



SmartAdvice

Intelligent thinking about
advice services

**Smartly funded and designed advice
could save £millions**

**This is a call for new thinking to realise the
potential of advice from the largest network
of independent advice providers, AdviceUK**

Independent advice services are a vital part of a modern democratic society. The complexities of modern life make it virtually impossible for individuals to know all they need to when they face a problem.

Events such as redundancy, relationship breakdown, spiralling debt and homelessness and the consequent need to navigate complex legal, benefit and welfare systems make access to advice essential. AdviceUK members alone advise 2 million people each year.

But despite its importance, the provision of independent advice is not a statutory duty. It is delivered instead by a wide variety of organisations supported by grants, donations, public contract income and voluntary effort.

Supply of advice is insufficient to cope with demand, particularly in difficult economic times. And there is strong evidence that current policy towards the funding, commissioning, regulation and design of advice services is hampering their effectiveness and locking in cost and waste.

Why change?

Recent AdviceUK research shows that top-down, target-driven reform can result in unintended and detrimental consequences¹.

An obsession with competitive tendering, output-heavy service specifications, standardisation and micro-management is leading advice organisations away from a focus on the needs of people. It wastes their potential to offer far more for the money invested in them.

Failure: Nearly a third of the capacity of advice agencies is spent dealing with work generated by the failure of public bodies (like the Department for Work and Pensions and HM Revenue and Customs) to get services right.²

Waste: Targets and bureaucratic requirements of funders can mean advice services do things that are of no value to the person they are advising, and change their behaviour – cherry picking less complex cases, placing more junior staff on duty.³

Dehumanised services: An advice service with a human face achieves better results. But legal aid reforms, high levels of demand caused by failures in the benefits and public services and competitive tendering are dehumanising advice.⁴

1. It's the System Stupid! Radically Rethinking Advice, AdviceUK, 2008 and Radically Re-thinking Advice Services in Nottingham, Interim Report of the Nottingham Systems Thinking Pilot, AdviceUK 2009

2. Radically Re-thinking Advice Services in Nottingham, Interim Report of the Nottingham Systems Thinking Pilot, AdviceUK 2009

3. Study of Legal Advice at Local Level, Ministry of Justice, 2009

4. Time Well Spent, Council on Social Action, 2009

Think Again

This is a call for new thinking about advice that will enable a diverse range of provision to flourish and contribute to meeting social, economic, community and health needs while improving access to justice and human rights.

Smartly funded and designed independent advice services can play a huge role in helping central and local government reduce cost and waste and improve public services. Making benefits, tax credits and other welfare systems better could save £millions.

But realising this potential requires a change in approach.



We call upon Government, local councils and funders to:

Lift the burden of regulation, bureaucracy, funding conditions and top-down design that stifles innovation and people focused delivery of advice.

Build learning into the system by giving advice organisations a greater role in local and national social policy making and public service improvement.

Invest in advice services through funding and commissioning programmes that focus on the delivery of quality services, early intervention and preventative work that meets real need in ways that produce the best possible outcomes and social returns.

Think Smart

Redesigning advice for the better is possible. With proper knowledge about the way the system is working and the nature of demand for advice, it is possible to redesign and fund services from a people-centred perspective. AdviceUK is leading the way in applying new approaches to the design and funding of advice to support those who are keen to re-think advice and realise its full potential.

Sign up to support us and find out more at
www.adviceuk.org.uk/smartadvice

Time to **think** again
Time to think **smart** about advice

About AdviceUK

AdviceUK is a charity supporting community organisations that give free advice to members of the public. Established in 1979, AdviceUK is the largest network of independent advice agencies in the country. Our members work in some of the poorest parts of the UK, helping to solve legal and social welfare problems.

Together, they provide access to advice for over 2 million people a year. We support our members to improve what they do and provide them with a national voice.

Our vision is of a society where every individual, regardless of means, is able to get the help and advice they may need in order to deal with problems they face, and to protect and exercise their rights.

AdviceUK
6th Floor
63 St Mary Axe
London
EC3A 8AA

Telephone: **020 7469 5700**
Facsimile: **020 7469 5701**
E-mail: **policy@adviceuk.org.uk**
Website: **www.adviceuk.org.uk**

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The independent advice network

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