

# Working together better

Report for ASTF Sustainable Advice in Hackney Partnership



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# Contents

1. Executive Summary	3
2. About this report	4
3. National and local context	6
4. Views from advice organisations	11
5. Views from key stakeholders	14
6. Key issues	17
7. Recommendations	22
Appendix – List of interviewees	24

# 1. Executive Summary

This research for the ‘Sustainable Advice in Hackney’ (SAH) partnership funded through Big Lottery Fund’s Advice Services Transition Fund shows that voluntary sector advice providers in the London Borough of Hackney face the dual challenge of decreasing levels of public sector funding, and rising demand for services from local people.

Hackney has a large and diverse not-for-profit advice sector ranging from relatively large general advice providers to small volunteer-led organisations working with specific communities who provide advice as part of a range of activities.

The London Borough of Hackney’s funding for advice services does not currently compare unfavourably with funding for similar activities in neighbouring boroughs however, as budgets grow ever tighter, future funding is uncertain.

The diverse range of organisations that deliver advice services in Hackney have an equally diverse range of views both about how advice providers can best work together and about what advice organisations exist to do. Some are strongly focused on quality assured service provision and working in partnership with the public sector, others favour a campaigning approach.

The diversity of organisations involved in advice provision in Hackney and their differing worldviews presents both opportunities and challenges as organisations look to ‘adapt to a new funding environment’.

While advice organisations in Hackney are already working together in consortia funded via council grants or set up on an ad hoc basis to bid for outside funding, there is currently no organisation or group responsible for ongoing collaboration and joint working.

Both national and local research suggests that resources will be hard to come in the advice sector for the foreseeable future. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is no single new model that advice providers can adopt to ensure their sustainability.

There are, however, many new ideas and approaches that are being utilised as organisations find new ways to work together, work with volunteers and develop new business models.

As advice organisations in Hackney work to ensure their own continued existence while meeting clients’ needs in an uncertain funding climate, the need for imaginative thinking and successful collaboration is greater than ever.

# 2. About this report

## 2.1 About the partnership

'Sustainable Advice in Hackney' (SAH) is a two-year project funded through Big Lottery Fund's Advice Services Transition Fund (ASTF) to enable not-for-profit advice providers working in the London Borough of Hackney to 'adapt to a new funding environment' while continuing to provide services to their local communities.

It is a partnership of seven local organisations: Hackney Community Law Centre, Hackney Caribbean Elderly Organisation, East End Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK East London, the Hackney Migrant Centre, Halkevi and City & Hackney Mind.

With the expectation of decreasing levels of funding available from public sector agencies, partner organisations (and other local providers) need to transform the way they work to be more efficient and effective, generate new sources of income and find ways to do more with less.

## 2.2 Report methodology

'SAH' commissioned Social Spider CIC, a social enterprise that delivers research, writing, publishing and training services as well as running its own local and national projects, to work with the partnership to conduct this research.

Our report is based on a combination of desk research and discussions with local advice organisations and other stakeholders. It considers the options for transforming local advice services based on the assets, skills and experience of partners (and other local organisations), the opportunities available to them and the particular challenges they face.

Between June 2014 and November 2014 we carried out 19 face-to-face interviews and 2 phone interviews with:

- 10 advice organisations working in Hackney
- 9 with key stakeholders in Hackney
- 2 with advice organisations in other boroughs

A full list of interviews is available on page 22. We also attended 2 meetings of Hackney Advice Forum in May 2014 and January 2015.

The report particularly considers organisations' appetite for and attitudes towards:

- Collaboration – including joint funding bids, joint services and sub-contracting;
- Co-location – with each other and/or other organisations in the voluntary or public sectors;
- Working with volunteers – to increase the impact of existing services or develop new ones;
- Developing new business models – including using social enterprise models to sell services beyond the London Borough of Hackney and to private sector customers.

The report concludes with a series of recommendations for consideration by the partnership, other advice organisations and stakeholders.



# 3. National and local context

## 3.1 National context

ASTF was launched in October 2012 and awarded a total of £68million to 228 partnerships across England, with half of the funding provide by The Cabinet Office.<sup>1</sup>

The fund stipulated that local partnerships should:

- reflect the needs of the people and communities in their local areas;
- include providers of welfare benefits and debt, housing and employment advice;
- show that they have plans in place to improve efficiency, adaptability and quality of service over the long term.

Alongside the launch of the fund, The Cabinet Office published 'Not-for-Profit Advice Services in England',<sup>2</sup> which it described as 'a review of the not-for-profit social welfare advice sector'.

This review noted that: 'quantifying the total level of demand for advice or need for advice services is challenging as data is not collected in a consistent way. However, there seems to be a pattern of rising demand during difficult economic circumstances.'<sup>3</sup>

Many advice providers claimed to be working 'at full capacity and struggling to meet demand' with Citizens Advice Bureau reporting in 2010 that its members received over two million phone calls but were only able to answer 100,000.

Aside from the general challenges caused by the economic situation, the review also notes the potential effects of government policies – such as the Department for Work and Pensions' introduction of Universal Credit – on demand for advices services. It notes that the DWP 'recognises that the Welfare Reform programme may place additional challenges on the sector during the transitional period'.<sup>4</sup>

As the table below illustrates, rising demand for services had been accompanied by falling funding, with regular funding for not-for-profit advice services from central government projected to fall from around £195million in 2011/12 to around £110million in 2014/15, the bulk of these cuts being due to government reforms to legal aid in its Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.<sup>5</sup>

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1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/making-it-easier-to-set-up-and-run-a-charity-social-enterprise-or-voluntary-organisation/supporting-pages/advice-services-transition-fund>

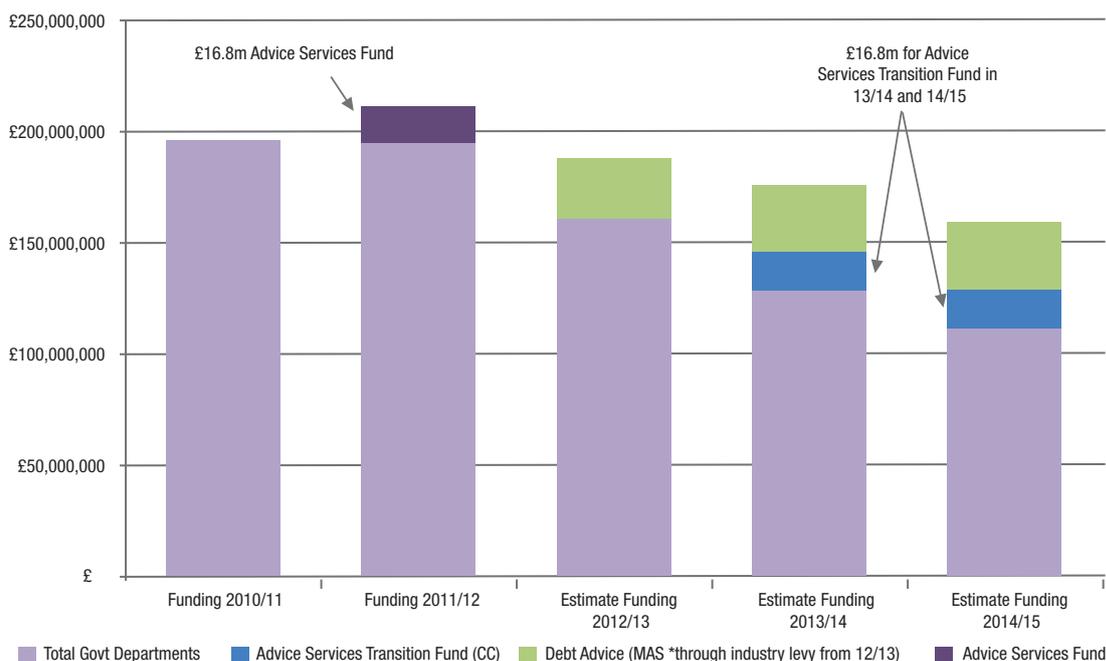
2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/not-for-profit-advice-services-in-england>

3 Not for Profit Advice Services in England, p6.

4 Not for Profit Advice Services in England, p9.

5 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/contents/enacted>

## Central Government Funding to Not-for Profit Advice Providers



ASTF is part of the government's effort to help not-for-profit advice providers respond to what the report describes as 'a new funding landscape'.

The Cabinet Office review notes that many providers' income sources vary: 'For example, Citizens Advice Bureaux on average receive 40% of their income from local authorities and around 30% from central government'<sup>6</sup> but evidence suggests all sources of public funding for advice services have either been significantly reduced or are under ongoing threat.

A House of Commons report published in March 2012, 'Changes to legal aid: The impact on providers'<sup>7</sup> noted that: "Concerns about 'advice deserts' that is, areas where people cannot access certain legal aid services have been expressed for several years... Such concerns have been revived by the Bill, which (its critics claim) may have an adverse impact on providers of legal aid and especially, but not exclusively, the not-for-profit sector."

The Local Government Association claimed: 'Government funding given to councils to run local services will have been cut by 40 per cent by May 2015'<sup>8</sup> while NCVO reported that: 'Local government spending is estimated to fall by 11.4% between 2010/11 and 2015/16' and that 'If these cuts are passed on to local charities this would suggest a fall in local government income to charities of around £800 million per year by the end of the period'.<sup>9</sup>

The extent to which national funding cuts are reflected in cuts in funding to particular parts of the voluntary sector in specific local areas clearly depends on the combination of specific local needs and the policies of local politicians.

6 Not-for-Profit Advice Services in England, p8

7 <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN06273/changes-to-legal-aid-the-impact-on-providers>

8 [http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal\\_content/56/10180/6172733/NEWS](http://www.local.gov.uk/media-releases/-/journal_content/56/10180/6172733/NEWS)

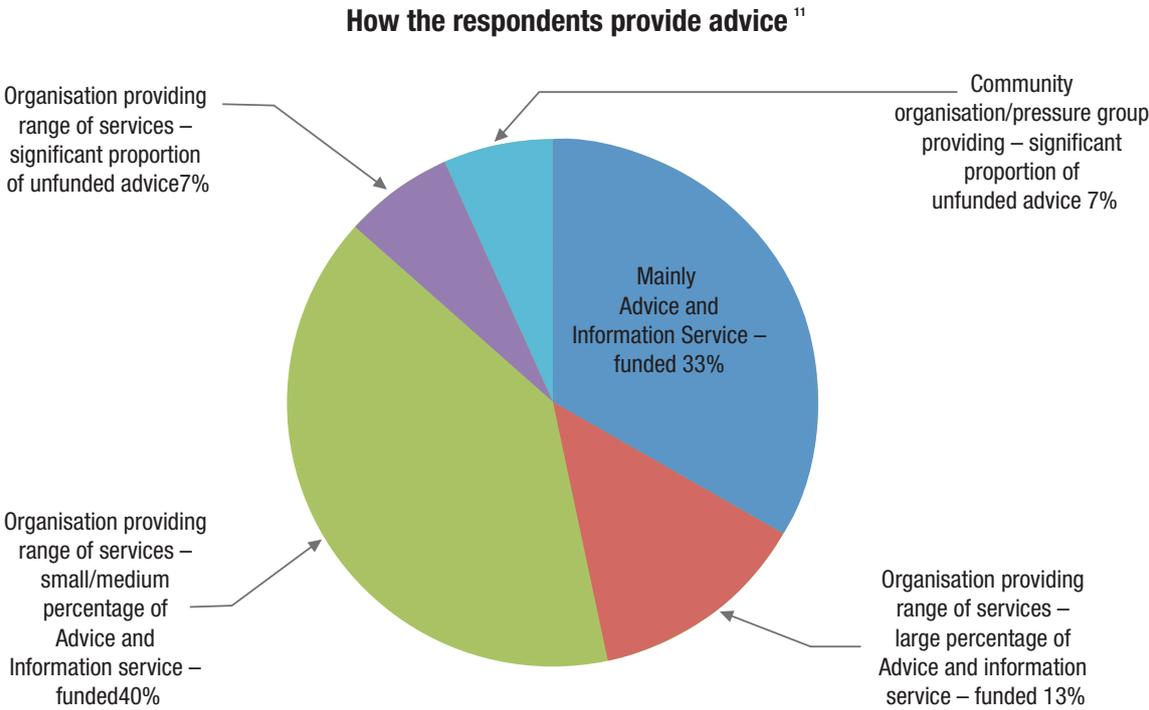
9 <http://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac12/how-are-public-sector-spending-cuts-affecting-the-voluntary-sector/>

### 3.2 Local context

The London Borough of Hackney (LBH) has a large and diverse not-for-profit advice sector. Hackney Advice Forum, a group that ‘aims to help independent advice agencies in the borough improve the quality, level and co-ordination of their services and activities’ has over 100 organisations on its mailing list.<sup>10</sup>

A 2012 Hackney Advice Forum survey, Clients Needs and the Independent Advice Sector, talked to over 20 organisations with some involvement in providing advice services – either as their core activity or as one of a range of services.

The report provides a snapshot of these organisations’ roles in delivering advice services in the borough:

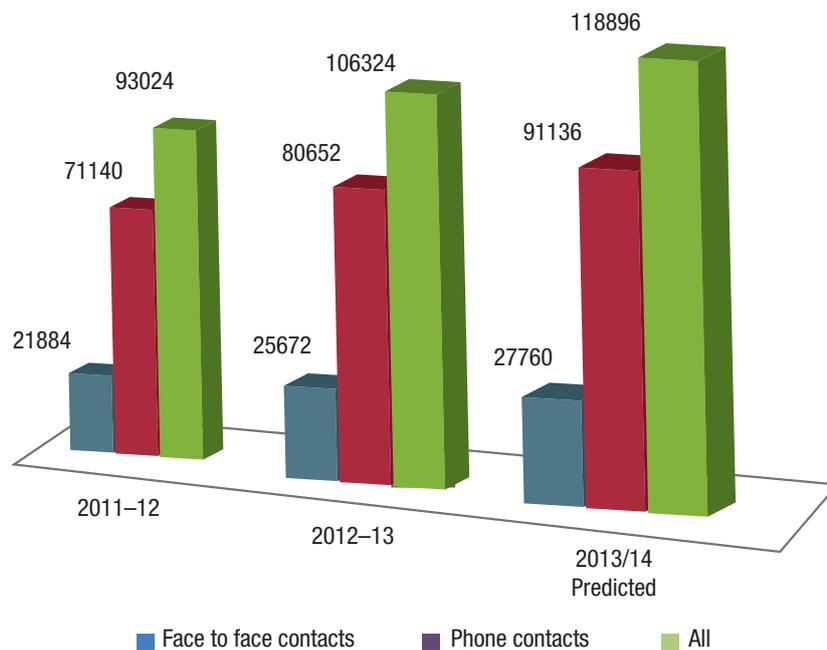


Based on responses from 20 local organisations, the report showed a significant increase in local use of advice services between 2011–12 and 2012–13, with further increases predicted in 2013–14.

Phone Contacts increased 13% from 71,140 in 2011–12 to 80,652 in 2012–13 while Face to Face Contacts increased 17% from 21,884 in 2011–12 to 25,672 in 2012–13.

<sup>10</sup> Independent Advice Provision in Hackney: The ‘state of the sector’ (2007)  
<sup>11</sup> Chart – Clients Needs and the Independent Advice Sector (2012) – Executive Summary page 3

## Use of Advice Services in Hackney<sup>12</sup>



There are currently 17 organisations currently commissioned to deliver services via (at least one of) the three consortia funded through LBH's independent advice services grant scheme.

LBH is currently spending £770k per year in 2014/15 and 2015/16 on three contracts:

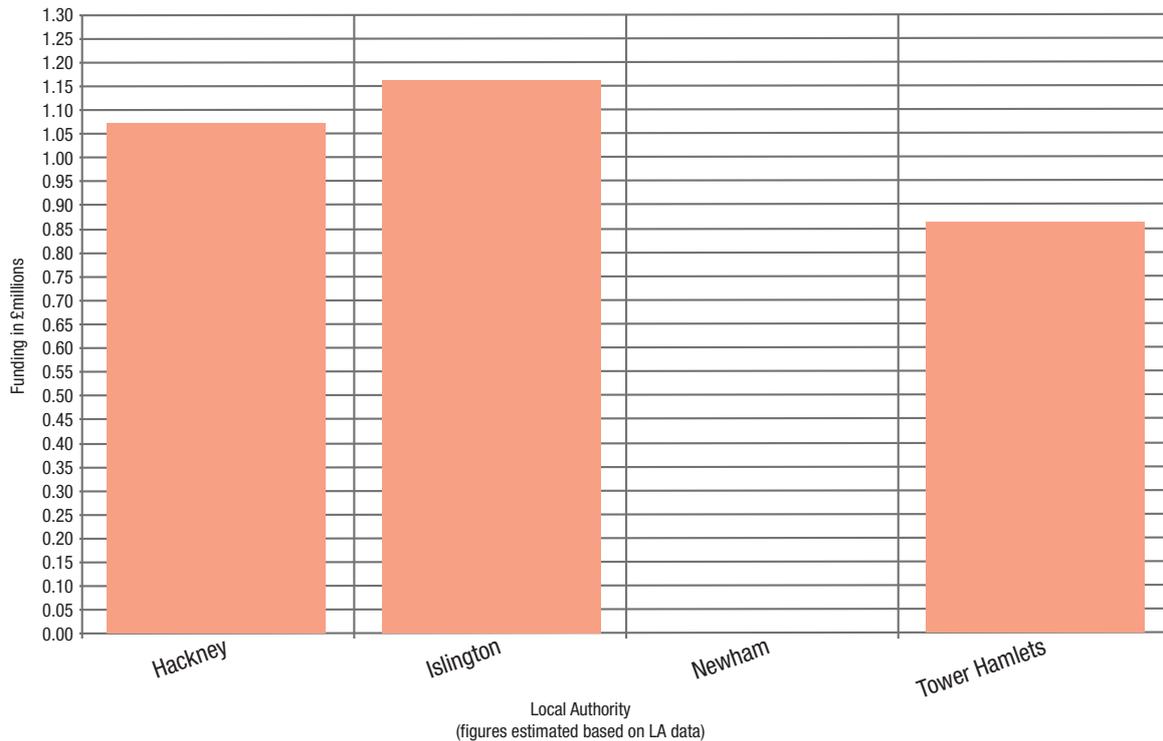
- **General Help and Advice** – £370k per year – led by Hackney CAB – partners: City & Hackney Mind, Off Centre, Age UK East London;
- **Legal Help and Advice** – £200k per year – led by Hackney Community Law Centre – partners: Hackney CAB and Hoxton Trust Legal Advice Service;
- **Community Advice Partnership/General Advice** – £200k per year – led by Social Action for Health – partners: City and Hackney Carers, Agroforep, Derman, Hackney Marsh Partnership, Hoxton Trust, North London Muslim Community Centre, Daymer, Fair Finance, Hackney African Forum, Hackney Chinese Community Services and Agudas Israel Community Services.

In addition to these contracts, LBH's Public Health team currently spends £300k per year on HIAC – a consortium led by Social Action for Health that provides advice services in 25 GPs' surgeries across the borough. The partners in this consortium are: Age UK Hackney, City & Hackney Carers Centre, East End Citizens' Advice Bureau, Derman, Hoxton Legal Trust, Hackney Marsh Partnership, Agudas Israel and Hackney Community Law Centre.

It is difficult to make useful comparisons between levels of funding for advice services in different boroughs as services are not necessarily funded in the same ways or by the same public sector agencies however the graph on page 10 suggests LBH's current funding package does not compare unfavourably with those of neighbouring boroughs.

<sup>12</sup> Chart – Clients Needs and the Independent Advice Sector (2012) – Executive Summary page 5

## Current LA Funding for Advice Services (2014–15)



Newham is an anomaly, as the local authority has chosen not to provide any significant ongoing funding for general advice services, preferring to meet local needs through in house provision.

Many organisations in Hackney have received outside grants for work that involves some advice provision however two relatively large consortium grants currently in operation are:

**Take Care of the Pennies** – A 16-organisation partnership led by Hackney CVS, which received £250,000 over three years from Lloyds TSB Foundation. Project partners are providing financial advice, support and guidance to older people across Hackney.

**Hackney Money Smart** – A partnership between Hackney CAB and 9 local housing associations + Hackney Homes. The project has been awarded £1million over five years to assist and train social housings residents to manage their finances better.

# 4. Views from advice organisations

## 4.1 Advice organisations (general)

### Funding:

As might be expected based on the overall national picture, most organisations we talked to reported a decrease in public funding.

As well as cuts to national funding streams such as Legal Aid, many organisations have also experienced significant cuts in local funding.

Before the introduction of the independent advice services grant scheme consortia model, most organisations delivering advice services who received LBH funding were funded via the annual voluntary and community sector grants programme.<sup>13</sup>

While many of these organisations are now members of at least one of three consortia, several organisations who had previously receive grant funding are not now funded to deliver advice services at all – and have either ceased delivering advices or are attempting to maintain services on a voluntary basis while seeking other sources of funding.

### Information:

Many organisations expressed a desire to better understand the work of other advice organisations operating in the borough.

While it was recognised that the SAH website – [hackneyadvice.org.uk](http://hackneyadvice.org.uk) – is helping to clarify the situation – and some specific links that were working well – generally there is widespread confusion about what other agencies did and the basis for referring clients elsewhere.

### LB Hackney:

Almost all organisations feel that LBH needed to spend more time interacting with them and listening to their views on clients' needs and the wider implications of the current economic and policy climate.

There is a widespread view that the consortium funding arrangements makes it hard for both unfunded organisations and organisations that are part of consortia but not lead partners to make their voices heard.

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13 Funding for independent advice services 2014–16 – Briefing for the Welfare Reform Working Group, LBH

**Charging for services:**

Most organisations agreed that it was either practically impossible, unethical or both to charge clients for most core advice services. For example, organisations would not be willing to attempt to charge clients for support in recovering benefits payments due to them.

## 4.2 Advice organisations (larger)<sup>14</sup>

**Delivery focus:**

Larger organisations have a clear focus on high quality service delivery rather than campaigning for either local or national policy change.

These organisations either have a speciality in providing general advice services, a specific type of advice services or providing a range of services to people with specific needs. In most cases, they do not see themselves as representatives of a particular section of the community.

**Maintaining existing services:**

Most large organisations saw maintaining existing services as their key priority. While they have relatively large staff teams compared to small organisations, staff numbers are reducing and they are becoming more reliant on volunteers.

**Importance of general services:**

Some larger organisations believe that general services are appropriate for most clients. They take steps to adapt services to clients' specific needs – including by providing advice in a range of different languages – but do not believe services aimed at specific ethnic groups are necessary in most cases.

**Open to partnership:**

While larger organisations were mostly keen, in principle, to engage in partnership work, they emphasised the importance of all partners being able to deliver quality assured services.

These organisations are concerned about becoming involved in partnership with small organisations that may not have the skills or capacity to deliver to a professional.

**Wary of confrontation:**

While happy to represent the needs of their clients on specific issues, larger organisations are keen to avoid confrontation with LBH on wider issues of policy and principle.

Although this is not true in all cases, they are more likely to accept the argument that LBH is doing its best to fund and support advice services based on a difficult overall climate for public sector funding.

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14 For the purposes of this report 'larger organisations' are organisations with two or more paid members of (full time equivalent) staff/caseworkers delivering advice services

### 4.3 Advice organisations (smaller)<sup>15</sup>

#### **Lack of funding:**

Smaller advice organisations are more likely to be concerned about an overall lack of funding.

In some cases they are attempting to maintain services with no funding at all and believe funded organisations rely on them to provide support which no one is paying for.

#### **Meeting specific needs:**

Smaller advice organisations are more likely to be delivering advice services for a specific group of people.

In many cases, they believe that their clients would be unable to access general services or would choose not to do so.

#### **Advice as one of many activities:**

Many smaller organisations provide advice service alongside other activities, in some cases as an ad-hoc service within drop-in community spaces.

While some organisations have paid staff, these workers are not likely to be employed specifically as specialist advice workers.

#### **Reliance on volunteers:**

Smaller organisations are more likely to rely on volunteers to deliver advice services however many have difficulty attracting trained volunteers.

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15 For the purpose of this report 'smaller organisations' are organisations with one or fewer paid members of (full time equivalent) staff/caseworkers delivering advice services



# 5. Views from key stakeholders

## 5.1 Hackney CVS

The process of putting together a bid to the ASTF for the project that become SAH led to strong disagreements between Hackney CVS and leading figures in Hackney Advice Forum (HAF) who had initially hoped to lead a bid, and Hackney Community Law Centre who ultimately did so.

At time of interview, Hackney CVS remained disenchanted by this process and was not keen to develop more advice consortia in the future.

While details of specific disputes that took place during the ASTF funding process are contested, it is clear that Hackney CVS's perspective on advice services is different to that of some larger advice organisations.

Hackney CVS is concerned about maintaining the diversity of the advice sector. It believes that larger organisations such as Hackney Community Law Centre and Hackney CAB can and should do more to support smaller organisations, enabling these smaller organisations to maintain services that cater for specific groups within the community.

Following the disagreements during the ASTF process, Hackney CVS believe that Hackney Community Law Centre should concentrate on bridge-building with smaller organisations – particularly by “getting out and about talking to them”.

Hackney CVS believes that Sustainable Advice in Hackney needs to support Hackney Advice Forum.

## 5.2 Hackney Advice Forum

HAF is a longstanding but informally constituted grouping of not-for-profit advice service providers.

Leading members of HAF strongly believe that advice organisations should campaign on behalf of clients as well as providing services.

These HAF members feel that, in some cases, ‘agency self-interest’ leads to larger advice services organisations prioritising contract and funding income over wider social need. They believe that it is important to actively make the case to the LBH that advice service are important and need to be protected. Evidence is available to make these arguments but it is not being using effectively.

In particular, Forum members believe that Sustainable Advice in Hackney should use its voice to make the case for properly funded advice services rather than accepting that cuts are an inevitable result of the economic situation.

Both as a result of the ASTF funding process and in a general sense, Forum members believe that larger organisations – in particular Hackney Community Law Centre and Hackney CAB – need to take a different approach to engagement with smaller organisations. They believe that larger organisations need to be able to ‘come and be part of things they’re not leading’.

## 5.3 London Borough of Hackney

LBH is the single biggest funder of advice services in the borough. Funding is provided through the three independent advice services consortium grants managed by Corporate Policy and Partnerships, and the HIAC grant administered by the Public Health team. Council Officers responsible for both funding streams regard advice services as important.

In the case of Public Health, the fact that advice services are funded by that department is an anomaly<sup>16</sup> but not one that is viewed negatively – the wider health and wellbeing benefits of advice services are recognised despite being hard to measure. The Public Health team were not able to predict future funding decisions at time of interview but had no plans to cease funding for HIAC.

The Corporate Policy and Partnerships team at time of interview had no plans to reduce funding for advice services overall during the period up to 2016/17. The current consortium contracts are in place until 2015/16 and the team were in the process of reviewing their commissioning model for 2016/17 and beyond.

Officers had not been impressed with the standard of bids for some of the consortium grants awarded for 2014/15 – 2015/16. They are clear that they needed to get the possible value for residents and that they see their commissioning role as one of buying services not supporting organisations to run campaigns or engage in wider community building activities. They are also keen to see better evidence of the outcomes produced by advice services.

There is enthusiasm for more early intervention and services provided via remote channels in order to reduce the demand for one-to-one services.

Officers in the Corporate Policy and Partnerships team feel that it is more difficult for LBH to work with advice providers than with other sub-sectors of the voluntary sector. They feel some advice organisations have an overly oppositional attitude towards LBH and are not open to working with LBH to achieve shared goals.

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16 The HIAC contract was formerly funded by the PCT before the reorganisation of the NHS which gave public health responsibilities to the council. There are few similar examples of advice services being funded through public budgets elsewhere in the country

At time of interview, officers preferred to meet regularly with the three consortium lead organisations – Hackney CAB, Hackney Community Law Centre and Social Action for Health – rather than with larger groups of advice organisations. They are keen to find ways to work more closely with advice providers but do not want to attend meetings that were “confrontational and unproductive”.

# 6. Key Issues

## 6.1 Collaboration

The size and diversity of the not-for-profit advice sector in Hackney creates both opportunities and challenges in situations where organisations attempt to collaborate and form partnerships.

As outlined in 3.2, aside from Sustainable Advice In Hackney, there are at least six significant consortium contracts or funded partnerships currently operating in the borough specifically to deliver advice services.

At time of interview, most organisations had positive experiences of the partnerships they were involved in. Several of those partnerships are relatively new but one, the HIAC partnership formerly funded by the local PCT and now funded by LB Hackney's public health team, has been in operation for over 10 years.

Of the six consortia, four deliver public sector contracts, one is a partnership between Hackney CAB and housing providers and the other is managed by Hackney CVS. Partnerships are formed on an ad hoc basis and there is no specific organisation or forum responsible for co-ordinating new partnerships.

The borough's existing forum for advice service organisations, HAF, is unfunded and has no formal legal structure – so is not currently in a position to lead partnership bids. However, at the time of writing, HAF is exploring hosting options.

Advice UK's 2013 briefing, Models of Advice Forum,<sup>17</sup> notes that there are 'many models and styles of forum' and gives examples of seven common models currently operating within the London area:

Information sharing – Havering

Policy & practice – Lambeth

Service delivery – Tower Hamlets

Theme based – Brent

Training – Haringey

Independence – Hackney

Combined – Barnet

17 <http://asauk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Models-of-Advice-Fora.pdf>

The suggestion is not that these forums devote themselves entirely to these issues or approaches but that they emphasise and focus on them.

The briefing notes that the potential pros and cons of the 'Independent' model used by HAF explaining that the model: "may have some advantages in that providers may feel freer to discuss issues that concern them, including how the local authority's (LA) policy and practices in administering Housing Benefits affects their clients."

On the other hand: "Some might argue that it may have a detrimental effect on the integrity and sustainability of a forum in that it loses the LA's potential support, whether in kind or financial and any plans that the LA has which might affect the future of the advice sector."

Interviews with advice organisations produced a range of views on the effectiveness of HAF. Some believed that HAF played an important role in highlighting the challenges faced by organisations and their clients, others felt meetings often became bogged down in process discussions and wide-ranging debates with the result that HAF was not an effective vehicle for practical support or partnership work.

The process of developing the bid to Big Lottery Fund that ultimately led to funding for SAH was not a smooth one. Both Hackney CVS and several of the most active members of HAF felt the Forum had been poorly treated by Hackney Community Law Centre during this process. Hackney Community Law Centre felt equally aggrieved. At time of interview, these views were still passionately held on both sides.

Beyond the strongly held views about specific events there are (as indicated in Sections 4 and 5) at least two underlying issues:

- (i) There is a broad mixture of views about how advice organisations should work together
- (ii) There is a spectrum of views about what advice organisations exist to do

These different views are not preventing organisations forming partnerships on a case-by-case basis but they are a barrier to ongoing collaborative working.

Our recommendations (Section 7) include the suggestion that SAH should look to initiate a new Alliance or Working Group to focus on practical collaboration. This would not resolve either of the underlying issues but it would create an opt-in route for those organisations interested in taking it.

## 6.2 Co-location

Many advice organisations in Hackney are already successfully delivering services in multiple settings. Examples include the HIAC consortium providing service in 25 GP practices across the borough and Hackney CAB offering advice in partnership with a range of housing providers. Most organisations interviewed were open to the idea of delivering more services in community locations based on appropriate funding being available. Several organisations are already sharing office space and others were open to the possibility of doing so.

There is limited enthusiasm for possible mergers, primarily because there are relatively few organisations large enough to have back office functions and/or fundraising operations that could usefully be merged. Those that do feel that they are more viable as distinct organisations than they would be merged with other.

While mergers within the borough seem unlikely, several leading advice providers are already cross-borough organisations. Hackney CAB is part of East End CAB which also operates in Tower Hamlets. Age UK in Hackney is part of Age UK East London, which also operates in Tower Hamlets and Newham.

There is equally limited enthusiasm for the creation of a single 'Advice Hub' with advice providers feeling that clients benefit from being able to access services in a wide range of locations across the borough.

## Case Study – Genesis Housing Association

Genesis is a large housing association with over 100,000 residents living in their properties across 88 local authority areas. Their in-house team provides some advice services but they also work in partnership with voluntary sector providers.

These partnerships include paying advice providers to train in-house staff, supporting providers to develop new services and, in some case, commission organisations to provide specific services directly to tenants.

In Hackney, Genesis commissioned CAB to provide advice and carry out case work on particular estates on the Woodberry Down estate.

While Genesis is keen to work with the voluntary sector, commissioning outside organisations to deliver services is an expensive option and they need to have a clear business case for doing it – generally, 'will the service mean tenants are more likely to pay their rent?'

They are keen to work with the voluntary sector to find ways to tackle new challenges such as the introduction of universal credit. While they will rarely commission services directly, they can support new services benefitting residents through the Genesis Community Foundation,<sup>18</sup> which offers grants up to £50,000.

## 6.3 Working with volunteers

Some organisations work with large numbers of volunteers while others struggle to recruit volunteers with the necessary skills to support advice service provision.

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.genesisha.org.uk/genesis\\_community/genesis\\_community\\_foundation.aspx](http://www.genesisha.org.uk/genesis_community/genesis_community_foundation.aspx)

In some cases, smaller organisations explained that potential volunteers were available but they do not have the time and resources to train them to the necessary standard. There is no point in asking a volunteer to fill in a form with a client if there is a high possibility that it will be completed incorrectly and clients risk, for example, missing out on benefits they are entitled to, as a result.

At time of interview, there was no mechanism in place for sharing volunteers with relevant skills between advice organisations or no way for advice organisations to refer volunteers to each other than on an ad hoc basis.

SAH is now working with Volunteer Centre Hackney to develop training for volunteers to assist clients with form filling. These volunteers will be trained by Volunteer Centre Hackney and will then be able to be assigned to any advice providers who need them.

## Case Study – Community Links

Community Links provides advice services in the London Borough of Newham. In 2011, the council cut its budget for voluntary sector advice services from £700,000 to £20,000 – on the basis that advice would be delivered primarily via the Council’s own online system.

Community Links has maintained its advice services by accessing 12 different sources including contracts with housing associations and the Money Advice Trust. Aided by their proximity to Canary Wharf, it has also secured some funding from private sector firms including Clifford Chance and Lovells alongside pro-bono support.

Community Links has also been piloting an early intervention project called Advice First Aid,<sup>19</sup> a partnership with the legal education charity Law for Life focused on: “teaching the basic skills that we all need to know to stay healthy, on top of money, debts, jobs and our rights”.

Following a pilot series of short courses for local residents, Community Links has worked with Newham’s ASTF consortium to train 50 Community Advice Champions:<sup>20</sup> local people, volunteers and non-advice staff training recognise legal issues and refer people for further support.

## 6.4 New business models

Most advice organisations interviewed would not be willing or able to charge clients for most services they provide. For example, charging clients for helping them to recover benefits that they are entitled would be practically difficult but, even if it were possible, most organisations would object to it on a moral basis.

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19 <http://www.community-links.org/linksuk/?p=3791>

20 <http://www.lawforlife.org.uk/law-for-life-projects/advice-services-transition-fund-prevention-and-early-intervention-through-public-legal-education/>

There are some instances where it is possible to charge clients for services that cannot be provided by any other means. Hackney Community Law Centre is now offering some clients services, provided by outside advisers, on a no-win no-fee basis. The Green Roots Law case study (below) explains an alternative approach being tested by the Law Centre in Islington.

Some NHS agencies and Housing Associations do commission advice services but need a clear business case to do so. As the Genesis Housing case study illustrates, it is useful for advice organisations to seek partnerships with agencies beyond LB Hackney but, while contracts may be available in some situations, there is no easy money on offer.

Business models for online and other digital services – beyond public funding and project grants – are as yet unproven. The 2012 Cabinet Office report ‘Not-for-Profit Advice Services in England’ cites the flagship example of the ‘One Stop Advice App’<sup>21</sup> – a smart phone app piloted by Manchester CAB.<sup>22</sup> At time of writing, this app no longer appears to exist.

The implication is not that advice services cannot and never will be provided via digital channels but few (if any) successful advice apps have yet been developed in the UK. Given that many Hackney advice organisations are located in close proximity to ‘Silicon roundabout’, SAH may wish to consider ways it could engage with tech professionals to break new ground in this market.

## Case Study – Green Roots Law – Islington Law Centre

Following the 2012/13 cuts in Legal Aid which severely restricted, Islington Law Centre wanted to find a way to offer services to people on low incomes. They set up Green Roots,<sup>23</sup> a social enterprise wholly owned by the Law Centre, which offers services in the fields of immigration, education and employment.

The business is not designed to make a significant profit but is intended to enable the Law Centre to continue offer services that would otherwise not exist while covering its costs.

Green Roots is a separately branded organisation, based in a separate building to avoid confusion between the Law Centre’s free at the point of delivery services and the paid-for services offered by the social enterprise.

The process of developing the business has presented a series of challenges that do not apply to traditional grant funded model – aside from the obvious difficulty of finding enough paying customers, Green Roots have to ensure that their hourly rates for face-to-face work are high enough to cover the overall costs of the business.

21 Not for Profit Advice Services in England, p14

22 [www.onestopadvice.org.uk](http://www.onestopadvice.org.uk)

23 <http://greenrootslaw.co.uk/> ewewe

# 7. Recommendations

These recommendations draw on the combination of challenges raised or ideas suggested in interviews with advice organisations and stakeholders, or reflected in case studies from elsewhere within the report.

Sustainable Advice in Hackney has already begun to address some of the recommendations as part of the 2nd year of their programme while others are put forward for discussion and action, in partnership with others, following the completion of the programme.

## Strategic Recommendations:

### 1. Working Together

Sustainable Advice in Hackney and other interested organisations should look to form a wider Alliance or Working Group of organisations interested in:

- (i) Sharing information about practical issues related to service delivery and the interaction between the services they provide
- (ii) Developing new partnerships to bid for contracts and apply for grants

### 2. Supporting Each Other

Sustainable Advice In Hackney should aim to engage with smaller specialist organisations, both within the partnership and beyond, to consider what support they would need to provide services within wider partnerships – eg. support in recruiting and training volunteers.

### 3. Working with LB Hackney

Sustainable Advice in Hackney should work with LB Hackney to create a mechanism for advice organisations and public sector agencies to work together to identify and respond to local need.

### 4. Developing new approaches

Sustainable Advice In Hackney should look to develop projects, services and products that enable local people to help themselves before seeking advice and to access advice when, where and in the form they need it.

### 5. Developing new partnerships

Sustainable Advice In Hackney should aim to develop wider partnerships beyond the advice sector to respond to areas of shared interest – for example, Housing Associations and changes to welfare benefits.

## Recommendations for further activity

### 6. Shared Systems

Beyond the work it is already doing in collating information about services online at – Sustainable Advice in Hackney should consider:

- Sharing information and resources between partners for specific purposes – such as volunteer recruitment
- Developing shared administration systems
- Co-ordinating referrals via a single point of access

### 7. Early intervention

Sustainable Advice in Hackney should consider developing projects that both:

- Provide specialist early intervention services that tackle specific local needs
- Give local people the information they need to help themselves without or prior to accessing advice services

### 8. Digital Channels

Sustainable Advice In Hackney should consider the opportunities and possibilities for digital service delivery including: expanding online FAQs/signposting and potential to create an app to signpost to local services.

### 9. Measuring outcomes

Sustainable Advice in Hackney should explore funding opportunities to develop models for measuring outcomes generate by local advice services.

### 10. New commercial models

Sustainable Advice in Hackney should explore options for selling services to organisations and (where appropriate) individuals:

- (i) Organisations – NHS, housing associations
- (ii) Individuals – legal services (social enterprise), debt recovery

# Appendix

## List of interviewees:

### Advice organisations (Hackney):

Yasmin Alam and Andrew Skipper – East End CAB  
Jackie Sharland and Reeta Kauppinen – City and Hackney Mind  
Victor McAllister – Hackney Caribbean Elders Organisation  
Sadiye Gurbuz – Halkevi  
Helen Hibberd – Hackney Migrant Centre  
Odette Messiah – Age UK East London  
Sean Canning – Hackney Community Law Centre  
Martin Williams and Elizabeth Ladipo – Off Centre  
James Demming – Social Action For Health  
Margaret Lauder – Hoxton Trust Legal Advice Service

### Advice organisations (outside Hackney):

Ruth Hayes – Islington Law Centre  
Jude Simmons – Community Links (phone)

### Key Stakeholders:

Jake Ferguson – HCVS  
Cathy Murphy – Hackney Advice Forum  
Lauren Tobias – Hackney Volunteer Centre  
Lola Akindoyin – LB Hackney  
Sonia Khan – LB Hackney  
Lesley Cooper – East London NHS (phone)  
Stephen Henshaw – DWP  
Matt Clack – LB Hackney Public Health  
Margaret Roffe – Genesis Housing

### Other meetings attended:

Hackney Advice Forum (May 2014 & January 2015)  
ASTF Steering Group (July 2014 & November 2014)



# Working together better

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