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**COMMUNITY BASED ADVICE AND SUPPORT**  
**DARLINGTON HELP HUB**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. This report aims to update the committee on the work of the Community Based Advice and Support Group.

**Background**

2. Darlington Partnership Board received a report from the Poverty Reduction Task and Finish Group at its meeting of November 2013.
3. The group made a specific recommendation that agencies explore how comprehensive support is made available for people facing crisis due to poverty close to where they live through peripatetic outreach in community settings. The aim would be that people can get at one go:
  - (a) access to a food bank
  - (b) advice (debt, benefit, housing)
  - (c) access to the Credit Union
4. A group chaired by Tim Grant has been meeting since to progress. It determined that a phased roll out would be the best approach so that agencies didn't get overstretched and to allow for learning along the way.
5. The Council has recently opened a new Contact Centre at the Town Hall. In addition to access to Council services it also provides access to other support services. Darlington Credit Union and Darlington CAB provide services there. It has been agreed that the community outreach would be delivery 'spokes' with the Contact Centre as the hub. It was also agreed that the first places to be targeted would be those where there was a demonstrable need and where access to the town centre could be limited. Where possible venues will be used from where services are currently being provided.
6. The first place identified through analysis of the data and the experience of support agencies is Cockerton. With known pockets of need in the area there is an expectation that people from surrounding areas seen as more affluent may also use the services. The elected members for Cockerton joined the working group and identified and secured an appropriate venue.
7. Though the food bank has been operating from the King's Centre on Whesoe Road for some time, a need for a broader range of support has been recognised.

8. Darlington Help Hub provision is now provided at St Mary's Community Centre in Cockerton on Thursday afternoons and at the King's Centre on Monday afternoons involving Darlington Food Store, Darlington Credit Union, Darlington Citizen's Advice Bureau and the Council's Contact Centre staff. Feedback from the Contact Centre staff has been very positive and they have been able to resolve a number of long standing issues for individuals in relation to their council tax and housing needs and who have been very grateful for their support. The staff have been so struck by the level of need that they have started a food collection at the town hall which they are delivering to the food bank when they attend the session.
9. The CAB in the contact centre although not long up and running at the time of writing have seen 40 individuals in 18 days. They have been able to help those individuals prioritise their debts to prevent them from losing either housing or a vehicle essential to enable them to stay in employment. Resolve non-priority debts through payment arrangements. Assist individuals in applying for hardship payments and other benefits including children's disability benefit which they were entitled to but not claiming. In all cases arrangements have been made to enable council tax and housing rent to be paid by arrangement through the immediate connection with council staff. The pilot is at an early stage but initial feedback is positive.
10. Initial feedback therefore is that the pilots are proving successful and that they are significantly helping individuals with their circumstances. Effort is now being focused on promoting the provision. (see **appendix 1 and 2**)
11. The next proposed area to be addressed is Red Hall.
12. Darlington Borough Council has increased the funding of the Contact Centre provision to allow for 6 months outreach provision. The Community Based Advice and Support Group is now exploring other sources of funding to expand and prolong the provision.

## **Recommendation**

13. That the report be received

**Catherine Whitehead**  
**Assistant Director Chief Executive's**

Author: Seth Pearson extn 6090

## **Background Papers**

There were no other papers used in the preparation of this report other than those referred to

## Struggling to Cope?

- Are you struggling to cope with rising costs, household bills and reduction/changes to your income?
- Would you like help with access to free Money and Debt Advice?
- Do you want to learn more about how you can access local banking and saving options?
- Have you run out of food by the end of the week?

If you have answered yes to any of the above then why not come along to St. Mary's Community Centre in Cockerton. Where, you can access the support services of Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau, Darlington Credit Union and the Food Store who have joined forces with the Council's Customer Services team to deliver you support on your doorstep.

We can help with :-

- Debt problems
- Housing & Council Tax issues
- Benefits
- Opening a Bank Account

**Come along to:**

**Darlington Help Hub**  
**St Mary's Community Centre Newton Lane**  
**Cockerton East**  
**Thursdays**  
**1.00 p.m. to 3.00 p.m.**



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