

**South Ayrshire Council**

**Report by Head of Employee and Customer Services  
to Service and Performance Panel  
of 4 June 2019**

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**Subject: Annual Performance Report – Information and Advice Hub**

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**1. Purpose**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the performance of the Information and Advice Hub service from 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019.

**2. Recommendations**

**2.1 It is recommended that the Panel considers the service performance for 2018/19.**

**3. Background**

3.1 At its meeting on 13 December 2018, the Council requested that an annual report on the operation of the Information and Advice Hub during 2018/19 be brought to the Service and Performance Panel of 4 June 2019.

3.2 On 31 October 2017, the Leadership Panel approved current staffing arrangements in the Hub which resulted in the introduction of multi-skilled information and advice roles with higher graded posts (Level 9 and Level 8) dealing predominantly with complex cases and the lower graded post (Level 5) with high volume, less complex enquiries.

3.3 The Information and Advice Hub (the Hub) provides a comprehensive information and advice service from a range of locations. Services provided include:

- Advice and information on welfare benefits, including help to appeal decisions;
- Advice on money and debt related issues, including negotiating with creditors, such as credit cards or loans;
- Personal Budgeting Support;
- Assistance with mandatory reconsiderations and tribunal preparation and representation;
- Income Maximisation checks/Better Off Calculations;
- Food bank vouchers;
- Crisis grant applications;

- Help to apply for Social Fund Loans and Grants; and
- Help with issues where customers are at threat of eviction or disconnection of their fuel supply.

#### **4. Proposals**

- 4.1 Members are asked to consider the service performance for 2018/19as outlined in [Appendix 1](#)

#### **5. Legal and Procurement Implications**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.
- 5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 Not applicable.

#### **7. Human Resources Implications**

- 7.1 Not applicable.

#### **8. Risk**

##### **8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations***

- 8.1.1 There are no risks associated with adopting the recommendations.

##### **8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations***

- 8.2.1 There are no risks associated with rejecting the recommendations.

#### **9. Equalities**

- 9.1 The proposals in this report have been assessed through the Equality Impact Assessment Scoping process. There are no significant potential positive or negative equality impacts of agreeing the recommendations and therefore an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required. A copy of the Equalities Scoping Assessment is attached as [Appendix 2](#).

#### **10. Sustainable Development Implications**

- 10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** - This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme or strategy or document otherwise described which could be considered to constitute a plan, programme, policy or strategy.

#### **11. Options Appraisal**

- 11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

#### **12. Link to Council Plan**

12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to the Council strategic objective to reduce poverty and disadvantage.

### **13. Results of Consultation**

13.1 There has been no public consultation on the contents of this report.

13.2 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Philip Saxton, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Wellbeing, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

**Background Papers** [South Ayrshire Council - 13 December 2018 – Minutes](#) – Item 8 (c) – Page 10

Report to Leadership Panel of 31 October 2017 - [Staffing Changes within the Information and Advice Hub](#)

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**Date:** 28 May 2019

## Service Performance 2018-19

### 1. Performance of Service 2018-19

1.1 Customers access Hub services in a number of ways: through referrals on the Signpost Tracker/ Referral system; by calling (via the Netcall 0300 number) or visiting the Hub directly; and by e-mail. Where enquiries cannot be dealt with at the first point of contact, customer cases are created and recorded on the Advice-pro system. Data for this report, which covers the period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019, has therefore been drawn from the Signpost Tracker Referral system; Netcall; and the Advice-Pro case management system.

### 2. Enquiries by Category

2.1 In 2018/19, Hub advisors managed 7,001 enquiries, an increase from 4, 752 in 2017/18 The table below shows the top 5 enquiry categories:

1.	PIP Personal Independence Payments
2.	ESA Employment and Support Allowance
3.	UC Universal Credit
4.	AA Attendance Allowance
5.	Tax Credits

2.2 Information on the number of enquiries received by ward can be found at [Annex 1](#).

2.3 Information on customers by age, sex and employment status can be found at [Annex 2](#).

### 3. Enquiries by Type

3.1 The Scottish Legal aid Board (SLAB) categorises information and advice provision into three distinct types, depending on complexity, as follows:

- Type 1 - Active Information, Signposting and Explanation;
- Type 2 – Casework; and
- Type 3 - Advocacy, Representation and Mediation at Tribunal or Court Action.

### 4. Staffing

4.1 Analysis of customer enquiries against types shows 6,085 type 1 and 2 enquiries and 916 type 3 enquiries. This suggests an imbalance between customer requirements and the current staffing arrangements in terms of the ratio of Level 8 to Level 5 posts. A revised staffing proposal will be submitted to Leadership Panel in August 2019.

4.2 Staff training and performance is measured against the Scottish Legal Aid Board's (SLAB) Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers. The service is currently working with SLAB to gain national accreditation.

## 5. Early Intervention, Tribunal Representation and Success Rates

5.1 Our approach in having fully trained, experienced advisors completing benefit applications and getting it right first time prevents claimants from experiencing the stress of having a claim rejected, and having to attend a Tribunal.

5.2 In 2018/19 we helped 79% of our customers to get their benefit applications right first time, thus reducing the number of customers who had to appeal to the Tribunal Service in 2018/19.

5.3 Senior advisors assist customers to appeal DWP benefit decisions at Tribunal as referred to at 5.1 above. The majority of this work involves preparing a written tribunal submission for the customer, although advisors do accompany customers at Tribunals if they are particularly vulnerable. This approach, which was supported by the Tribunal Service, enables advisors to prepare more thorough submissions, which has seen our success rate at Tribunal broadly increase as detailed in the table below.

<b>Tribunal Hearing Cases</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Won</b>
April 2016 to March 2017 (advisors representing in person)	194	101 (52%)
April 2017 to March 2018 (advisors preparing appeal submission)	302	216 (72%)
April 2018 to March 2019 (advisors preparing appeal submission)	231	155 (67%)

## 6. Income Generated

6.1 Money generated for customers through welfare and benefits advice is estimated at £3,640,233. This calculation is based on the national approach to determine the impact of welfare/ benefits advice on customers and is calculated using a standard measure on Advice Pro. The calculation is based on a combination of actual benefit received and assumed benefit where a client does not return to seek help to appeal a DWP decision. Of the total sum:

- £3,079,233 was generated through Hub provision of welfare and benefits advice and assistance; and
- £561,000 was generated through assisting customers to appeal DWP decisions.

## 7. Debt Handled

7.1 Advisors assisted customers to manage debt totalling £1,362,502. The principal reasons for debt can be found in the table below:

Debt Type	Total Amount owed
Credit Card debt	£455,496
Bank Loans	£271,856
Council Tax Arrears	£129,284
Mail Order	£74,296
Pay Day Loans	£48,444

## 8. Customer Engagement, Communication and Service Branding

8.1 Customer surveys take place throughout the year to assess: how accessible the service is; how customers found out about the service; how customers would prefer to receive communication from us; and how effectively they felt their enquiry was handled. Feedback indicates that customer satisfaction is **high**. More detailed information can be found at [Annex 3](#).

8.2 Open day sessions were held in February 2019 which were attended by representatives from Community Councils; partner organisations such as The Salvation Army, the Health and Social Care Partnership; local churches and the Trussell Trust.

8.3 Hub staff have participated in a range of community engagement activities to promote the service including: Tenant Participation days; Our People, Our Place events; World in Work Week at Glenburn Primary School; South Ayrshire ASN Parent Forum open evening at Ayr Academy; Ayrshire College Information session; and Maybole Family Futures at Cairn and Gardenrose Primary Schools.

8.4 The service has been promoted through South Ayrshire Council Live, posters and leaflets, the Tenants' Newsletter; Going Out magazine and on social media.

8.5 A recognisable brand has been developed which has been designed (through a Gold; Silver; and Bronze classification) to signpost customers to the level of advice required:

Type	Branding	Provided By
1, 2 and 3	Gold	The Hub
1 and 2	Silver	Customer Service Centres
1	Bronze	A range of frontline locations (for example, libraries) following staff training

8.6 The Gold and Silver classifications will launch in summer 2019 and will be complemented by a comprehensive customer communications plan. The Bronze one will launch on a service by service basis as frontline staff complete the required training. This will be co-ordinated by the Information and Advice Supervisor.

## **9. Partnership Working**

9.1 Partnership working underpins the effective delivery of the service and we continue to lead on developing a network of agencies who can refer customers who need help through the Signpost system. This year the Information and Advice Supervisor has co-ordinated the introduction of two new partner agencies to the Signpost tracker/ referral - Activity for Health (Macmillan Move More) and Headways Ayrshire.

9.2 The Signpost system is used by a wide range of services and agencies to make referrals to the Hub. The top 5 referring partners/ agencies are:

- Customer Services;
- Housing Services;
- Employability and Skills;
- Benefit Services; and
- MacMillan.

## **10. Tackling Child Poverty**

10.1 The Information and Advice Hub Supervisor is currently working in partnership with the Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP) and the NHS, to drive initiatives to tackle child poverty and hardship in families with young children. This has involved establishing the Hub as the single point of contact for financial inclusion referral pathways. The Hub Supervisor has delivered a range of staff awareness sessions to promote this approach to frontline staff working with pregnant women and families with dependent children, including Health Visitors and District Nurses.

## **11. National Work and Projects**

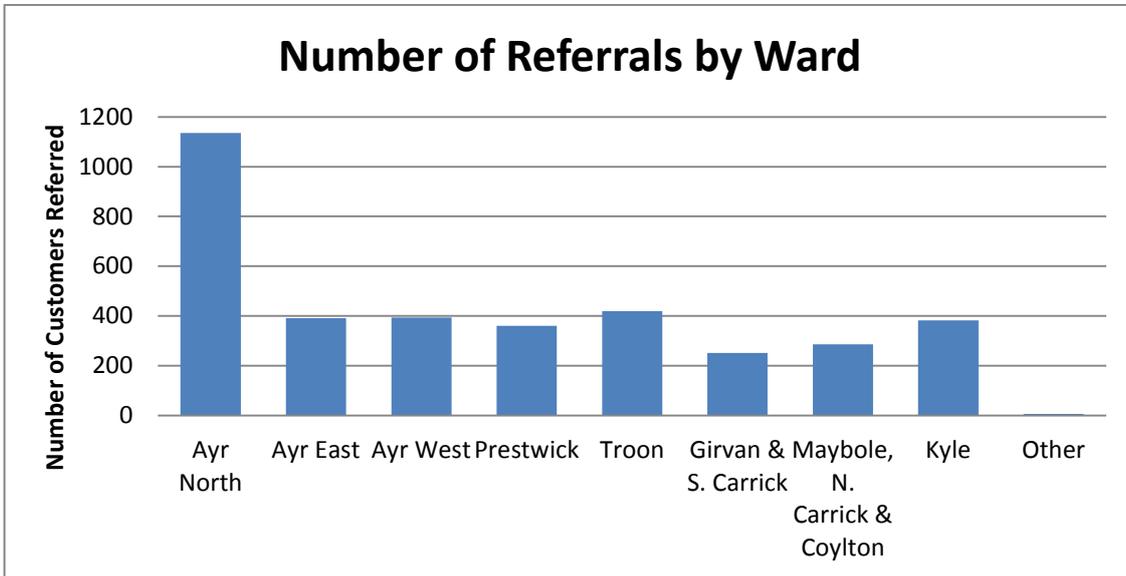
11.1 The Hub Supervisor participates in a range of national projects, including:

- Piloting a new online reporting system for the Improvement Service's Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework;
- Supporting the evaluation review of the Standard Financial Statement (SFS) on behalf of the Lending Standards Board;
- DAS (debt arrangement scheme) Consultation - Building a Better Debt Arrangement Scheme working group;
- Rights Advice Scotland Managers Working Group; and
- Digital Advice Working Group.

## Annex 1- Signpost Referrals by Ward

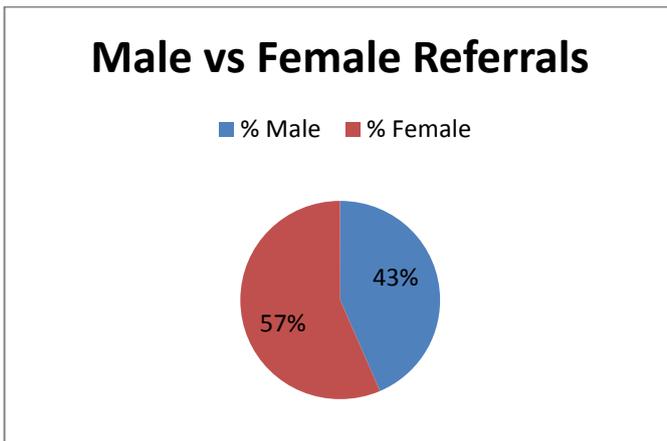
The Signpost Tracker Referral system allows reporting of customer data by ward.

The table below shows the number of Signpost referrals by ward.

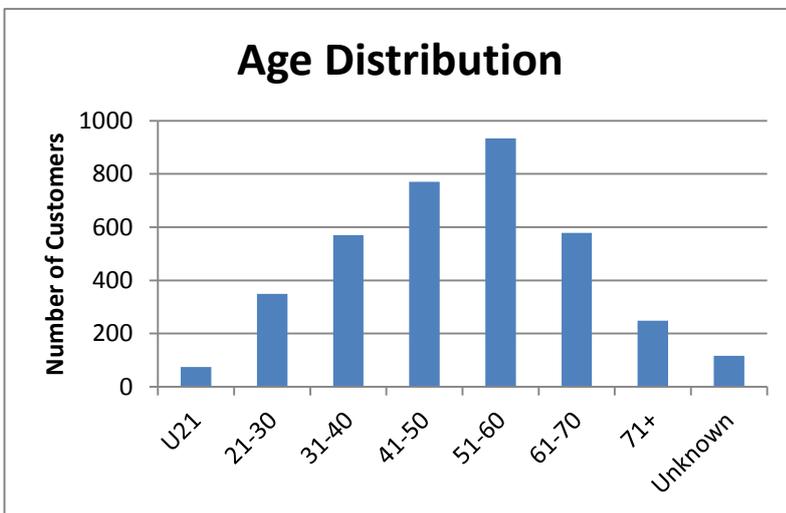


## Annex 2 – Customers by Sex; Age and Employment Status

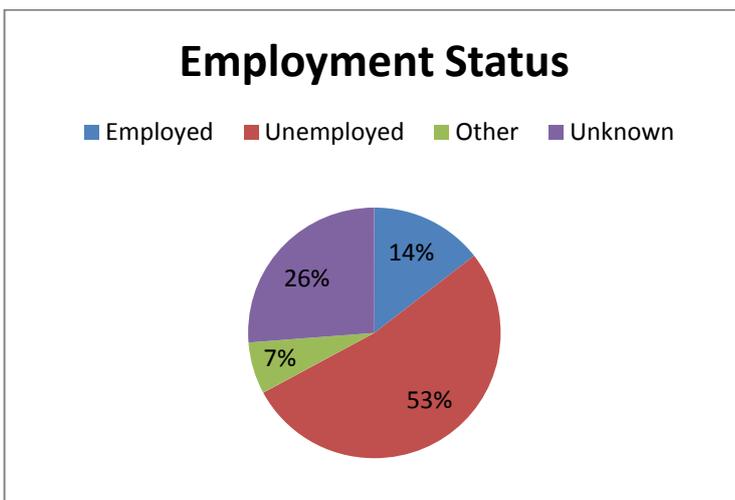
The chart below shows Signpost data for customers by sex.



The table below shows Signpost data for customers by age range.



The chart below shows Signpost data for customers by employment status.



### Annex 3 - Customer Survey Feedback

Customer survey results October 2018 to May 2019

- 1) 91% of respondents found it easy to make contact with the Hub.
- 2) Respondents rated the following as their most popular ways to be contacted:

Telephone	73%
Email	27%
Face to Face	23%
Text Message	17%
Other	10%

- 3) Further survey results to be added prior to Panel.

## 1. Proposal details

Proposal Title <b>Annual Performance Report – Information and Advice Hub</b>	Lead Officer <b>Gillian Farrell</b>
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2. Which communities, groups of people, employees or thematic groups do you think will be, or potentially could be, impacted upon by the implementation of this proposal? Please indicate whether these would be positive or negative impacts

Community, Groups of People or Themes	Negative Impacts	Positive impacts
The whole community of South Ayrshire	-	-
People from different racial groups, ethnic or national origin.	-	-
Women and/ or men (boys and girls)	-	-
People with disabilities	-	-
People from particular age groups for example Older people, children and young people	-	-
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual people	-	-
People who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process to change sex	-	-
Pregnant women and new mothers	-	-
People who are married or in a civil partnership	-	-
People who share a particular religion or belief	-	-
Thematic Groups: Health, Human Rights, Rurality and Deprivation	-	-

3. Do you have evidence or reason to believe that the proposal will support the Council to:

General Duty and other Equality Themes	Level of Negative and/ or Positive Impact (high, medium or low)
Eliminate discrimination and harassment faced by particular communities or groups	Low impact
Promote equality of opportunity between particular communities or groups	Low impact
Foster good relations between particular communities or groups	Low impact
Promote positive attitudes towards different communities or groups	Low impact
Increase participation of particular communities or groups in public life	Low impact
Improve the health and wellbeing of particular communities or groups	Low impact
Promote the human rights of particular communities or groups	Low impact
Tackle deprivation faced by particular communities or groups	Low impact

## 4. Summary Assessment

Is a full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) required? (A full EQIA must be carried out on all high and medium impact proposals)		Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rationale for decision:  <b>This report advises the Panel on performance information. Their decision on this has no specific equality implications. Any future proposal on staffing arrangements will be equality impact assessed in advance of being remitted to Leadership panel.</b>			
Signed :	<b>Kate O'Hagan</b>	Head of Service	
Date:	<b>10 May 2019</b>	Copy to <a href="mailto:equalities@south-ayrshire.gov.uk">equalities@south-ayrshire.gov.uk</a>	