Funding update

The Baring Foundation

The Foundation has announced their 2006 programme for strengthening the voluntary sector. This year they are merging their project grants and core costs grants into a single fund. The grants amounts will range from £20,000 to £100,000 and will be for up to five years. The improved application process will have no deadline, and have a single annual round and any constituted not-for-profit voluntary organisation in England will be able to apply. In London the priority will be given to bids covering more than one London borough. The grants programme will continue to fund work that will bring about a significant and lasting change in the effectiveness of an organisation. There will be a theme to focus the grants programme which is currently under discussion. Please re-visit the Baring Foundation website in March 2006 for more information.

See their website at www.baringfoundation.org.uk or telephone on 020 7767 1348

Refugee Week Funding 2006 – Community Chest Fund

Due to continued funding from the Association of London Government, Refugee Week will be running the Community Chest Fund again this year. This is a small grants scheme for refugee community organisations based in London who plan to hold a refugee week even this year.

Grants will be for £1,000 or less, and must go towards the costs of holding an event during Refugee Week 2006, which will be taking place from the 19th - 25th June 2006.

The deadline for completed applications is Thursday 29th March and successful organisations will be notified by the week beginning 13th April.

For an application form and details of how to apply, please phone on 020 7346 6752 or email gerdy.rhys@refugeecouncil.org.uk

For more information about Refugee Week and how you can get involved see their website at www.refugeeweek.org.uk

Lloyds TSB Foundation launches grant making guidelines for 2006

During 2006, the Lloyds TSB Foundation will make grants through two programmes – the Community Programme and a new Thematic Programme. The main focus of the Community Programme is to fund projects that support disabled and disadvantaged people. The Thematic Programme will focus on supporting charities working with ex-prisoners with a focus on their families and mental health issues.

See their website at www.lloydstsbfoundations.org.uk/guidelines2006.html, telephone on 020 7398 1728, or email jude.stevens@lloydstsbfoundations.org.uk

Bridge House Trust

A new small grants scheme aimed at disadvantaged older people was launched on Monday 27th February 2006. The new programme will not have application deadlines. Bridge House Trust aims to address disadvantage by supporting charitable activity across greater London through quality grant making and related activities within clearly defined priorities.

See their website at www.bridgehousetrust.org.uk or telephone on 020 7332 3705

Awards for All

The London Region of Awards for All is seeking more applications to fund community projects that either benefit the disabled or their carers or increase accessibility for the disabled to community activities. The Awards for All programme provides grants of £500 to £5000 that will enable or improve disabled access to a wide range of organisation types and activities i.e. wheelchair ramps, disabled toilets, sign language interpreters, braille, IT such as talking books, sharing information, or awareness raising.

See their website at www.awardsforall.org.uk/england/london/london_main.html or telephone their enquiry line on 020 7842 4020

advice london

National Vocational Qualifications - work-based learning to help you and your organisation

Local Area Agreements - should your organisation play a part?

Association of London Government - future commissioning strategy - encouraging people in registering to vote

Spring 2006
Members’ page

Disability Alliance: The Tribunal Support Unit

Paddy Cullen, Tribunal Support Officer at Disability Alliance, describes a new and innovative project for London-based benefit advisers.

The Tribunal Support Unit (TSU) at Disability Alliance is a new service set up with three years’ funding from the Big Lottery Fund. It provides advice, information and practical support to paid and voluntary workers based in Greater London who give benefits advice.

Disability Alliance aims to improve the living standards of disabled people by breaking the link between poverty and disability. It produces the essential guide to benefits for disabled people, the Disability Rights Handbook, and is recognised as the country’s leading authority on social security benefits for disabled people. The TSU intends to increase the income of disabled people by helping advisers to identify benefit and tax credit entitlement and use dispute procedures effectively.

Our advice service helps with all aspects of benefit entitlement, from what to write on a claim form to what to do if you lose an appeal tribunal. We will discuss the benefit and tax credit rules and the administrative procedures of bodies such as Jobcentre plus, HM Revenue and Customs, and the Appeals Service. We can advise by telephone, fax or email, but will also visit advisers to discuss more difficult cases in detail or to help draft letters or legal submissions. For more experienced advisers, we can offer a second opinion on complex claims – perhaps helping to trace that piece of case law or guidance that you know is out there somewhere.

The TSU has particular expertise in disability benefits appeals. Representation by advisers at benefit appeal tribunals greatly improves the chances of an appeal’s success. A disability living allowance appeal decided without a formal tribunal hearing has about a 15% chance of success. Nearly 70% of appeals are successful if an adviser represents the claimant at a tribunal hearing.

The TSU aims to increase the number of appeal representatives in London. We hope to do this by providing an effective advice and support service and running a small number of reduced-cost training courses on disability benefits and on appeals.

We ask all advisers who wish to use our service to register with us first. Once registered, you’ll get fuller details of how the service operates.

For more information contact Paddy Cullen on 020 7244 8776 or paddy.da@dsl.pipex.com or visit the Disability Alliance website at www.disabilityalliance.org.uk

Local Area Agreements

Dianna Neal from Association of London Government provides an overview of Local Area Agreements (LAA) in London.

An LAA is a national initiative of negotiated three-year agreements that set out the priorities for a local area agreed by Central Government (represented by the Government Office for London (GOL)) and the local area (represented by a Local Authority (LA) and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)).

An LAA means that local agencies, led by the Local Authority, can discuss with the Government what issues are important for them and how Government funding, rules and regulations might be changed to help agencies deliver a set of locally agreed targets. Agreements are currently being rolled out in three tranches between April 2005 and April 2007. Voluntary and community sector organisations need to ensure that they will be key partners in LAAs to support the delivery of local services.

LAAs are usually organised around four areas:
- Children and Young People
- Safer and Stronger Communities
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Economic Development and Enterprise.

To help them achieve set targets LAAs give agencies the opportunity to:

1. Pool or align some funding streams: Agencies can use existing mainstream Government funding, area-based funding and funding from Non-Departmental Public Bodies (such as the Regional Development Agency and the Learning and Skills Council) to deliver the priorities they have identified.

2. Reduce the amount of monitoring: An LAA is a way to get the different agencies to agree to just one set of monitoring information being needed thereby reducing bureaucracy.

3. Gain freedoms and flexibilities: The LAA process gets local agencies to identify rules and regulations and negotiate with the Government the freedom to operate outside of these.

To sum up, the LAA provides a framework for local agencies and partners to identify local priorities and targets, as well as the funding that contributes to these targets. In return for a commitment to delivering the targets, the Government may allow agencies to use funding in new ways, operate outside government rules and reduce the amount of reporting that local agencies have to do.

Looking at the draft LAAs in the second round, some have taken a focused approach to their LAA themes; some cover a very wide range of issues. Some are concentrating their LAA on particular neighbourhoods, others identify borough wide outcomes.

Is there any additional funding attached?

LAAs do not generally offer new money to Local Authorities, however Local Authorities and their partners can identify other streams of funding to help achieve the targets set by the LAA.

If the LAA includes a particularly demanding target for the local area, then a ‘reward element’ can be negotiated through funding received if the target is achieved. However, the main focus of the LAA is for local partners to use existing funding in a more focused and innovative way.

Advice Sector Involvement

Local Authorities need to demonstrate that local agencies have been involved in agreeing the priorities for the LAA, including involving a good range of voluntary sector agencies and service providers. As advice agencies are likely to work across all of the four LAA blocks it is important that they become involved. A few London boroughs have specifically identified issues such as improving benefit tackle up and increasing household income within their draft LAA. If you do wish to find out more a good starting point would be your voluntary sector representative on your LSP.

For further information, and to access a list of which boroughs are in which rounds, plus website details of LSP contact details please refer to ‘LAAs in London’ at www.lvsc.org.uk/templates/information.asp?NodeID=91109

For background information and to access a toolkit on LAAs 2005 please visit www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1151632. This website also gives background information on LAAs and Government guidance.
Association of London Government

The Association of London Government (ALG) is consulting on which services it should fund under their future commissioning strategy. advice® London Region held a consultation event for members to allow them to feedback their concerns. Michael Murray, Development Team Manager, describes steps that advice® is taking to address these concerns.

ALG Consultation Event

advice® members demonstrated their concern over the ALG commissioning process planned for 2007 by participating in number at our consultation event held on 13 January. Using online tools, members engaged in discussion, web-based voting and electronic questionnaires. The session was an initial outline of which can be found in the consultation document Better Services for Londoners on our website www.adviceuk.org.uk/doc.asp?doc=160208&cat=980. Meanwhile, ALG has commissioned consultants to map needs which will help inform the distribution of funding across London boroughs.

Better services for Londoners

ALG will fund projects that address three ‘top level’ outcomes; increasing access to London’s opportunities, reducing social exclusion, poverty and disadvantage, and promoting equality and reducing discrimination.

There are 12 sub-outcomes linked to these, with 75 examples of services that could potentially achieve these outcomes. The ALG would consider funding. ALG has asked for feedback from the voluntary sector on the outcomes and examples of services given in Better Services for Londoners. ALG also wants views on whether it has left any important services off the list or if any of the services included should not be funded. At a recent consultation, ALG said it is looking at funding 25-30 pan-London services, so it seems likely that a variety or combination of services may be proposed by groups seeking funding to meet the outcomes that ALG selects.

The deadline for responses to the Better Services for Londoners consultation is 17 March. advice® members are encouraged to submit comments to inform advice®’s response, a draft of which will be forwarded to members in advance of the deadline for comment. Members are also encouraged to submit their own responses, in which case please copy these to advice® as well.

Partnerships

ALG wants commissioning to ensure that “priority services are available to those who need them, wherever they live in London,” and that “resources are distributed and used efficiently.” To achieve these aims, ALG will commission services that are available across London. ALG has indicated that in most cases, this will involve organisations working in partnership to develop a network capable of offering services to residents across London.

To assist our members to start the search for potential commissioning partners, we have launched a partnerships page on our website. Members will be asked to fill in their contact details, current work, and the type of partnerships/partners they may be looking for, all of which will then be posted on the website. We hope that this page will allow our members and other organisations seeking to work with advice® members, to reduce the time needed to identify potential partners across London. You can find the link to the partnerships page on the advice® website under advice® London Region/ALG.

Full cost recovery (FCR) training

The members’ consultation event highlighted the need for further support and training on FCR. It is important that members understand how to cost and price their services accurately and competently. advice® will be holding a free training day on 24th April from 10am - 4pm to introduce the key features of FCR and budgeting for advice services.

A copy of advice®’s response to ALG’s commissioning consultation can be found at www.adviceuk.org.uk/DisplayPage.asp?pag eid=8742.

If you are interested in attending the full cost recovery training, would like to feed into our response to Better Services For Londoners, or would like more information on the partnerships please contact Artie Singh on 020 7923 6412 or email artie.singh@adviceuk.org.uk.

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Welcome

This is the last issue of advice London I will introduce before going on long-term secondment to the National Offender Management Service. So, as I highlight the contents of our spring issue, I want to reflect on some examples of what advice® London Region, with its committed staff team, has achieved over the last few years.

Improving services for members is always a priority. We have substantially improved our newsletter and on-line resources for members, including a set of 18 information briefings (see www.adviceuk.org.uk/displayPage.asp?pageid=341). Funding support has also increased via the newsletter, via our monthly funding email and via the free funding advice ‘surgeries’ introduced for members. We are now developing links between members and the sustainable funding agenda (see page 6), shortly to result in new training and resources.

One element of our free consultancy in relation to members’ advice services is specific support for housing advice providers (see page 11); we are currently using this in-house expertise to influence the Greater London Authority’s development of its housing advice strategy.

Across London, local advice forums are now a key part of our strategy to develop the advice sector. We have supported 17 forums, giving members access to a free local source of information exchange, networking and peer support. A new project is now supporting local advice forums to consolidate and share good practice (see page 5). Also, our advice development expertise is increasingly recognised not just by members, but also by second tier agencies (e.g. Age Concern London, Youth Access & the Refugee Council) which are keen to develop their services to advice providers.

Our Training and Assessment Centre goes from strength to strength (page 7 & 8). The tremendous increase in training delivered each year has been achieved alongside overwhelmingly positive learner evaluations, showing that our training results in direct improvements to practice in London advice centres. We now have over 300 candidates registered with our NVQ Assessment Centre and over 40 trainers and assessors supporting our diverse learners. Gaining access to Learning & Skills Council funding has enabled us to offer free Advice & Guidance and Management NVQ programmes: the progress of two current programmes is highlighted on page 3. We are also awaiting the outcome of a bid to the London Development Agency to provide free training and NVQ assessment to managers across our London membership.

I have enjoyed promoting members’ interests and the diversity of members’ provision to funders and policy makers. The changes in Association of London Government funding to members is a continuing area of work, an update can be found on page 13. I am confident that the skilled staff team at advice® London Region will continue to develop our services and support to members.

Ruth Power
London Region Director
On 15th February, to celebrate the successes after the first year of the two-year Competent Advisers Project (CAP), advice™ London Region held an afternoon event at the Vortex in Hackney. There is a lot to celebrate - so far 20 candidates have completed their NVQs!

The event was a great success, providing a valuable networking experience for people involved in the project. Amongst the speakers were Anthony Stern, our new Learning and Skills Council Contract Manager, and Shalim Khan, who was not only the first candidate to finish his NVQ but is now a trainee assessor for the project. Shalim spoke about his experience and how the project has benefited him, particularly as he will receive a pay rise! Other guests were CAP candidates their colleagues, and representatives from one of our project partners Age Concern London.

Elevate Update

This unique management and leadership training and development programme by women for women and funded by European Social Union and the Learning and Skill Council, has now been running for one year.

The evaluation so far has been very positive with women feeling that the training not only help improve their work practice; but helped increased their confidence and self esteem. Kim Connell from Age Concern Lambeth had this to say:

"The management training has really helped with my personal development and confidence building. I was told at my appraisal that the training is really making an impact on my managerial skills. I feel that this is the most valuable and worthwhile training that I have done."

We now have two new groups started. So far we have had three women achieve their Management NVQ unit. Well done to them! By the end of the project we hope that in total 30 women will have worked towards and achieved an NVQ management unit.

The Elevate training is free to women who fit the project criteria and are willing to commit to ten days of training over a four to five month period. For further information contact the Elevate team on 0845 330 7918 or email elevate@wrc.org.uk

On the road to Quality

With the increasing number of quality standards being introduced into the advice sector over recent years, advice™ is planning to revise its Quality Mark course to incorporate other quality assurance systems.

advice™ currently runs a two-day course on Achieving the Quality Mark. The introductory course covers the requirements of the Quality Mark at General Help and General Help with Casework Level. It helps identify the practical steps an organisation needs to take to achieve it and considers the skills an organisation needs to successfully work towards the standard.

Haq Ismail, an Advocacy Worker from Action and Rights for Disabled People in Newham attended advice’s™ last Quality Mark course. He tells us why he came along, what he learned and what comes next for his organisation around quality.

I was told about the course by John Mahoney from Community Links, [another advice™ member], based in the same building. Action and Rights for Disabled People in Newham will be applying for the Quality Mark at casework level.

Haq says, “I found the course very useful as, while my last organisation had applied, I hadn’t been directly involved in the whole process. The course gave me far more of an understanding of the Quality Mark. The trainer explained everything in depth. She was very good.”

Haq felt that advice™ met his learning needs well and commented, “I am visually impaired and I was pleased with the support; the trainer was attentive. She read out slides, ensured I was paired with a partner for exercises and provided the training materials on disk. Basically, the support ensured that I didn’t feel isolated.”

In terms of the next steps toward the Quality Mark, Haq explained, “We are reviewing our policies and procedures and updating and adding to them as needed. A review needed to be done anyway, so irrespective of what happens with the Quality Mark it has been useful.”

Haq was positive about advice™ plans to broaden out the Quality Mark course and feels that including other quality standards in the revised course is “a good thing”. The other standards likely to be included are:

- The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) standard which providers of immigration advice and services must achieve by law before delivering immigration advice
- The Quality Assurance System for Refugee Organisations (QASRO), developed by the Refugee Council
- The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) standard for organisations providing Immigration Advice and Services

Other generic standards such as Investors in People (IIP) and PQASSO may also be covered in the revised course.

To find out more about the new Quality Standards course, contact either Kaye Barham or Lillian Brown for more details at kaye.barham@advicelondon.org.uk or lillian.brown@advicelondon.org.uk

Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham

Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham is a campaigning based organisation which is run and controlled by local disabled people. Funded by the London Borough of Newham, the organisation aims to:

- Advocate that Newham’s built and public realm areas meet inclusive design standards.
- Provide Advocacy/Benefits support to all local disabled people.
- Hold regular meetings to address issues that affect local disabled people such as Housing, and Health and Social Care.

Please call 020 7473 9655 (voice or minicom) or email actionandrights@btconnect.com
National Homelessness Advice Service

Anjila Sinha, National Homelessness Advice Service Policy and Co-ordination Worker, explains about services available for the housing advice sector.

adviceUK London Region’s statement on quality states: “Independent advice centres exist because they want to meet the community’s needs for advice as effectively as possible. It is recognised that if they provide poor quality advice they fail in their own purpose, sometimes with disastrous consequences for the very people they were set up to help.”

In keeping with this, adviceUK London Region’s objective has been to develop the provision of good quality advice by independent advice organisations in London. Our team works with partner organisations and forums to facilitate the continuous development of the skills and knowledge of advice workers.

The National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) aims to prevent homelessness and alleviate wider housing problems by enabling access to good quality housing advice. Anjila Sinha, a Worker with the NHAS team in London, develops and co-ordinates services to support housing advice workers on the ground. In addition to Anjila, the team consists of workers from Shelter and Citizens’ Advice Bureaux. The partnership has existed for over a decade now and for those organisations that use the service regularly, it is part of the general housing advice environment.

The NHAS provides free services to support housing advisers including:

- The NHAS consultancy line: Telephone consultation for advice workers is provided by the Shelter NHAS team. Generalist and specialist advisers can speak to a fieldworker for support on any query arising from client work on housing and homelessness issues. The telephone number (recently changed) is 0800 120 6446. The line operates on Monday to Friday 10.30 to 1pm and 2pm to 4.30pm.
- Training: Varying levels of training are offered on housing advice issues and can be delivered locally if your service fits certain criteria. Contact Anjila or the NHAS directly on 020 7014 1560 to find out if your organisation is able to access the training.
- In addition to the above support, there is also an information service on homelessness and housing topics and a social policy group. Other special initiatives and projects are undertaken as a response to the housing advice and/or policy environment in London.

For further information on the NHAS please contact Anjila at anjila.sinha@adviceuk.org.uk

Island Advice Centre

adviceUK recently finished running a Learning to Advise training course in Bethnal Green on behalf of member organisation Island Advice Centre.

The 13-day programme (held over 13 weeks) was run after identification of a need for volunteer advisers in the local community with a view to addressing a skills gap identified by the local Community Legal Services Partnership. Some of those who finished the course will go on to achieve NVQs in Advice & Guidance.

Island Advice have been running similar training schemes for the past two years. This has helped to increase the amount of high quality advice provision in the locality. It also helped Tower Hamlets Council with its income maximisation project, which was to ensure all people able to claim welfare benefits claimed their entitlement.

For more details about future training programmes held by Island Advice centre please contact: Jo Ellis by emailing jo@island-advice.org.uk

Support Services

The last Support Services and Receptions Skills training course was held in late January to early February. Melanie Ross was the trainer and did such a superb job that she was given a card and a box of chocolates by the trainees attending the course!

The three-day course is designed to meet the needs of receptionists, support service staff and anyone in a supporting role. The main course objectives are that the candidates will:

- have an awareness of putting people at ease
- have an understanding of customer care
- be able to provide appropriate information for clients

The course is geared towards people working in organisations that give advice, but many of the participants do not have advice backgrounds and still find the course very useful.

For further information or a course brochure please contact the Training Team on 020 7407 6611 or by emailing traininglondon@adviceuk.org.uk.

adviceUK Membership Renewals for 2006/7

The adviceUK Membership year ends on 31st March 2006 and by now you should have received an invoice for your membership fee for 2006/7. All you need to do is send the invoice back to adviceUK with a cheque for the membership fee. If your membership fee band has changed since last year there is a section on the invoice where you can tell us what the correct fee band should be for 2006/7.

£25 discount Voucher for early renewals!

We are giving away a £25 voucher to every centre that renews their membership by 17th March. These vouchers are redeemable against any adviceUK service during the 2006/7 year (including insurance).

So make sure you get your renewal in early and claim your free £25 voucher! If you have any queries about your membership renewal, please contact the Membership Team on 020 7407 4777 or by email to membership@adviceuk.org.uk.
Local advice forum news

Ealing Advice Forum
Ealing Advice Forum meets bi-monthly at venues across the borough of Ealing. The most recent meeting was on the 8th March, but there were no details at the time of going to print. The two next meeting dates of Ealing Advice Forum are scheduled for Wednesday 10th May and Wednesday 12th July 2006. For more information please contact Wesley Harcourt on 020 7407 6622 or wesley.harcourt@adviceuk.org.uk

Hillingdon Advice Forum
The second meeting of the Hillingdon Advice Forum was held on 17th January at Key House, Kaks Chahal, Acting Manager of London Borough of Hillingdon Housing Advice Team was present to address some of the concerns raised at the inaugural meeting such as inconsistency of advice and internal delays with the local authority. A full and lively debate followed and the forum agreed to feed the issues raised into the Hillingdon Housing Strategy consultation seminar later that month.

Building on its reputation as a model of best practice, Hillingdon forum has taken the innovative step of securing funding for its administration and to provide training to members on Support Services and Reception Skills. Funds are being planned to fund a training programme based on a training needs analysis of forum members.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 28th March, 10.00am at Key House, 106 High Street, Yeovil.

Lewisham
Lewisham Advice Forum was established by Adviarc in London Region in November 2004 and meets bi-monthly at Lewisham Council’s Civic Suite. Forum members share information about services, get updates from Lewisham Community Legal Service Partnership and training on topics of relevance to them. So far, over 40 groups have benefited from its activities which have included talks from Lewisham Council’s Adult Social Care services and Housing Options Centre, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner and Housing Strategy consultation seminar later that month.

The Forum is now actively addressing how it will become sustainable once advice® withdraws as facilitator this year with the intended outcome of handing over the forum to a local advice provider. We would welcome your input into how you could play a part in ensuring the forum continues to work collectively at a local level, encouraging shared resources and learning and raising and promoting the quality of the advice sector in Lewisham.

The next meeting will take place in late March 2006 from 3pm – 5pm. For further details about the forum, contact Siobhan Hogan, Advice Services Development Worker on 020 7407 6622 or by email at siobhan.hogan@adviceuk.org.uk

Hackney
Established in July 2004, Hackney Advice Forum meets bi-monthly. So far over 25 organisations have shared information about their services and received training. They heard from speakers on issues such as funding in the advice sector, regulation of immigration advice, referrals and signposting in the advice sector, accessing statutory services. The forum discussed Hackney’s local compact between local council and the voluntary sector and fed into Hackney Information and Advice Consortium’s report to the Chief Executive of Job Centre Plus regarding the poor performance of its services in the borough.

The next meeting will take place on 11th April 2006 at 10am-12pm at Queensbridge Community Centre, 30 Holly Street, Hackney. For further details about the forum, contact Siobhan Hogan by phone on 020 7407 6622 or by emailing siobhan.hogan@adviceuk.org.uk

Redbridge Advice Forum
Redbridge Advice Forum held its last meeting on the 12th January 2006. It will meet again on 23rd March at 2pm at the Council for Voluntary Services in Clements Road, Ilford. Please contact liilian.brown@adviceuk.org.uk for further details.

Walthamstow Advice Forum
Walthamstow Advice Forum meets quarterly. The last meeting was on 25th January 2006 when the forum heard from Eiri Ohtani, Co-ordinator of Asylum Support and Appeals Project. The forum will next meet on 25th April 2006 at the Anchor Centre in Walthamstow. Please contact liilian.brown@adviceuk.org.uk for further details.

Disability Law Service Training
For Advisers and Advocates Working with and for Disabled People
Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance: How to achieve successful claims
1.30pm-5pm, Tuesday 28th March 2006
This session is for those advising disabled people and those with long term health problems about disability-related benefits. It will focus primarily on Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance-maximising the chance of a successful claim and how to appeal when claims are rejected.

An Introduction to Community Care
1.30pm-5pm, Friday 31st March 2006
This session will provide those advising and advocating for disabled people with a better understanding of the main principles of community care.

Mental Capacity and Decision Making
1.30pm-5pm, Wednesday 5th April 2006
This session will provide advisors and advocates with a working knowledge of the existing legal framework for protecting disabled people. The session will cover appointment, receivership and guardianship, the role of litigation friends, contractual relationships, decision making and the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

1.30pm-5pm, 6th April 2006
This session will provide advisors and advocates with a guide to Part III of the DDA, which covers the provision of goods, services and facilities to disabled people. The session is intended for people with some prior knowledge of the DDA and will include funding of litigation and how to take a service provider to court.

All sessions cost £65 including VAT and lunch (voluntary organisations and all members) £75 inc VAT and lunch (commercial businesses and local authorities). Full details can be obtained on the website at www.dls.org.uk - where you can also make a booking. Alternatively email enquiries to christine@dls.org.uk or phone 0207 791 9828

London Funders Website: www.londonfunders.org.uk
London Funders have recently launched their newly developed website. advice® London Region have access to their new pages and we feel that the website will be a useful resource for members.

London Funders (LF) is a membership forum open to all London-based funders of the voluntary and community sector including local authorities, public, independent and corporate funders, and all charitable funders and investors. There are currently more than 100 members with a combined expenditure on a wide variety of voluntary work in London of approximately £600 million per annum.

This is a key information portal for London Funders, containing links to members’ funding programmes and priorities, best practice case studies, key funding publications and much more.

Website benefits
advice® members can benefit from searching the London Funders resource area for:
• key funding advice guidelines
• funding publications
• member project information
• best practice case studies in one easy to access information source.

The website offers the public a key information resource for London’s funders. A private members-only access, not open to general public viewing, includes contact details of other members and up to date information on London Funders events and project groups. As an associate member, advice® will monitor the sections for useful resources of interest to our members.

For further information on membership please email belinda@londonfunders.org.uk or telephone 020 7255 4488

If you would like to advertise your forum and its next meeting date, you can do so on this page!
If you want to find out more about the new Advice Forum Development Project and how it can support your existing forums development or you wish to set up a new forum in your area please contact Liliana Brown at liliana.brown@adviceuk.org.uk or call 020 7407 6622
Quality update

The Office of the Immigration Services Commission (OISC) is carrying out two areas of consultation

The first area of consultation is on the revision of the Code of Standards and Rules booklet. The Code of Standards and Rules, written in October 2000 before the regulatory scheme became operational now requires some revision so that it remains useful for advisers, complainants and other users. One suggested change to code 6 could mean that Level 1 advisers could now be expected to ensure that all their instructions to clients are in writing regardless of the level of advice or service they provide.

The second area is on introducing a compulsory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) scheme for exempted advisers.

The OISC commissioner has a statutory duty to promote good practice to those who provide immigration advice or immigration services. To ensure this, the OISC proposes to introduce a CPD scheme that will mean regulatory advisers update their personal skills and knowledge in a structured manner that this is recorded and monitored.

The proposed scheme would affect all advisers, although CPD requirements would be less onerous at Level 1. If introduced, it is intended that the scheme would start on 1st April 2007 with monitoring of compliance starting in Spring 2008.

But does CPD represent yet another level of assessment of advisers’ competence by the OISC? How will smaller, less well funded organisations with exempted advisers afford the potentially higher costs of attending CPD accredited courses?

advice™ members can have their say on both proposals by clicking on to www.oisc.gov.uk or by emailing consult@oisc.gov.uk to respond to the code and rules booklet and consult@oisc.gov.uk for the CPD scheme.

London Franchise Forum (LFF)

In February LFF delivered a training session on how to cost your advice service. Members were briefed on the updates regarding not-for-profit (nfp) audits to date. The future of nfp contracting and a potential new nfp contract that may be issued shortly was also discussed. An Immigration sub-group meeting followed the main session looking at particular issues contract holders face. The LFF is now working in partnership with the Law Centres Federation to incorporate their members’ needs into the forum. Members of both networks are invited to attend each other’s franchise meetings.

The next meeting will be held on April 26th at advice™’s office from 2.00pm - 4.00pm. The main theme will be the development of contract advice workers and the supervision and development needs of staff and volunteers.

Advice in Turkish

The Turkish Community Project based in Lewisham has developed a website for London’s Turkish-speaking community intended to increase their access to advice.

To visit their website please go to www.turkishcommunitylondon.co.uk

Matrix quality standard

The matrix Standard is the national quality standard for any organisation that delivers information, advice and/or guidance on learning and work. To inform you about the benefits of the matrix Journey and the processes involved in achieving accreditation, matrix has arranged a series of roadshows and Getting Started Workshops across the country to inform you about the standard.

Wesley Harcourt, Development Worker from advice™ recently attended a Getting Started Workshop recently and had this to say;

“The workshop was a very useful introduction to what the matrix standard actually requires; the standard itself is a good one in that it is not purely paperbased. However, an issue for many of our members is still the cost.”

The cost of matrix accreditation is £550 per day + VAT, plus auditors’ expenses. In addition, the fees charged by a matrix adviser supporting an organisation with their application can vary from £350 – £750 a day – audit may require up to 2 days work. A potential total fee of over £2500!

For more information visit www.matrixstandard.com

Sustainable Funding

advice™ London Region is working with partners and members to boost their sustainability and diversify their funding base. Michael Murray, Development Team Manager, looks at initiatives to earn income.

Sustainable Advice Project

Sustainable Buildings Initiative

As part of our Bridge House Trust (BHT) funded Sustainable Advice Project (SAP), advice™ London Region would like to help members use their assets more effectively to improve their financial sustainability. The first asset area we are looking at is buildings owned or leased by our members.

Our previous experience has shown that groups can earn income through renting rooms for social events or hosting outreach work from other or larger agencies. Recent research in Tower Hamlets, for example, found a need for access to advice interview rooms, which could bring in unrestricted income to agencies with space to rent. advice™ may also seek to rent space from members to undertake future training events.

advice™ London Region is launching a Sustainable Buildings Initiative (SBI) in which we would like to register the building assets of our members to help support marketing and income generation. If you own your building, or have a lease that allows you to rent rooms please contact us to register your interest in SBI support.

To help with SBI, advice™ London Region are teeming up with Ethical Properties Foundation (EPF) to provide technical support and consultancy to ready your building to become an income earner. (www.ethicalproperty.org.uk)

From early summer 2006 EPF will be offering online, telephone and face-to-face consultancy and health checks on lease terms, contract issues, refurbishment and access issues. We are also linking with the Centre for Accessible Environments (www.cae.org.uk) to offer specialist

 ASA conference 2006

ASA holds its one day conference ‘Advice Uncovered’ on 24th March 2006 at Friends Meeting House in Euston. Please visit www.asauk.org.uk/conference for details.

Possession Prevention Project Conference - come find out more about the project!

May 17th 2006, South Bank University

The Possession Prevention Project (PPP) is an innovative Southwark-based initiative that aims to reduce the number of evictions caused by rent arrears via training, awareness raising and policy and research work. The PPP, which is funded by the Legal Services Commission’s Partnership Initiative Budget until March 2007, is a joint venture delivered by Blackfriars Advice Centre and Southwark Law Centre. This event will provide an opportunity to share good practice and situate the project’s achievements within a wider policy context.

Keynote speakers include:

Adam Sampson, director of Shelter
David Watkinson, Civil Justice Council
Simone Cribbins, Greater London Authority
Kyle Kilgour, Legal Services Commission CLS policy manager

If you would like to either discuss the project or book a place at the conference, please contact Southwark Law Centre on 020 7732 2008 or at general@southwarklawcentre.org.uk

Delivering public services is increasingly becoming one of the options through which voluntary and community organisations can serve the needs of their beneficiaries. But managing public sector contracts requires a diverse range of skills. To facilitate the development of these skills, and to enhance partnership working between the public and voluntary and community sectors, National Council of Voluntary Organisation’s Sustainable Funding Project has launched a new network in partnership with Futurebuilders England.

The network aims to develop capacity within the voluntary and community sector and will provide a forum for peer support, networking and professional development opportunities. Specific tools will include publications, resources and events focused on promoting effective partnership working not just across the two sectors, but by also creating new partnerships between smaller and larger organisations.

For more information about the Network and to join for free, please contact Trudy Muwanga on 020 7520 2489 or by email at Trudy.muwanga@nsvco-vol.org.uk.
National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) - how do they work?

**advice** London Region is also an Assessment Centre, offering NVQ accreditation in Advice & Guidance, NVQ Assessor & Verifier Awards & Learning and Development, as well as NVQs in Management at Levels 3 & 4 with the Institute of Leadership and Management. Liz Carboni, Training and Assessment Manager, gives an overview of what an NVQ is and how it could help you and your organisation.

City & Guilds is the UK’s largest vocational awarding body and they have recently awarded our NVQ Centre a double A grade – the highest there is! Currently over 40 assessors work with the Centre to help the staff of our member centres and the wider Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) across London achieve recognised qualifications. So...

**What is an NVQ?**

An NVQ is a nationally recognised qualification based on someone’s ability to do a job – paid or voluntary. You gain an NVQ by proving that you can perform that job against set national standards. The best way to tell if someone can do something is by watching them at work, looking at how they use their skills and apply their knowledge. For example, the best way to tell if someone is a competent adviser is to watch them giving advice to the public and perhaps asking some questions on why they took particular action. This will create evidence of competence showing that someone can advise and therefore work towards gaining the NVQ. NVQs have different levels, for example Level 3 is more or less the equivalent of “A” levels, with level 4 at undergraduate / degree level.

**Do I need to do any training to gain an NVQ?**

NVQs are not training courses, they are outcomes of someone doing the job and meeting specific practice standards. Although training is important and relevant for NVQs, it will not gain you an NVQ. An assessor (the person who judges your performance against set standards) will not be interested in how you learnt to advise only whether you are giving advice, correctly or not, against the standards. However, your assessor may judge that you’re not yet ready to qualify and refer you onto an advice training course as you may have gaps in your knowledge or skills. Observing someone do something is the best way of telling if they can do it or not. You cannot fail an NVQ – you can only be judged competent or not yet competent. If the candidate is not yet competent they have the chance to do whatever is necessary to meet the standards, as long as there is assessable evidence of this.

**How will this help my organisation?**

Having staff who are trained to nationally recognised standards will enhance the quality of your service delivery. For example, working towards a Management NVQ that includes assessing of planning and management skills across the organisation demonstrates to potential funders that the organisation can look after the funding and achieve results. Aiding staff to achieve an Advice & Guidance NVQ is another benchmark that shows the organisation is interested in developing its staff and providing a consistent high standard of advice to its clients. It may throw up some issues along the way, such as - “do we have all the relevant policies and procedures in place?” Or “If the answer is “no”, then it’s time to take action!"

Cindy Withey, Corporate Affairs Manager on 020 7294 2733 or email cindy.withey@cityandguilds.com

**FUNDING FOR NVQs**

Many people are involved in assessing each candidate’s work. Assessor, Internal Verifier and the awarding body all need to check over each candidate’s work. Therefore the overall cost is fairly high, and can seem daunting, particularly for small voluntary sector organisations. However, there are funders that will consider funding NVQs. Here are our recommendations:

- The Awards for All Lottery grant programme is calling on community and voluntary groups across London to apply for grants of £500 to £5000. For the first four months of 2006 community groups applying to the Awards for All programme in London will have a higher than usual chance of success, due to an increased grant budget in 2005/6. Funding can be used to access training courses, purchase NVQs and cover volunteers’ expenses.

- From April, Awards for All, will be changing its lower and upper limits to £300 and £10,000 respectively.

For further information please contact their enquiry line on 020 7842 4020 or use their online email enquiry form at www.awardsforall.org.uk/england/london/london_contacts.html. For an application pack contact their hotline on 0845 600 2040

- Lawrence Atwell’s Charity helps young people from low income backgrounds aged 16-26 to become qualified and equipped to work in their chosen career. Funding is available for employed, unemployed and volunteers. Grants could be up to £1,500 for UK individuals or for refugees with Indefinite Leave to Remain (ILR).

Please contact 020 7213 0561 or see www.skinnershall.co.uk/lawrence_atwell.htm

- City and Guilds offer a small number of educational grants yearly to people who want to study for a C&G qualification, including NVQs. The funding covers course fees, childcare or travel expenses and other costs that prevent the candidate from enrolling on a programme.

If you need further information please contact Cindy Withey, Corporate Affairs Manager on 020 7294 2733 or email cindy.withey@cityandguilds.com
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Don’t think of it as a cost. It’s an investment in your service and staff. You are giving advice on the spot, including NVQs. That funding covers course fees, childcare or travel expenses and other costs that prevent the candidate from enrolling on a programme.

For more information about NVQs or how to register please call the Training Team on 020 7407 6611 or email traininglondon@adviceuk.org.uk

FUNDING FOR NVQs

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If you need further information please contact Cindy Withey, Corporate Affairs Manager on 020 7294 2703 or email cindy.withey@cityandguilds.com
Quality update

The Office of the Immigration Services Commission (OISC) is carrying out two areas of consultation.

The first area of consultation is on the revision of the Code of Standards and Rules booklet. The Code of Standards and Rules, written in October 2000 before the regulatory scheme became operational now requires some revision so that it remains useful for advisers, complainants and other users. One suggested change to code 6 could mean that Level 1 advisers could now be expected to ensure that all their instructions to clients are in writing regardless of the level of advice or service they provide.

The second area is on introducing a compulsory Continuous Professional Development (CPD) scheme for exempted advisers.

The OISC commissioner has a statutory duty to promote good practice to those who provide immigration advice or immigration services. To ensure this, the OISC proposes to introduce a CPD scheme that will mean regulatory advisers update their personal skills and knowledge in a structured manner that this is recorded and monitored.

The proposed scheme would affect all advisers, although CPD requirements would be less onerous at Level 1. If introduced, it is intended that the scheme would start on 1st April 2007 with monitoring of compliance starting in Spring 2008.

But does CPD represent yet another level of assessment of advisers’ competence by the OISC? How will smaller, less well-funded organisations with exempted advisers afford the potentially higher costs of attending CPD accredited courses?

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“The workshop was a very useful introduction to what the matrix standard actually requires; the standard itself is a good one in that it is not purely paper-based. However, an issue for many of our members is still the cost.”

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For more information visit www.matrixStandard.com

Sustainable Funding

Advice® London Region is working with partners and members to boost their sustainability and diversify their funding base. Michael Murray, Development Team Manager, looks at initiatives to earn income.

Sustainable Advice Project - Sustainable Buildings Initiative

As part of our Bridge House Trust (BHT) funded Sustainable Advice Project (SAP), advice® London Region would like to help members use their assets more effectively to improve their financial sustainability. The first asset area we are looking at is buildings owned or leased by our members.

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To help with SBI, advice® London Region are teaming up with Ethical Properties Foundation (EPF) to provide technical support and consultancy to ready your building to become an income earner. (www.ethicalproperty.org.uk)

from early 2006 EPF will be offering online, telephone and face-to-face consultancy and health checks on lease terms, contract issues, refurbishment and access issues. We are also linking with the Centre for Accessible Environments (www.cae.org.uk) to offer specialist consultation, advice and information to members wishing to make their buildings more accessible and sustainable. CAE can help with DDA access issues and grant applications to BHT.

Please contact Artie Singh or Michael Murray on 020 7407 6622 to register your interest in the initiative.

Voluntary Sector Management of Public Service Delivery Network

Delivering public services is increasingly becoming one of the options through which voluntary and community organisations can serve the needs of their beneficiaries. But managing public sector contracts requires a diverse range of skills. To facilitate the development of these skills, and to enhance partnership working between the public and voluntary and community sectors, National Council of Voluntary Organisation’s Sustainable Funding Project has launched a new network in partnership with Futurebuilders England.

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For more information about the Network and to join for free, please contact Trudy Muwanga on 020 7520 2489 or by email at Trudy.muwanga@ncvo-vol.org.uk

ASA holds its one day conference ‘Advice Uncovered’ on 24th March 2006 at Friends Meeting House in Euston.

Possession Prevention Project Conference - come find out more about the project!

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Keynote speakers include:

- Adam Sampson, director of Shelter
- David Watsonson, Civil Justice Council
- Simon Cribbens, Greater London Authority
- Kyle Kilgour, Legal Services Commission CLS policy manager

If you would like to either discuss the project or book a place at the conference, please contact Southwark Law Centre on 020 7732 2008 or at general@southwarklawcentre.org.uk
Local advice forum news

Ealing Advice Forum

Ealing Advice Forum meets bi-monthly at venues across the borough of Ealing. The most recent meeting was on the 8th March, but there were no details at the time of going to print.

The two next meeting dates of Ealing Advice Forum are scheduled for Wednesday 10th May and Wednesday 12th July 2006. For more information please contact Wesley Harcourt on 020 7407 6622 or wesley.harcourt@adviceuk.org.uk

Hillingdon Advice Forum

The second meeting of the Hillingdon Advice Forum was held on 17th January at Key House. Kaks Chahal, Acting Manager of London Borough of Hillingdon Housing Advice Team was present to address some of the concerns raised at the inaugural meeting such as inconsistency of advice and internal delays with the local authority. A full and lively debate followed and the forum agreed to feed the issues raised into the Hillingdon Housing Strategy consultation seminar later that month.

Building on its reputation as a model of best practice, Hillingdon forum has taken the innovative step of setting up funding for its administration and to provide training to members on Support Services and Reception Skills. Future funding will be being planned to fund a training programme based on a training needs analysis of forum members.

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 28th March, 10.00am at Key House, 106 High Street, Ickenwley.

Lewisham

Lewisham Advice Forum was established by adviceUK London Region in November 2004 and meets bi-monthly at Lewisham Council’s Civic Suite. Forum members share information about services, get updates from Lewisham Community Legal Service Partnership and training on topics of relevance to them. So far, over 40 groups have benefited from its activities which have included talks from Lewisham Council’s Adult Social Care services and Housing Options Centre, the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner and training on topics such as funding, benefits and internal delays with the local authority. A full and lively debate followed and the forum agreed to feed the issues raised into the Hillingdon Housing Strategy consultation seminar later that month.

The next meeting will take place on 11th April 2006 at 10am-12pm at Queensbridge Community Centre, 30 Holly Street, Hackney. For further details about the forum, contact Siobhan Hogan by phone on 020 7407 6622 or by emailing siobhan.hogan@adviceuk.org.uk

Hackney

Established in July 2004, Hackney Advice Forum meets bi-monthly. So far over 25 organisations have shared information about their services and received training. They heard from speakers on issues such as funding in the advice sector, regulation of immigration advice, referrals and signposting in the advice sector, accessing statutory services. The forum discussed Hackney’s local compact between local council and the voluntary sector and fed into Hackney Information and Advice Consortium’s report to the Chief Executive of Job Centre Plus regarding the poor performance of its services in the borough.

The next meeting will take place on 11th April 2006 at 10am-12pm at Queensbridge Community Centre, 30 Holly Street, Hackney. For further details about the forum, contact Siobhan Hogan by phone on 020 7407 6622 or by emailing siobhan.hogan@adviceuk.org.uk

Redbridge Advice Forum

Redbridge Advice Forum held its last meeting on the 12th January 2006. It will meet again on 23rd March at 2pm at the Council for Voluntary Services in Clements Road, Ilford. Please contact liilian.brown@adviceuk.org.uk for further details.

Wandsworth Advice Forum

Wandsworth Advice Forum now meets quarterly.

The last meeting was on 25th January 2006 when the forum heard from Eiri Ohtani, Co-ordinator of Asylum Support and Appeals Project. The forum will next meet on 29th April 2006 at the Anchor Centre in Wandsworth. Please contact liilian.brown@adviceuk.org.uk for further details.

If you would like to advertise your forum and its next meeting date, you can do so on this page!

If you want to find out more about the new Advice Forum Development Project and how it can support your existing forums development or you wish to set up a new forum in your area please contact Lillian Brown at liilian.brown@adviceuk.org.uk or call 020 7407 6622

Disability Law Service Training

For Advisers and Advocates Working with and for Disabled People

Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance: A Guide to Successful Claims

1.30pm-5pm, Tuesday 28th March 2006

This session is for those advising disabled people and those with long term health problems about disability-related benefits. It will focus primarily on Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance-maximising the chance of a successful claim and how to appeal when claims are rejected.

An Introduction to Community Care

1.30pm-5pm, Friday 31st March 2006

This session will provide those advising and advocating for disabled people with a better understanding of the main principles of community care.

Mental Capacity and Decision Making

1.30pm-5pm, Wednesday 5th April 2006

This session will provide advisors and advocates with a working knowledge of the existing legal framework for protecting disabled people. The session will cover appointment, receivership and guardianship, the role of litigation friends, contractual relationships, decision making and the Mental Capacity Act 2005.


1.30pm-5pm, 6th April 2006

This session will provide advisors and advocates with a guide to Part III of the DDA, which covers the provision of goods, services and facilities to disabled people. The session is intended for people with some prior knowledge of the DDA and will include funding of litigation and how to take a service provider to court.

All sessions cost £65 including VAT and lunch (voluntary groups and organisations), £75 inc VAT and lunch (commercial organisations). Fees for all other sessions are £65 inc VAT and lunch (voluntary groups and organisations), £75 inc VAT and lunch (commercial organisations). Further details can be obtained on the website at www.dls.org.uk - where you can also make a booking. Alternatively email enquiries to christine@dls.org.uk or phone 0207 791 9828

London Funders Website: www.londonfunders.org.uk

London Funders have recently launched their newly developed website. adviceUK London Region is promoting access to their new pages and we feel that the website will be a useful resource for members.

London Funders (LF) is a membership forum open to all London-based funders of the voluntary and community sector including local authorities, public, independent and corporate funders, and all charitable funders and investors. There are currently more than 100 members with a combined expenditure on a wide variety of voluntary work in London of approximately £600 million per annum.

This is a key information portal for London Funders, containing links to members’ funding programmes and priorities, best practice case studies, key funding publications and much more.

Website benefits:
- adviceUK members can benefit from searching the London Funders’ resource area for:
  - key funding advice guidelines
  - funding publications
  - member project information and best practice case studies in one easy to access information source.

The website offers the public a key information resource for London’s funders. A private members-only access, not open to general public viewing, includes contact details of other members and up to date information on London Funders events and project groups. As an associate member, adviceUK will monitor the sections for useful resources of interest to our members.

For further information on membership please email belinda@londonfunders.org.uk or telephone 020 7255 4488
National Homelessness Advice Service

Anjila Sinha, National Homelessness Advice Service Policy and Co-ordination Worker, explains about services available for the housing advice sector.

adviceUK London Region’s statement on quality states: “Independent advice centres exist because they want to meet the community’s needs for advice as effectively as possible. It is recognised that if they provide poor quality advice they fail in their own purpose, sometimes with disastrous consequences for the very people they were set up to help.”

In keeping with this, adviceUK London Region’s objective has been to develop the provision of good quality advice by independent advice organisations in London. Our team works with partner organisations and forums to facilitate the continuous development of the skills and knowledge of advice workers.

The National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) aims to prevent homelessness and alleviate wider housing problems by enabling access to good quality housing advice. Anjila Sinha works with the NHAS team in London, developing and co-ordinating services to support housing advice workers on the ground. In addition to Anjila, the team consists of workers from Shelter and Citizen’s Advice Bureaux. The partnership has existed for over a decade now and for those organisations that use the service regularly, it is part of the general housing advice environment.

The NHAS provides free services to support housing advisers including:

- The NHAS consultancy line Telephone consultation for advice workers is provided by the Shelter NHAS team. Generalist and specialist advisers can speak to a fieldworker for support on any query arising from client work on housing and homelessness issues. The telephone number (recently changed) is 08 00 120 6446. The line operates on Monday to Friday 10.30 to 1pm and 2pm to 4.30pm.

- Training Varying levels of training are offered on housing advice issues and can be delivered locally if your service fits certain criteria. Contact Anjila or the NHAS directly on 020 7014 1560 to find out if your organisation is able to access the training.

- In addition to the above support, there is also an information service on homelessness and housing topics and a social policy group. Other special initiatives and projects are undertaken as a response to the housing advice and/or policy environment in London.

For further information on the NHAS please contact Anjila at anjila.sinha@adviceuk.org.uk

Island Advice Centre

adviceUK recently finished running a Learning to Advise training course in Bethnal Green on behalf of member organisation Island Advice Centre.

The 13-day programme (held over 13 weeks) was run after identification of a need for volunteer advisers in the local community with a view to addressing a skills gap identified by the local Community Legal Services Partnership. Some of those who finished the course will go on to achieve NVQs in Advice & Guidance.

Island Advice have been running similar training schemes for the past two years. This has helped to increase the amount of high quality advice provision in the locality. It also helped Tower Hamlets Council with its income maximisation project, which was to ensure all people able to claim welfare benefits claimed their entitlement.

For more details about future training programmes held by Island Advice centre please contact Jo Ellis by emailing jo@island-advice.org.uk

Association of London Government

- Encouraging people in registering to vote

The Association of London Government (ALG) is calling on voluntary and community organisations to help ensure that Londoners are able to vote in May 2006 council elections.

There has been much concern raised in the press recently at the low numbers of people registered to vote. In London in particular the situation has been highlighted as being especially acute, with nearly one in five Londoners missing from the electoral roll.

Some groups are particularly under-represented, including young people, those renting from private landlords on a short-term basis and black minority ethnic (BME) Londoners. Some ethnic minorities have exceptionally low registration rates - 37% of black Africans and 30% of British Chinese are failing to register to vote.

Voluntary and community organisations are often uniquely placed to reach some of the most marginalised and excluded groups in society, who are often those least likely to exercise their democratic rights. To support voter registration, voluntary organisations could display leaflets and posters encouraging people to register to vote. These are available in a number of languages from the Electoral Commission at http://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/toolkit/documents.cfm/43

E25 discount Voucher for early renewals!

We are giving away a £25 voucher to every centre that renews their membership by 17th March. All you need to do is send the invoice back to adviceUK with a cheque for the correct fee band should be for 2006/7.

For further information or a course brochure please contact the Training Team on 020 7407 6611 or by emailing traininglondon@adviceuk.org.uk.

Support Services

The last Support Services and Reception Skills training course was held in late January to early February. Melanie Ross was the trainer and did such a superb job that she was given a card and a box of chocolates by the trainees attending the course!

The three-day course is designed to meet the needs of receptionists, support service staff and anyone in a supporting role. The main course objectives are that the candidates will:

- have an awareness of putting people at ease
- have an understanding of customer care
- be able to provide appropriate information for clients

The course is geared towards people working in organisations that give advice, but many of the participants do not have advice backgrounds and still find the course very useful.

For further information or a course brochure please contact the Training Team on 020 7407 6611 or by emailing traininglondon@adviceuk.org.uk.

The adviceUK Membership year ends on 31st March 2006 and by now you should have received an invoice for your membership fee for 2006/7. All you need to do is send the invoice back to adviceUK with a cheque for the membership fee. If your membership fee band has changed since last year there is a section on the invoice where you can tell us what the correct fee band should be for 2006/7.

£25 discount Voucher for early renewals!

We are giving away a £25 voucher to every centre that renews their membership by 17th March. These vouchers are redeemable against any adviceUK service during the 2006/7 year (including insurances).

So make sure you get your renewal in early and claim your free £25 voucher!

If you have any queries about your membership renewal, please contact the Membership Team on 020 7407 4777 or by email to membership@adviceuk.org.uk.
Competent Advisers Project Celebration Event

On 15th February, to celebrate the successes after the first year of the two-year Competent Advisers Project (CAP), advice® London Region held an afternoon event at the Vortex in Hackney. There is a lot to celebrate - so far 20 candidates have completed their NVQs!

The event was a great success, providing a valuable networking experience for people involved in the project. Amongst the speakers were Anthony Stern, our new Learning and Skills Council Contract Manager, and Shalim Khan, who was not only the first candidate to finish his NVQ but is now a trainee assessor for the project. Shalim spoke about his experience and how the project has benefited him, particularly as he will receive a pay rise! Other guests were CAP candidates their colleagues, and representatives from one of our project partners Age Concern London.

Elevate Update

This unique management and leadership training and development programme by women for women and funded by European Social Fund and the Learning and Skill Council, has now been running for one year.

The evaluation so far has been very positive with women feeling that the training not only help improve their work practice; but helped increased their confidence and self esteem. Kim Connell from Age Concern Lambeth had this to say:

“The management training has really helped with my personal development and confidence building. I was told at my appraisal that the training is really making an impact on my managerial skills. I feel that this is the most valuable and worthwhile training that I have done.”

We now have two new groups started. So far we have had three women achieve their Management NVQ unit. Well done to them! By the end of the project we hope that in total 30 women will have worked towards and achieved an NVQ management unit.

The Elevate training is free to women who fit the project criteria and are willing to commit to ten days of training over a four to five month period. For further information contact the Elevate team on 0845 330 7918 or email elevate@wrc.org.uk

Advice Forum Development Project

advice® London Region has launched the advice forum development project, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The project will enable us to provide longer term strategic support to local advice forums and their lead agencies across London.

The project builds on the early successes of our forum work funded by Association of London Government (ALG). To date, advice® London Region has helped to set up 17 local advice forums, either as the lead facilitator or supporting a local lead agency. This new project will add value to the work advice® has previously done in relation to advice forums by supporting their continued effective operation after the one year set up period that ALG funding allows. Members can get an update of our existing ALG funded work on page 5 - our new page dedicated to information on the forums.

The project will now enable us to respond to requests from advice forums across London for longer-term support helping local forums to continue and develop their work at a borough level. We can offer ongoing advice, practical support, a lead agencies seminar, and training, as well as any new forums set up over the next three years. Practical help in planning forum meetings and maintaining a strong membership, free policy and funding updates, advice and templates for funding forum work and help with arranging speakers will also be offered.

advice® has started contacting forums to arrange a suitable time to meet and hear in more detail what their needs are and how the project can best help support their progress.

If you wish to talk about the project or need any more information then please contact Lillian Brown in the London Region Development Team at 020 7407 6622, or by email at lillian.brown@adviceuk.org.uk

On the road to Quality

With the increasing number of quality standards being introduced into the advice sector over recent years, advice® is planning to revise its Quality Mark course to incorporate other quality assurance systems.

advice® currently runs a two-day course on Achieving the Quality Mark. The introductory course covers the requirements of the Quality Mark at General Help and General Help with Casework Level. It helps identify the practical steps an organisation needs to take to achieve it and considers the skills an organisation needs to successfully work towards the standard.

Haq Ismail, an Advocacy Worker from Action and Rights for Disabled People in Newham attended advice®’s last Quality Mark course. He tells us why he came along, what he learned and what comes next for his organisation around quality.

I was told about the course by John Mahoney from Community Links, [another advice® member], based in the same building. Action and Rights for Disabled People in Newham will be applying for the Quality Mark at casework level.

Haq says, “I found the course very useful as, while my last organisation had applied, I hadn’t been directly involved in the whole process. The course gave me far more of an understanding of the Quality Mark. The trainer explained everything in depth. She was very good.”

Haq felt that advice® met his learning needs well and commented, “I am visually impaired and I was pleased with the support; the trainer was attentive. She read out slides, ensured I had a partner for exercises and provided the training materials on disk. Basically, the support ensured that I didn’t feel isolated.”

In terms of the next steps toward the Quality Mark, Haq explained, “We are reviewing our policies and procedures and updating and adding to them as needed. A review needed to be done anyway, so irrespective of what happens with the Quality Mark it has been useful.”

Haq was positive about advice® plans to broaden out the Quality Mark course and feels that including other quality standards in the revised course is “a good thing”. The other standards likely to be included are:

• The Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) standard which providers of immigration advice and services must achieve by law before delivering immigration advice
• The matrix, the new standard for organisations providing Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) on education and learning
• Quality Assurance Systems for Refugee Organisations (QASRO), developed by the Refugee Council

Other generic standards such as Investors in People (IIP) and PQASSO may also be covered in the revised course.

To find out more about the new Quality Standards course, contact either Kaye Barham or Lillian Brown for more details at kaye.barham@adviceuk.org.uk or lillian.brown@adviceuk.org.uk

Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham

Action and Rights of Disabled People in Newham is a campaigning based organisation which is run and controlled by local disabled people. Funded by the London Borough of Newham, the organisation aims to:

• Advocate that Newham’s built and public realm areas meet inclusive design standards.
• Provide Advocacy/Benefits support to all local disabled people.
• Hold regular meetings to address issues that affect local disabled people such as Housing, and Health and Social Care.

Please call 020 7473 9655 (voice or minicom) or email actionandrights@btconnect.com
Association of London Government

The Association of London Government (ALG) is consulting on which services it should fund under their future commissioning strategy. adviceUK London Region held a consultation event for members to allow them to feedback their concerns. Michael Murray, Development Team Manager, describes steps that adviceUK is taking to address these concerns.

ALG Consultation Event

adviceUK members demonstrated their concern over the ALG commissioning process planned for 2007 by participating in number at our consultation event held on 17 January. ALG members highlighted their concerns, including how they might develop partnerships to work pan-London or sub-region, ALG will commission services. These concerns were incorporated into adviceUK’s response to ALG’s commissioning document, submitted in late January.

However, this is not the end of the consultation process. ALG is currently holding sessions for frontline voluntary and community sector organisations and second tier organisations. An article on this subject may be commissioned, an initial outline of which can be found in the consultation document Better Services for Londoners, available across London.

Better services for Londoners

ALG will fund projects that address three ‘top level’ outcomes:
• increasing access to London’s opportunities reducing social exclusion, poverty and disadvantage
• promoting equality and reducing discrimination.

There are 10 sub-outcomes linked to these, with 75 examples of services that could potentially achieve these outcomes that ALG would consider funding. ALG has asked for feedback from the voluntary sector on the outcomes and examples of services given in Better Services for Londoners. ALG also wants views on whether it has left any important services off the list or if any of the services included should not be funded. At a recent consultation, ALG said it is looking at funding 25-30 pan-London services, so it seems likely that a variety or combination of services may be proposed by groups seeking funding to meet the outcomes that ALG selects.

The deadline for responses to the Better Services for Londoners consultation is 17th March. adviceUK members are encouraged to submit comments to inform adviceUK’s response, a draft of which will be forwarded to members in advance of the deadline for comment. Members are also encouraged to submit their own responses, in which case please copy these to adviceUK as well.

Partnerships

ALG wants commissioning to ensure that “priority services are available to those who need them wherever they live in London,” and that “resources are distributed and used efficiently.” To achieve these aims, ALG will commission services that are available across London. ALG has indicated that in most cases, this will involve organisations working in partnership to develop a network capable of offering services to residents across London.

To assist our members to start the search for potential commissioning partners, we have launched a partnerships page on our website. Members will be asked to fill in their contact details, current work, and the type of partnerships/partners they may be looking for, all of which will then be posted on the website. We hope that this page will also allow our members and other organisations seeking to work with adviceUK members, to reduce the time needed to identify potential partners across London. You can find the link to the partnerships page on the adviceUK website under adviceUK London Region/ALG Funding. Members will not need to log in to fill in the survey or see the list of organizations interested in partnerships.

Full cost recovery (FCR) training

The members’ consultation event highlighted the need for further support and training on FCR. It is important that members understand how to cost and price their services accurately and competitively. adviceUK will be holding a free training day on 24th April from 10am - 4pm to introduce the key features of FCR and budgeting for advice services.

If you are interested in attending the full cost recovery training, would like to feed into our response to Better Services For Londoners, or would like more information on the partnerships please contact Artie Singh on 020 7407 6622, or email artie.singh@adviceuk.org.uk

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2. Welcome

3 & 4. adviceUK news - news and information on new services and other activities at adviceUK London Region

5. Local advice forums - information on local advice forums, plus meeting dates

6. Sustainable funding - a look at two initiatives to earn income

7 & 8. Understanding NVQs - what they are and how they could benefit you and your organisation

9 & 10. Quality update - keeping you informed about developments relating to quality assurance, funding and support

11. National Homelessness Advice Service - developing access to good quality housing advice

12. On the road to Quality - adviceUK is changing the Quality Mark course to include other quality standards


14. Local Area Agreements - getting involved and making a case for local needs

Funding update

A copy of adviceUK’s response to ALG’s commissioning consultation can be found at www.adviceuk.org.uk/DisplayPage.asp?pageid=8742.

If you are interested in attending the full cost recovery training, would like to feed into our response to Better Services For Londoners, or would like more information on the partnerships please contact Artie Singh on 020 7407 6622, or email artie.singh@adviceuk.org.uk

Welcome

This is the last issue of advice London I will introduce before going on long-term secondment to the National Offender Management Service. So, as I highlight the contents of our spring issue, I want to reflect on some examples of what adviceUK London Region, with its committed staff team, has achieved over the last few years.

Improving services for members is always a priority. We have substantially improved our newsletter and on-line resources for members, including a set of 18 information briefings (see www.adviceuk.org.uk/displayPage.asp?pageid=8414).

Funding support has also increased via the newsletter, via our monthly funding email and via the free funding advice ‘surgeries’ introduced for members. We are now developing links between members and the sustainable funding agenda (see page 6), shortly to result in new training and resources.

One element of our free consultancy in relation to members’ advice services is specific support for housing advice providers (see page 11); we are currently using this in-house expertise to influence the Greater London Authority’s development of its housing advice strategy.

Across London, local advice forums are now a key part of our strategy to develop the advice sector. We have supported 17 forums, giving members access to a free local source of information exchange, networking and local feedback. A new project is now supporting local advice forums to consolidate and share good practice (see page 5). Also, our advice development expertise is increasingly recognised not just by members, but also by second tier agencies (e.g. Age Concern London, Youth Access & the Refugee Council) which are keen to develop their services to advice providers.

Our Training and Assessment Centre goes from strength to strength (page 7 & 8). The tremendous increase in training delivered each year has been achieved alongside overwhelmingly positive learner evaluations, showing that our training results in a high level of learner satisfaction and that our training is cost-effective. I would like to thank our trainers, assessors and our learners for their positive feedback. We have just launched a new 100% NVQ at Level 1 for caseworkers and interviewers working in the advice sector. Thank you.

I have enjoyed promoting members’ interests and the diversity of members’ provision to funders and policy makers. The changes in Association of London Government funding to members is a continuing area of work, an update can be found on page 13. I am confident that the skilled staff team at adviceUK London Region will continue to develop our services and support to members.

Ruth Power
London Region Director
Members’ page

Disability Alliance: The Tribunal Support Unit

Paddy Cullen, Tribunal Support Officer at Disability Alliance, describes a new and innovative project for London-based benefit advisers.

The Tribunal Support Unit (TSU) at Disability Alliance is a new service set up with three years’ funding from the Big Lottery Fund. It provides advice, information and practical support to paid and voluntary workers based in Greater London who give benefits advice.

Disability Alliance aims to improve the living standards of disabled people by breaking the link between poverty and disability. It produces the essential guide to benefits for disabled people, the Disability Rights Handbook, and is recognised as the country’s leading authority on social security benefits for disabled people. The TSU intends to increase the income of disabled people by helping advisers to identify benefit and tax credit entitlement and use dispute procedures effectively.

Our advice service helps with all aspects of benefit entitlement, from what to write on a claim form to what to do if you lose an appeal tribunal. We will discuss the benefit and tax credit rules and the administrative procedures of bodies such as Jobcentre plus, HM Revenue and Customs, and the Appeals Service. We can advise by telephone, fax or email, but will also visit advisers to discuss more difficult cases in detail or to help draft letters or legal submissions. For more experienced advisers, we can offer a second opinion on complex claims – perhaps helping to trace that piece of case law or guidance that you know is out there somewhere.

The TSU has particular expertise in disability benefits appeals. Representation by advisers at benefit appeal tribunals greatly improves the chances of an appeal’s success. A disability living allowance appeal decided without a formal tribunal hearing has about a 15% chance of success. Nearly 70% of appeals are successful if an adviser represents the claimant at a tribunal hearing.

The TSU aims to increase the number of appeal representatives in London. We hope to do this by providing an effective advice and support service and running a small number of reduced-cost training courses on disability benefits and on appeals.

We ask all advisers who wish to use our service to register with us first. Once registered, you’ll get fuller details of how the service operates.

For more information contact Paddy Cullen on 020 7244 8776 or paddy.da@dsl.pipex.com or visit the Disability Alliance website at www.disabilityalliance.org.uk

Local Area Agreements

An LAA is a national initiative of negotiated three-year agreements that set out the priorities for a local area agreed by Central Government (represented by the Government Office for London (GOL)) and the local area (represented by a Local Authority (LA) and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)).

An LAA means that local agencies, led by the Local Authority, can discuss with the Government what issues are important for them and how Government funding, rules and regulations might be changed to help agencies deliver a set of locally agreed targets. Agreements are currently being rolled out in three tranches between April 2005 and April 2007. Voluntary and community sector organisations need to ensure that they will be key partners in LAAs to support the delivery of local services.

LAAs are usually organised around four areas:
- Children and Young People
- Safer and Stronger Communities
- Healthier Communities and Older People
- Economic Development and Enterprise.

To help them achieve set targets LAAs give agencies the opportunity to:

1. Pool or align some funding streams: Agencies can use existing mainstream Government funding, area-based funding and funding from Non-Departmental Public Bodies (such as the Regional Development Agency and the Learning and Skills Council) to deliver the priorities they have identified.

2. Reduce the amount of monitoring: An LAA is a way to get the different agencies to agree to just one set of monitoring information being needed thereby reducing bureaucracy.

3. Gain freedoms and flexibilities: The LAA process gets local agencies to identify rules and regulations and negotiate with the Government the freedom to operate outside of these.

To sum up, the LAA provides a framework for local agencies and partners to identify local priorities and targets, as well as the funding that contributes to these targets. In return for a commitment to delivering the targets, the Government may allow agencies to use funding in new ways, operate outside government rules and reduce the amount of reporting that local agencies have to do.

Looking at the draft LAAs in the second round, some have taken a focused approach to their LAA themes; some cover a very wide range of issues. Some are concentrating their LAA on particular neighbourhoods, others identify borough wide outcomes.

Is there any additional funding attached?

LAAs do not generally offer new money to Local Authorities, however Local Authorities and their partners can identify other streams of funding to help achieve the targets set by the LAA.

If the LAA includes a particularly demanding target for the local area, then a ‘reward element’ can be negotiated through funding received if the target is achieved. However, the main focus of the LAA is for local partners to use existing funding in a more focused and innovative way.

Advice Sector Involvement

Local Authorities need to demonstrate that local agencies have been involved in agreeing the priorities for the LAA, including involving a good range of voluntary sector agencies and service providers. As advice agencies are likely to work across all of the four LAA blocks it is important that they become involved. A few London boroughs have specifically identified issues such as improving benefit take-up and increasing household income within their draft LAA. If you do wish to find out more a good starting point would be your voluntary sector representative on your LSP.

For further information, and to access a list of which boroughs are in which rounds, plus website details of LSP contact details please refer to ‘LAAs in London’ at www.lvsc.org.uk/templates/information.asp?NodeID=91109.

For background information and to access a toolkit on LAAs 2005 please visit www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1161632. This website also gives background information on LAAs and Government guidance.

Paddy Cullen and advisers

Dianna Neal from Association of London Government provides an overview of Local Area Agreements (LAA) in London.
Funding update

The Baring Foundation

The Foundation has announced their 2006 programme for strengthening the voluntary sector. This year they are merging their project grants and core costs grants into a single fund. The grants amounts will range from £20,000 to £100,000 and will be for up to five years. The improved application process will have no deadline, and have a single annual round and any constituted not-for-profit voluntary organisation in England will be able to apply. In London the priority will be given to bids covering more than one London borough. The grants programme will continue to fund work that will bring about a significant and lasting change in the effectiveness of an organisation. There will be a theme to focus the grants programme which is currently under discussion. Please re-visit the Baring Foundation website in March 2006 for more information.

See their website at www.baringfoundation.org.uk or telephone on 020 7767 1348

Refugee Week Funding 2006 – Community Chest Fund

Due to continued funding from the Association of London Government, Refugee Week will be running the Community Chest Fund again this year. This is a small grants scheme for refugee community organisations based in London who plan to hold a refugee week event this year.

Grants will be for £1,000 or less, and must go towards the costs of holding an event during Refugee Week 2006, which will be taking place from the 19th – 25th June 2006.

The deadline for completed applications is Thursday 29th March and successful organisations will be notified by the week beginning 13th April.

For an application form and details of how to apply, please phone on 020 7346 6752 or email gerdy.rhys@refugeecouncil.org.uk

For more information about Refugee Week and how you can get involved see their website at www.refugeeweek.org.uk

Lloyds TSB Foundation launches grant making guidelines for 2006

During 2006, the Lloyds TSB Foundation will make grants through two programmes – the Community Programme and a new Thematic Programme. The main focus of the Community Programme is to fund projects that support disabled and disadvantaged people. The Thematic Programme will focus on supporting charities working with ex-prisoners with a focus on their families and mental health issues.

See their website at www.lloydstsbfoundations.org.uk/guidelines2006.html, telephone on 020 7398 1728, or email jude.stevens@lloydstsbfoundations.org.uk

Bridge House Trust

A new small grants scheme aimed at disadvantaged older people was launched on Monday 27th February 2006. The new programme will not have application deadlines. Bridge House Trust aims to address disadvantage by supporting charitable activity across greater London through quality grant making and related activities within clearly defined priorities.

See their website at www.bridgehousetrust.org.uk or telephone on 020 7332 3705

Awards for All

The London Region of Awards for All is seeking more applications to fund community projects that either benefit the disabled or their carers or increase accessibility for the disabled to community activities. The Awards for All programme provides grants of £500 to £5000 that will enable or improve disabled access to a wide range of organisation types and activities i.e. wheelchair ramps, disabled toilets, sign language interpreters, braille, IT such as talking books, sharing information, or awareness raising.

See their website at www.awardsforall.org.uk/england/london/london_main.html or telephone their enquiry line on 020 7842 4020

Local Area Agreements – should your organisation play a part?

Association of London Government

Future commissioning strategy

Encouraging people in registering to vote

Spring 2006