

ADVICE SHOP SERVICE UPDATE

The Committee considered a report by the Head of Finance and Property Services (copies of which had been circulated) on the work undertaken by the Advice Shop Service during the period from April 2017 to March 2018.

The Advice Shop provided free, impartial and confidential advice to those in the area, focussing on alleviating poverty and promoting inclusion and equality through advice, assistance and advocacy.

The report included a profile report for the Bathgate ward at Appendix 1. The number of enquiries had increased by 22% compared to the 2016-17 period, totalling 6543 enquiries from 1942 individual customers during the year. Information was also provided on the Court Advice Project which supported people facing eviction. 32 families had been supported to sustain their home which was a reduction in previous years due to successful early intervention.

Further details of the amounts of money the service had helped customers claim, save and manage, and the aims of the service for 2018/19 were highlighted.

The Committee discussed the statement that 22% of children were living in poverty after housing costs in Bathgate and whether this was exacerbated by issues such as gambling addiction. Information was not available on the causes behind poverty figures but it was recognised that poverty could be due to a number of reasons.

Members also considered whether the roll out of Universal Credit had impacted on the increase in enquiries and the danger of people who had taken 'payday' loans as a result of this. The increased links with partner organisations for referring customers to the Advice Shop as early as possible was noted.

The Committee was recommended to:

- 1) Note the Advice Shop provision in the ward; and
- 2) Note the impact this provision had in terms of supporting the outcomes of the Community Planning Partnership's Anti-Poverty Strategy 2018-23.

Decision

- 1) To note the report.
- 2) To note that the Advice Shop would be mindful that gambling issues may be a reason for customers seeking their assistance with money advice.