

**Radically Rethinking Advice: Workshop at ASA Conference
20 March 2009
Phil Jew and Chilli Reid, AdviceUK**

Phil Jew and Chilli Reid provided an introduction to the work and findings of AdviceUK's RADICAL project, plus an outline of work in Nottingham that will build on this and new work around advice funding and design in Manchester (BOLD Project). A handout summarising this work was provided.

The RADICAL report *It's the System Stupid! Radically Rethinking Advice* is available to download from www.adviceuk.org.uk

It was proposed by AdviceUK that advice needs a radical rethink:

We've lost a clear sense of purpose – client focus – we're too driven by targets, KPIs and funding limits

The value and potential of preventative work and early intervention is being ignored and going largely unfunded

An obsession with cost, control and tidying up has locked waste and cost into the advice system and has offered no method for improvement

The following solid black bullet points summarise comments that were made in the subsequent discussion. The clear bullet points relate to points from Phil and Chilli:

- Agree with most of questions, but most agencies are more focussed on keeping themselves afloat rather than develop services/ intervention.
- The LSC will start commissioning in 2010 but don't know what to do.
- Would like to do more but need money to get services. At the moment it's about managing services as every funder wants something different.
- There are problems influencing LAA and LSP process in getting advice on the agenda. Getting advice considered a part of thinking is difficult. Champion issue with LA but they don't see advice as cross-cutting (PLE)
- LAA is a barrier to helping change happen
- Good for different reasons – it's "us making things better for us". How we can improve, it's our responsibility to communicate to Government.
 - We need to put something positive out rather than criticism. We need to think about why we are here.
 - A key question from people that have been involved in the RADICAL project is 'what is the purpose of advice services?'
- We haven't lost our clear purpose – but we put our effort into getting funding and chasing that.
- In North Yorkshire there are 7 CABx - they all put money into a joint pot and have funded one of the managers to sit on the LSP to get advice on the agenda.

- County Durham unitary authority will take over in April. They will make sure they reflect advice in Durham. Prevention and intervention work is happening but there is still an obsession with cost.
- Early intervention should be cheaper than picking up the problem. The advice sector can't just use systems thinking it needs to be bigger – we can't do it on our own.
 - Nottingham City Council are fully supportive of the systems thinking approach to advice that is being implemented there. The Council has already applied systems thinking to HB and CTB services.
- Prevention isn't funded as core grant, it's only project funded.
 - We have seen in CLAC and CLAN specifications that the emphasis is on numbers of matters starts/cases. Where preventative and social policy work is mentioned it is not specifically funded and there are not targets.
- The LSC do systems thinking. They are bound by the Legal Aid act so can't take on board any social policy.
 - Disproportionate perception of targets/ outputs that stems from fixed fees
- The LSC is a victim of its own success (money has been taken away from other sources to fund Legal Aid). Core funding has then been reduced from LA – this shouldn't have happened.
- Funding can skew what happens – we need to be lean and mean. LA, Central Government departments need to think with advice services and clients to make changes.
- LSC are asking LA's to fund social policy work – this is the idea behind joint commissioning.
- There is a clause in LSC contract that they will never be the main funder. However, they are now the main funder in organisations but rather than pull out and have no advice in that area they are staying.
- Did the RADICAL study look at what happens to clients when they come through the door? Doesn't feel model allows for that.
 - Due to time and funding constraints the RADICAL work concentrated on getting a picture of where demand comes from and what clients present as problems.
 - The Nottingham work will go further - looking at the flow of work – what the client's journey is.
- Have you looked at our users' perspective – demand for advice isn't necessarily NEED. Beyond advice services potential users – you are not properly re-engineering if not

- We are working with what presents itself – the demand check records, verbatim – what clients present – but it doesn't directly question clients about what they want – we recognise the need to cover this but it needs more research
- Attention was drawn to the 'Solihull pilot' which applied a systems thinking approach to asylum advice. A report on this project is now available. It demonstrates the value of front-loading services and early intervention.
- It was also noted that the Access workstream of the Working Together for Advice project are looking using systems thinking as one of their pilots.