



CASE STUDY

Fife Advice Partnership - A Fife Approach to Fair Commissioning



The Fife Advice Partnership brings together key agencies in Fife to provide an integrated approach across advice services. It was established in 2014 and is led by Frontline Fife Homelessness Services. The Partnership's two projects, Making Justice Work and Wise2Welfare, are funded by the Scottish Legal Aid Board.



The Partnership was initially established to address the overlap of advice provision in the region, meet the needs of the people of Fife and ensure effective use of funding. It also aimed to look at how best to implement the key principles of the Framework of Public Funding Advice into practice. Its four guiding principles are:



- **Effective coordination and delivery:** to enable a coordinated approach for the delivery of multi-agency advice as per current funding arrangements.
- **Transparency and accountability:** all parties are accountable for their actions, created through unambiguous and well-defined understanding of roles and responsibilities.
- **Representation and inclusion:** the partnership represents the interests and needs of key stakeholders through membership and delivery, ensuring advice services are accessible to all in Fife.
- **Addressing need:** a forum where service gaps and funding opportunities can be identified with potential for the partnership to pursue or highlight as appropriate.

The Partnership is responsible for the strategic oversight and co-ordination of the delivery of its two multi-agency projects which work to resolve complex issues around debt, money, housing, eviction/repossession and homelessness.

Ruth Young, Lead for Homeless Prevention (Frontline Fife) and Chair of the Fife Advice Partnership, commented, "The partnership works to deliver a comprehensive package of advice, information and representation to people and facilitates the improvement of outcomes and individual resilience."

The Fife Advice Partnership includes the following organisations:

- Frontline Fife Homelessness Services



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- Citizens Advice and Rights Fife
- Fife Council Housing
- The Fife Law Centre
- The Fife Rights Forum
- The Fife Housing Association Alliance – made up of Fife Housing Association, Kingdom Housing, Ore Valley Housing Association and Glen Housing Association
- The Fife Migrants Forum
- Fife Credit Unions

Action/Approach Taken

The partnership steering group meets quarterly to evaluate performance of the projects, monitor budgets and discuss and agree strategic priorities. Funding is a big issue for the partnership and a funding sub-group was formed to investigate options for the long-term continuation of the services delivered.

A Memorandum of Understanding and partnership agreements were established to set out partner responsibilities and the scope of activities that will be delivered. As lead partner, Frontline Fife holds overall responsibility for the management of the allocated funding, budgets and monitoring and reporting of activities to the Scottish Legal Aid Board. Individual partners are responsible for monitoring of the standard and quality of advice provision by their own staff in line with the appropriate regulatory requirements for their particular area of expertise.

As well as the steering group meetings, practitioners meet on a regular basis to review cases, share knowledge and information and discuss issues. This is reported back to the steering group to inform decision-making and strategic development.

Obstacles and Issues

Partnership working isn't easy. There were a number of challenges to overcome in order to meet funder requirements and ensure the services continue to be relevant. Improvements around joint caseworking and communication, case recording and monitoring, building working relationships and referral processes were made. Joint development meetings were organised to assist with this and to involve practitioners in informing the ways in which working could also be improved.

Results

The benefit to clients has been the main driver for the partnership. Ruth Young commented, "The partnership projects have a very high

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success rate in the prevention of evictions, whether through court representation or helping with debt. This has not only benefited the client, it has also benefited the local economy. Earlier intervention has been achieved due to a reduction in waiting times for services through the recruitment of specialist staff. Although the partnership anticipates demand to continue to increase due to the impact of Universal Credit (full service Universal Credit was introduced to Fife on 6 December 2017).

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Partners have also benefited from access to services. Beverley Graham, Housing Manager at Fife Housing Group (FHG), said, “Fife Housing Group has been involved with Fife Advice Partnership for a number of years. The partnership ensures that FHG can provide additional services to tenants and residents which it cannot provide direct. Being a partner in joint funding applications helps to ensure that there is a coordinated and consistent approach to maximise any funding bid and enables us to provide the best services possible.”

Lessons Learned

Fife Council has joint political leadership and elected members are having to work together more closely in the administration.

There is also more realisation that the council cannot deliver on everything and that there needs to be more support for the third sector. Ruth stated, “When the partnership was initially set up, it was difficult to anticipate every need and potential scenario. This resulted in issues further down the line around costs and added extra pressure on the funding. Assistance with this would have been extremely beneficial.”

Next Steps

Ruth Young commented, “We are about to enter into a new funding year and we have recently brought in a new partner to represent Fife Credit Unions. The partnership will continue to look at how it can secure future funding and increase its capacity to deliver the appropriate advice and support to the people of Fife.