# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE** | **Regional Advice Networks** |
| **DATE** | **15 January 2020** |
| **BY** | **Jane Hutt, Deputy Minister and Chief Whip** |

I am issuing this statement to update Members on our continued support for Advice Services.

Welsh Government is committed to supporting advice providers so people have access to free and impartial advice on a range of issues including debt, money management issues, housing and welfare benefits.

Members may recall that on 2nd October 2019, I issued a written statement announcing the that £8.04 million in grant funding was being made available through the Welsh Government’s new Single Advice Fund for the provision of social welfare advice services during 2020.

This was one of a number of developments aimed at increasing access to advice services for those people who need them. I am now able to announce a further successful development – the establishment of regional advice networks across Wales.

The Welsh Government has a lead strategic role in increasing access to advice services, ensuring that advice providers are working closely together to help people with multiple social welfare advice problems and ensuring that the wide range of funding supporting advice services achieves the maximum benefit for the people of Wales. These ambitions are contained within the Information and Advice Action Plan for Wales that we published in 2016.

These ambitions however cannot be achieved by the Welsh Government alone. They can only be achieved if advice providers, planners and funders work together to offer joined-up services and to address unmet need.

One of the actions within the Information and Advice Action Plan has been to establish partnership working on a local and regional basis. I am therefore pleased to be able to announce that following a period of engagement and co-production with advice providers, planners and funders, six Regional Advice Networks have now been established across Wales.

Each Regional Advice Network has an independent Chair and steering group and a membership of local and regional stakeholders. Welsh Government officials are supporting the networks with staff time and funding for regional events and regular communications.

A website is in development to provide easier access to a national directory of advice services.

Over the coming year, the Regional Advice Networks will be undertaking tasks to address identified regional priorities in their areas. These include:

* Mapping advice need and provision and identifying gaps.
* Building referral networks between all advice services.
* Combining their experiences to identify the root causes of common problems.
* Sharing best practice and supporting each other to deliver quality-assured advice.

There is no sign of any respite in the demand for advice services in Wales. It is now more important than ever that everyone involved in advice services works together to offer the best possible help to those in crisis. The new Welsh Government-supported Regional Advice Networks will help to ensure that we have a social welfare advice sector where resources are used as effectively as possible and quality-assured providers are delivering joined-up services that achieve sustainable outcomes for those in need of advice.

**Appendix 1**

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| **Regional Advice Network** | **Local Authority Areas Covered** | **Network Chair** |
| North Wales | Denbighshire  Conwy  Flintshire  Gwynedd  Isle of Anglesey  Wrexham | Gwyneth Millington  *CEO Citizens Advice Conwy* |
| Mid and West Wales | Carmarthenshire  Ceredigion  Pembrokeshire  Powys | Stuart Chadbourne  *CEO Citizens Advice Powys* |
| Swansea Neath Port Talbot | Neath Port Talbot  Swansea | Professor Richard Owen  *Director Swansea Law Clinic* |
| Cwm Taf Morgannwg | Bridgend  Merthyr Tydfil  Rhondda Cynon Taf | Councillor Chris Davies  *Cabinet Member for Social Services,*  *Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council* |
| Cardiff and Vale | Cardiff  Vale of Glamorgan | Jane Clay  *CEO Cardiff and Vale Citizens Advice* |
| Gwent | Blaenau Gwent  Caerphilly  Monmouthshire  Newport  Torfaen | Craig Lane  *CEO Newport Citizens Advice* |

**Appendix 2**

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| **Scope of Advice Services Covered** | |
| **Levels of Advice** | **Advice Subjects** |
| * Information * Guidance * Advice * Advice with Casework * Specialist Casework | * Welfare Benefits * Money and Debt * Housing * Employment * Discrimination * Education * Immigration |