

A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community



A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community

Contents	Page
1. Background and Current Services	3
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Current Advice and Information Services in Northern Ireland	3
1.3 Funding Advice Services	5
1.4 Profile of Advice Services in NI	6
1.5 Improving Advice Services	7
2. The Strategy	9
2.1 Principles and Values	9
2.2 What Kind of Advice is Needed	9
2.3 How Should Advice and Information Services be Delivered	10
2.4 The New Infrastructure	11
2.5 Delivering the Strategy: Recommendations	12
2.6 Monitoring and Review Plan	16
Annex 1 Strategy Timeline	23
Annex 2 Primary Generalist Hub	24
Annex 3 Advice Services Alliance	26
Annex 4 Satellites, Outreach and E Access	27
Annex 5 Resource Plan	28
Annex 6 Benefits to Advice Users	30
Annex 7 Summary of Recommendations	31
Annex 8 Model	34

1. Background and Current Services

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The Department for Social Development (DSD) has policy responsibility for voluntary information and advice services in Northern Ireland. In 2003, DSD acted on requests from advice organisations and began a review to put in place an integrated strategy to deliver these services. David Hanson, as Minister with responsibility for Social Development, now seeks views on this strategy for advice and information services that has been developed by the department.

1.1.2 A strategy was required because:

- a shared view was needed on definitions of advice, infrastructure and policy from government, funders and providers;
- co-ordination between funders was lacking;
- public policy and practice were changing;
- the quality and geographical levels of provision varied; and
- pressures on public funding for more effective use of available resources were growing.

1.1.3 The review led to this consultation document and copies of both are available from DSD's Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) and from the Department's website (www.dsdni.gov.uk).

1.1.4 DSD seeks views, including written submissions, from interested individuals and organisations on this proposed strategy over the next 12 weeks. DSD will also be holding consultation meetings, details of which will be published. To find out more, contact the Voluntary and Community Unit (vcu@dsdni.gov.uk).

1.1.5 DSD will then produce a final strategy and a plan to put the key recommendations into action.

1.2 Current Advice and Information Services

1.2.1 The main advice providers are:

Government departments and agencies on issues relevant to their role and authority, or support organisations that do so for them.

Regional and local voluntary organisations (and some community groups) on specific issues and/or provide a wide range of information and advice to specific target groups. Advice generally forms one element of their work and is usually

A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community

focused on a specific issue or targeted at a specific group of clients.

Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) advise people and speak for them in the local communities where they are based.

Independent Advice Services – some are primary advice providers (i.e. those for whom advice is their sole or main purpose) and some are community development organisations which provide advice as part of their work.

local voluntary and community groups which provide advice and information as part of their work and to community organisations which provide advice services.

Law Centre NI provides support and training to local advice providers on legal and welfare issues. It also deals with the most complex legal issues (most of which test policy or legislation), generally referred by advice providers. Most providers are members of the Law Centre.

1.2.2 Most are members of either Citizens' Advice, Advice NI and/or Law Centre NI. Some are in all three.

Citizens' Advice provides support to local CAB offices, through the administration of a wide area network, provision of information, training and NVQ's, advice on policy issues, advice on quality issues, lobbying, etc. All local CAB are affiliated to Citizens Advice which also provides insurance, representation on policy issues and strategic support.

Advice NI was established to provide structured support in areas such as IT, training, quality standards and information to independent advice providers, regional and

1.2.3 Advice is provided on a wide range of issues. This includes welfare and benefits issues, health, education, employment, consumer, housing, money and debt issues, legal issues, etc. Some advice providers offer a full range of advice, while some specialise on certain topics and/or groups. Some advice work is considered specialist as it focuses on a particular element of work at a more complex level or is targeted at addressing the needs of a specific group of people (e.g. legal advice on immigration, complex housing advice, advice which relates to certain sections of society, money and debt advice, advocacy at SSA appeals and tribunals, etc.)

1.2.4 The Advice Services Alliance (ASA) Representatives from Citizens' Advice, Advice NI and Law Centre NI make up the Advice Service Alliance (ASA) which is an overarching body for advice provision. Its main function is to act as a conduit between Government and local advice providers (who are members of one or all of the ASA organisations). It encourages the agencies to work together and there have been some significant examples of co-operation, in areas such as social security advice and training. Together the three bodies support a wide range of providers, with a different ethos but similar standards, which ensures that everyone has choice in how they obtain advice. The ASA has contributed to the development of this Strategy through an Advice Services Steering Group.

1.3 Funding Advice Services

1.3.1 Central Government DSD's Voluntary and Community Unit (VCU) funds and supports regional advice services from the Law Centre NI, Advice NI and Citizens' Advice.

1.3.2 Local Government Most Councils support advice services, however, funding levels vary significantly because of an inconsistent approach to the

criteria used by Councils for allocating funds. As a result, the level of local advice provision often varies and may not always reflect the needs of a particular area. Councils have indicated to Government that they would welcome guidance on how best to support the sector.

1.3.3 VCU and Councils are the main, but not the only, funders. Other Government departments, agencies, branches and Non Departmental Public Bodies directly provide information (and sometimes advice) to the public relating to their remit, or provide specific funding to organisations to do so on their behalf. These include Social Security Agency, Child Support Agency, DSD Housing Division, NIHE, Health and Social Services Trusts, Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI has responsibility for consumer issues) and Her Majesty's Customs and Revenue. A range of other funding bodies also support advice/information work. The advice sector generally views funding from a number of sources as very positive, as long as there is sufficient core funding from Government.

1.3.4 The funding environment in which advice organisations work is changing. The amounts available for advice services from many

A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community

funding sources are likely to reduce in the future and have in many cases already started to decline. Significant funding programmes, particularly those emanating from Europe, are reducing and will offer decreasing support to the voluntary and community sector. There may however be emerging opportunities for developing advice services through, for example, the work of the Legal Services Commission in mapping legal services and identifying alternative delivery mechanisms to ensure that appropriate services are available to people who need them.

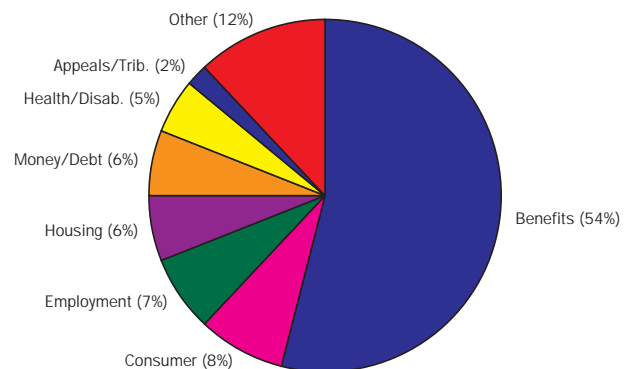
1.4 The profile of Advice Services in Northern Ireland¹

1.4.1 Advice outlets and levels of advice in Northern Ireland are as follows;

- 63 Generalist advice providers. Most council areas have 1-2 providers. Belfast has 20 advice organisations and Derry City Council area 5.
- Generalist providers typically have 3.5 whole time equivalent paid advice staff (2 generalist advice staff, 0.4 money advice staff, 0.6 tribunal workers and 0.5 other specialist advice staff), 1.5 volunteers and admin support.

- 400,000 enquiries are dealt with a year by Generalist providers - around 250 enquiries for every 1,000 people. Demand for services increases with capacity and therefore the number of enquiries/1,000 people varies over a large range. (e.g. Derry has 870 enquiries/1,000, Belfast has 240 enquiries/1,000). (Differences in how advice work is monitored by providers contributes to these differences).

1.4.2 Breakdown of Advice Enquiries



- Other enquiries include relationship/personal, taxes, utilities, education, leisure, human rights, justice, etc.

1.4.3 The total cost of these services is around £4m per year. This is based on an average of £65,000 per provider over 63 bodies. The average local cost per advice enquiry is about £11 (this

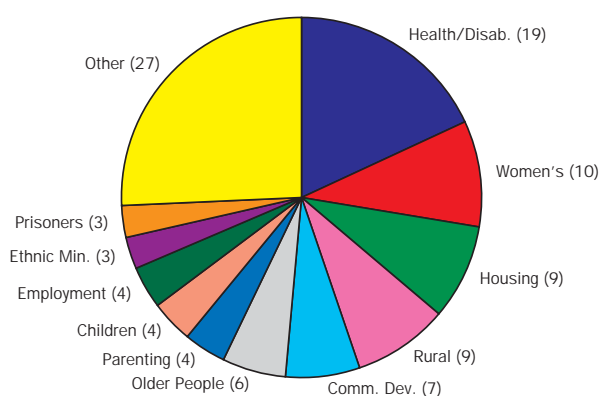
¹ Section 2.3.2 of Williamson Review

excludes the regional support organisations' costs e.g. Citizens' Advice, Advice NI and Law Centre). Funding from Councils varies widely and totals around £1.8m (including money received from VCU through Community Support budgets). Councils provide from £1m to £1.2m of this total.

1.4.4 £2.23m per year comes from other sources, mostly short-term, one off, funding. Other funding from Health and Social Service Trusts (H&SST's), charitable trusts and other sources may continue but on a casual basis. This means a gap in the future of £1.2 - £1.5m.

1.4.5 Approximately 105 specialist organisations provide advice and/or information and/or advocacy. The following diagram shows the areas in which they work:

Specialist ASA Members



"others" include gay/lesbian, equality/Human Rights, education, legal/justice, volunteering, poverty, consumer, money, etc.

1.5 Improving Advice Services

1.5.1 Advice services have grown in response to need, availability of resources (much of it short term) and as a consequence of the effectiveness of advice giving organisations in particular areas. Whilst there is much high quality provision there is also inconsistency in terms of geographical spread, range and quality with much advice work supported through short term funding.

1.5.2 The three main advice networks that include the vast majority of advice organisations have grown substantially and deliver a wide range of services, both generalist and specialist in nature. There has been little attempt made however to identify duplication of provision. In the absence of a comprehensive strategy based on a clear assessment of provision it is also likely that such duplication in some areas is matched by gaps in service provision in others.

1.5.3 Pressure is growing on the resources available to fund advice services with advice organisations reporting on the need to reduce services and finding difficulties in retaining trained staff because of uncertain employment prospects. Resources for advice services must be planned and delivered according to a framework that

A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community

matches resources and service delivery to need, with a particular focus on meeting the needs of the most disadvantaged. This strategy identifies how such a framework can be developed.

2. The Strategy

This Strategy puts forward a means of delivering advice services that will reach as many people as possible who need these across Northern Ireland.

The benefits for local and regional services include:

- the best use of resources;
- reduced duplication;
- better communication between Government, other funders and service providers;
- improved decision by funders through the development of agreed quality standards, and monitoring and evaluation systems;
- continued key role for the voluntary advice sector in both service delivery and identifying and challenging unfair decisions through changes in procedures and policies.

2.1. Principles and Values

2.1.2 The key principles and values of this Strategy are to provide:-

- access by all citizens, the disadvantaged in particular, to a level of advice that meets their needs;

- high quality services that can be kept going in the long term;
- value for money;
- quality of provision;
- integrated services that address gaps and overlaps; and
- the best use of the distinctive approach of the voluntary and community sector.

2.2 The Advice which is Needed

2.2.1 The overriding aim of this Strategy is to deliver a comprehensive advice and information service. These are the types of advice and information provision covered:



- Access to Information - basic provision of information to all citizens, including information from many public bodies as part of their service delivery obligations.

- Interpretation of Information - helping people to understand the information provided and how it relates to their own individual circumstances. This includes the work of help lines, but also more complete face-to-face support for those who may have difficulty with language, understanding what it means to them.
 - Assistance to act on Information - providing people with practical assistance when their circumstances are unusual and/or stop them from being able to help themselves. This might include statutory support for individuals, but is more often provided by independent organisations which can offer fully independent assistance.
 - Advocacy/Representation - supporting people to challenge decisions/actions. This would include the work of many larger, and some smaller, advice providers and would extend to Social Security Appeal Tribunals and Social Security Commissioners.
 - Informing Public Policy or Practice – questioning policies/legal issues when they result in inequality and/or discrimination, and commenting on policy consultations. This may involve legal action, lobbying and policy comment and is usually carried out by larger regional bodies such as ASA members.
- ### 2.3 How should Advice and Information Services be Delivered?
- 2.3.1 A key question for consideration is the level of generalist and specialist advice which should be provided. It is not practical to provide very specialised advice, which is in relatively low demand, at a very local level. Conversely, advice which is sought regularly by a significant number of people should be as accessible as possible. As a basic principle therefore, it is logical to provide the most specialised and complex advice/ advocacy at a regional level and to ensure that advice which is in high demand (i.e., generalist) is provided locally to facilitate accessibility for all.
- 2.3.2 Very specialised provision which is needed by a relatively small number of people is only affordable at a regional level. Appropriate referral, training and quality mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that specialist organisations can guarantee that their client group have appropriate access to such support, via local providers.

2.3.3 More specialised or complex provision, such as tribunal work and money and debt counselling, should be available relatively locally yet the complexity of these issues requires specialist staff. This means that these cannot be provided on everyone's doorstep. To balance accessibility and quality with appropriate levels of skill and specialisms some access at local level to specialist advice workers will be required.

2.3.4 Some of those who need highly specialised and complex advice on an infrequent basis may also be those who are least well equipped financially and socially to access centralised provision. Consequently there needs to be effective communication and referral processes and sharing of expertise between central and local provision. The small local provider must be aware of their limitations, while the centralised specialist provider must have confidence that local provision can offer a high quality front-line service. Without this confidence, the provider of specialised or highly complex advice will seek to continue to provide a service at a very local level, effectively making poor use of resources.

2.4 The New Infrastructure – Key Features

2.4.1 An integrated structure for delivery of advice and information services is therefore needed to provide advice, advocacy and high level support on a range of basic and complex general advice issues to as many people as possible. The proposed structure is illustrated in the diagram in Annex 8. The strategy recommends the establishment of a network of primary generalist providers (known as Area Hubs).

2.4.2 An Area Hub will be locally based and will provide a broad range of advice services. It will:

- provide accessible, generalist advice, advocacy and high level support on a range of basic and complex general advice issues;
- offer first line support to those who have specific needs; and
- act as a referral point to specialist agencies where dedicated specialist advice is required.

For more detail on the functions of the proposed area hubs see Annex 2. All local services, including outreach work in rural areas, home visits, work with community organisations, support for services using the Internet (E-

A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community

access), will be linked to the relevant Area Hub.

2.4.3 The number, location and size of hubs will be based on need, taking account of deprivation, population size and the overall level of funding available. As much advice sought results from the delivery of Government services, the new structure should be linked to these services. This will mean that where the Area Hubs are to be sited will be significantly influenced by the Review of Public Administration, which emphasises the need to develop structures which deliver co-terminosity of services.

2.4.4 There will continue to be a demand for specialist provision, however this is required by a relatively small number of people and is only affordable at a regional level. All initial advice should be sought from a local provider and it is vital therefore that appropriate referral, training and quality mechanisms are put in place to ensure that specialist providers can have confidence that their client group have access to support at a local level. High level specialised advice and information services should only be provided at a regional level with appropriate referral mechanisms and relationships developed between local providers and regional voluntary organisations.

2.4.5 This Strategy will guide:

- Government Departments on work which potentially impacts on the need for, or delivery of advice services;
- the approach of DSD in working with other Government departments or agencies on issues which affect the sector; and
- non statutory funding bodies in planning future support;

2.4.6 The main recommendations from this strategy should be in place within 3-years. Since radical change is required in some parts of the voluntary and community sector, it may take up to 5 years before some of the longer-term results are realised. Section 2.5 contains details of the full recommendations. A summary is contained in Annex 7.

2.5 Delivering the Strategy - Recommendations

2.5.1 High Level Generalist Advice Provision

2.5.2 One of the key objectives from this strategy is to implement the Area Hubs structure by the end of 2008. In determining the location of Area Hubs, the question of accessibility will be one of the main criteria. To help us decide where the area hubs should be located it is proposed that a

mapping exercise will be carried out, which will match advice provision to community needs, to identify the most appropriate location for generalist hubs. DSD, in consultation with the advice sector and other statutory bodies, will take this forward.

- 2.5.3 The new advice structure will be tested to identify and fix any operational problems before it is rolled out across Northern Ireland. Therefore DSD, working with other statutory funders and the voluntary advice sector, will set up a pilot hub with satellite links (with existing providers, if appropriate).

The work of the pilot will be assessed and discussed with key stakeholders before the new structure is put in place.

QUESTION 1:- The development of an area hubs model is at the centre of this proposed strategy. Do you consider this is the best model for the future delivery of advice and information services? If not, what alternative model would you suggest?

- 2.5.4 **Maximising Access to Basic Advice Provision**
This Strategy must ensure that basic advice is available to all and targeted at those most in need. When the location of area hubs

have been agreed, it will be necessary to identify where satellite and outreach provision should be located to ensure access to the greatest number of disadvantaged people. This will involve consultation with communities, Councils and providers.

- 2.5.5 Whilst the new structures should ensure that the most disadvantaged in society have increased access to advice services, it is also important that specific client groups are targeted and have access to quality local advice services. There will be an important role for regional voluntary organisations in working within the new structures to ensure that their client groups are effectively represented. DSD has a particular responsibility to work for disadvantaged communities and will work to put in place appropriate arrangements to deliver high quality advice and information through the Area Hubs that ensures effective provision to the most disadvantaged communities. DSD will be particularly concerned to ensure effective delivery of advice services in neighbourhood renewal areas.

QUESTION 2:- Will the Area Hubs model deliver high quality advice to our most disadvantaged communities?

A Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community

2.5.6 Resourcing the Sector in Future

2.5.7 The need for an advice and information strategy has been encouraged by public sector funders and providers alike who identified the need for a clear policy framework in which decisions could be made about advice provision and how it should be resourced. There is a need for a structured approach to maximise the allocation of available resources to ensure that core advice services can be sustained in the long term.

2.5.8 DSD will have a particular role in working with other Government Departments and other funders to ensure a co-ordinated approach and make the best use of available resources. To deliver such co-ordination, it is proposed that DSD will establish a Government Advice and Information Group where Government Departments involved in funding advice and information giving organisations can share information, ensure best use of funding and agree the principles to be applied to advice and information work at both regional and local levels. This Group will monitor the implementation of this Strategy.

2.5.9 A resource plan for this Strategy is set out in Annex 5 and this

identifies a number of sources of future funding to the voluntary advice sector. The potential of additional funding from Government Departments, Agencies and other bodies whose policies impact on the need for advice provision will be further explored. DSD will identify how available resources provided to advice and information networks can be utilised to support the implementation of this Strategy and the establishment of Area Hubs in particular. DSD will also identify options for meeting any funding gaps through discussions with other public funders, the private sector and the advice sector itself.

QUESTION 3:- What arrangements should be put in place to ensure the effective utilisation of current resources to support the strategy? What additional resources should be considered to support this Strategy? Are the proposed monitoring arrangements sufficient and appropriate?

2.5.10 Quality of Provision

2.5.11 During the development of this strategy, some concerns were expressed about the wide range of organisations involved in provision of advice and information services and the impact this has on levels of efficiency, effectiveness and

quality. The Advice Services Alliance (ASA) will have a key role in facilitating implementation of this Strategy and in ensuring that consistent quality standards are established and maintained within membership organisations.

advise on quality, training and access issues in relation to their client group. This Advisory panel will be asked to provide a report twice a year on the implementation of this Strategy to DSD. The reports will be considered by the Government Advice and Information Group.

2.5.12 The ASA is composed of three independent organisations who wish to maintain their own roles within the voluntary advice sector. Whilst Government is supportive of each of the ASA members, it is important the collective organisation operates as an effective and accountable representative body. An independent Chairperson has been appointed to ensure that decisions taken by the ASA are for the good of the sector as a whole and a central resource will be required to support the development of the organisation.

2.5.14 The ASA organisations have previously drafted a range of quality standards for the advice sector and it is recommended that these standards are examined and updated, in line with the recommendations in this strategy. To support the development of this Strategy, ASA will produce a standard set of quality measures for Area Hubs, satellite provision and outreach to cover training, I.T., reporting systems, premises and adherence to the core values of advice work. These quality measures will be applied across the advice sector and will inform future funding decisions.

2.5.13 Once agreement has been reached with the advice networks to implement this Strategy, DSD will liaise with the ASA and engage with regional voluntary organisations to ensure that their clients' needs are considered and addressed within the new structures. The ASA will establish a Specialist Advisory Panel made up of senior representatives from regional voluntary organisations to

2.5.15 Clear targets for the implementation of quality standards will be implemented with the intention that by 2008 only advice providers that meet agreed quality standards will receive funding. ASA will be tasked with supporting local advice providers to enable them to meet required standards.

2.5.16 It is recognised that there is a need to make better use of IT in some parts of the advice sector and to ensure that the digital divide between advice providing organisations is narrowed. ASA will be supported to implement an acceptable IT based case recording system suitable for the comprehensive monitoring of advice services.

2.5.17 This Strategy places significant and increased responsibilities on the Advice Services Alliance. The resource needs of the ASA with regard to administration, monitoring, evaluation and implementation of quality standards will be addressed by DSD.

QUESTION 4:- Will these proposals improve the quality of advice provision?

2.5.18 Using Existing Resources Effectively

2.5.19 The voluntary advice sector needs to improve levels of co-operation, to rationalise and minimise duplication of services, especially in training and IT services. DSD and ASA will agree how to provide effective co-operation and the best use of all training provided by ASA members.

2.5.20 A single, IT based, management information system is an essential

objective of this Strategy and there is a particular responsibility on regional advice organisations to work with Government in achieving this. The main advice networks will be expected to have IT systems in place to achieve consistent and agreed standards of monitoring, reporting and auditability by December 2006.

2.5.21 DSD will also work with ASA organisations to pursue the objective of a single shared IT based case recording and information system across the advice sector, by December 2008. This should consider the advantages of Advice NI's² AIMS and the Citizens' Advice CARMA³ systems and ensure access to accurate, fully auditable, online information.

QUESTION 5:- How can Government and the voluntary advice sector work together to ensure efficient use of resources and minimise duplication of services?

2.6 Monitoring and Review Plan

2.6.1 Implementation of this Strategy has a timescale of 3-5 years and VCU will develop a monitoring and review plan to cover this period. To ensure that this Strategy remains dynamic and relevant, the plan will

² AIMS (Advice and Information Management System)

³ CARMA (Citizens Advice Recording and Management System)

be regularly reviewed and updated as follows:

- 6 monthly progress reviews by the Government Advice and Information Group and the Advice Services Steering Group, drawn from VCU and the ASA, followed by the production of a 6 monthly action plan;
- An annual review and updating of this Strategy by the Government Advice and Information Group and the Advice Services Steering Group;
- An interim review after 3 years, to consider the extent to which objectives have been achieved to date and to examine how effective the structures are;
- An interim review of the ASA after 3 years to consider its future role in relation to the strategy; and
- An external review after 5 years with a view to making recommendations on future strategic approaches.



annexes

Annex 1:
Strategy Timeline

Annex 2:
Primary Generalist Hub

Annex 3:
Advice Services Allilance

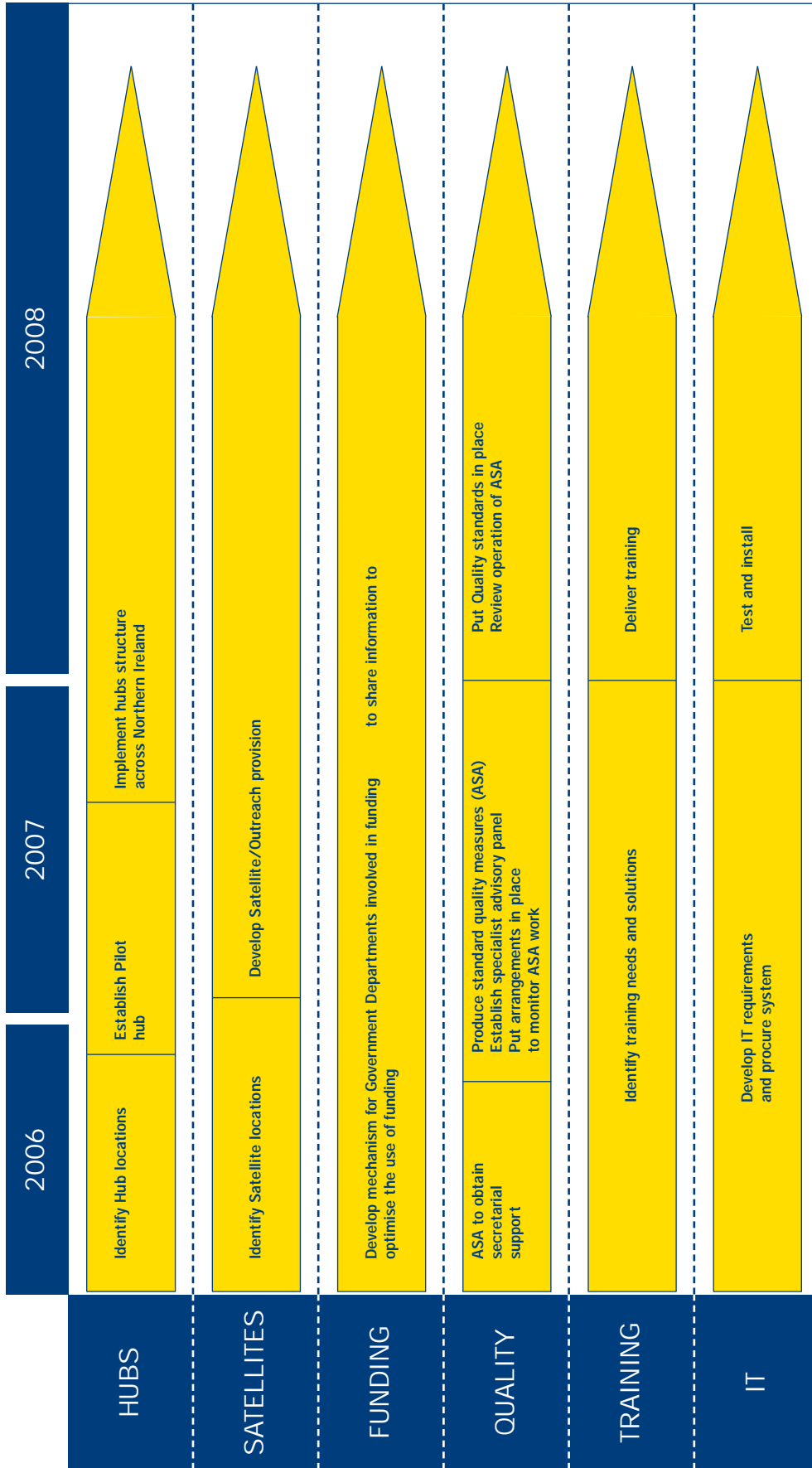
Annex 4:
Satellites, Outreach and E Access

Annex 5:
Resource Plan

Annex 6:
Benefits to Advice Users

Annex 7:
Summary of Recommendations

Annex 8:
Model



Annex 2

A Primary Generalist Hub

1. A primary generalist area hub is a locally based advice provider of a complete range of services, including advice, advocacy and high level support on a range of basic and complex general advice issues open to as many people as possible. It will also offer first line support to those who have specific needs and will refer them to specialist agencies where dedicated specialist advice is needed.
2. It will incorporate the following:-
 - 4- 8 advisors able to offer advice on each core area of general advice provision and to provide basic advice on particular specialist needs;
 - dedicated money and debt counselling and the ability to carry out tribunal and high level advocacy work;
 - will be sited on main transport routes, ideally close to where most people live but also open to those in country areas;
 - will meet the highest standards of disabled access and one advisor will have some expertise on disability issues.
 - each advisor will be responsible for one or more specialist areas, including disability, housing, the needs of ethnic minorities, older people, single parents and children. Advisors will not be experts in these areas but will have sufficient understanding to recognise the particular needs of the client group and to understand how and when to refer clients to regional voluntary bodies.
3. 80% of the population should live within five miles of an area hub, which will offer advice/advocacy on:
 - will be linked to a range of outreach and satellite provision. Hubs will have good links with larger community organisations in the area so that suitable ways to refer clients can be set up. These will enable community based E- access points.
 - will have well established relationships with relevant regional voluntary bodies and support structures at a Northern Ireland level. These will ensure that hubs can maintain their quality, through suitable training, access to specialist information, regular updating of general information and provision of staff training.
 - Benefits (including Disability

Benefits), Income Support, Housing, JSA, Tax Credits, Pension Credits;

- Appeal and Tribunal support and representation;
- Money and Debt;
- Consumer issues;
- Basic Immigration (with more complex cases referred to specialist organisations), Administration of Justice, Human Rights;
- Employment;
- Housing;
- Education;
- Health and Disability.

4. More complex enquiries relating to employment, housing, education, health and disability, immigration and social security should be referred to suitable specialist organisations.

Annex 3

Advice Service Alliance (ASA)

1. ASA is made up of Citizens' Advice, Advice NI and the Law Centre. Advice organisations are members of at least one of these bodies. Although, the three organisations which make up the ASA can, at times, be seen as representing the sector, advice providers have a degree of independence and use their membership of these bodies for advice and support on a wide range of issues, including:

- advice on operational/management issues (including implementation of quality procedures);
- back up support on systems and procedures used to make efficient and effective advice work easier;
- circulating information on wider, often strategic, issues which impact on members' work;
- making policy consultations involving the sector easy;
- lobbying on behalf of members and/or the sector as a whole on policy/legislative issues which affect advice work;
- training/updating for advice staff;
- support in developing new projects; and

- support in seeking and obtaining funding.

2. To maximise ASA's value it should:

- have an admin role and necessary staff;
- not provide funding; and
- be reviewed after three years.

ASA will:

- make sure training resources for the advice sector are used efficiently;
- ensure consistent quality standards across the sector;
- lobby and campaign;
- seek funding for the sector;
- develop strategic projects for the sector; and
- make it easier for the Advice and Information Strategy to be brought into operation.

3. In summary, the ASA will not be an operational body as such, rather it will, when appropriate, facilitate a joint approach to issues which affect the advice sector. It will not be a funding body for the sector but will have an admin role and its operation will be reviewed every 3 years.

Satellites, Outreach and E Access

1. Outreach and satellite provision, coupled with use of new technology (E-access), will be needed to make sure that people who do not live near the generalist hubs will be able to get advice easily. They must work as part of the hub structure and be able to update information, provide training and counselling for staff and have administrative support to be effective.

This is how they will work:

- Outreach services in specific community places at local level such as half-day sessions in community centres, doctors' surgeries, etc.
 - Outreach on an occasional basis at advice clinics, promotional events, etc. in community centres, leisure centres, schools and other public locations.
 - Outreach home visits to those who are unable to access advice because they are ill or disabled.
 - Part-time satellite provision such as a two day per week session with a part-time advisor located in an area of high demand.
- IT based community E access points, such as single computers within a community centre or a community organisation's premises linked by broadband access to the hubs and to a central point. They could cover basic advice needs that could be easily dealt with and offer advisors cheaper and faster links to a wide range of people.
 - All satellite, outreach and E-Access services should be directly linked to the primary generalist hub in the area.

Annex 5

Resource Plan

1. It is estimated that the local advice sector has an annual funding requirement of over £4 million. These figures do not include the cost of running the regional support organisations or any of the specialist regional bodies. Approximately £1.8 million - £2 million of funding for local advice provision comes from district councils, including funding received from the Voluntary and Community Unit through the Community Support Programme. While Council's contribution probably accounts for around 60% of the total local advice funding, the amount of funding from each Council varies considerably, with the higher spending Councils contributing over £2 per capita. If all Councils were to contribute at this rate the core funding available for local advice services would be around £3.3 million. Of the other funding for local provision, the only element that is likely to be sustainable in the longer term is funding obtained through Health and Social Services Trusts. This currently amounts to £0.5 million to £0.6 million per annum.
2. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the advice sector can expect to sustain local funding of £2.3 million to £2.6 million per annum, excluding one-off and short-term funding, which currently contributes up to £1.5 million per annum. The funding that is currently sustainable would not maintain the local advice sector in its present state. It is also unlikely that the current level of sustainable funding, up to £2.6 million, can support the proposed strategy.
3. New sources of funding will be needed to close the funding gap, at least £1.5 million per year, to put the improved advice and information structure in place. This should be viewed in the context of wider pressures on public expenditure and competing priorities in other Departments.
4. It is proposed that work should begin on identifying alternative sources of funding. The following options should be explored;
 - a. Discussions to be held with district councils on the possibility of additional resources to be delivered through the Community Support Programme. If reorganisation following the Review of Public Administration leads to fewer larger councils, VCU will explore what additional resources may be available from larger councils for advice provision.

- b. To explore with the Legal Services Commission what opportunities there may be for support for advice services. The Commission has already expressed an interest in working to implement a pilot programme as a first step in implementation of the strategy.
 - c. Through the Government Advice and Information Group to explore with all departments what additional support may be available for advice services in the context of departments buying services from the advice sector.
 - d. To explore with the advice sector what other options are possible including, for example, support from the finance sector to support money and debt advice.
5. Work should also begin immediately on identifying the level of sustainable resources that will be required for the first three years of this Strategy, taking into account the lending of other programmes currently being accessed to support advice.

Annex 6

Benefits to Advice Users

1. The benefits of this Strategy will be:
 - Best use of existing resources;
 - Making it easier to increase the resources available to the advice sector;
 - Improving the quality of advice and advocacy;
 - More consistent advice services across Northern Ireland and within Council areas;
 - People who need advice most will find it easier to get help;
 - More consistent approach to advice by funders at local and regional level.

2. Specific benefits for those who use advice services will include:

Easier and faster access to general advice:

- more people will live closer to advice services;
- advice locations will be on main transport routes;
- increased E-access and better use of new technology that people find easier to use; and
- more ways of obtaining advice, including additional opening hours.

Better specialised or high level advice

- consistent availability of special advice in each Council area;
- locally based advisors (within hubs) who understand the issues faced by people with specific needs;
- excellent links and referral between local satellites and hubs; and
- access to the best help available, through simplified and rapid referrals from local providers to regional specialist advice.

More consistent quality

- ASA will set up and monitor quality measures to be used by all providers.
- The same recording and monitoring and IT systems will be used by all; and
- Expert regional voluntary organisations will monitor specialist providers and their staffing.

Summary of Recommendations

1. High Level Generalist Advice Provision

- 1.1 DSD will aim, through the public consultation, to gain widespread agreement on the elements that are needed within a generalist hub, as outlined in Annex 2.
- 1.2 By October 2006 DSD will have identified appropriate locations for generalist hubs.
- 1.3 DSD will consult with the voluntary advice sector and other statutory funders to set up a pilot hub, with satellite links, by December 2006.
- 1.4 By December 2008 DSD, in consultation with other statutory bodies, will have established a network of high quality, adequately staffed and equipped, generalist information and advice hubs throughout Northern Ireland.

2. Maximising Access to Basic Advice Provision

- 2.1 By July 2007, DSD will have decided, in consultation with communities, Councils and providers, where satellite and outreach services should be sited to reach the greatest number of disadvantaged people,
- 2.2 By December 2007, DSD will make sure that all citizens can get

advice and information and that every effort is made to target the most disadvantaged.

3. Resourcing the Sector in Future

- 3.1 By March 2007, DSD will have informed all significant non Governmental funders about the Strategy and got their agreement to consider this in future funding decisions on advice and information.
- 3.2 DSD will also establish, by March 2007, a Government Advice and Information Group where departments involved in funding advice and information can share information, ensure best use of funding and agree how advice and information services will work at both regional and local levels.
- 3.3 DSD will identify how available resources for advice and information networks can be used to support this Strategy and the establishment of core hubs in particular. DSD will also identify options for meeting any funding gaps through discussions with other public funders, the private sector and the advice sector.
- 3.4 In the longer term DSD will also work with other funders to ensure that there are sufficient resources to sustain an adequate level of core advice provision across Northern Ireland, by December 2011.

Annex 7

4. Quality of Provision

4.1 By September 2006, ASA will have formed a Specialist Advisory Panel of senior representatives from regional voluntary organisations to advise on quality, training and access issues for their clients.

4.2 To support the development of this Strategy, ASA will produce a standard set of quality measures for Area Hubs, satellite provision and outreach to cover training, IT, reporting systems, premises and adherence to the core values of advice work. These quality measures will be applied across the advice sector and will inform future funding decisions.

4.3 The resource needs of the ASA with regard to administration, monitoring, evaluation and implementation of quality standards will be addressed by DSD. By April 2007, ASA will have obtained appropriate secretarial support and procedures will be established to monitor and record its work. In 2007/08, ASA will be reviewed to measure its effectiveness in delivering its objectives and to consider its future role.

4.4 ASA will support local providers to make sure that:

- 80% of advice providers with 3 or more staff meet quality

standards by December 2006; and

- 50% of smaller advice providers (2 or less staff) meet quality standards by March 2007.

By July 2007, it is envisaged that only advice providers which meet agreed quality standards will receive public funding.

4.5 ASA will support and encourage membership organisations to ensure that, by December 2006, 80% of all funded advice provision has an acceptable I.T. based case recording system in place to monitor advice work.

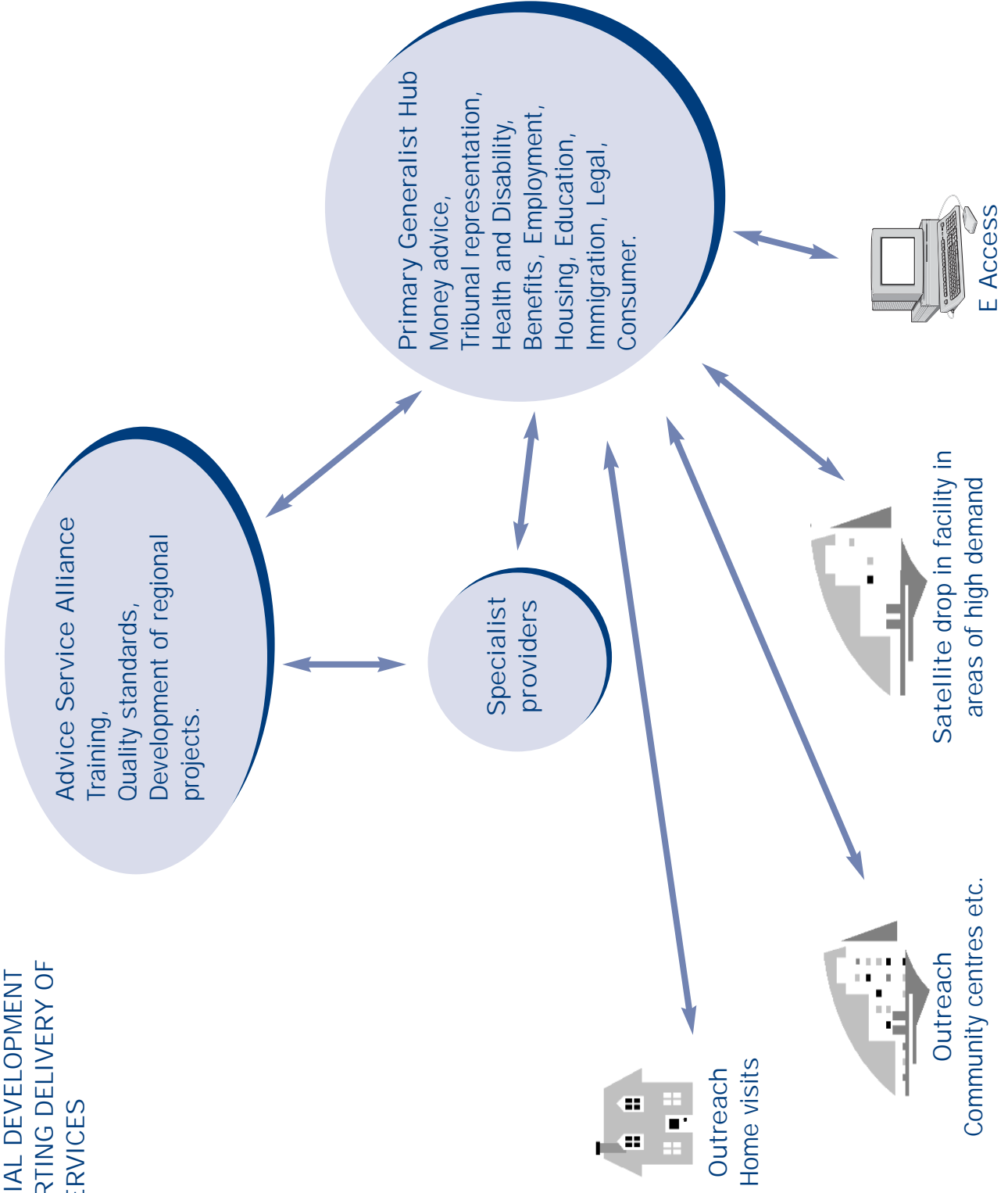
5. Using Existing Resources Effectively

5.1 By June 2006, DSD and ASA organisations will have agreed on training that should be made available to advice providers. By June 2007, they should have an integrated training strategy in place which ensures that there is a means to provide effective co-operation and to best use all training provided by ASA members.

5.2 In the short term, DSD will work with Citizens Advice and Advice NI so that IT systems are able to achieve a shared standard of monitoring, reporting and auditability by December 2006.

- 5.3 DSD will also work with ASA organisations to pursue the long-term objective of a single shared IT- based case recording and information system across the sector, by December 2008. This should consider the advantages of Advice NI's AIMS and the Citizens' Advice CARMA systems and produce recommendations to ensure accurate, fully auditable, online information is available.

Annex 8



www.dsdni.gov.uk

December 2005

Printed by Central Print Unit