

CASE STUDY: Dundee Advice Workers Forum on Knowledge Hub

The Dundee Advice Workers Forum is a local network for people working in advice services to share information and experiences.

The Forum meets 4-6 times a year but was looking for ways to improve communication between members on a day-to-day basis and increase partnership working across the sector.

It established an online group on the Knowledge Hub, a secure online collaboration platform which enables colleagues across public and third sector services to connect, discuss, exchange knowledge and develop initiatives to improve public services.

What was the issue faced by the Forum?

The Dundee Advice Workers Forum is a well-established network meeting several times a year. However, the group wanted to enhance the way members engaged with other day-to-day to discuss problems and get frontline issues addressed quickly.

At one meeting, with 'improving communication' on the agenda, members began to discuss how they develop a more 'open door' approach to communication between organisations.

Craig Mason, Welfare Rights and Money Advice Manager at Dundee City Council, delivered a presentation on the benefits of working in partnership across the advice sector. This brought the Knowledge Hub (K Hub) to the attention of members and encouraged them to consider ways of using Knowledge Hub to strengthen the partnership between the statutory and voluntary advice sectors in Dundee. You can hear Craig talk about the Forum and Knowledge Hub in the video below.



Craig Mason, Dundee City Council

(Video opens in browser window)

- [Download a copy of Craig Mason's presentation](#)

The Knowledge Hub is an online collaboration platform for people working in public services across the UK. Access is free to all

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public and third sector services in Scotland (funded by the Improvement Service with a contribution from the Scottish Government).

What was the Forum trying to achieve?

The Dundee Advice Workers Forum was trying to enhance and modernise the way that advice workers engage day-to-day, across all sectors. This would improve support for frontline workers and allow the group to reap the benefits of partnership working identified in Craig Mason's presentation.

How did it tackle the issue?

The Forum set up a Knowledge Hub group in July 2014, originally with 17 members.

The K Hub has many benefits, including:

- Facilitating knowledge exchange
- Networking and collaboration
- Providing access to a range of skills and expertise
- Creating new ways of working
- Providing a rich resource of current thinking
- Reducing costs through online rather than face-to-face collaboration
- The more you use the K Hub, the more it learns about you and your interests, and will suggest contents, groups and connections of relevance to you

The founding members of the K Hub group were drawn from across the advice sector. The group's facilitators are Alison Prophet, Tenancy Sustainment Officer at Hillcrest Housing Association, and Emma Crouch, Welfare Rights Worker, Dundee City Council. It's their job to consider and approve requests to join, as well as manage the group.

For Alison, the group encourages Hillcrest Housing Association to be more connected to other key workers and organisations in Dundee. You can hear what she has to say about her role as a facilitator in the video below.



Alison Prophet, Hillcrest Housing Association

(Video opens in browser window)

“It allows people from different agencies to engage with people from other agencies and share experiences.”

Ginny Lawson,
Brooksbank Centre

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Training was provided to all members of the group to help them develop their understanding of the K Hub, its functionalities and capabilities. Further training, telephone and online support is provided by the Improvement Service.

At the face-to-face Forum meetings, members are encouraged to give feedback on their use of the K Hub, what works well and not so well. This also helps identify any support needs for users.

Listen to what users had to say about training and support in the videos below.

“It’s about trying to support all the customers who come through all the agency’s doors.”

**Jane McEwen,
Department of Work &
Pensions**



(Videos open in browser window)

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What obstacles had to be overcome?

One of the challenges identified early on was the need to upskill some members of the group. This was to increase their confidence in the new way of working and encourage them to the K Hub more.

There were some early technical problems, mainly around understanding the software's capabilities and functions. Intensive training and support from the Improvement Service helped to overcome these.

The group also realised that, in order to keep the Forum active, it needed a dedicated person to manage the group. To overcome this, it has more than one facilitator and is planning to train more members to become facilitators and support the group.

What are the results of the Dundee Advice Workers Forum's actions?

In less than a year (July 2015 – May 2016), the group has grown from 17 to 119 members, exceeding expectations.

Communication between members has improved with people sharing knowledge and information more easily and responding speedily to issues on the frontline. This is helped by instant notifications of new forum posts, comments and materials. Workers have reported that the groups has been particularly useful throughout the implementation of Universal Credit, leading to better outcomes for clients.

It also provides storage for and distribution of documents such as agendas, minutes and presentations from the face-to-face meetings. Take a look at the videos below.

"It's good to iron out problems that you maybe haven't come across before, sharing knowledge and experience."

**Carol O'Neill,
Dundee Carers Centre**



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Carol O'Neill, Dundee Carers Centre

“The site is self-explanatory... it’s very, very easy to use.”

Alison Prophet,
Hillcrest Housing
Association



Ginny Lawson, Brooksbank Centre

Supporting partnership working through Knowledge Hub

The [Equally Well](#) team joined the group following a poverty meeting as a way of initially discussing joint training opportunities.

The Equally Well team does not give advice on the front line. It is a referral partner which has links to all services locally. For more details see the [My Wellbeing webpage](#) and the [My Wellbeing Leaflet](#).

Partners agreed to co-ordinate and work together to develop and produce a ‘Poverty & Stigma’ training package for front line staff across Dundee.

The KHub was used for this collaborative piece of work. Find out more in our case study on Partnership Working In Dundee to address Poverty and Stigma.

What were the lessons learned?

Firstly, set out the purpose of the group clearly as users may have different expectations.

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Have a management and facilitation plan in place for the facilitators to work with during set up.

Invest time in understanding the functionalities of the K Hub before rolling it out to potential users and facilitators.

Allow time to review the group with users to ensure that it is fit-for-purpose and addresses the members' development and support needs. Survey the group regularly to check their knowledge and understanding and gather suggestions for improvements. Bear in mind that users will seek different things from the Forum and it is helpful to understand the needs of all the users.

Next steps?

The main aim is to continue to grow the use of the group and keep the momentum going.

It will continue to engage with the IS around development of the K Hub and its functions, and how these can drive improvements for the Dundee Advice Workers Forum. Work is already underway at a national level on:

Integrating web conferencing facilities which will enable users to hold virtual meetings and deliver training/workshops through the K Hub
Integrating Eventbrite which will allow users to book places at events and, if relevant, make payments for bookings
Integrating basic project management tools to enable teams to track tasks and monitor progress
Exploring if e-learning functionality can be built into the K Hub

In the meantime, Craig says, "I intend to blog more on the group and create a culture in the network where members can feel encouraged to feed back their own learning from any events they attend. I can see the extra value and benefits for encouraging this."

Any new members of the group will continue to be supported by training through Dundee City Council and partners.

Further information

For details of some of the partners included in the network refer to the agency leaflet, [*Benefits, Money & Debt: Advice Services in Dundee*](#).

Read about a [partnership event bringing Health and Financial Inclusion partners together](#) in Dundee.