Evaluation Explained

An Evaluation Framework for Frontline Housing Information & Advice Services

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Communities Scotland
Working for housing and regeneration

OUR OBJECTIVE IS TO IMPROVE THE SCOPE AND QUALITY OF HOUSING INFORMATION AND ADVICE THROUGHOUT SCOTLAND.

We aim to:

- identify and meet the needs of consumers
- improve the standard of housing information and advice provision.

HomePoint has an advisory committee with members drawn from a variety of backgrounds, including housing and consumer information, local authorities, voluntary agencies, legal, technical and financial organisations.

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HomePoint publications are available on request in large print, Braille or audio cassette format.

EVALUATION EXPLAINED

An Evaluation Framework for Frontline Housing Information & Advice Services

A Twelve Step Programme of Evaluation for commissioners, funders and providers of information and advice services

Prepared for **HomePoint** by
Michael Bell Associates in partnership with the **CMC Ltd**

January 2000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication was based upon an extensive research project undertaken through the Summer and Autumn of 1999. A detailed research report is available from Scottish Homes. Michael Bell Associates (MBA) in partnership with the Customer Management Consultancy (CMC LTD) undertook this research. The team involved in this project included:

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We would like to acknowledge the contribution of all of those agencies and individuals who participated in the research project. We would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the HomePoint staff and the Project Steering Group to this work:

Catherine Bradley
East Dunbartonshire CAB

Paul Brown
Legal Services Agency

Eleanor Clark
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Marieke Dwarshuis
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Ian Gerono
Perth & Kinross Council

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INTRODUCTION

About this publication

This publication is designed to provide assistance to funders and providers of frontline information and advice services in the assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of their services.

The publication is in two main parts:

- **Part One** provides a **Framework for Evaluation,** outlining the areas that should be included in any evaluation, why these are important and highlighting the steps that need to be taken to ensure an effective evaluation can be carried out.

- **Part Two** provides **Good Practice Guidance** on how to undertake an effective evaluation.

In addition, **Part Three** provides a **Resource** list and glossary of terms used in this publication.

It should be noted that this publication does not set out to be a good practice guide to running an information and advice service. More detailed information on general good practice in running services can be found in other manuals. In particular, this publication recommends making use of HomePoint's National Standards and Manual of Good Practice. HomePoint's National Standards have been subject to major review in 1999 and a new, revised edition of the Standards and Good Practice Manual will be available early in 2000.

About evaluation

Too often evaluation is seen as a technical exercise that funders commit to when uncertain about the work of the agencies they fund and providers submit to with reluctance. Whilst the process of evaluation is not easy it should be seen as an essential part of ensuring that services remain relevant, efficient and effective.

Even where an outside body undertakes the evaluation it is important that all parties understand why certain activities and processes are studied, how data is gathered and the way in which it is analysed. Without this understanding the capacity of agencies, be they funders or providers, to learn from the exercise is seriously compromised.

The purpose of evaluation is therefore to assess the effectiveness of an intervention or group of interventions and to measure any changes brought about by these interventions. In the context of, for example, advice to prevent homelessness, this means finding out what type of advice service was delivered, how it was delivered, and whether this did contribute to preventing homelessness. As such, it can be seen as a key tool in the planning and management of any information and advice service:

- For **funders**, this framework approaches evaluation as a practical tool to assist them in the assessment of the effectiveness of their past decisions and to inform future decisions

- For **providers**, this framework approaches evaluation as a practical tool to assist them in understanding how their service works in order to identify ways in which it may become more efficient, effective and relevant to the needs it seeks to address.

Evaluation should not merely be an auditing process. It should be about creating a learning environment. As such, it is important that the agency subject to the evaluation should be open to scrutiny, challenge and change. A partnership approach is likely to enhance these qualities, whereas coercion and imposition of evaluation are likely to minimise the opportunities for learning. The processes recommended in this publication seek to promote a partnership between the funders and the providers of services - informed by a better understanding of the needs of current or potential service users.

This framework includes tools for:

- Measuring inputs
- Identifying processes
- Measuring outputs
- Measuring outcomes.

Evaluation is not a substitute for monitoring. Whilst evaluation will make use of monitoring data it is an exercise that seeks to identify strategies for changing a given situation. It is a combination of hard and soft processes. Systems to gain hard data, such as statistics on service use, and soft intelligence, such as how the service user felt they were treated, need to be in place throughout the organisation and used as working tools in every day processes such as supervision. Evaluation provides the opportunity to assess how far these working tools contribute to meeting the underlying objectives of the service.

This framework recognises that organisations providing information and advice vary considerably in the resources that are available to them. We provide guidance on ensuring that any evaluation is proportionate to the size of the agency subject to such a study.

A note about best value

The new Best Value regime increases the importance of effective evaluation. Under the previous 'Compulsory Competitive Tendering' (CCT) regime the responsibility of the funder was to set service specifications and minimum standards, monitor these and ensure value for money through a competitive tendering process. Whilst most funding of advice agencies was not part of a CCT process, the culture of CCT did effect the way in which such services were funded.

Best Value seeks to move away from set standards to a culture of constant improvement. Best Value requires programmes that can:

- **Challenge** the purpose of a service
- **Compare** performance
- **Consult** its users
- **Provide** for competition.

This framework is designed to be compatible with these requirements. Evaluation can be a tool to assist in both the analysis of existing performance and to inform the setting of targets for improved performance and greater efficiency.

Before starting

The framework has been developed primarily as a tool for evaluating existing services. As with all systems it assumes a number of minimum operating requirements. These include:

- **Clear service objectives** – It is essential that it is clear what a service hopes to achieve before it can be assessed as to how effectively it is meeting that objective. For example, if a service does not have clear objectives should it be assessed on how well it has assisted people in meeting their debts, raised income for the local area or trained volunteers for employment?
- **Appropriate monitoring information** - It is essential that there is sufficient statistical information, related to the service's objectives, before any assessment can be made. For example, if a service has decided that it wants to prioritise meeting the advice needs of women it will need to gather statistics on the gender of its service users.

If these minimum requirements are absent, we suggest ways in both **Part Two** of this publication and in HomePoint's National Standards Manual on how these may be put in place. This will add time to any evaluation, but should not be seen as reason for not proceeding with an evaluation.

Similarly, whilst the publication is designed specifically for evaluating existing services there are elements within the Framework that may be adapted as planning tools for new services. Again, these are highlighted in the Good Practice Guide.

PART ONE – THE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The twelve step programme in summary

It is important to stress that the steps in this framework are designed to be sequential. Each step builds upon the data and processes in previous steps to provide a full picture of the service that is being evaluated.

Step One - Getting Started

This step contains the areas that will need to be considered before commencing an evaluation.

Step Two – Measuring Inputs

This step identifies the 'inputs' that will need to be analysed in evaluating the service.

Step Three – Assessing Priorities for the Service

This step seeks to identify the priorities for the service and to look at how these are established.

Step Four – Assessing Relevance

In this step the evaluation seeks to assess how well the service is meeting the needs identified in Step Three.

Step Five – Identifying Processes

This step aims to identify the systems and processes behind the delivery of the service.

Step Six – Assessing Processes

This step seeks to test whether the processes are working as intended and identify how current and potential service users perceive the service.

Step Seven – Measuring Outputs

This step seeks to identify what the service delivers.

Step Eight – Assessing Outputs

This step is designed to test whether the information and/or advice provided is accurate and timely.

Step Nine – Measuring Outcomes

This step aims to measure the impact of the service.

Step Ten – Assessing Value

This step assesses the value of the service by comparing costs to either other similar services or to other types of intervention.

Step Eleven – Assessing Effectiveness (Conclusions)

This step brings together the data from earlier steps to allow for final assessment and conclusions.

Step Twelve – Identifying Learning (Recommendations)

This step seeks to identify the learning from the evaluation. It provides the recommendations for future action.

STEP ONE – GETTING STARTED

This step contains the areas that will need to be considered before commencing an evaluation. It is important to spend time at this stage of the evaluation in order that all stakeholders will contribute, understand and learn from the process.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Who should be involved and what role should they play?

What does the evaluation seek to find out about the service?

Who should undertake the evaluation?

What methods should be used in the evaluation?

How much will this cost and how long should the evaluation take?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Discussion

Negotiation

Desk research

STEP TWO – MEASURING INPUTS

This step identifies the ‘inputs’ that will need to be analysed in evaluating the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

How much does the service cost?

What are the staff resources (both paid and unpaid) that go into providing the service?

What qualifications do staff providing the service require?

What information resources go into providing the service?

How much use does it make of information technology?

What other support does the service need/receive?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research (including a questionnaire to supplement existing information if required)

Discussion/interviews

STEP THREE – ASSESSING PRIORITIES FOR THE SERVICE

This step seeks to identify the priorities for the service and to look at how these are established.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

How does the service establish need e.g. what indicators of need does it use?

How does it determine its priorities?

Does it have target communities and, if so, how does it identify target communities?

How does the service identify gaps in the service?

How does the service promote itself and how does it manage demand?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Interviews with service providers

Interviews with funders

Desk research

STEP FOUR – ASSESSING RELEVANCE

In this step the evaluation seeks to assess how well the service is meeting the needs identified in Step Three.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What is the profile of the local community, or the profile of users that the service wishes to meet?

How does the actual profile of service users compare to this?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research into local profiles and

Desk research into statistical service user data, or

Generating service user data for analysis

STEP FIVE – IDENTIFYING PROCESSES

This step aims to identify the systems and processes behind the delivery of the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What policies and procedures (standards) does the service have in place to ensure a quality service?

Are these systems adequate?

Are they understood and complied with by the staff working in the agency?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research/audit of written systems

Verification of policies and procedures in service practice

Interviews with staff operating the systems

STEP SIX – ASSESSING PROCESSES

This step seeks to test whether the processes are working as intended and identify how current and potential service users perceive the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

How (physically and psychologically) accessible is the service for current and potential service users?

How are service users treated by the service?

What do service users think about the information or advice received?

The main methodological tools for this step are dependent upon the systems in the agency which track service user satisfaction. Tools may include:

Desk research into service statistics

Consultation/Interviews with current or potential service users

Mystery Shopping

STEP SEVEN – MEASURING OUTPUTS

This step seeks to identify what the service delivers.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What type of information and advice is offered and what advice topics are covered?

What is the quantity of information and advice offered (by type and topic)?

What methods does the service use to deliver the different types of advice?

What relationship does the service have with other service providers?

What does the service do around social policy issues?

What else does the service do?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research into service statistics (or separate survey to generate data)

Interviews with the staff providing the service

Interviews with staff and in other agencies

STEP EIGHT – ASSESSING OUTPUTS

This step is designed to test whether the information and/or advice provided is accurate and timely.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Was the information/advice accurate?

Did it cover all that was needed?

If not, did the service provide for effective referral?

Was the service provided in an accessible format in order that the service user could make use of it?

The main methodological tools for this step are dependent upon the systems in the agency which track service user satisfaction. Tools may include:

Desk research into service statistics (e.g. exit surveys)

Consultation/Interviews with current or potential service users

File review

Mystery Shopping

STEP NINE – MEASURING OUTCOMES

This step aims to measure the impact of the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Did the intervention make a difference to the person?

If so how, and what systems do they have in place to find out if it's immediate or longer lasting?

Does the organisation/service make a difference to the community (community of interest)?

If so, how and what systems do they have in place to find out if it's immediate or longer lasting?

The main methodological tools for this step are dependent upon the systems in the agency which track service user satisfaction. Tools may include:

Desk research into service statistics

File review

Consultation/Interviews with current or potential service users

Mystery Shopping

STEP TEN – ASSESSING VALUE

This step assesses the value of this service by comparing costs to either other similar services or to other types of intervention.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What was the unit cost of the service?

How does this compare to other service providers?

How does this unit cost compare to other types of intervention?

Tools may include:

Desk research into service statistics

Unit cost comparisons

Opportunity cost analysis

STEP ELEVEN – ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS (CONCLUSIONS)

This step seeks to assess the overall effectiveness of the service provided.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Does the present service still meet need – is it relevant?

Does it make a difference to the problem – is it effective?

Does it add or detract from local resources and does it account for resources in an efficient way?

What would make it better?

How can it be improved?

Tools may include:

Review of purpose of the evaluation

Collation and analysis of research findings

Discussion

STEP TWELVE – IDENTIFYING LEARNING (RECOMMENDATIONS)

This step seeks to identify the learning from the evaluation.

This step aims to conclude the evaluation. At this step the evaluation should be able to answer the questions posed at the start of the evaluation, in particular:

What works, what doesn't and why?

What needs to be done, and by whom, to meet any deficiencies?

The main methodological tools include:

Discussion

Work planning

PART TWO – GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES

STEP ONE – GETTING STARTED

This step contains the areas that will need to be considered before commencing an evaluation. It is important to spend time at this stage of the evaluation in order that all stakeholders will contribute, understand and learn from the process.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Who should be involved and what role should they play?

What does the evaluation seek to find out about the service?

Who should undertake the evaluation?

What methods should be used in the evaluation?

How much will this cost and how long should the evaluation take?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Discussion
Negotiation
Desk research

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

Identify the Range of Possible Stakeholders

Clarify the Purpose of the Evaluation

Construct a Steering Group

Agree Objectives

Agree a Common Language

Agree the Tools for Assessment

Identify Existing Information Sources

Set a Budget

Select the Type of Evaluator

Agree a Timetable

Identifying the range of possible stakeholders

The first task is to agree who the stakeholders in the service are and who the stakeholders in the evaluation may be. These are likely to be drawn from the following groups:

- The funders of the service – this may include the principal funder and any others who contribute significant sums to support the work
- The agency itself – will you want to include paid managers, paid and unpaid staff, management committee members
- Other agencies – this may include those that refer clients to the service or those that accept referrals from the agency
- Past, current and potential service users.

Clarifying the purpose of the evaluation

The second task is to agree the purpose of the evaluation, that is, what questions the evaluation is designed to answer. The different stakeholders are likely to want the evaluation to answer different questions. Not all of the possible questions are likely to be answered by a single evaluation.

The key questions this framework seeks to address are:

- Does the present service still address the problem?
- Is it effective?
- Does it still meet need – is it relevant?
- Does it add to or detract from local resources?
- Does it account for resources in an efficient and effective way?
- What needs to be improved?
- How can it be improved?

In considering these questions the stakeholders in the evaluation will need to discuss and agree what is meant, in the context of the service being evaluated, by terms such as ‘efficient’, ‘effective’ and ‘relevant’. Throughout this section of the publication we make suggestions as to definitions. However, it is important to note that these are not absolutes, but will vary from service to service depending upon just what that service wishes to achieve. These issues should be revisited and finalised once the Steering Group overseeing the evaluation is established (see the next task in this step below).

This section contains some of the questions that an evaluation may seek to answer. The nature of the questions that are prioritised should shape the nature of the evaluation.

Questions that funders may ask include:

- Does the problem identified as needing an advice intervention still require this sort of intervention?
- Does the present service still address this problem?
- Is it effective?
- What would the impact be of closing the service or doing nothing?
- Are there alternative ways of seeing the same end at less cost?

Questions providers may ask include:

- Does the current service provide a basis for the strategic development of the organisation?
- Does it still meet need?
- Can it account for its resources in an efficient and effective way?
- What needs to be improved?
- How can it be improved?

Other agencies may ask:

- Does it add to or detract from local resources?
- Does it meet a real need?
- How does the way the service provider acts impact upon the way in which others deliver their services?
- Are there ways other agencies could be better served?

Service users may ask:

- Was it easy to access the service?
- Were the waiting times reasonable?
- Did they provide me with a solution to my problem that was practical?
- Was all the information needed to progress the matter provided?

Constructing a Steering Group

The third task is to construct a Steering Group that will oversee the progress of the evaluation. The Steering Group will be drawn from the range of stakeholders identified earlier. This task involves agreeing which of the stakeholders will be involved in the evaluation, and the extent of their involvement, e.g. are they to be subjects of study or are they to be active players in determining the shape of the evaluation.

Each of these choices will be dependent upon the purpose of the evaluation and the questions it seeks to answer. For example, if the evaluation’s main aim is to see how things could be improved the service provider is likely to be a key player. Alternatively, if the evaluation seeks to address the issue of whether the problem still needs an advice intervention the role of the funder is likely to be greater in the stakeholder group.

There may be a need when considering the roles of members of the Steering Group to agree to exclude some from participation in certain aspects of future discussions. If, for example, mystery shopping is to be used it would be inappropriate for service provider representatives to be aware of the exact nature of the enquiry that is to be tested in their agency.

Agreeing objectives

The fourth task is to identify the objectives of the service that are subject to evaluation. The different constituencies identified above may have different objectives for the same service.

In considering the objectives for any service, and, therefore, the terms of reference for any evaluation, it is important to be aware of the differing constituencies and what they may wish the service to achieve.

These will form the outcomes from the service's activities that the evaluation will assess. For example, if the aim of the service is to maximise the income of its service users then the outcomes the evaluation will seek to identify relate to this aim. However, if the aim of the service is to empower its users to take control of their lives the outcomes the evaluation will seek to identify may relate to, for example, changes in the level of community activism.

The objectives of the service may also provide the basis for comparison between different types of services or interventions to meet the same end. If, for example, the aim of the service is to alleviate homelessness it may be valid to compare the service's outcomes with those of a hostel.

In establishing the objectives it is important to distinguish between the aims of the service and the activity applied to meet those aims.

Agreeing the definitions of advice

The fifth task should be agreeing a common language. In undertaking an evaluation there needs to be a clear understanding about all of the terms used.

There is not a nationally agreed definition of advice that is accepted by all agencies. The definitions we suggest are drawn from HomePoint's Standards and are broadly compatible with other definitions.

Similarly, it is important that there is common understanding of the data that is collected. In one recent advice review one agency which counted clients/cases was compared to another that counted enquiries. At first sight the second agency appeared to be many times more productive until the reviewer discovered that the agency claimed that each client brought an average of 16 separate enquiries per visit.

Part Three of this publication contains a glossary of terms and definitions of types of advice and terms for the recording of data.

Agreeing the tools for assessment

The sixth task is to agree the tools for the evaluation. It is important for the evaluation Steering Group to decide what they will investigate, how they will investigate and any indicators that they will use in making their assessments.

It should also include agreeing the baseline standards that provide the backdrop to evaluation. This framework recommends use of the National Standards produced by HomePoint. However, other standards may be relevant and these should be agreed prior to commencing the evaluation.

All tasks or tools for assessment should be itemised, allocated and timetabled. These should be circulated and agreed by all members of the Steering Group.

Identifying existing information sources

The seventh task is to identify what information the service currently generates that may be of use in the evaluation. This could include statistical information on activities or service users or evidence of how the service works with other providers.

The amount of information available will affect both the budget and time-scale for the evaluation.

Setting a budget

The eighth task is to agree a budget. This will impact upon the range of methodological tools that may be applied.

The budget needs to be proportionate to the size of the service under review. As a rule of thumb we suggest that the budget should be equivalent to between 5% and 10% of the service's annual budget. (Assuming that this is an activity that takes place once every three years the actual proportion spent upon evaluation is therefore between one and four per cent of the overall spend on the service. If it is an activity that takes place more often the cost of each evaluation should be reduced as data collection systems are likely to be more sophisticated.)

This amount should be increased if the service is a pilot service. It needs to be proportionate not only to the service under review but to the scale of future investment should the pilot be developed elsewhere. The rule of thumb we suggest here is between 10% and 25% of the service's annual budget. This should include researching the baseline position before the service starts and establishing the data set for both the evaluation and for general management information gathering.

The sums required will be affected by the type of evaluators that are applied to the task. However, in considering the issue of using internal evaluators rather than external evaluators the 'opportunity cost' of this option should be considered (e.g. what the staff could be doing if they were not undertaking this evaluation).

This framework suggests that evaluation should be seen as a standard management tool, as integral to the provision of services as the requirement to produce annual accounts or maintain staff records. As such it should be considered a responsibility of the funder when funding any service. However, the nature of the questions that the evaluation is designed to address will determine whether this should be included in existing funding arrangements to service providers or a separate budget held by the funder for the purpose. For example, if the questions tend toward those that address a funder's concerns (see Task 2 'Clarifying the Purpose of the Evaluation' page 11) it is probably appropriate that the budget should rest with the funder, and the obverse is true where the questions relate to those of the providing agency.

Selecting the type of evaluator

The ninth task is to select the type of evaluator or evaluators that are required. There are two key options at this stage. Is the evaluation to be undertaken internally or externally? Each of these then leads to the need to decide upon the type of evaluator appointed.

The factors that may need to be considered in reaching these decisions include:

- Is there a need for the process to be seen as independent?
- Are the skills available to undertake the work with sufficient rigour?
- Is there a need for the work to be seen as rigorous (e.g. using a recognised expert in the field to add weight to the conclusions)?

The other dynamic affecting the evaluation is the standpoint of the evaluators themselves. Past experiences shape the way in which anyone sees the world and will impact upon the view taken of various data. That is, where we are and what we do shapes and constrains what we can know.

Therefore there is the need for a cultural fit between the Steering Group, the evaluator(s) and the subject(s) of evaluation. Because of the different cultures prevalent in the different constituencies this may be easier to balance in a team approach. The process of selecting the evaluators, involving a range of stakeholders in drawing up the brief and assessing the tenders may assist in ensuring a cultural fit.

If the way in which the evaluator(s), the commissioners and the subjects of evaluation see the world is similar and compatible there is a better chance of the evaluation being a learning tool rather than merely an audit of past activity.

Agreeing a timetable

The tenth task is to agree an appropriate timetable for the evaluation. In agreeing this time-table it will be important to consider the range of information already available, the tools that are to be utilised in undertaking the evaluation and the impact of the evaluation on service provision.

The questions that an evaluation may be required to address are complex and sufficient time to consider these should be set aside. Similarly, in most circumstances, the agency being evaluated will still continue to provide their service during the research. The impact upon service delivery must be factored into any timetable agreed.

STEP TWO – MEASURING INPUTS

This step identifies the inputs that will need to be analysed in evaluating the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

How much does the service cost?

What are the staff resources (both paid and unpaid) that go into providing the service?

What qualifications do staff providing the service require?

What information resources go into providing the service?

How much use does it make of information technology?

What other support does the service need/receive?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research (including a questionnaire to supplement existing information if required)

Discussion/interviews

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

What method will be used to gather the data? Interviews, questionnaire, existing statistical information?

What are the issues that can be covered in a questionnaire?

What are the issues that will need to be covered in interviews?

Do these methods provide data to cover all areas?

Financial

In this section the evaluation should identify:

- The level of funding
- Sources of funding
- Purpose of funding
- Value of donations/funding in kind (e.g. free/low rent premises).

Staffing

In this section the evaluation should identify:

- The number of paid staff (expressed as number of Full Time Equivalent posts)
- The roles/job descriptions of paid staff – in particular the number of advice hours

- Any external measures of competence of paid staff
- Employment costs
- The number of volunteer staff
- The roles of volunteer staff – in particular available advice hours
- Associated costs such as pensions
- Staff competencies – SVQs or other training and at what level
- Sources of training
- Supervision and support systems
- The numbers of trainees
- The role of trainees – in particular their impact upon available advice hours.

Information resources

In this section the evaluation should seek to identify:

- Sources of information
- Costs/budget for information
- Access to, and use of, IT resources.

Leverage and other support

In this section the evaluation should:

- Quantify the value of volunteer input
- Seek to identify the support costs of the service such as premises, central administrative support, etc.
- Seek to identify and quantify any other external support such as access to secondary advice services.

Measuring inputs – Questionnaire template

We provide a template questionnaire that could be completed by service providers that addresses these questions:

Financial Information

Source of funding	£	Purpose of funding

Donations in Kind

E.g. free premises but not volunteer input.

Type of donation	Estimated annual value

Staffing

How many paid staff are employed by your organisation?

______ Number of full-time staff

______ Number of part-time staff

______ Total staff hours per week

Further details of the staff that are involved in providing advice services to the public

Post (job title)	Salary Scale/Grade	No. of hours per week	Brief description of duties	Training/Qualifications required or trainee status

What is your organisation's total annual staffing budget including Employers' Contributions and Pension costs?

£ ____________________

Information Resources

Which information resources do you use to ensure that your advice is accurate and up to date?

What is your annual budget for information?

£ ____________________

What use do you make of Information Technology?

What use do you make of computers in your agency? *(Please tick all boxes that apply)*

- ❑ For word-processing (letters and reports)
- ❑ For keeping case records
- ❑ For monitoring the use of the service
- ❑ For keeping financial information (e.g. Budgets and Accounts)
- ❑ Storing information to be used by staff
- ❑ Storing information to be accessed by the general public
- ❑ None, we do not have any people trained in using computers
- ❑ None, we do not have any computers
- ❑ Other (please specify) ____

Leverage

Do you use volunteers in your advice service?

- ❑ Yes
- ❑ No

If yes, please tell us about the number of volunteers in your organisation.

______ Number of volunteers

______ Total number of volunteer hours per week

Please provide us with details of other support provided to your service from other parts of your organisation (e.g. central administrative support, management, etc.)

Please tell us about other external support your service receives (e.g. access to secondary advice services, support from an umbrella organisation, etc.)

STEP THREE – ASSESSING PRIORITIES FOR THE SERVICE

This step seeks to identify the priorities for the service and to look at how these are established.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

How does the service establish need e.g. what indicators of need does it use?

How does it determine its priorities?

Does it have target communities and, if so, how does it identify target communities?

How does the service identify any gaps in service?

How does the service promote itself and how does it manage demand?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Interviews with service providers

Interviews with funders

Desk research

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

In this section the issues the evaluation should identify are:

- Methods used by the service to establish need
- Methods used by the service to determine priorities
- Methods used by the service to target particular communities
- Methods used by the service to identify gaps in service
- Strategies for managing demand
- Promotion strategies.

Who is to be interviewed to assess purpose?

Do these interviews provide all of the information needed to establish the purpose?

Do these interviews provide you with details of the systems the service has in place to meet this purpose?

- ❖ Methods to establish need

This seeks to identify what evidence backs up the need that the service seeks to address. For example, is this based upon an internal or external needs analysis, part of a national programme of services, local demand, etc.

- ❖ Methods to determine priorities

This seeks to identify how the service determines its priorities. For example, why the service seeks to address family breakdown rather than housing disrepair cases.

- ❖ Methods to target particular communities

How the service determines particular target communities. For example, whether it seeks to work with particular black or minority ethnic communities and how it goes about this.

- ❖ Methods to identify gaps in service

This may include looking at why a service has a disproportionately low number of young people using the service.

- ❖ Strategies for managing demand

Most advice services struggle to meet demand from the public. Restricting opening hours is perhaps the most common means of managing demand. However, the hours chosen to deliver the service may restrict access to certain groups. For example, a service that provides a drop-in facility during office hours may be inadvertently ensuring that people in low income jobs who often find it difficult to take time off work cannot use their service.

❖ Promotion strategies

Because of the level of demand many agencies are reluctant to ‘advertise’ their services. Again this may have the effect of ensuring that only those that already know about the service make use of it – these may not be those in greatest need. Investigation of how services promote themselves to such communities and individuals is therefore a critical part of the data that must be collected for an assessment of ‘relevance’.

STEP FOUR – ASSESSING RELEVANCE

In this step the evaluation seeks to assess how well the service is meeting the needs identified in Step Three above.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What is the profile of the local community or the profile of users that the service wishes to meet?

How does the actual profile of service users compare to this?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research into local profiles, **and**

Desk research into statistical service user data, **or**

Generating service user data for analysis

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

What is the geographical catchment for the service?

What is the target client group for the service?

Can the local authority supply all of the relevant demographic data for this area?

Does the service gather data that corresponds to these community profiles?

If yes, are there discrepancies and can these be explained by the agency’s specific purpose?

If no, what mechanisms will be used to gather this data?

Have the Steering Group discussed this data?

The Steering Group should agree the catchment for the service. This will be both geographical and by client type (for those on low incomes, etc.). For local advice centres this may include up to four local authority wards that represent where the majority of service users come from.

Local authority data should be used to gain a profile of the community in these wards on the basis of:

- Gender
- Age
- Income or employment status
- Disability
- Race
- Tenure
- Family composition.

Annual figures for service users within the service should be gathered and tested against these categories. Allowance should be made for any targeting of services identified in Step Three above. For example, if the service is primarily working with women one would expect the profile of service users to vary from the local community profile in this regard.

If the service does not gather this data on a routine basis a system for gathering a snapshot of service use will be required. This may be particularly the case for services primarily offering an information only service. The effort in gathering this data will detract from the time available for service delivery, but should not be seen as a distraction from service delivery as it is a means of measuring and ensuring relevance. We suggest that service users should be asked these questions for one week per quarter to create a sample. The gathering of this data is often a task that can be completed by reception staff, providing them with a valuable opportunity to contribute to the work of the agency and place service users at ease.

Discrepancies between the community profile and the service user profile (allowing for any targeting of communities) should be reported and discussed by the evaluation Steering Group.

PRO FORMA CLIENT PROFILE FORM

Characteristic	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total for Week commencing…
Male						
Female						
Under 16						
17 – 24 years						
25 – 59 years						
60 + years						
Employed						
Unemployed						
Registered Disabled						
African						
Afro Caribbean						
Asian						
Chinese						
White UK						
White Other						
Private rented						
Public sector rented						
Home owner/ mortgagee						

Other characteristics may be added dependent upon the needs and work of the service.

STEP FIVE – IDENTIFYING PROCESSES

This step aims to identify the systems and processes behind the delivery of the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What policies and procedures (standards) does the service have in place to ensure a quality service?

Are these systems adequate?

Are they understood and complied with by the staff working in the agency?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research/audit of written systems

Verification of policies and procedures in service practice

Interviews with staff operating the systems

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

What standards will be used to assess the processes of the agency?

Which items will require verification?

Are there areas where the service does not comply with the standards?

Have these areas, and the reasons for non-compliance, been discussed with the Steering Group?

This section aims to look at the standards of service operated by agencies. We suggest that the National Standards published by HomePoint be used as the benchmark against which agencies are tested.

The main methodological tools here are interview and verification of data, e.g. looking at the systems the service claims to have in place.

The National Standards published by HomePoint contain a check-list for auditing purposes that can be used or adapted for this step. If these are not used we suggest that the evaluators should consider the following areas:

General management – the systems to ensure accountability

Planning of services – those systems that ensure the service is 'fit to trade'

Customer Care – those systems that ensure that service users are treated well

Technical issues – those systems that ensure that the advice or information is accurate and appropriate

Competencies for staff and agencies – those that ensure that staff are able to deliver a quality service

The level of sophistication required of service providers will be dependent upon the nature of the service that they seek to provide. Guidance on appropriate standards is contained in the National Standards published by HomePoint.

STEP SIX – ASSESSING PROCESSES

This step seeks to test whether the processes are working as intended and identify how current and potential service users perceive the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

How (physically and psychologically) accessible is the service for current and potential service users?

How are service users treated by the service?

What do service users think about the information or advice received?

The main methodological tools for this step are dependent upon the systems in place in the agency regarding tracking service user satisfaction. Tools may include:

Desk research into service statistics

Consultation/interviews with current or potential service users

Mystery Shopping

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

Which approach(es) will be used to test processes?

Are there priority communities that will be researched?

Does this produce a picture of the ease of access to the service for individuals from different communities?

Does this produce a picture of how the customer care aspects of the service are experienced by service users?

Desk research undertaken in **Step Four – Assessing Relevance** will have identified who is using the service and who is not.

The most straightforward approach is to ask the recipient of the advice what happened. It does not allow for an assessment of the technical competence.

Both current and potential service users should be asked a range of more qualitative questions regarding how responsive and helpful they found the service. There are a number of methods of doing this and all of them will require careful preparation. The following list of approaches is not exclusive:

- **One to one interviews** – with service users
- **Focus groups** – comprising groups of local people. Focus groups of distinct communities where the participants are likely to have some common experiences, such as disabled people, lone parents, etc. are often effective for this type of approach.

These approaches should be used to test views on accessibility, customer care and the profile of agencies (e.g. barriers and obstacles to use).

- In addition, services may conduct **exit surveys** that identify service users, views of the accessibility and customer care issues of the service provided. It is unlikely that services will undertake these with all service users. However, we recommend that these should be undertaken for all service users for at least one week in every quarter. During the survey period services should mail all users after closing a case or after a major advice intervention (whether the case has been closed or not). Follow-up letters should be sent if no response is received within 15 days.

An alternative or complementary method of testing these issues is:

- **Mystery Shopping** – where an actor, equipped with an invented history and problem, accesses the service and reports on access arrangements and customer care.

The more extensive the consultations the more detailed the evaluation will be of how the processes of delivering the service, impact upon the service user.

STEP SEVEN – MEASURING OUTPUTS

This step seeks to identify what the service delivers.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What type of information and advice is offered and what advice topics are covered?

What is the quantity of information and advice offered (by type and topic)?

What methods does the service use to deliver the different types of advice?

What relationship does the service have with other service providers?

What does the service do around social policy issues?

What else does the service do?

The main methodological tools for this step are:

Desk research into service statistics (or separate survey to generate data)

Interviews with the staff providing the service

Interviews with staff and in other agencies

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

What data can be covered for the service's statistics?

Does this need to be supplemented by a survey?

What will need to be explored in interviews?

What data will need external verification?

Does this produce an accurate picture of the advice outputs?

Does this produce an accurate picture of the methods of delivery and the time associated with the different approaches?

Are there any special factors (such as complexity, dealing with people for whom English is not a first language, etc.)?

How does the service work with others in the area?

What does the service contribute to the development of social policy?

What other outputs are there from the service?

This section looks at the service outputs: what do they do, how much do they do it, and when do they do it. Again, we would stress the need for a common language and recommend use of the defini-tions provided in Part Three of this publication.

The first stage of this would be undertaken in interviews and by data provided by the agency.

Advice outputs

The evaluation should gather:

- Statistics based upon the types of advice identified above and on the basis of enquiries, episodes and/or client numbers
- This should be categorised by different advice topics.

ADVICE OUTPUTS TEMPLATE

Either Enquiries Episodes or Cases	TYPE I (information & sign-posting only)	TYPE II (casework)	TYPE III (advocacy & representation)
Homelessness			
Housing Benefits			
Disrepair			
Harassment			
Other advice topics			
...			
...			

Please note the advice topics are not a definitive list. The list developed should reflect the work of the service.

Methods of delivery

The evaluation also needs to be able to develop a picture of how services are delivered. The key questions are covered in the template below:

METHODS OF DELIVERY TEMPLATE

Either Enquiries Episodes or Cases	TYPE I (information & sign-posting only)	TYPE II (casework)	TYPE III (advocacy & representation)
Telephone			
From advice centre			
From sub-office e.g. where back-up resources available			
From other people's venues where no back-up resources exist			
In people's homes			
Others (please specify)			

If possible this should include the proportion of time spent on each method of delivery and the volume of work for each method.

It is also important that the evaluation identifies when the service is provided:

HOURS OF SERVICE TEMPLATE

When is your advice service normally available? **Please complete all appropriate boxes.**			
	MORNING	**AFTERNOON**	**AFTER 6PM**
MONDAY			
TUESDAY			
WEDNESDAY			
THURSDAY			
FRIDAY			
SATURDAY			
SUNDAY			

Links with other agencies

The evaluation section should seek to identify the referral networks used by the service provider.

Written indicators may include:

- Formal written agreements
- Pro-forma referral sheets
- Common standards of service.

It may be appropriate to verify these networks by interviews with the external bodies used for referral. Such interviews may be undertaken over the telephone, but these bodies would need to be assured that any comments made would be unattributable.

Social policy

The evaluation also needs to be able to identify what the service does in the social policy area and who knows about this work. We have included our definition of 'Social Policy' in **Part Three** of this publication.

This may be undertaken by asking the service to identify what it does in terms of social policy work and assessing the impact in external interviews with relevant agencies.

Other outputs

The evaluation also needs to be able to identify what other products or services are delivered. Again, the benefit could be tested by appending questions about these other outputs to the interviews with the intended recipients such as other agencies, local authority, service users, etc. To ensure the engagement of these outside bodies and individuals it may be necessary to ensure that comments are unattributable.

STEP EIGHT – ASSESSING OUTPUTS

This step is designed to test whether the information and/or advice provided is accurate and timely.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Was the information/advice accurate?

Did it cover all that was needed?

If not, did the service provide for effective referral?

Was the service provided in an accessible format in order that the service user could make use of it?

The main methodological tools for this step are dependent upon the systems in place in the agency regarding tracking service user satisfaction. Tools may include:

Desk research into service statistics (e.g. exit surveys)

Consultation/interviews with current or potential service users

File review

Mystery shopping

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

What data does the service already collate?

Which other approach(es) will be used to measure the outputs?

Does this provide a picture of the accuracy of the information or advice provided by the service?

Much of the desk research undertaken in **Step Four – Assessing Relevance** will be of use in undertaking this step of the evaluation. However, a more qualitative approach is required to supplement this data.

Whilst the processes may be similar to those in **Step Six,** and, indeed, may be undertaken at the same time, the questions will be different.

Again, both current and potential service users should be asked a range of more qualitative questions, this time to assess the usefulness and appropriateness of the advice itself. The processes used in this step may also be used in **Step Six** with specific questions designed to elicit the necessary information.

Both current and potential service users should be asked a range of more qualitative questions regarding how responsive and helpful they found the service. There are a number of methods of doing this; all of them will require careful preparation. The processes are similar to those in **Step Six** above, however, the questions asked through these methods will need to address service users' views of the accuracy and appropriateness of advice provided.

The methods include:

One to one interviews – with service users.

Focus groups – drawn from locally determined priority communities.

Exit surveys of either all service users or regular samples of service users.

As with **Step Six,** an alternative or complementary method of testing these issues is:

Mystery Shopping – where the actor, equipped with an invented history and problem, accesses the service as outlined in **Step Six,** and also produces a report on the accuracy and appropriateness of the information or advice received.

In addition the accuracy of the advice may be tested through:

File review – this will look at a sample of case records and assess the adequacy of record keeping and test the accuracy of advice given. There are a number of ways in which this can be undertaken as part of an evaluation. These include the use of peer reviewers from neighbouring agencies or the use of outsiders with 'expert' knowledge in that particular area of law. It is important that such reviews are undertaken in line with the service's confidentiality policy (it should be noted that if a service's policy does not permit outside scrutiny where the aim is to ensure a quality service there is probably something wrong with that policy!).

STEP NINE – MEASURING OUTCOMES

This step aims to measure the impact of the service.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Did the intervention make a difference to the person's problem ?

If so how, and what systems are in place to find out if it is immediate or longer lasting?

Does the organisation/service make a difference to the community (community of interest)?

If so, how and what systems do they have in place to find out if it's immediate or longer lasting?

The main methodological tools for this step are dependent upon the systems in place in the agency regarding tracking service user satisfaction. Tools may include:

Desk research into service statistics

File review

Consultation/Interviews with current or potential service users

Mystery Shopping

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

Revisit the aims of the service.

Are there any other outcomes that the service measures?

Does the service currently track service users' experiences of using the service and any advice outcomes?

If yes, does this provide all of the data needed to assess outcomes?

If no, can tracking mechanisms be established for a sample of users, and what time-scale will this report in?

Does this provide a picture of the difference the intervention makes to the individual?

Does this provide a picture of the difference the intervention makes to a community (or particular community of interest)?

As with earlier steps, the most straightforward approach is to ask the recipient of the advice what happened. This should allow the evaluators to see whether the advice was appropriate for the client, given in a way that was useful to them and whether they acted upon it and what then happened.

The processes for this step may include:

- **Follow-up surveys** – where service users are contacted at a predetermined time after their case has been closed to find out what happened as a result of the advice. Assessment of file notes where outcomes are recorded (likely in the event of court tribunal action)
- **Focus groups** or one to one interviews – with past service users identified.

In all cases it should be noted that a positive outcome should include not only a successful resolution of the problem, but also where a successful outcome is not possible, that the service user understands why their problem cannot be resolved. For example, if someone seeks assistance around rehousing but they are not eligible for rehousing a positive outcome would be that they understood why they were not eligible for rehousing.

In addition, there may be external indicators of the outcome of interventions depending upon the work of the agency. For example, an agency may be able to identify a change in the administration of Housing Benefit as a result of its interventions. For others, there may be financial measures of local community gain, for example, many welfare benefits advice agencies identify the financial gain to their area from their interventions.

These external measures will be dependent upon the service provided and the indicators for outcome measures should be agreed before commencing the evaluation.

STEP TEN – ASSESSING VALUE

This step assesses the value of this service by comparing costs to either other similar services or to other types of intervention.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

What was the unit cost of the service?

How does this compare to other service providers?

How does this unit cost compare to other types of intervention?

The main methodological tools include:

Desk research into service statistics

Unit cost comparisons

Opportunity cost analysis

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

What will be used as a benchmark for the unit costs of the service?

Is there sufficient data to compare the costs of the service to the benchmark?

If there are significant differences in terms of the service being more expensive:

- Recheck the data to ensure that it was accurate; in particular, have you cross-checked against staffing levels and ensured that it is clear that episodes rather than cases are being counted
- Consider reasons why it may be more expensive (e.g. greater complexity, different methods of delivery).

If it is considerably cheaper:

- Recheck the data to ensure that it was accurate[1], in particular, have you cross-checked against staffing levels, ensured that the agency is reporting episodes rather than enquiries
- Consider reasons why it may be cheaper (largely delivered by telephone, etc.)

The unit cost for the service can be ascertained from the data gathered at **Step Two – Measuring Inputs** and **Step Six – Measuring Outputs.**

The evaluation will have gathered data on the total number of advice hours available and the total cost of the service:

- To gain an hourly rate for the service the total cost of the service should be divided by the total number of advice hours available per year
- To gain a unit cost the hourly rate should be multiplied by the average amount of time spent on each intervention. (For example, if the average information enquiry takes half an hour, including both client contact time and follow up time, the unit cost is hourly rate multiplied by 0.5).

It should be noted that the unit costing should include all support costs including premises, management, training, information budgets, etc. If these are not available, we suggest that a figure of around 50%[2] of adviser salaries should be added for these on-costs.

These figures may be compared to those in other services or to national benchmarks where these exist.

[1] In one review agencies over-reported activity - on staffing levels this would have allowed just four minutes per client.

[2] This figure is based upon evidence of average on-costs from a large number of advice reviews.

BENCHMARKED ACTIVITY LEVEL AND UNIT COSTS

We provide rough benchmark figures below:

Adviser productivity assumptions[3] per FTE adviser:

	Number of episodes	Hours spent	Client contact time	Unit cost per person
Type I *	1237	412	272	£11.96
Type II	309	309	155	£35.87
Type III	124	248	82	£71.74

Unit cost per hour = £35.87

** See Part Three for definitions of Types I, II and III advice work.*

These are based upon a number of assumptions that may not be appropriate to the service under review:

- Ratio between the Types: assumes 25% of Type I turn into Type II and 10% of Type I turn into Type III
- Throughput of clients: Type I – 3 per hour, Type II – 2 per hour, Type III – 0.5 per hour
- Client contact to follow up ratio: Type I – 2:1, Type II – 1:1, Type III – 1:2 ratio
- Salary level – assumed at average of £20,000 + NIC and 5% pension contribution
- Adviser costs to other running costs – adds 50% of adviser salary costs as estimate of running costs and other salaries.

Benchmarks are not 'targets'. All benchmark figures need to be tested against the way in which the agency works (home visits will greatly reduce the throughput of cases; telephone advice may increase it), degrees of complexity (court work would greatly reduce the throughput in Type III cases).

An alternative means of looking at value would be to look at cost and the number of people assisted by one type of service compared to those of another. For example, an advice service funded to prevent homelessness may be compared to the cost and number of people assisted by a hostel.

[3] Based upon one FTE adviser on a 35 hour week, which, after training holidays etc. = 966 hours for advice per year. The ratio between Type I, II & III will also need to be tested against local data gathered.

STEP ELEVEN – ASSESSING EFFECTIVENESS

This step seeks to assess the overall effectiveness of the service provided.

The key questions this step is designed to address are:

Does the present service still meet need – is it relevant?

Does it make a difference to the problem – is it effective?

Does it add to or detract from local resources and does it account for resources in an efficient way?

What needs to be improved?

How can it be improved?

The main methodological tools include:

Review of purpose of the evaluation

Collation and analysis of research findings

Discussion

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

Ensure that the service and other relevant stakeholders have verified the data upon which the assessment is based.

Revisit the purpose of the evaluation and the priorities for the service.

Steps Eleven and **Twelve** are amongst the most difficult within this framework. Careful thought and consideration is needed to conclude the evaluation and to draw recommendations for future action.

This step requires pulling together data from all of the earlier steps and drawing the conclusions from the evaluation about the efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of the service.

In undertaking this phase it is important that the Steering Group revisits the purpose of the evaluation and the objectives of the service.

The Steering Group should encourage the testing and scrutiny of the findings from the earlier steps before reaching its conclusions. Even if the evaluation has been undertaken internally it may be appropriate to use an external body to assist the evaluators in reaching their conclusions.

STEP TWELVE – IDENTIFYING LEARNING

This step seeks to identify the learning from the evaluation.

At this step the evaluation should be able to answer the questions posed at the start of the evaluation, in particular:

What works, what doesn't and why?

What needs to be done, and by whom, to meet any deficiencies?

The main methodological tools include:

Discussion

Work planning

CHECKLIST/ACTION POINTS

Revisit the purpose of the evaluation and the priorities for the service.

Test the final recommendations for viability with all of those that will be involved in implementation.

This section is effectively the 'Recommendations' section of the final report for the evaluation.

Any recommendations emerging from the evaluation should be tested with the various stakeholders to ensure that they are viable and can be implemented.

PART THREE – DEFINITIONS AND RESOURCES

LANGUAGE

Terms used in evaluation can often mystify the reader and make them feel that it is a process only to be understood by the 'experts'. This section aims to highlight the main terms used and provide them with our definitions.

Definitions of Information and Advice

There is not a nationally agreed definition of advice that is accepted by all agencies. The definitions we suggest are drawn from Home-Point's Standards and are broadly compatible with other definitions.

The importance of agreeing common definitions is essential if the results of any measuring in these areas are to be accepted. Even within a single agency this can vary considerably. In one agency we were told:

'The same type of enquiry can be Type I on a busy day and Type II on a slack day.'

Advice is likely to comprise some or all of the following components:

- Listening to clients
- Diagnosing the problem
- Giving information
- Advising on the options available
- Taking action on behalf of clients
- Negotiating on their behalf
- Representing clients' cases at tribunals and courts
- Referral where appropriate
- Enabling or empowering the individual to take informed action on their own behalf.

We have broken these activities down into three principal categories:

Type One – Information, Sign-posting and Explanation

This work refers to activities such as providing information either orally or in writing, sign-posting or referring the user to other available resources or services, and the explanation of technical terms or clarifying an official document, such as a tenancy agreement or a possession order.

Type Two –Casework

Initially this work will include:

- A diagnostic interview where the problem and all relevant issues are identified; **and**
- Making a judgement as to whether the individual has a case that can be pursued.

Once it has been established that the individual has a case that can be pursued activities may include:

- Setting out an individual's options or courses of actions
- Encouraging the user to take action on their own behalf
- Providing practical aid with letters or forms
- Negotiating with third parties on the user's behalf
- Introducing the enquirer by referral to another source of help
- Support to users in making their own case.

Type Three – Advocacy, Representation and Mediation

This work includes a range of further actions arising from the casework undertaken above. This may have been undertaken by the adviser preparing the tertiary work or may have come to the adviser by referral from another organisation or adviser.

The principal activities may include:

- **Advocacy and Representation** – where the adviser may prepare a case for the user and represent or speak on their behalf at a tribunal or court.
- **Mediation** – where the adviser may act on behalf of the user by seeking to mediate between the user and a third party.

Social Policy Work

We use a narrow definition of 'social policy work' commonly used in the advice sector. This definition suggests that advice agencies should collect information generated by individual casework activities and aggregate this in order to identify trends and emerging issues. It is likely that in many cases advice agencies will be able to gather considerable amounts of local intelligence through this route that would be of considerable use to the providers or planners of other services. An example of this approach could include an increase in enquiries at an advice agency following recent changes in the administration of Housing Benefit. By making this information available to the managers of that service the advice agency may be able to secure changes and therefore prevent the problem affecting other individuals.

Definitions of recording

Agencies differ greatly in the way that they record the work that they undertake. Some services record people using the service and others record each enquiry that a service user may bring to the service. For example, in one recent review we discovered that the average number of enquiries to an agency presented by individual service users was 16!

- **Enquiries** – The number of advice topics that an individual may request/require assistance on.
- **Episodes of Advice** – This counts the number of sessions a provider offers.
- **Clients/Cases** – This counts the number of people using a service.

Glossary

This section does not attempt to be a definitive glossary of all terms around evaluation but to provide an explanation of terms used in this publication.

Different types of evaluation include:

- **Formative Evaluation** – What strategy will work best?
- **Process Evaluation** – Are we doing it right?
- **Summative Evaluation** – Are we getting anywhere? What is and isn't working, why, what are the gaps? What improvements could be made?
- **Impact Evaluation** – What did we achieve?

Other terms used in this report:

- **Inputs** – The things that go into providing a service. These include financial data, staffing (including staff training), information and other resources.
- **Methodology** – The way in which a study is undertaken.
- **Monitoring** – The gathering of data about a service on an ongoing basis – this may be used to inform an evaluation.
- **Opportunity Cost** – The cost of doing one thing rather than another.
- **Outcomes** – The result of any given intervention or service.
- **Outputs** – The things that a service delivers or produces.
- **Processes** – The way in which things are done.
- **Topics** – Areas of law undertaken by a service.

HOMEPOINT RESOURCES

This publication is one of a series prepared by HomePoint to assist commissioners and funders of services to provide high quality, accessible information and advice services.

Other resources include:

1 Housing Options Database: a template for the production of a local housing options database available on disk. Several local authorities have completed or are developing their local version using the Scotland-wide template.

2 Training Pack: two sets of training modules for use by agencies as 'in house' training resources. The pack encourages agencies to work from the basis of experience; exercises are set which can be completed by referring to the agency's own current practice.

> **Set One – Planning and Monitoring the Work of Your Agency:** a set of nine modules which take you step by step through a process from defining the aims of your agency to reviewing, monitoring and evaluating the service you provide.

> **Set Two – Employing Staff and Volunteers in Agencies**: a set of five modules which can each be used independently. Issues such as recruitment, supervision and appraisal and motivating staff and volunteers are covered in detail.

3 Local Housing Information and Advice Strategies, Good Practice Manual: this is a guide to developing strategies rather than information; the manual emphasises the usefulness of partnership and networking.

4 National Standards for Housing Information and Advice Services (revised 2000): Volume 1 The National Standards and Adviser Competencies; Volume 2 Self Assessment Checklists and the Good Practice Guide.

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Date of Publication, February 2000