



BATHGATE LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE

ADVICE SHOP SERVICE UPDATE

REPORT BY HEAD OF FINANCE AND PROPERTY SERVICES

A. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to inform the Local Area Committee of the work undertaken by the Advice Shop Service from April 2017-March 2018.

B. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the committee notes:

1. The Advice Shop provision in the ward; and,
2. The impact provision is having in terms of supporting the outcomes of the Community Planning Partnership's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2018-23.

C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS

I	Council Values	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; making best use of our resources; working in partnership
II	Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)	None.
III	Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers	None.
IV	Impact on performance and performance Indicators	The activity contained in the report contributes to service KPIs.
V	Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement	<p>We are better educated and have access to increased and better quality learning and employment opportunities.</p> <p>We live longer, healthier lives and have reduced health inequalities.</p> <p>We have tackled significant inequalities in West Lothian society.</p>

VI	Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)	Activities delivered from approved budgets supplemented by external funding from Macmillan Cancer Support, European Social Fund and Scottish Legal Aid Board.
VII	Consideration at PDSP	None.
VIII	Other consultations	None.

D. TERMS OF REPORT

D.1 Background

The Advice Shop is a free, impartial and confidential service to help the people of West Lothian with a focus to alleviate poverty, promote inclusion and equality through advice, assistance and advocacy. It does this by providing comprehensive advice to adults and specifically targets those who are:

- Without work or in low paid work.
- Are poor and/or fuel poor.
- Have money/debt issues.
- Have been affected by cancer or other long term conditions.
- Are over 60.

The Advice Shop service is funded through: a core council budget, European Social Fund, Macmillan Cancer Support and the Scottish Legal Aid Board.

All activity across the service is informed and prioritised by the recently refreshed Community Planning Partnership Anti-Poverty Strategy. The overall purpose of this strategy is to help minimise the impact of poverty on the people of West Lothian. Its objective is to ensure that people are equipped to cope with the challenges they currently face and the impact that this has on their health, education and community involvement.

D.2 Local Provision

Appendix one shows the number of people the service has worked with over the last year in the Bathgate area.

The Advice Shop has helped 1942 customers to manage their money and to resolve benefit problems. This resulted in 6543 separate enquiry types. This is an increase of 22% compared to the 2016-17 period. As a result, customers better understand that claimants and benefit administrators have rights, obligations and constraints and have some idea what these are. Customers know how to take the steps they can to sort out their benefit queries and are able to maximise their household income.

The Court Advice Project is funded through the Scottish Legal Aid Board to support anyone who is at court facing eviction and who engages with the service to provide positive outcomes. Customers can be in social or private housing or an owner occupier. The service worked with 32 families in the ward to support them to sustain their home. This is a decrease from the previous year and is mainly due to improved early intervention.

The service has identified the following priorities for development over the 2018/19 year. Namely, to;

- Continue to improve the customer journey through modernisation of the Advice Shop service.
- Work with partners to mitigate the effects of the full roll out of Universal Credit which commenced in May 2018.
- Increase awareness of the One-2-One project which focuses on those with long term poor mental health.

We will be working to embed these services into the local community, continue to work towards National Standards for Advice Providers and to support customers who are affected by the introduction of the council's Contributions Policy.

E. CONCLUSION

The report and attached appendix summarise the work of the Advice Shop service in the Bathgate ward area and an overview of the Advice Shop Service as a whole. The Local Area Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and to consider how the service could better target its resources in this area. It is the intention to report on activity in the ward area on an annual basis.

F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES

None.

Appendices/Attachments:

Appendix 1: Bathgate Ward Profile Report April 2017-March 2018

Contact Person: Elaine Nisbet, Anti-Poverty and Welfare Advice Manager

Tel: 01506 282936 Email: Elaine.Nisbet@westlothian.gov.uk

Donald Forrest

Head of Finance and Property Services

Date of meeting: 10th December 2018