

DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**Consultation document on Guidance on the Provision of
Local Generalist Voluntary Advice**

JANUARY 2011

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FOREWORD

The Department for Social Development (the Department) has policy responsibility for voluntary advice in Northern Ireland and is leading the implementation of the Department's Advice Strategy 'Opening Doors'. This aims to support local voluntary advice services based on a model of local commissioning arrangements led by Councils, supported by the Department and operating within an agreed framework of quality standards.

The implementation of the strategy is ongoing and during the consultation exercise on the location of Area Advice Centres many Councils requested that the Department produce guidance to assist them in the resourcing of local voluntary advice.

Councils, combining their funding with the Department's funding through the Community Support Programme are the main funders of frontline voluntary advice in Northern Ireland. In 2009/10, of the estimated £7.45m spent by Government (excluding Health Trusts) on frontline voluntary advice provision, circa £4.1m was planned expenditure by Councils and the Department.

Taking into consideration the current levels of funding and the requests from Councils for guidance, DSD has an opportunity to help in a way that is good for the consumer, i.e. the guarantee of a good service, and good for Councils, by helping to safeguard their investment in the provision of advice services, providing them with a tool to support discussions with their local advice providers in order to secure best quality within available resources.

These are challenging times for both the voluntary advice sector and government. There is a real need for collaboration and the sharing of resources and services to address the challenges presented by welfare reform and the difficult economic climate.

I welcome steps taken by the advice organisations to regulate themselves, through membership charter marks and quality standards. This draft guidance document reflects in many instances the standards that the Advice Services Alliance NI (ASA) have set themselves either within the region or as part of the wider network e.g. CAB UK etc

It is not our intention to place overly onerous demands on services at a time when demand for those services is high or to make it difficult to implement the guidance by making onerous demands on already stretched financial resources. It is hoped that the guidance document will support discussions between local Councils and local voluntary advice organisations to agree standards to be achieved in the context of available funding.

I am pleased to launch this consultation process and look forward to hearing the views of those who deal on the ground with the provision of voluntary advice services. This will help to make the final draft of practical benefit to Councils and voluntary advice organisations in their work together to provide good quality generalist advice services

Maeve Walls

Director, Voluntary and Community Unit

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1. Introduction

This draft guidance document has been developed within the overall context of the Department for Social Development Advice Strategy '*Opening Doors*' - *The Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community*.¹ This aims to put in place an integrated voluntary advice service across Northern Ireland along with a framework to ensure that services are planned and delivered in a way which matches resources to need. The strategy focuses on generalist voluntary advice provision.

Implementation of the Strategy is ongoing with a number of strands of work completed. These include:

- A Government Advice and Information Group has been established;
- A Specialist Advisory Panel has been established under the auspices of the Advice Services Alliance NI (ASA);
- Research mapping of advice sector activity has been completed; and
- Research to identify the optimum location of voluntary advice services has been completed and a policy statement published on the 'Number and Location of Area Advice Centres'.

During the Department's consultation exercise on the 'Number and Location of Area Advice Centres' many Councils requested that the Department produce guidance to assist them in the provision of voluntary advice services. As the quality of advice services is a key aspect of the Department's Advice Strategy the Department has taken the lead in producing this draft guidance using available information. This draft guidance represents a further step in the ongoing implementation of the Advice Strategy in relation to quality standards.

¹ The 'Opening Doors' document can be accessed at <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary-and-community/vc-publication/vc-strategy-for-voluntary-advice-services.htm>.

The Advice Service Alliance (ASA) in Northern Ireland has already commenced work in line with 'Opening Doors' on three themes that impact on the quality of voluntary advice services. They published reports in March 2008 on quality standards, IT and training and these are referred to within the guidance document where appropriate. Therefore it is intended that the Departmental guidance document will provide assistance to Councils in the interim as work continues on the further development of quality standards within the advice sector in NI.

The draft guidance document also draws significantly on the new quality standard being developed by the advice sector in England as part of the BIG Lottery funded 'Working Together for Advice Project'².

2. Responding to the Consultation

The period for the submission of comments on this consultation document will extend from 05 January 2011 until 07 March 2011. Respondents are asked to submit their views as early as possible to allow as much time as possible for consideration.

To aid the consultation process we have identified a number of key questions which are contained separately in our consultation response booklet. You can download this in word format from the Department's website or it can be completed online at <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultation-provision-of-local-generalist-voluntary-sector-advice.htm>

If you require a printed copy of the consultation response booklet, it can be requested from the Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) at the contact details provided in section 1.6. Alternatively should you only wish to respond to a particular element of this consultation, you can submit your comments

² This project was led by the Advice Services Alliance (England) working in partnership with Advice UK, Age UK, Citizens Advice, Law Centres Federation and Youth Access

by e mail or written submission by referring to the relevant question. For example:

Question x – I/We consider that.....

All responses not submitted electronically must be made in writing and your name, address and organisation name (if applicable) should be clearly stated. Responses should be submitted before the closing date of 07 March 2011.

Hard copy responses should be sent to:-

**Una Gilmore
Voluntary & Community Unit
Department for Social Development
3rd Floor, Lighthouse Building,
1 Cromac Place,
Gasworks Business Park,
Ormeau Road,
Belfast,
BT7 2JB**

E mail responses should be sent to

Una.Gilmore@dndni.gov.uk

We cannot accept responses by telephone however if you require any further information, or wish to discuss your proposed response in general terms, please contact us at the above address or on the telephone numbers below.

Tel: (028) 90 829 430
Fax: (028) 90 829 431
Text Phone: (028) 90 829 446

The information you send us may be passed to colleagues within the Department and published in any summary of responses received. Under the Freedom of Information Act all information contained in your response,

including information about your identity, may be subject to disclosure. More information about the Freedom of Information Act is at **Appendix 1** of this consultation document.

3. Next Steps

Following detailed analysis of the consultation responses, it is anticipated that a guidance document to support local Councils in the resourcing of local voluntary advice services will be finalised by Spring 2011.

APPENDIX 1 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Freedom of Information Act 2000 – Confidentiality of Consultations

The Department will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public please include an explanation in your response.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection

with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;

- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office
(or see web site at: <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/>).

DRAFT Guidance Document

(text contained on pages 8 to 43)

Section 1 - Introduction and Scope

- 1.1 This draft guidance document has been developed within the overall context of the Department for Social Development (the Department) Advice Strategy *'Opening Doors' - The Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community* launched in September 2007. This aims to put in place an integrated voluntary advice service across Northern Ireland along with a framework to ensure that services are planned and delivered in a way which matches resources to need. The strategy focuses on generalist voluntary advice provision.
- 1.2 All 26 Councils in Northern Ireland support voluntary advice services and the Department for Social Development (the Department) is pleased to support Councils in this work through the Community Support Programme. This guidance has been produced by the Department in light of the requests from Councils during the consultation on the 'Number and Location of Area Advice Centres'. The guidance will act as a tool to support Councils in making informed decisions about resourcing local generalist voluntary advice provision.
- 1.3 Councils have a range of requirements in relation to voluntary advice already in place and this guidance does not seek to replace these but to enhance and supplement them where appropriate. Similarly this guidance is not intended to replace any legal advice that Councils feel they should seek in respect of any aspect of their relationship with local voluntary advice organisations.

- 1.4 It is hoped that Councils will find this guidance of use in enhancing their own arrangements for local voluntary advice provision. Councils can apply the guidance in the context of local circumstances and available resources. The Department anticipates that the application of the guidance will involve discussion between local Councils and their voluntary advice providers.
- 1.5 In the preparation of this guidance consideration has been given to current best practice in Northern Ireland, best practice in Great Britain and also to the following publications produced by the ASA in Northern Ireland in March 2008:
- Information Technology Working Group Report;
 - Training Working Group Report – Future Proofing the Skills Base of the NI Advice Sector; and
 - Quality Working Group Report.
- 1.6 This guidance sets out some key provisions and where relevant includes references to a range of documents and publications which set out the issues in more detail. In particular the three reports produced and endorsed by the ASA, along with subsequent responses to these reports, will be useful reference material for Councils. **Annex A** contains a useful list of reference materials.
- 1.7 Section 2 of the guidance offers comment on the method of allocating funding for voluntary advice provision. Sections 3 – 5 of the guidance set out principles, processes and standards that Councils may wish to consider in arranging local voluntary advice services. Section 3 considers overarching principles for advice work, section 4 sets out issues in relation to the quality of advice provided, while section 5 considers issues in relation to the organisational framework needed to support good quality advice. Sections 4 and 5 are consistent with the issues identified in the new quality

standard being developed by the advice sector in England as part of the BIG Lottery funded 'Working Together for Advice Project'.

Section 2 - Method for allocating funding

- 2.1 The rationale for funding and supporting local voluntary advice is well established within the Community Support Programme and 'Opening Doors'. In general terms each Council sets out its business case for supporting voluntary advice within their Community Support Plan.
- 2.2 Currently a variety of funding mechanisms are used across Council areas for the provision of voluntary advice services to the community. This allows for the differing circumstances within each area to be accommodated.
- 2.3 'Opening Doors' provided early thinking on the method of allocating funding under its proposed model and reflecting on Treasury Guidance at that time stated that 'a procurement process open to competition and leading to a conventional trading relationship under contract is the best option'. At the time of publication it was also envisaged that contracts would be awarded jointly by Councils and the Department .However, it is likely that the Department's funding for frontline voluntary advice services will continue to be channeled through the Community Support Programme where it is established practice that Councils are responsible for all local funding arrangements with the voluntary and community organisations supported through this programme.
- 2.4 In taking 'Opening Doors' forward a key determinant in the decision making process around funding methods will be to ensure that the overall outcomes of the strategy are achieved. 'Opening Doors' identifies the outcome of the strategy as providing a structure for delivering voluntary advice services that will ensure increased co-operation between local voluntary providers and improved accessibility for the many people who rely on these services across Northern Ireland.

2.5 ‘Opening Doors’ develops these outcomes further and identifies the key features that any future structure should encompass:

- are accessible to all, and targeted at those most in need;
- can be sustained in the long term;
- can demonstrate value for money; and
- can demonstrate appropriate quality of provision.

2.6 The strategy proposes that this is provided through a network of Area Advice Centres backed up by appropriate outreach provision, to be determined by Councils, along with the use of technology to ensure access to the greatest number of disadvantaged communities.

2.7 It is therefore likely that, to ensure that the outcomes are delivered, within the context of the Community Support Programme, Councils can continue to apply funding mechanisms consistent with their policy for funding the voluntary and community sector.

Section 3- Overarching Principles for local advice agencies

General Principles for local advice agencies

3.1 The ASA Quality Working Group Report March 2008 set out general principles for local advice agencies as below and Councils may wish to give these consideration when making their arrangements for local voluntary advice.

i) Independence

Be independent of political parties, statutory organisations and free from other conflicts of interest.

ii) Impartiality

Provide an impartial service open to everyone regardless of race, religion, politics, age, sex, sexual orientation or disability.

iii) Accessibility

Provide a free and accessible service to all members of the community which it serves.

iv) Confidentiality

Provide a confidential service to all its clients and meet all data protection legislative requirements.

v) Effectiveness

Provide an effective service to all of its clients and the community which it serves. The advice centre should be able to show its effectiveness through demonstrable and measurable outcomes.

vi) Accountability

Provide a service which is accountable to users and others who work with the advice centre.

Section 4 - Quality of Advice

- 4.1 A good quality voluntary advice organisation ensures that the advice and information it gives to its clients consistently meets certain criteria. The criteria below have been developed by the advice sector in England as part of the Working Together for Advice Project.
- 4.2 **Establishing the facts and diagnosing the problem** - Relevant aspects of the enquiry are explored to establish the background, the facts, what the client wants and needs, and the client's relevant personal circumstances. This information is used to correctly diagnose the client's problem/s.
- 4.3 **Advice** – Advice has been offered on the options available to the client, including the likelihood of success, where appropriate. The advice given is accurate, sufficient and provided in time to deal with the client's problem. Where the advice provider has referred to research materials or sought expert advice, there is evidence that this research has been applied correctly to the client's problem.
- 4.4 **Action or support** - Action or support was appropriate to the client's needs and was sufficient to progress the issue for the client within any relevant time limit. There is a clear record of what action is to be taken and who (the advice provider or the client) is responsible for any specific action. The advice provider has considered whether the client requires advice on any other issues arising from their original problem/s.
- 4.5 **Signposting and referral** - Where the advice provider has identified that they cannot meet the client's needs, the client has been helped to gain access to another source of information or advice by signposting or referral.
- 4.6 **Advice records** - Written records are legible and provide a clear picture of the facts of the client's initial query, any subsequent developments, and the

advice given by the advice provider at all times. Records clearly note any action necessary, and any taken. Copies of any relevant supporting documents are held on file.

- 4.7 Councils can discuss with their local voluntary advice organisations how their documentation and recording systems evidence that the criteria are being met. Discussion will also include how any membership scheme assessments or other quality schemes they participate in provide evidence of meeting the standards above. In the Quality Working Group Report (2008) the ASA set out the existing arrangements for Citizens Advice and Advice NI. For ease of reference these have been reproduced in this document at **Annex B**.
- 4.8 ASA recently published a summary of responses to their Quality Working Group Report and stated that quality assurance at a high level should include a quality of advice audit conducted by peer review. However there may be cost implications in respect of peer review systems.

Section 5 - Organisational framework to enable the delivery of good quality advice

5.1 Under the terms of the quality standard being developed in England an organisation which is quality marked is “managed effectively and independently”. The managing body ensures that the organisation meets legal and regulatory requirements, plans strategically and financially, exercises financial control, continuously develops client, community and stakeholder relations”. The new quality standard also sets out a number of processes that an advice service should have to meet the standard. These include:

- processes to ensure that an effective managing body is in place to provide an independent advice service;
- governance arrangements and management processes which are appropriate to the advice organisation’s size and complexity to ensure effective
 - understanding and implementation of the quality standard requirements;
 - annual planning, including financial planning;
 - financial control; and
 - back up of electronic records.

5.2 The new quality standard work in England sets out four service standards:

- Managing the organisation effectively;
- enquiry and case management;
- people management; and
- access client care and community relations

that an advice organisation should meet in order to obtain their quality standard. The detailed content of these service standards is reflected in this section and may provide a useful framework within which Councils can discuss performance standards with their local voluntary advice provider.

5.3 In the report of their Quality Working Group the ASA provided an overview of various external frameworks for quality standards. These have been reproduced at **Annex C** for ease of reference. It is worth noting that there

are plans for 'passporting' organisations with existing quality standards into the new quality standard for England. For example, it is likely that those advice organisations with the General Help Quality Mark (similar to CAB membership scheme requirements) will not have to demonstrate that they meet standards that are covered by that Quality Mark.

5.4 Managing the organisation effectively - Finance and Governance

It is acknowledged that Councils will have their own criteria in respect of finance and governance requirements for the organisations they fund. Councils may also wish to consider the best practice set out in "*SETTING STANDARDS, IMPROVING PERFORMANCE*", the Best Practice Manual on Finance and Governance in the Voluntary and Community Sector produced by the Department. The manual highlights and illustrates best practice principles which Government would expect to find in a well run organisation. Each chapter of the manual deals with a key area of organisational management outlining best practice principles. Areas covered include planning, risk management, governance and accountability, financial management, fraud and irregularity, audit, monitoring and evaluation and embedding good practice.

An electronic copy of '*SETTING STANDARDS, IMPROVING PERFORMANCE*' may be found on the Department's Internet site at;

http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/finance_and_governance_for_vcu.pdf

5.5 Councils will also wish to note that there are some specific legal requirements in respect of:

- Debt Advice - It is a legal requirement under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 (as amended) that any organisation or individual that provides debt advice to the general public must have a valid licence in debt counseling and debt advice issued by the Office of Fair Trading; and

- Immigration Advice - The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) is an independent public body set up under the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. It is a criminal offence for anyone to give immigration advice or services in the United Kingdom unless they are regulated by the OISC, a regulated solicitor, barrister or legal executive (or European equivalent) or exempted by Ministerial Order.

5.6 Enquiry & Case Management

A good quality voluntary advice organisation has appropriate processes and documents in place to ensure consistent good quality service and advice is delivered to clients. Where an advice organisation undertakes casework it also has additional processes to ensure good quality casework is provided for clients.

5.7 For **advice enquiries** these will include processes to:

- operate a case filing and records management system;
- keep its information resources up to date, both for legal advice and internal procedures;
- signpost and refer to caseworkers or other appropriate local service providers;
- provide advisers with access to technical advice guidance and support which includes at least one person responsible for supervising advisers who is competent to do so and who is accessible to them;
- effectively monitor and check the day to day advice given by the advice service, correcting or amending incomplete or incorrect advice provided, at regular intervals;
- operate a key dates and action items system which is accessible to all staff within the advice service, where appropriate;
- operate an internal quality of advice assessment procedure for both open and closed enquiries and act on the findings;

- create and securely store advice records for the time required; and
- ensure secure disposal and/or retention of advice records.

5.8 Where **advice with casework** is provided by a good quality voluntary advice organisation it will have additional processes to:

- allocate casework to advisers according to their level of competence and experience;
- provide technical advice and support for caseworkers which includes at least one person responsible for supervising caseworkers who is competent to do so and who is accessible to them;
- progress casework using its case management procedure;
- provide a supervised case checking system for casework which includes a system for taking any corrective action identified; and
- annually review case checking system and amend in the light of findings / experience.

5.9 It should be noted that the ASA report of the IT Working Group Report 2008 states that the three member organisations (Law Centre, Advice NI and CAB) confirmed that their members had already achieved an acceptable IT based recording ability to monitor advice work. This report also sets out detailed information on a range of IT issues, identifies quality standards and makes a number of recommendations. These recommendations are contingent on resources being available for their implementation. Councils may wish to refer to the ASA IT Working Group Report to support their discussions with their local advice providers to agree standards to be achieved within available resources.

5.10 The IT Working Group Report states that voluntary advice organisations should be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. It also identifies and recommends BS7799/ISO27001 (External Standard) as the industry standard "Code of Practice for Information Security Management"

to underpin the recording, storage, retrieval and management of all confidential client data collected by the voluntary advice organisation.

5.11 The IT Working Group Report also sets out a number of proposals in relation to reporting systems (sections 4.1.17 – 4.1.25 of the ASA IT Working Group Report refer) and these have been reproduced in **Annex D** for ease of reference. Councils will already have reporting arrangements in place with their voluntary advice organisations however the ASA (Northern Ireland) recommendations may also provide a useful benchmark.

5.12 **People Management**

A good quality voluntary advice organisation recognises that its staff, paid and voluntary, are its most valuable resource. It has sufficient competent volunteers and paid staff to achieve its purposes and mission and deliver its services efficiently. Volunteers and paid staff are selected, recruited and inducted according to agreed equality and diversity policies, and are well supported, supervised and trained. The organisation will have processes in place to:

- recruit and select people fairly and legally;
- provide induction for staff into the organisation and on their role within it;
- ensure that all staff are trained and supervised in order to achieve maintain and develop competence in their role within the organisation;
- ensure equal opportunities and diversity awareness training opportunities are accessible for all staff;
- manage, support and supervise its staff and volunteers appropriate to the size of the organisation;
- provide induction and updates for board members into the operation and management of the advice service, including how advice policies such as client confidentiality and conflict of interest apply to them; and
- ensure effective internal communication

- 5.13 Some of the issues noted above, which are drawn from the work of the advice sector in England on the new quality standard are also covered within the ASA Quality Working Group Report.
- 5.14 The ASA Training Working Group Report – ‘Future proofing the Skills Base of the NI Advice Sector’ sets out a range of recommendations developed to improve the effectiveness of the training and development support available to the advice sector. These recommendations were contingent on resources being available. Among these were recommendations that training provision should be accredited where possible and linked to vocational and occupational standards. Work is currently ongoing within the voluntary advice sector in NI to map training provision to the relevant National Occupational Standards for Legal Advice and develop an integrated training strategy for the voluntary advice sector.
- 5.15 Councils may also wish to consider ‘Investors in People’ (IIP), as a standard for delivery of effective training and development for the voluntary advice organisation. A summary of this is featured in the extract from the ASA Quality Working Group report at **Annex D** of this document and further details on ‘Investors in People’ may be found at:
www.investorsinpeople.co.uk
- 5.16 The Department has policy responsibility for volunteering in NI and is soon to launch the first Volunteering Strategy for NI. Volunteers play a key role in voluntary advice organisations and the Department is keen to ensure that the potential for volunteer involvement is maximised as far as possible. Councils should, in discussion with their voluntary advice organisations, seek to ensure that volunteers are engaged as appropriate across a range of roles in the organisations from governance to service delivery and that the organisation’s volunteer management follows best practice, for example that the voluntary advice organisation;

- Is committed to the involvement of volunteers, and recognises that volunteering is a two-way process which benefits volunteers and the organisation;
- Commits appropriate resources to working with volunteers; and
- Is open to involving volunteers who reflect the diversity of the local community and actively seeks to do this in accordance with its stated aims.

5.17 Further good practice information on volunteer management and organisational standards can be found at www.volunteering-ni.org and www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk . ‘*Investing in Volunteers*’ is the UK quality standard for all organisations which involve volunteers in their work. The Standard enables organisations to comprehensively review their volunteer management, and also publicly demonstrates their commitment to volunteering.

5.18 **Access, Client Care & Community Relations**

A good quality voluntary advice organisation values its clients and community. It builds good relationships with them and includes them in the development and assessment of services to ensure that they receive a quality service. Its services are independent and accessible to all sections of the community which it serves. The organisation will have processes in place to:

- publicise its service using methods appropriate to its community/client group;
- ensure services are delivered as publicised;
- ensure client services are independent including a conflict of interest checking procedure which covers both staff and board members;
- encourage comment and involvement in service developments by all parts of the community; regularly survey client satisfaction;

- respond to feedback;
- address complaints by following a defined complaints procedure;
- monitor and record client data to identify the client profile of the advice service; and
- maintain up to date and relevant information as appropriate on other advice providers.

5.19 The Department and Councils have a statutory responsibility under Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to have due regard to the need to promote equality of treatment and opportunity in carrying out its functions. The Department and Councils must therefore take these responsibilities into account when planning and enabling advice services. It is anticipated that Councils will arrange these services in line with their own equality schemes.

5.20 *'Opening Doors' - The Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community* was subjected to a full equality impact assessment. The *STRATEGY FOR SUPPORTING DELIVERY OF VOLUNTARY ADVICE SERVICES TO THE COMMUNITY - EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT* may be found at;
http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/equality_impact_assessment_april_2007.doc

5.21 Councils will also want to give consideration to compliance with disability access requirements under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, such as advice centres being accessible for people with disabilities or who require special facilities due to visual or hearing impairments.

Annex A: - Reference Materials

- **Setting Standards, Improving Performance**, Best Practice in Finance and Governance in the Voluntary and Community Sector.
http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/finance_and_governance_for_vcu.pdf
- **Specialist Quality Mark Standard**, Legal Services Commission document 2nd edition September 2009.
qualitymark@legalservices.gov.uk
- **Advice Services Alliance Quality Working Group Report.**
<http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk/en/Publications/Advice-Services-Alliance/Working-Group-Reports/>
- **Advice Services Alliance IT Working Group Report.**
<http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk/en/Publications/Advice-Services-Alliance/Working-Group-Reports/>
- **Advice Services Alliance Training Working Group Report.**
<http://www.citizensadvice.co.uk/en/Publications/Advice-Services-Alliance/Working-Group-Reports/>
- **“Opening Doors” – The Strategy for the Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community.**
<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary-and-community/vc-publication/vc-strategy-for-voluntary-advice-services.htm>.
- **Investors In People (IIP)**
www.investorsinpeople.co.uk
- **Investing In Volunteers (IIV)**
www.volunteering-ni.org
www.investinginvolunteers.org.uk
- **DSD Area Advice Centre Location Policy Statement, Oct 2010**
<http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/voluntary-and-community/vc-publication/vc-strategy-for-voluntary-advice-services.htm>
- **New advice sector quality standard – Working together for Advice**
(available on the ASA website “www.asauk.org.uk” in January 2011)

ANNEX B: - ASA Quality Working Group Report 2008 extract - existing arrangements for Citizens Advice, Advice NI.

1. Citizens Advice Membership Scheme

Citizens Advice was awarded Investors in People Status in 2005, and local CAB offices comply with the Citizens Advice Membership Scheme which is based on external audit. This includes an organisational audit and a quality of advice audit and is compliant with the requirements of the Legal Services Commission in England and Wales. This scheme is well established, and currently operates across England and Wales, and in the 24 District Councils in Northern Ireland which fund CAB offices.

The scheme is based on a model introduced by Citizens Advice in England and Wales which itself was developed from the PQASSO model, the Practical Quality Assurance Scheme for Small Organisations developed by Charities Evaluation Services in 1997. The scheme, through auditing processes, measures the quality of advice provided to the public and the quality of the local CAB organisation against a series of agreed quality standards.

Membership and Standards Committee

Audit reports are formally considered by a Membership and Standards Committee, which will note the details and timetable for any corrective action which is identified for the local management committee by the external auditor. Where these are not met then further timescales may be set. Where there is a failure or refusal to meet corrective action identified by the audit, the Membership and Standards committee, can impose sanctions and ultimately recommend removal of membership and closure of a local CAB office.

Purpose of the organisational audit

The purpose of this audit is to verify that the local organisation is providing quality advice, is undertaking social policy work, is accessible and relevant to its community and to evidence that effective governance and management supports consistent quality and constant improvement against the usual background of continual change. The Citizens Advice Membership Scheme is developed to embed PQASSO quality standards. In meeting the Citizens Advice quality assurance standard the organisation would meet the Quality Mark standard at the General Help level (at present not operative in Northern Ireland).

Audit Criteria

The audit criteria are defined by the policies of the Citizens Advice service, and the requirements of the *Citizens Advice Membership Scheme April 2005*, which is convergent with CLS Quality Mark at General Help Level only (GQM). Local Bureaux in Northern Ireland are subject to two audits, an Organisational Audit and a Quality of Advice Audit (professional practice & technical practice) undertaken on a three year cycle.

a) Organisational Audit Criteria

- Governance
- Financial Management
- Planning & Managing Resources
- Operational Management
- Employer Responsibilities
- Training and Development
- Networking and Partnership
- Client-centred service
- Case Management
- Casework
- Social Policy
- Complaints, suggestions and positive feedback

b) Quality of Advice Audit

In delivering a service that provides quality advice to clients, two aspects of advice practice need to be satisfied:

- professional practice - the process of advice giving.
- technical practice - the technical content of the advice.

The CAB standard for quality of advice

A Citizens Advice Bureau ensures that the advice and information it gives to its clients complies with identified criteria, where applicable, and demonstrates this by providing sufficient information in the case record.

Quality of Advice Assessment (QAA) examines the quality of advice given by advisers on individual cases dealt with by a bureau. QAA in the Membership Review is based on the principle of peer review – quality of advice assessments made by advice practitioners with current knowledge, skills and experience. The QAA incorporates a method for assessing the quality of advice developed by Andy Benson and Penny Waterhouse within the CAB Service over the last 10 years. The Assessment is based on a check of 30 generalist case files. The QAA is applied to each separate enquiry topic that is dealt with within a case (benefits, housing, employment, etc.), and to the way in which the case has been handled overall. The criteria are as follows:

- Problem diagnosis
- Information and evidence
- Exploring options and consequences
- Appropriateness to person, problem and local circumstance
- Accurate and complete advice
- Case management
- Signposting and referral
- Effectiveness of the advice overall
- Outcome

2. Advice NI Membership Scheme

Advice NI has a joint Membership Scheme with Advice UK. The Scheme sets out the standards which independent advice providers are required to meet in order to be members of Advice NI. Members must submit supporting documentation with their membership form and an initial meeting is held with each new member. On membership renewal all documentation is closely scrutinized by Advice NI with follow-up with individual members when required.

Advice NI has the following membership conditions:

- The centre is striving to pursue a policy of Equal Opportunities
- Advice is part of the centre's work
- The centre operates a confidentiality policy
- The centre operates a complaints procedure
- The centre is independent of central or local government control

- The centre has a means by which it is accountable to the community. This is normally a management committee that meets regularly, and a list of management committee members is provided to Advice NI
- The centre is non profit-making and advice is free
- The centre uses the AIMS case-recording system and/or the centre operates a compatible case-recording system
- The centre has professional indemnity insurance to cover any advice it gives
- The centre provides an Annual Report and Accounts
- The centre has or is working towards an Advice Services Development Plan

Members must provide details and documentation to confirm compliance with membership conditions. Members are also asked to provide details of the level of work undertaken, information resources, and advice services staffing – titles, experience, qualifications and training and development undertaken in the last 12 months.

External Accreditation

Advice NI undertook an options appraisal in relation to Quality Assurance in 2003 with BSP funding and recommends Investors in People (IIP) accreditation to its members in respect of organisational standards. It provides a group contract support scheme for members and has developed an IIP Quality Support Resource.

Advice NI has achieved revised IIP status and 29 members either have or are working towards IIP, 4 have the Matrix standard, 2 Charter Mark, 2 ISO standard and 1 Lexcel.

Quality of Advice

(a) Some Advice NI members use the LASA peer review model (London Advice Services Alliance) written by Benson and Waterhouse of Citizens Advice to measure the accuracy and effectiveness of advice. This is not a compulsory requirement for membership of Advice NI. Advice is assessed and scored against the following quality criteria:

- Problem diagnosis
- Information and evidence
- Exploring options and consequences

- Appropriateness to person, problem and local circumstance
- Accurate and complete advice
- Case management
- Signposting and referral
- Effectiveness of the advice overall
- Outcome

The level and type of enquiry being dealt with is also considered, as is client satisfaction.

(b) Advice NI audit the quality of the advice giving process by providing the NVQs in Advice in Guidance Level 2-4 although it is not compulsory at this stage for members to undertake this qualification. The NVQ assesses and verifies the advisers competency against occupational standards contained within the NVQ framework.

Outcome Measurement

Advice NI undertakes an annual profiling exercise with its members which measures outcome statistics in relation to caseload, tribunal representation, opening hours, staffing and income generation etc.

ANNEX C - ASA Quality Working Group Report 2008 extract - overview of various external frameworks for quality standards.

1. The Investors in People Standard

The Investors in People Standard is a business improvement tool that helps employers' link people management and development activity to the specific aims and objectives of the business. It provides a framework to assess the training and development needs of staff in helping them achieve the vision and a process to evaluate the extent the training actually achieves the purpose for which it is designed. At its heart the Standard has **three** principles - Plan, Do and Review - and 10 indicators of good business practice, each with a central theme:

1. Business Strategy
2. Learning & Development Strategy
3. People Management Strategy
4. Leadership & Management Strategy
5. Management Effectiveness
6. Reward & Recognition
7. Involvement & Empowerment
8. Learning & Development
9. Performance Measurement
10. Continuous Improvement

2. European Business Excellence Model

EQFM provides an assessment process to enable organisations to see what extent the commitment to meet user and stakeholder needs and expectations is being delivered, and to monitor continuous improvement.

3. PQASSO (Practical Quality Assurance System for Small Organisations)

This framework has been developed specifically for smaller voluntary organisations. It provides suggested quality standards and types of evidence for self-assessment at three different levels of achievement, across the following 12 quality areas:

- Planning for quality
- Governance
- Management
- User-centred service
- Staff and volunteers
- Training and development
- Managing money
- Managing resources
- Managing activities
- Networking and partnership
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Results

4. Community Legal Service – General Help Quality Mark

The Quality Mark is part of the Community Legal Service (CLS), a major government initiative launched in April 2000. The aim of the CLS is to improve access for the public, to quality information, advice and legal services through local networks of services supported by co-ordinated funding and based on an assessment of local needs. It applies to advice agencies in England and Wales and is used in Northern Ireland by Citizens Advice. Initially it will consist of members with a Quality Mark for the level of service they provide. The Quality Mark is the quality standard that will underpin all CLS services, so that members of the public who need legal information, advice and other help can rely on receiving a quality assured service. To be awarded the Quality Mark and be able to display the Quality Mark logo organisations will need to demonstrate that they meet the standard required for the type of service being delivered. The three Quality Mark standards are:

- Information
- General Help
- Specialist Help

5. National Occupational Standards

National Occupational Standards (NOS) specify the standards of performance that staff are expected to achieve in their work, and the knowledge and skills they need to perform effectively. They have been agreed by all interests in the sector and approved by the education regulatory bodies of all four countries in the United Kingdom. The NOS for Legal Advice are relevant to all levels of advice provision from first line advice to representation in court. They apply to England and Wales and cover advice given in the Not for Profit, private and statutory sectors. The NOS for Advice and Guidance apply throughout the UK and have been developed into Scottish and National Vocational Qualifications.

National Occupational Standards cover mainstream advice giving operations as well as managerial, support and specialist functions. They can be used for a wide-range of purposes to support individual and organisational development and quality assurance at all levels in an organisation.

(a) The Legal Advice National Occupational Standards

There are 64 units within the Legal Advice NOS. Units LA1-LA30 describe standards of performance expected of advisers, regardless of their specialist areas of practice or the client group with which they are working. Units LA31-LA64 contain the knowledge required when practising in a particular area of law or with a particular client group.

Generic units contain -

- Unit Summary - describing the key aspects of the unit
- Outcomes and effective performance - showing what someone must be able to do, eg *'Agree with the client where a situation requires immediate action and take steps to implement this.'*
- Knowledge and understanding - required for someone to perform their jobs effectively - what someone must know, eg *'The kind of situation which may require immediate action and organisational procedures for doing so'.*
- The skills needed to enable people to deliver the service effectively, eg *'active listening, questioning, presenting information orally and in written form'.*

Knowledge units contain -

- Unit summary - describing the key aspects of the unit.

- Outcomes of effective performance - what someone must be able to do, eg *'Identify and explain the legislative framework relating to discrimination in employment or the provision of goods and services and describe how to access more detailed information when required.'*
- Knowledge and understanding - that someone must be able to show they know and understand, eg *'The grounds on which actions on the grounds of discrimination may be taken in the UK in relation to sex, race, sexual orientation, disability, religion, age (from September 2006).'*

Cross sector NOS

The Legal Advice NOS are advice specific; there may be other NOS which are relevant to some roles in the legal advice sector including:

- Business and administration
- Customer service
- Fundraising
- Health and safety
- Information technology
- Learning and development
- Management and leadership
- Managing volunteers
- Personnel
- Trustees and management committee members
- Workplace violence

(b) The Advice, Guidance and Advocacy Occupational Standards

There are 41 units within the Advice and Guidance Occupational Standards. Units AG1-AG30 describe standards of performance and knowledge required from advice and guidance workers. They cover areas such as establishing communication, assisting clients to decide on a course of action, managing a personal caseload, presenting cases in formal proceedings, operating within networks and negotiating and maintain service agreements. Eleven of the forty one units are imported from other sectors including, customer service, health and social care, health and safety and learning and development.

6. LEXCEL

LEXCEL is the quality mark developed by the Law Society of England & Wales for practices and legal departments which have been independently assessed as having achieved the Practice Management Standards. The Law Society of Northern Ireland has negotiated a licensing arrangement with LSEW to market and assess LEXCEL as a Quality Mark to solicitors in Northern Ireland. No compulsion is involved; it is a matter for the individual practice whether to undergo assessment.

7. The Matrix Standard

The Matrix Standard is the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work. The Standard is useful for organisations that deliver information, advice and/or guidance to external clients as part of their business and also for employers who are committed to developing their people. It consists of eight elements, four focused on how services are delivered, and four focused on how services are managed, as follows:

- People are made aware of the service and how to engage with it
- People's use of the service is defined and understood
- People are provided with access to information and support in using it
- People are supported in exploring options and making choices
- Service delivery is planned and maintained
- Staff competence and support they are given are sufficient to deliver the service
- Feedback on the quality of the service is obtained
- Continuous quality improvement is ensured through monitoring, evaluation and action

The Standard is outcome based and does not require the organisation to produce a portfolio of evidence. An Assessor will find the evidence by a mixture of talking to people, observation and reviewing any documents that may be used. It takes an average of 6-9 months to achieve accreditation and accreditation lasts for 3 years.

EMQC Ltd is responsible for the Assessment and Accreditation of organisations to the matrix Standard and acts as the Accreditation Body. ENTO is the guardian of the Matrix Standard and acts as the Standard Setting Body.

8. BS EN ISO 9001:2000

The origins of this standard are in manufacturing process systems. This standard specifies requirements for a quality management system where an organisation is required to demonstrate its ability to consistently provide services that meet customer and regulatory requirements. The aims of this standard are to enhance customer satisfaction through the effective application of the system, including processes for continual improvement and the assurance of compliance with customer and regulatory requirements. All elements of this standard are generic and can be applied to any type of organisation. Each section of BS EN ISO 9001:2000 is based upon 8 management principles:

- Customer focus
- Leadership
- Involvement of people
- Process approach
- Systems approach to management
- Continual Improvement
- Factual approach to decision making
- Mutually beneficial supplier relationships

9. Charter Mark Scheme

The Charter Mark scheme is a tool designed to help organisations focus on, and improve, their customer service and delivery to users. The six criteria shown below make up the Charter Mark standard. By addressing the elements shown against each criterion, the organisation will be focusing on its customers and aiming to constantly improve and give value for money. By reaching the standard the organisation will show that it puts its customers first.

Criterion 1: Set standards and perform well

Criterion 2: Actively engage with your customers, partners and staff

Criterion 3: Be fair and accessible to everyone and promote choice

Criterion 4: Continuously develop and improve

Criterion 5: Use your resources effectively and imaginatively

Criterion 6: Contribute to improving opportunities and quality of life in the communities you serve

ANNEX D - Sections 4.1.17 – 4.1.25 ASA IT Working Group Report 2008 extract on reporting requirements.

4.1.17 Integrated Reporting (Statistical)

As well as capturing and recording case data, the integrated system must encompass an effective management reporting tool that can be accessed from the browser interface.

Generated reports need to reflect statistical data at:

- Agency/Bureau Level
- Organisational Level (Citizens Advice, Advice NI & Law Centre)
- Sector Level as a whole.

Reports should consist of anonymised statistical data, not containing personal information that could specifically identify individuals, and comprise:

- Standard sector wide reports
- Standard organisation wide reports
- Standard agency/bureau reports
- Customised reports

Dynamic filters will allow reports to be produced on the basis of a full range of criteria including, but not limited to:

- Funded Projects
- Contracts
- Geographical Area
- Local Authorities
- Local Authority Wards/Parliamentary Constituencies
- Post Codes
- Health Trusts
- Policy Categories
- Age
- Gender
- Occupation

- Money/Debt Advice
- Etc

4.1.18 Integrated Reporting (Internal Management Information Reporting)

In addition to an anonymised statistical reporting capability, the integrated system must also provide an effective internal management information reporting solution. It should be able to produce flexible management reports (including some elements of personal data) reflecting areas of specific need. For example:

- Client Lists by Adviser
- Client Outcomes by Adviser.

Criteria and variables relating to report configuration should be user configurable.

4.1.19 Integrated Post Code Functionality

To ensure consistency and accuracy of data recording, the system will also include an integrated post code utility. This will allow addresses to be searched for on the basis of an individual post code with the resulting selected address automatically populating the relevant client record fields when a record is created. In addition to the associated full address, the post code utility will also identify the following information related to the selected address (again populating the relevant client record fields),

- Local Authority
- Local Authority Ward
- Parliamentary Constituency
- Member of Parliament
- Primary Health Care Trust
- Super Output Area (Aspirational).

4.1.20 Integrated Access to Information System

The Citizens Advice Electronic Information System (Advice Finder) has been identified as the probable on-line information library for the voluntary advice sector across Northern Ireland. Therefore, the case recording system should have integrated access to this resource using a single login and authentication process in order to minimise the number of required passwords necessary to access services and consequently reduce the overall administrative overhead of the system. Use of this integrated feature should not exclude access to other specialised on-line or paper based

information sources by any of the sector's agencies or bureaux e.g. Rightsnet

4.1.21 Time Recording

To meet existing funder and future LSC requirements, the case recording system must incorporate accurate time recording for individual issue/enquiry/matter records and associated contacts. Time recording should be exact (to the minute) rather than to pre defined blocks (i.e. <15 minutes, 15-30 minutes, etc) and also allow time apportionment between multiple funders for an issue/enquiry/matter where appropriate. As part of the time recording framework, time tracking will alert supervisors and advisers/case workers when time spent exceeds predetermined and configurable thresholds for individual cases.

4.1.22 Recording of Disbursements

In addition to capturing time spent on an individual issue/enquiry/matter, the case recording system will accurately record all associated disbursements resulting from and attributable to work undertaken on behalf of clients; for instance, translation and interpreting costs for non English speakers where external and third party services are retained.

4.1.23 Outcomes

It is essential that the system records both financial and non financial outcomes for each individual issue/enquiry/matter.

4.1.24 Social Policy Evidence Forms

To underpin the social policy and campaigning objectives of the advice and information sector, the adopted case recording system will have an integrated evidence capability. This will record, document and produce specific client and case study information in a format that can be used at local, regional and national levels to illustrate particular issues. This evidence should be exportable in both electronic and printed formats.

4.1.25 Customisation

In order to deliver consistency and ongoing quality in the recording of client cases across the advice and information sector any customisation of

recording and reporting fields for individual agencies/bureaux within the database should be avoided. The system should have the flexibility and structure to address the needs of both generalist and specialist advice providers without the need for specific user modifications. Any divergent functionality within the system itself will inevitably increase both initial development and ongoing support costs, and deliver the potential for diluting consistency in the recording of client data. All ongoing changes and enhancements to functionality need to be implemented on a system wide rather than on an agency/bureau basis.