to become a place where everyone thrives, all the evidence tells us **people need a home, a friend and a purpose**.

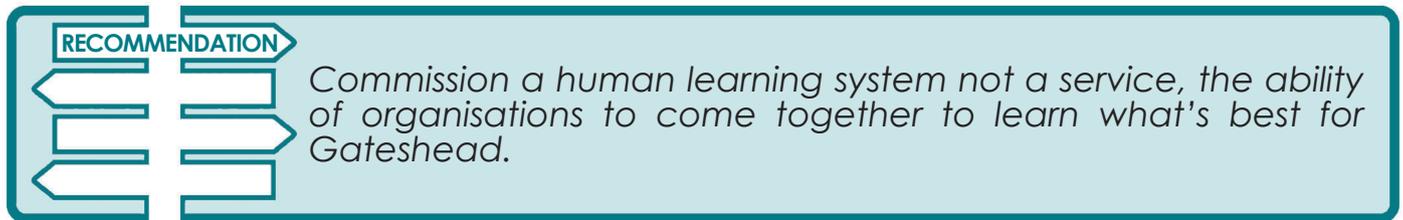


It is proposed that we commission an advice, information and guidance model in the first instance which looks quite similar to the current offer but with very different partnership principles and support for staff built in to engender creativity and resilience. Our advocacy commissions and a few advice commissions still have time to run, but our commission should be flexible to bring these into the collaboration if that is the right thing to do at the time they conclude. However, by the time we get to the end of our new commission, **we need to be very clear about our vision for advice, information, guidance and advocacy**. The marketplace must be ready to deliver something new; an advice and advocacy service that meets the basic problem solving needs of its users, but also supports their health and wellbeing; reducing inequality and disadvantage in Gateshead.

³² Independently evaluated by Northumbria University, Dr Deborah Harrison, Professor Rob Wilson, Dr Kristina Brown, Dr Gosia Ciesielska and Dr Hannah Hesselgreaves in their August 2019 report entitled "Gateshead Council's Making Every Contact Count (MECC) programme, Final Report"

³³ Extract taken from the book Poverty Safari written by Darren McGarvey.

We recognise that to get to this point we must be able to admit when we fail or if things don't work, because otherwise we continue to propagate a system where everyone is terrified of getting their funding cut and we keep doing things that we know, deep down, don't work. We're very clear that this is a learning piece, and in positioning it in this way we give permission to not get it right every time.



RECOMMENDATION

Commission a human learning system not a service, the ability of organisations to come together to learn what's best for Gateshead.

5 Conclusion



This Review sets out a blueprint for the type of advice, information, guidance and advocacy services we want to support the people who live, work and study in Gateshead.

The current advice infrastructure is not good enough for Gateshead. Evidence suggests only 30% of people who need advice actually seek it. **We've got to do better than that.** We want to create the conditions to allow our residents to flourish, to be prosperous, successful and faring well. Our aim is to make Gateshead a place where everyone thrives.

The principles outlined in the Review of embracing learning and course correcting, increased and more generous collaboration, co-locating, valuing our respective strengths and identifying our common purpose are equally relevant to the public and VCSE. At its heart it is about creating an advice, information, guidance and advocacy offer that suits local needs; a return to community, building trusting relationships over time and more sustainable outcomes. It's about changing lives for the better, not just for our clients, but for their families, for our partners, for our employees and volunteers.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE COUNCIL?

Critical to our success is an ability to really unpick our data, to create an advice, information, guidance and advocacy strategy; to understand the signals and the learning from this Review and from Gateshead Council Public Service Reform prototyping; to use their findings to galvanise the Gateshead Strategic Partnership and the wider system to help Gateshead people thrive. It means working very differently with the VCSE, collaborating, co-designing,



funding and co-locating when it is reasonable to do so. When there is a need to recruit to vacancies, to scale up or to grow new services linked to advice, information, guidance and advocacy **the Council should look to the VCSE first for a solution.** It also means relinquishing some control and moving away from a provider supplier model to one which offers greater parity in the relationship, creating partnership and collaboration capable of rising above a written contract.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE VCSE?

We expect the advice, information, guidance and advocacy service we fund for the future will look quite different to the service we commission right now. Funding levels are yet to be agreed but we anticipate maintaining existing levels. **How we spend money and with whom will almost certainly be different.** We need to understand what is already out there before starting to spend money on anything that at best replicates and at worst undermines any existing capacity in the VCSE; it requires a thoughtful, measured and collaborative response.

With that in mind, we want to use this opportunity to commission a new advice, information, guidance and advocacy service as a Public Service Reform prototype, **an opportunity to create a human learning system**³⁴ and explore what "[commissioning for complexity](#)" really means for Gateshead.

In the short term, this means we'll likely commission something that looks very similar to what we currently have, we don't want to jump the gun and think we have the answer, but **we can't allow the status quo.** This means we will expect to be working with our leaders and providers to reimagine the future and to help us course correct as we go so by the time we are half way through the term of the commission we are closer to creating a social welfare offer that is not just about practical problem solving but is also about enhancing the health and wellbeing of Gateshead people.

³⁴ <https://collaboratecic.com/exploring-the-new-world-practical-insights-for-funding-commissioning-and-managing-in-complexity-20a0c53b89aa>

6 Recommendations



Recommendations appear throughout this report, looking from above, a number of trends emerge, namely how we:

- Commission for impact
- Restructure the delivery model
- Drive early access to advice services
- Strengthen sector alliances
- Build knowledge and skills

For ease, the recommendations are grouped under these thematic headings and listed below.

COMMISSIONING FOR OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

- Extend the scope of this Review to include the advice, information, guidance and advocacy services commissioned by Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group (see page 10).
- Conduct a Strategic Review of the work going on to address multiple and complex needs (see page 13).
- Create a relational, person centred approach, enhancing our advice, information, guidance and advocacy to improve the accessibility and impact of advice services in Gateshead (see page 21).
- Create an outcomes framework that offers a broader range of outcome measures to include qualitative and experience measures not just counting numbers (see page 25).
- Revise the way we commission; the method we use to contract should be commensurate with the value, the strength of the relationship between the partners, their quality measures and the risk of the activity (see page 27).
- Create an advice, information, guidance and advocacy strategy so there is clarity about the council's spending priorities and what good looks like for these services (see page 40).

RESTRUCTURE THE DELIVERY MODEL

- Create capacity to meet both existing demand and to up-scale for additional demand that is as yet unquantified (see page 15).
- Fast-track commissioning for providers with quality assurance, external standards and accreditation (see page 27).
- Increase provider resilience and create dynamic and creative services, capable of reflecting local needs and demand pressures by commissioning for no less than 5 and up to 10 years (see page 28).
- Significantly increase the number of welfare benefit and money advice specialists in the system capable of doing higher level interventions needed

for clients with multiple and/or complex needs (see page 34).

- Agencies must take greater responsibility for helping to resolve people's problems, pulling the help to the person rather than pushing the person to the agency (see page 19).
- Create and facilitate cross-sector small grants fund, free of bureaucracy, so advisors and caseworkers, have direct means to purchase those little things (without delay or permission) providing the small things that develop the trust required for the bigger conversations. (see page 34).
- Test the benefits and impact for all stakeholders of co-location with independent advice and advocacy agencies (see page 35).

DRIVE EARLY ACCESS TO ADVICE, INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND ADVOCACY

- Proactively drive demand from those who need advice but aren't yet seeking help (see page 14).
- Address unmet digital need, otherwise we risk escalating our residents' needs and the complexity of their problems, pushing them further down the Thrive pyramid of need (see page 17).
- Access points across all channels – digital and face-to-face – must be more easily recognisable and accessible (see page 17).
- Review the Gateshead digital offer to ensure we are maximising this resource to promote and signpost advice, information, guidance and advocacy (see page 18).
- Raise the profile of advice services and improve engagement with people facing problems who need advice by returning to communities, adapting delivery to suit local needs and using trusted venues and people (see page 31).

STRENGTHEN SECTOR ALLIANCES

- Create a new body that is communally invested in - and whose purpose is - to understand and help people with issues that transcend current structures (see page 23).
- Review the Gateshead Compact to better understand how the Council and the VCSE can work together better for the benefit of the people they serve. (see page 28).
- Create a voluntary sector liaison role, a connector, who can be a broker, a single point of contact for the VCSE accessing council services and support (see page 38).
- Create a generic definition of commonly used terms within the Gateshead advice and advocacy system to improve understanding (see page 30).
- Explore the impact and responses required to support staff because of the changing nature of advice and the complexities of residents' needs on the people delivering the services. (see page 39).

- Focus on how we unleash our collective capability, strengths, influence and resource to better support our common purpose and shared values (see page 38).

BUILD KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

- Commission a human learning system not a service, the ability of organisations to come together to learn what's best for Gateshead (see page 45).
- Develop and resource a cross sector workforce development plan and training offer to improve social welfare knowledge and skills (see page 30).
- Develop cross sector leadership capability, providing sponsored system leadership programmes (see page 43).
- Increase awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences on behaviour and mental health, and provide training to support better conversations and outcomes for this group (see page 35).
- Increase understanding of the role of the Mental Health Initial Response Team, safeguarding and social work teams and what agencies can reasonably expect from them. (see page 37).
- Embed Making Every Contact Count in the advice, information, guidance and advocacy commission along with a requirement for the provider to support and train other VCSE organisations to work in this way (see page 44).

7 Annexes



Annex 1

METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW

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.

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.

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.

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.

Consideration of intelligence gathered and comparison with findings from the Public Service Reform and Customer Experience work streams.

Grey literature review exploring best practice elsewhere, understanding the landscape, policy and legislative demands.

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 commissioning for complexity.

Annex 2

PROVIDERS COMMISSIONED BY GATESHEAD COUNCIL TO PROVIDE ADVICE, INFORMATION, GUIDANCE AND ADVOCACY SERVICES TO GATESHEAD RESIDENTS.

ADVICE

Citizens Advice Gateshead – social welfare advice, information, advice, court and tribunal representation.

Mental Health Matters – welfare benefit advice.

ADVOCACY

Your Voice Counts – self-help advocacy for people with learning disabilities, and advocacy for those who lack capacity.

Age UK – works with older people to ensure their voices are heard and they receive the services they need.

Advocacy Centre North – statutory advocacy .

Independent advocacy for children, young people and families with complex needs.

NHS Complaints Advocacy Service – for those who wish to make a complaint about an NHS service.

SUPPORT, NAVIGATION AND SIGNPOSTING

Royal National Institute for the Blind – supporting people with sight loss at the point of diagnosis to navigate the system.

Tyneside Mind – supporting people with mental health issues to reduce social isolation and improve personal resilience.

Tyneside Women's health – supporting women to improve their potential, mental and emotional wellbeing.

ADVICE AND ADVOCACY

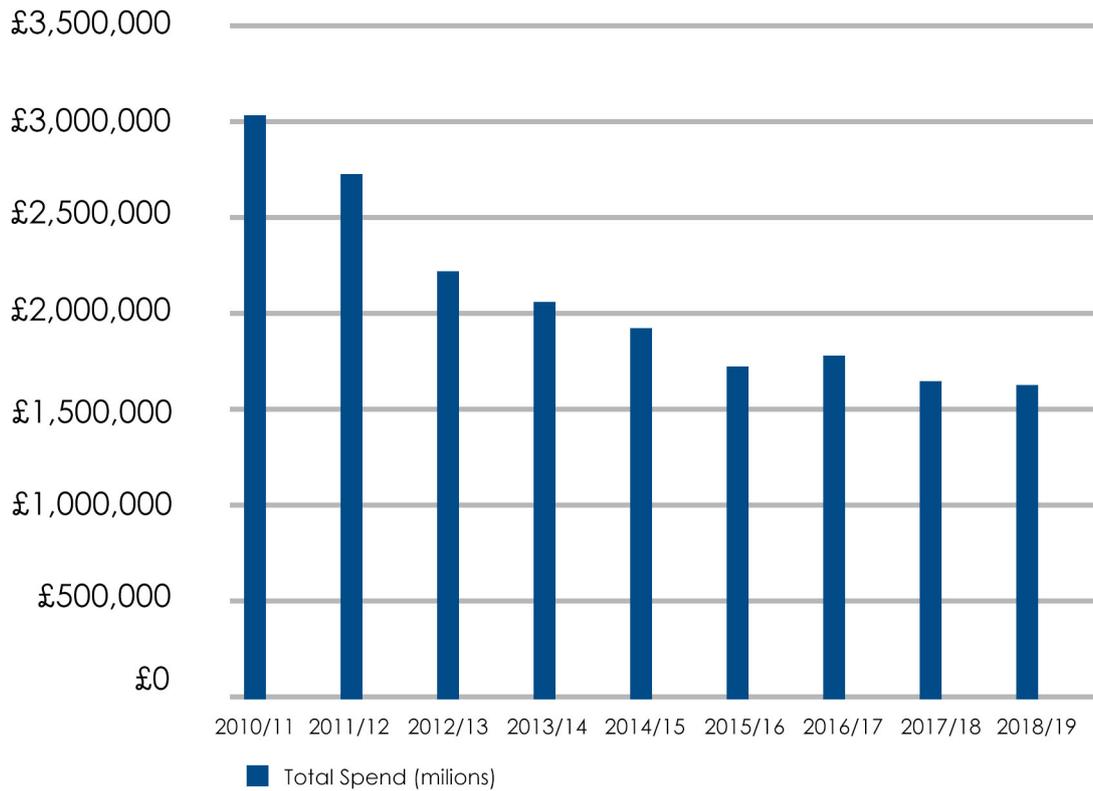
Healthwatch - champion for people who use health and social care services, aim is to find out what matters to people, and help make sure their views shape the support they need. They also support the public to find and access health and social care services

North Region Association for Sensory Support – advocacy and welfare rights for people with hearing loss.

Annex 3

GRAPH SHOWING THE DECLINE IN FUNDING OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS

VCSE advice and advocacy commissioned services



Source: Gateshead Council's Commissioning Team

Acknowledgements

This report represents a unique collaboration between Gateshead Council and Citizens Advice Gateshead and reflects the determination of all parties involved with improving the lives of the residents of Gateshead. A project of this nature requires keen vision and foresight from those commissioning the work and a recognition, from the senior leadership of both organisations, of the common values and alignment of our respective vision and strategies to stimulate this unique collaboration to drive forward a review of advice in Gateshead.

For their contribution to this report, recognition should be given to:

The commissioners, service managers, staff and volunteers of the VCSE organisations who added their experience and knowledge to this report; Advocacy North, Age UK, Healthwatch, Mental Health Matters, NHS Complaints Advocacy Centre North, NRASS, RNIB, Tyneside Mind, Tyneside Women's health, Your Voice Counts.

Barry Taylor, Chair of Trustees, Citizens Advice Gateshead (and his predecessor Mike Nott) and the wider Trustee board who have generously supported the secondment of Alison Dunn, Chief Executive Officer, to lead the review on behalf of Gateshead Council.

The staff, volunteers and Trustees of Citizens Advice Gateshead, in particular Jayne Graham and Neil Gow, for their contributions and insights to inform the review.

Sheena Ramsey, Chief Executive | Mark Smith, Public Service Reform Lead | Alice Wiseman, Director for Public Health | Officers across advice services within Gateshead Council, all of whom have added tremendous value to the review process, with their open and honest contributions.

Alison Dunn
Strategic Lead for Poverty and Inequality
Gateshead Council