



St Pauls Advice Centre

# The road ahead

**Strategic Plan 2013-2018**



# The road ahead

ST. PAULS ADVICE CENTRE

GROSVENOR RD. BSC

St Pauls Advice Centre has been a community resource at the heart of St Pauls for four decades. Our strategic plan sets out how we will continue to be one of Bristol's key independent legal advice centres for the future.

We have met and adapted to many changes in our time while staying true to our core purpose of supporting citizenship by providing reliable advice. The changes we face now, alongside many community groups, are unprecedented in their scale and rapidity. This tough working environment is unlikely to change significantly over the next five years.

We have reviewed our mission, taken a fresh look at the values that underpin our ethos and the vision that drives us. This review will be a firm foundation on which we can build our future for the benefit of clients and stakeholders.

Trustees and staff have worked together to agree five strategic priorities and a strategic direction, which will clarify the focus for our future work and the outcomes we aspire to achieve. We will make this plan the backbone of SPAC, aligning our policies, procedures, services and values with it. If we are to succeed over the next five years, it is vital that the plan permeates all that we do and is embraced by trustees, staff and volunteers alike.

**Laura Corballis, Chair**  
**St Pauls Advice Centre Ltd**

**Our vision: to be the advice centre that best understands and serves the needs of local people. To improve lives and communities, and provide high quality, independent advice services that are trusted, in an environment where people feel welcome.**

# About us

St Pauls Advice Centre works in some of the most densely populated, diverse and vibrant inner city areas of Bristol.

Deprivation levels are high with some areas ranked among the most deprived 10% nationally. There is a high percentage of Black and minority ethnic residents with large concentrations of Somali refugees. Benefit claimant rates are above average and are climbing as a result of the recession.

For the communities we serve, there is high and increasing need for free and independent legal advice services.

## We offer

- >> Independent and impartial legal advice
- >> Confidential, non-judgemental and free advice
- >> Drop-in and appointment based advice sessions from our main office in St Pauls
- >> Outreach sessions at various venues
- >> Home visits arranged on request
- >> A daily reception service providing information and a triage facility
- >> Bilingual advice is available at a number of access points

## A brief history

- 1972** St Pauls Advice Centre (SPAC) opens its doors for the first time
- 1980** Following the St Pauls uprising, SPAC was centrally involved in developing a defence campaign which served to strengthen community links
- 1984** Outreach services target Black and minority ethnic people, disabled and older people helping overcome barriers to accessing rights
- 1998** Specialist benefits advice expanded as a result of securing one of Bristol's first legal aid franchises
- 2004** Development of a unique bilingual generalist advice service
- 2006** Specialist debt advice team, funded by Financial Inclusion Fund
- 2008** Health outreach service, delivering benefits advice at local health centres
- 2010** Expansion of services into east Bristol as a result of the demise of East Bristol Advice Service
- 2012** Today, 16 people work in our team, dealing with over 3000 enquiries per year

# The challenge

Over the next five years we can expect the social and economic landscape – for us and our clients – to worsen.

**Recovery from the recession will be slow** There will be continued economic instability and poor growth, affecting communities, individuals, businesses and service providers nationwide.

**Deeper cuts ahead** The government's commitment to reducing the budget deficit will include implementing the biggest cuts in state spending since the second world war, increasing poverty for the most vulnerable.

**Increasing inequality likely** Historically, periods like this have been characterised by widening inequality. And as social anxiety rises, BME and newly arrived and already disadvantaged groups are likely to suffer prejudice and discrimination.

**Welfare Reform Act 2012** This ushers in the greatest changes to the benefits system in sixty years. These will have far-reaching impacts for benefit claimants and their children, particularly vulnerable people and the services that support them.

**Fewer employment opportunities** As unemployment rises and benefit regimes become harsher, more people will be forced into low paid and insecure employment.

**Debt may rise** With many households being unable to meet minimum repayments to creditors, debt levels will undoubtedly increase. This in turn could see more people made bankrupt, being evicted, or using expensive short term credit solutions.

**Significant cuts to public funding** for the local voluntary and community sector. Many organisations are facing closure, or at the very least a severe reduction in services they are able to provide. The anticipated increase in demand for services will be difficult to meet with less funding and resources.

**Less funding** The Government's plan to take social welfare law out of scope for legal aid entitlement will mean a loss of £540,000 per year in revenue to advice centres in Bristol. Much of our welfare benefits advice work is funded through a legal aid contract, which will end on 31st March 2013.

# Charitable aims

To relieve poverty by providing and promoting the provision of free legal advice, assistance and other legal services which would not otherwise be available through lack of means.

## We will tackle the effects and causes of poverty by

**Providing** an independent and confidential advice service to individuals living or working within the advice centre's catchment area

**Empowering** individuals through provision of advice, information, support and advocacy, in order to maximise people's income and to secure their rights, and the services available to them

**Promoting** community care by maximising income and improving the quality of life of service users, thus enabling independent living

**Challenging** discrimination; whether it impinges on service users or the work of the centre

**Liaising** with other service providers and funding authorities to ensure the promotion and development of advice provision throughout Bristol

# Core values

## Justice

- >> We champion the legal rights of individuals
- >> We pursue fair and just outcomes for people
- >> We challenge discrimination and disadvantage, and tackle systemic inequality

## Approachable

- >> We listen to and deal with people warmly and politely
- >> Our services are accessible and available
- >> We are open with clients, colleagues and partners

## Community

- >> We improve the lives of local people and the wider community
- >> We listen to and understand community needs
- >> We are committed to supporting local people and community initiatives

## Integrity

- >> We are honest and ethical
- >> We are consistent with actions, principles, expectations and outcomes
- >> Our independent and expert service is trusted by our clients, colleagues and partners

## Expertise

- >> We are professional, organised and competent
- >> We ensure the advice we give is accurate and up to date
- >> We pride ourselves in supporting our experienced and skilful team

## Respect

- >> We respect people's differences and value diversity
- >> Where possible we adapt our services to take account of different needs
- >> We treat people fairly and consistently

# Strategic priorities

**Each of our five strategic priorities are defined by a set of critical success factors (CSFs). These feed into detailed operational plans, annual service outputs and budgets.**

How will we know we've been successful? We've also developed a range of outcomes for each priority, which we aspire to achieve by 2018.

# One: Deliver a professional legal advice service

## Critical Success Factors

- >> Offer legal advice on the issues people need, at the level they need it, and to a high standard
- >> Ensure that our casework is well managed and is of an excellent standard
- >> Provide accurate and up to date advice
- >> Deliver advice which is impartial and independent
- >> Respect privacy and ensure our service is confidential
- >> Invest in our information resources and case management software
- >> Inform clients about other agencies and services if we are unable to deal with their problem

## Outcomes

- >> Clients will say that they are more aware of their rights, responsibilities and of the services available to them
- >> Advisers will have received appropriate legal and skills training
- >> Information resources will be accurate and up-to-date
- >> Independent file reviews will show that our casework meets consistently high standards
- >> We will have been awarded an advice quality mark
- >> We will have improved our case management system
- >> Clients will tell us that they recommended our service to others
- >> People will have their needs met due to our ability to signpost or refer to other agencies
- >> Services will be held in high regard by clients and partners

# Two:

## Provide an accessible and approachable service

that respects the needs of our clients

### Critical Success Factors

- >> Move to new premises that better meet the needs of our clients and staff
- >> Listen to clients and act on their feedback
- >> Treat people fairly and in a welcoming manner
- >> Value the diversity of our staff team and of the community we serve
- >> If possible, deliver advice in the client's own language or provide an interpreter
- >> Invest in developing staff, volunteers and trustees in ways that keep our clients at the heart of what we do
- >> Maintain a project that specifically meets the needs of Somali clients
- >> Provide a range of delivery methods that best respond to local needs
- >> Consider a new name and brand for the advice centre that better reflects the communities we serve and that conveys our aims, achievements and service quality
- >> Work to identify excluded groups within the local community and deliver services that meet their needs

### Outcomes

- >> Clients and staff will enjoy using modern, accessible premises
- >> Clients will tell us that they were satisfied with our overall level of service
- >> Clients will tell us that we listened to them
- >> Clients will tell us that we treated them fairly
- >> Staff, volunteers, and trustees will have received training and support to develop their skills and maintain a client focus
- >> We will have provided outreach facilities in locations that meet client needs
- >> We will have provided home visits for clients who cannot access our venues
- >> We will have provided a range of drop-in, appointment and reception based services
- >> Our clients and partners will have a clearer understanding of our aims, achievements and services

# Three:

# Make a positive difference

to the lives of local people and communities

## Critical Success Factors

- >> Work with clients and collaborate with partner agencies to get positive results for the community
- >> Reduce poverty levels within the communities we serve by helping people to maximise their household income
- >> Help people to manage their debts and improve their budgeting skills
- >> Monitor our work and let people know the difference we are making
- >> Contribute to improving the health and well being of our clients
- >> Aim to find solutions that clients feel are right and just
- >> Ensure that, as far as practicable, our board of trustees reflect the diversity of the communities we serve

## Outcomes

- >> Clients will say that their circumstances have improved
- >> We will have helped to increase or maintain household incomes, which will contribute to the local economy and reduce poverty levels
- >> Clients will say that the issue that they needed assistance with has been addressed
- >> We will have helped clients to manage their debt
- >> Clients will say that their health, self-esteem and stress levels have improved
- >> We will have informed our clients, funders and partners about the difference we are making
- >> Our trustees will better reflect the diversity of the communities we serve

# Four:

## Maintain, expand and develop services

### Critical Success Factors

- >> Improve financial strength by identifying new funding sources
- >> Help more people by developing new services where practicable
- >> Ensure that our services complement the delivery of advice across Bristol
- >> Develop services to help people learn about their rights and responsibilities, and teach practical skills that will help people to deal with issues independently
- >> Consider other methods of delivery such as mentoring, self-help and telephone advice
- >> Explore new ways of resourcing, expanding and delivering services, including volunteering, student placements and apprenticeships
- >> Place partnership working at the core of what we do in order to develop and maintain advice services for our clients

### Outcomes

- >> We will have secured funding to maintain or expand existing services
- >> We will have worked in partnership with other agencies to identify need, gaps in service provision, and to plan service delivery or development
- >> We will have responded to opportunities to develop new services
- >> Clients will have been helped through a variety of service delivery methods
- >> Clients will say that they are more able to deal with issues themselves
- >> We will have established a volunteer, student placement or apprenticeship programme that enables us to help more people, as well as raising the skills of those taking part

# Five: Lobby for social change

## Critical Success Factors

- >> Promote what we believe in by contributing to local and national policies and practices in the best interests of our clients, organisation and the sector
- >> Challenge and help change stereotypes and negative perceptions towards the people we help
- >> In partnership, develop good relationships with local and national decision-makers, in order to influence policy development
- >> Dedicate time to social policy issues
- >> Challenge systemic inequality

## Outcomes

- >> We will have been a significant contributor to sector-wide policy development and lobbying activities
- >> Advisers will have collected evidence of systemic failure that impacts on our clients
- >> Advisers will have contributed to the local social policy collection system
- >> In partnership, we will have responded to local and national consultations on issues that affect our service and our clients
- >> We will have responded to media requests for our input
- >> We will have maintained positive relationships with local MPs, councillors and the Bristol Mayor
- >> We will have attended key meetings and fora where we have been able to influence policy or practice
- >> Our values will be held in high regard by policy makers and our partners
- >> We will have challenged discriminatory views and behaviour that have an impact on the community we serve



# Strategic direction

Our fresh approach is the result of the Trustees' decision to clarify our vision and values.

As a consequence we have been able to offer our view of the key political, economic, social and technological trends that affect our work, enabling us to specify our strategic priorities and the outcomes we aim to achieve.

The process of developing this plan has led the trustees to agree the following strategic direction.



# We will

1. Continue to provide independent, impartial and free legal advice and information to the local community. By enabling people to exercise their rights and secure access to services, we will help improve quality of life.
2. Remain a community resource at heart, identifying need and responding appropriately. Building a consistent, people centred ethos, will help us value the diversity of our community and deliver accessible and welcoming services.
3. Continue to work in partnership with other organisations, building new relationships and collaborating on joint funding opportunities, policy initiatives and service development.
4. Remain a professional legal advice service of high quality by investing in our staff, volunteers and ensuring that quality standards are developed and maintained.
5. Work to strengthen existing funding streams and develop new ones. Exploring new ways to deliver our services will help us identify new funding sources and opportunities whilst ensuring organisational financial security.
6. Play an active role in reducing poverty and improving health and wellbeing within the communities we serve by focussing on services that maximise household incomes and reduce the burden of debt.
7. Continue to empower people to deal with bureaucracy and negotiate complex legal procedure in order to make a positive difference in their lives. We will let our funders, clients and partners know about the outcomes our work has achieved.
8. Be highly regarded by our clients and partners for the quality of our services and as a key community advice provider. We will consider changing our name so that it better reflects the communities we serve and update our brand to successfully convey our achievements and service quality.
9. Modernise what we do, moving to new accommodation where we can deliver accessible services that are welcoming and comfortable for our clients, staff and volunteers. Updating our technology and systems will help us to become a more efficient and flexible organisation.
10. Lobby for social change on issues which may have an impact on the communities we serve or on the services we provide. By collecting evidence from our work and engaging with local and national decision makers, we aim to influence the development of both policy and practice, and to challenge inequality.

# St Pauls Advice Centre

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**This is a summary of our  
strategic plan.**

**If you would like to see the  
fully detailed plan, please  
contact us for a copy.**

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