

OUR IMPACT

2018/19

Over 31000 people supported



Almost £2 million
worth of debt written off

£36 million
in benefits secured for residents

Every £1 of funding generates £18.16 of increased benefits for residents



Partnership working
Planning for the future
Training

A network of 15+ independent advice providers



Annual Report April 2018 – March 2019

Introduction by Chair of Sandwell Advice Providers Network (SAPN)

This is the fourth annual report of Sandwell Advice Provider Network. Our overall aims are to improve the quality of advice in Sandwell by joining up services, improving the knowledge and skills of advisors, and social policy work. Network meetings are held regularly across Sandwell bringing together all advice providers who share the common goal of tackling tackle poverty.

Everyone in the Network is working hard to make a real difference to the people of Sandwell. In 2018/19 we supported over 31,000 people and secured over £36 million in benefits for local residents (comparable with 2017/18). This is a very positive achievement, given the changes to the benefits system.

Shabud Ullah
Chair

Role of the Sandwell Advice Providers Network

The Network is a forum for discussion about a very wide range of topics that relate to providing high quality, free advice in Sandwell about debt, welfare benefits, housing, immigration, consumer matters, employment and other issues. Training, referrals, social policy and information about changes in the law are discussed on a regular basis.

Over 15 independent advice providers belong to the Network including: Citizens Advice Sandwell, members of Sandwell Consortium, AgeUK, Cranstoun, EMCONET, Centrepont Christian Church and the council's welfare rights unit. Meetings are chaired by Shabud Ullah from CBO and partners from other services are invited to ensure that links are made. Any organisation that provides free advice in Sandwell is able to attend meetings which take place every 2 months and is able to access free training.

Most but not all members of the network receive funding from Sandwell Council specifically to enable them to deliver free advice on welfare benefits, debt and other matters.

Outputs delivered as a result of council funding

The context

- The welfare rights team focus on benefits advice. All other agencies deliver advice on a range of topics including welfare rights, housing, debt, employment, consumer etc
- Welfare reform has meant that benefits are reducing and are harder to secure.

- The time required to secure a positive result for a number of clients is increasing as cases become more complex – for example claimants from abroad
- Everyone has worked hard to build an improved partnership with the DWP at a local level
- Need to challenge DWP decisions – advisers continue to see high numbers of cases where medical evidence is poor or where agencies such as Capita have carried out poor quality medical assessments, leading to increased refusal of PIP and ESA claims.
- This ability to challenge successfully has increased as advisers confidence grows as a result of investment in training and support.

Numbers of unique clients supported

Organisation	2018/19
Citizens Advice	15,464
Sandwell Consortium open door	4,146
Sandwell Consortium children's centres	703
SPMA	699
Welfare rights team	10,295
Total	31,307

Welfare rights advice April 2018 – March 2019

Organisation	Level of funding	Confirmed gains	Leverage
Citizens Advice	630,475	2,500,421	3.97
Sandwell Consortium open door	237,178	4,786,858	20.18
Sandwell Consortium children's centres	98,959	1,275,976	12.89
SPMA	31,047	1,631,663	52.55
Welfare rights team	1,022,513	26,496,066	25.91
Total	2,020,172	36,690,984	18.16

Members of Sandwell Consortium are listed at the end of the annual report.

Debt outputs April 2018 – March 2019

The Citizens Advice debt advice service is jointly funded by Sandwell council and by the Money Advice Service. Outputs were as follows:

Funder	Supported clients dealing with debt totalling	Amount of debt written off (estimated)
Sandwell Council	£ 3,971,201	£198,560
Money Advice Service	£ 7,189,689	£798,865
Total	£11,160,890	£997,425

SPMA have secured additional funding for a debt worker, as a result of which they have been able to support clients dealing with debt totalling £1,723,275 and helped to write off £896,761 of that debt.

Housing advice – support provided to people in housing crisis

Organisation	2018/19 No of clients
Citizens Advice	2,761
Sandwell Consortium open door	47
Sandwell Consortium children's centres	176
SPMA	143
Welfare rights team	1,533 *
Total	4,660

*The welfare rights team deal with referrals from the arrears team and housing options team

Continuous improvement

Members of the network are all committed to service improvements. In 2018/19 our achievements include:

- Preparation for the introduction of Universal Credit in November 2018
- Strengthening our partnership working with the DWP
- Briefings at SAPN meetings on Private Rented Sector (Sandwell council team), MySandwell and new Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- On-going learning through the Matters Family case study
- Introduction of housing advice output measures
- Developing the immigration offer
- Securing funding from the Controlling Migration Fund for the Settling Well Project

Looking Ahead

In 2019/20 providers will work together on the following:

- Immigration advice: build capacity to deliver OISC level 1 and 2 immigration advice and pilot an immigration advice session once a week in Oldbury
- Support to newcomers: deliver Settling Well
- Volunteer involvement: expanding the use of volunteers to support some clients to do more things for themselves including translation, on-line applications etc, so that trained advice workers can be freed up to deliver advice to the most vulnerable
- Budgeting and BetterOff Sandwell is well integrated into the advice offer
- Improved levels of referral into employment support

Members of Sandwell Consortium

The following members of Sandwell Consortium deliver generalist advice:

Bangladeshi Islamic Centre (BIC)

Bangladeshi Women's Association (BWA)

Brushstrokes

Centrepont Christian Church

Community Connect Foundation (CCF)

Confederation of Bangladeshi Organisations (CBO)

Ideal for All

Sandwell Consortium

Sandwell Youth and Community Centre

Skills Work and Enterprise Development Agency (SWEDA)

Yemeni Community Centre (YCA)