

The Advice in County Durham partnership was set up in 2013. It brings together some of the key advice providers in County Durham. The Partnership has active membership from both voluntary and public sectors.

### Where have we come from?

Managed by a small board, made up of representatives from advice providers in County Durham, the partnership now has a wider membership of over 50 organisations, all of which provide advice and support for individuals and groups in the County.

Over the last two years the Partnership has achieved:

- Establishment of a brand "Advice in County Durham"
- A website mapping all of the Advice in County Durham accredited centres in the county
- A network of over 50 advice, community and public sector bodies committed to working together
- A fully functional online secure referral system. This helps to ensure individuals are referred to the right help, in the right places and for the right reasons, minimising confusion or incorrect referrals.
- Funding has been secured for a series of pilots to explore ways of working in partnership more closely
- Closer working between partners to reduce duplication and increase the efficiency of the advice sector
- A voice for the sector at various forums and networks in County Durham.
- Funding for a telephone advice line at Citizens Advice County Durham (CACD) that has assisted in excess of 12,000 clients in the period and is now being mainstreamed into other funding.

### Where are we now?

The Partnership is an independent entity managed by the voluntary and community sector. Durham County Council is now an active partner within the Partnership, bringing experience and input from their Welfare Rights team.

The Poverty Action Steering Group is convened within Durham County Council. It looks at the effects of Welfare Reform, investment in, and the performance of, advice services, and the Council's strategic response to issues relating to poverty and deprivation.

Advice in County Durham will provide a front line view of how services are working in the County and the changing needs of those experiencing or at risk of poverty.

The Partnership has been developing so that it can influence the Council's strategic direction in relation to advice, its response to poverty and the effects of poverty in general. The principles underpinning are centred on working together to provide a voice to the sector.

## Resources

Advice in County Durham employs two key staff members, to service the partnership network, and to represent the membership in shaping policy, service provision and development of commissioning exercises.

## Governance

Advice in County Durham is managed by a small group of representatives from some of the founding advice providers in the County.

**Durham Community Action** Chair, **Age UK County Durham**, **Durham Christian Partnership** (Durham Money Advice and Foodbanks), **Citizens Advice County Durham** - *Current accountable body for finance and employing body for Advice Network Coordination*, **Durham County Council** - *Current funder and employing body for Strategic Development Coordinator*.

Further representation to be confirmed from Social Housing Providers and the Advice in County Durham Network membership.

## Advice in County Durham Network - moving forward

The wider network membership of the Advice in County Durham Partnership will be consulted and supported to network on a regular basis, to develop the agenda and inform the priorities for the Partnership. Membership has been developing steadily and we are experiencing increasing levels of interest and engagement from the wider VCS.

Key incentives for getting involved are opportunities for networking and collaboration, workforce development and training, and better communications.

The Advice in County Durham Network will aim to meet bi-monthly, where information will be given and views sought.

The principles and objectives underpinning Advice in County Durham have recently been refreshed and endorsed by the Board. Now, the Partnership will:

- Develop Terms of Reference with the wider network membership
- Ensure we have strong governance in place, so that the Partnership can influence and make effective bids for resources together.
- Consult, and plan the strategic priorities for the Partnership over the coming year.
- Ensure support arrangements are working well to encourage active participation from the wider membership.

We hope that the members of the Advice in County Durham Partnership network will join with us in endorsing these objectives and work with us to improve the Partnership, in the best interests of all our beneficiaries in County Durham.