

# netWORKS

NEWS FROM WALES' NATIONAL AND REGIONAL ADVICE NETWORKS



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# EDITORIAL

Welcome all, to the first edition of the Advice Network Wales Newsletter.

This is an exciting new project which we hope will better connect the information and advice services throughout Wales.

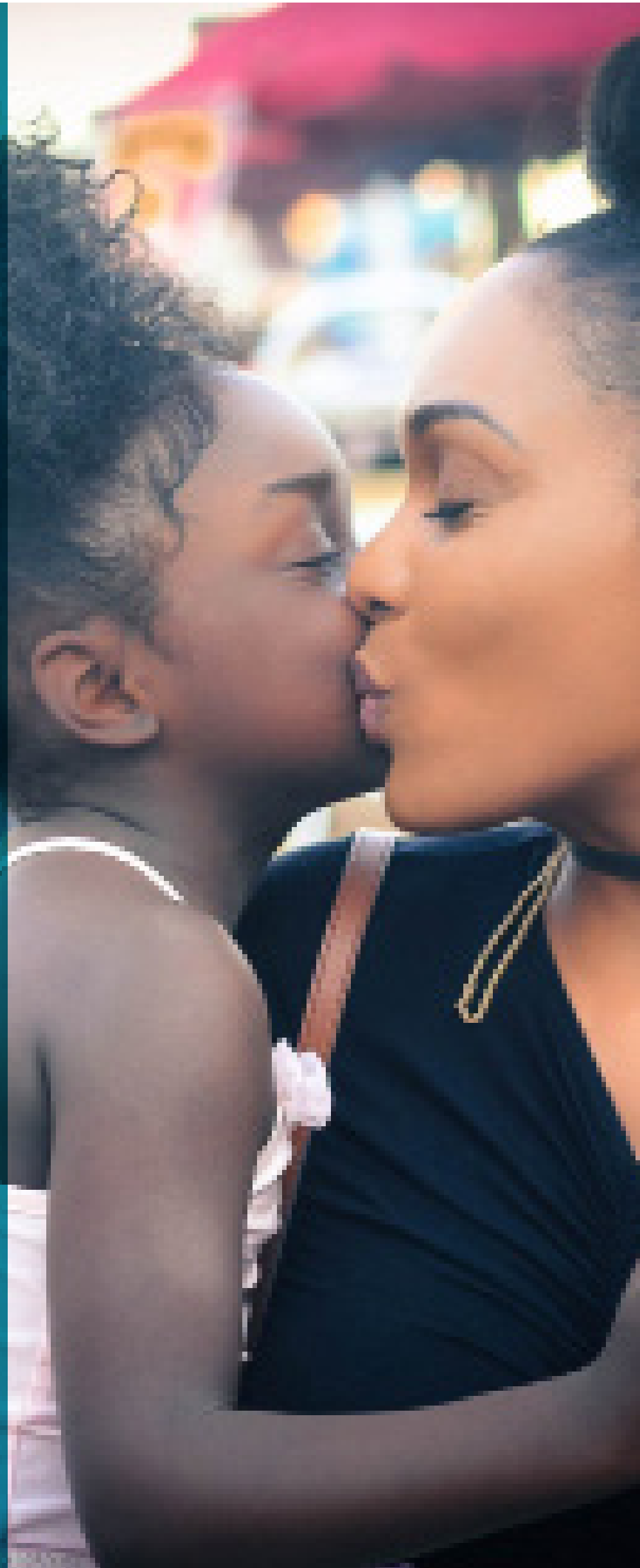
There is so much going on within your communities and we want to showcase all of you and the great work that you are doing. Whether you're a small community or a nationwide organisation, we want to hear about your successes, your projects and your case studies.

With a cost of living crisis and recovery from the pandemic, a collaborative and progressive information and advice sector is more important than ever. We hope that this newsletter will provide the information necessary to help you help your clients.

Finally, you are receiving this newsletter because you are signed up to the advice networks mailing list.

Please do forward this to your colleagues and to any others who you think may benefit from it.

And if this has been sent to you by a colleague and you'd like to stay up to date, email [advicenetworks@gov.wales](mailto:advicenetworks@gov.wales) to sign up to the mailing list.



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# We will fight for equality every single step of the way



Wales' Minister for Social Justice, Jane Hutt, MS, appointed to the role last year, talks to us for our first edition of netWORKS

**Q: You have been working as a public servant for decades, what initially interested you in the career?**

**A:** All my life I have held a passion for social justice. Having been involved in campaigns in the women's movement throughout the 1970's, I became the coordinator of Welsh Women's Aid, a formal position, in which I was calling for legislation regarding domestic violence, tackling homelessness and women's issues. It became increasingly obvious I wanted to become more formally involved in these issues through politics.

**Q: As the Minister for Social Justice, what's your vision for Wales?**

**A:** Social Justice means a fair and equal Wales, where no one is held back and no one is left behind. A Wales where we tackle poverty; protect our most vulnerable communities; create the best possible working conditions; and champion equality.

I see a Wales in which our Credit Unions will support the most financially vulnerable in our society and we will continue to assist people to access the welfare benefits they are entitled to.

A Wales that supports victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence; tackles hate crime and encourages reporting of it also.

We have done a huge amount of work in this respect. Recently we also put more Police Community Support Officers on our streets and we continually reaffirm our commitment to being Nation of Sanctuary.

We will fight for equality every single step of the way. We will deliver on our plan to create a truly anti-racist Wales; we will redouble efforts to ensuring equality for women; we will fight to improve the lives of disabled people; and we will continue to champion LGBTQ+ rights at every turn.

And as we recover from the pandemic, now is the moment to make this vision a reality, and that means being bold and doing things differently.

Our ambition for the future is a Wales where everyone is included and no-one is held back or left behind. Only then will we live in a truly fair and equal Wales.

*Social Justice means a fair and equal Wales*

**Q: How would you characterise your overall approach to achieving social justice?**

**A:** The Welsh Government has adopted an approach of "equality of outcome", in which all should have the same opportunities, but may need different treatment in terms of rights, benefits, responsibilities and opportunities.

I have always believed in the power of bringing people together. My approach in Government has always been to bring those who are directly affected, who have the greatest stake in change and who often go unheard into the decision making process.

We have released a diversity and inclusion strategy of which an underlying principle is the "Social Model of Disability". This recognises the need for society to be transformed, removing barriers so that disabled people are able to participate fully.

As Minister with responsibility for public appointments and equality and diversity in Wales, I am committed to ensuring that the public appointments process will support and proactively encourage all sections of society to engage in public life.

That's why I have launched a diversity and inclusion strategy for public appointments in Wales, "Reflecting Wales in Running Wales". It's an important document because it aims to make Wales an exemplar in nurturing and deploying all Welsh talent.

**Q: What are some of your immediate plans for making a difference to the people of Wales in the realm of social justice?**

**A:** Since May last year, I have already initiated a range of actions. A significant step was crafting and announcing our Basic Income pilot for care leavers in Wales. A pilot which will hopefully empower individuals and help them forge their own life path free of so many constraints.

We are also pushing ahead with a number of other plans. I'm excited to say that we're going to create a Community Bank and we are pushing ahead with Social Partnership Bill to help ensure Wales is a fair work nation.

Of course in recent months we have had to contend with some very real challenges facing people in their day to day lives. One of these is regarding the War in Ukraine. It is wonderful to see the strength of the Welsh spirit reflected in our response. Our nation, as ever, has proven itself generous, compassionate and ready to help. I have spent a great deal of time coordinating the Government response to this crisis and we will continue to do everything we can to help.

The cost of living crisis in particular. We have worked tirelessly and launched one of the most generous financial support packages to try and mitigate its worst effect but I have to be clear here that so many levers to solve this crisis are held by the UK Government. Our Government has spent a great deal of time pushing them to take this crisis seriously and this has included calls to reverse their decisions around cutting the £20 Universal Credit payment.

It is more critical than ever that people across Wales understand all the financial support that is available to them. In the Child Poverty – Income Maximisation Action Plan, we delivered a range of successful projects that had a simple aim – to put more money into people's pockets. I am pleased we are delivering another national campaign to raise people's awareness of welfare benefits and encouraging them to phone Advicelink Cymru to get help to navigate the benefit system.

I repeatedly hear of the struggles people across Wales are facing to meet the basic costs of living, whether it is to warm their homes, put food on the table or pay for essentials for their children. That's why, using all the powers available to the Welsh Government, I am committed to doing everything I can to help households with their living costs and the role of the advice sector is absolutely central to that work.

Jane Hutt MS  
Minister for Social Justice

Jane Hutt was elected to represent the Vale of Glamorgan in the then National Assembly for Wales (Now Senedd Cymru) during the very first elections that took place in 1999. She has been re-elected to represent that seat at every election since. She has held a series of Cabinet positions across almost all Government portfolios. In May last year she was appointed Minister for Social Justice, a position which has brought together her expertise and personal passion for equity.

She has been committed throughout her adult life to equality and social justice, starting as a community worker in the South Wales valleys. She helped open the first Women's Aid refuge in Wales and was the first co-ordinator for Welsh Women's Aid, first director for the Tenant Participation Advisory Service (TPAS) Wales and Chwarae Teg (Fair Play). She also served as an elected member of South Glamorgan County Council for 12 years.

As Health Minister from 1999-2005 she initiated the establishment of Better Advice Better Health, providing advice through primary health care settings and Citizens' Advice, recognising the links with improved health through tackling health inequalities.

She has long been involved with local advice providers holding surgeries in the Barry office of Cardiff and Vale Citizens Advice as the Senedd Member for the Vale of Glamorgan.



## Clinic to pilot new digital referral system



Stand by, members of Swansea Neath Port Talbot RAN!

You may be hearing soon from Swansea Law Clinic, who have been awarded the contract to pilot a new digital referral system in the county which aims to get clients the social welfare advice and information they need quickly and efficiently.

The initiative, supported by the Children's Society's Coordinated Community Support (CCS) programme, will create an online system which will put clients in touch with a broad cross section of community-level providers to give them tailored social welfare advice and information.

The CCS programme is working with the Law Clinic to set up the referral system as soon as possible including an initial test site. RAN members will be contacted regarding system demonstrations and sign-up process at the earliest opportunity. The system will also be a central feature of the next SNPT RAN meeting agenda this spring.

For further information and to get involved, please contact [amy.wright@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:amy.wright@childrenssociety.org.uk) or [lawclinic@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:lawclinic@swansea.ac.uk).

## Cost of living crisis

Welsh Government unveils £300m+ support package for low-income families



The Resolution Foundation analysis of the Spring Statement 2022 warns that the cost of living crisis "looks set to make this Parliament the worst on record for household incomes". The analysis warned that the lack of support for low-income families will see 1.3 million UK families pushed into absolute poverty next year. What is Welsh Government doing to help?

The Minister for Finance and Local Government has announced a £300 million-plus package of support including:

- £150 cost-of-living support payment will be provided to all households in properties in council tax bands A to D and to all households, which receive support from the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in all council tax bands.

- £25m will be provided as a discretionary fund for local councils, to help households which may be struggling.

It will also fund investment so:

- the Discretionary Assistance Fund can continue to be flexible, ensuring people receive urgent and emergency financial support when they need it.

- a Wales Fuel Support Scheme can be delivered in the autumn offering low incomes households a non-repayable £200 cash payment towards their energy bills.

The Welsh Government also has a range of policies that are helping to keep money in people's pockets – these are collectively known as the social wage and include:

- Childcare Offer – we provide 48 hours of free childcare a year for working parents of three and four-year-olds (see below)
- Free school meals
- Free prescriptions
- Help with Health Costs
- Council Tax Reduction Scheme
- The Pupil Development Grant Access scheme
- Carer's Allowance - More than 57,000 unpaid carers in Wales will receive a £500 payment in recognition of the 'pivotal role' they have played during the pandemic.

The payment is part of a £29 million investment in unpaid carers from the Welsh Government and recognises the financial and emotional hardship many have experienced. Unpaid carers who are receiving Carer's Allowance on 31 March this year will be eligible for the payment.

## New specialist advocacy firm supports Emily-Rose



*Emily-Rose Hurley, the inspiration for Moss Rose Cottage CIC in Rumney, Cardiff.*

Emily-Rose Hurley from Cardiff has a brain injury – but, with the help of the first not-for-profit legal advice and safeguarding service of its kind, has been closely involved in starting up a company to help other people living with invisible disabilities.

Emily-Rose has been the inspiration for, and a key colleague in, a new community interest company, Moss Rose Cottage CIC, in Rumney, Cardiff, to provide an environment in which people with 'invisible' barriers such as brain injuries can access community-based rehabilitation.

The 150-year-old building, in its past life a corn store and a local post office, will now provide a haven where people can improve their self-esteem and their chances of employment.

She has been supported in the move by her mother and her wider care team as well as

"I saw an opportunity to offer these important services to vulnerable people and their families in an environment which is not driven by profit," he said.

"Trading as an asset-locked community interest company means that, unlike a traditional law firm, we do not generate profit. Any surplus is used for the benefit of the community.

"It's an unusual combination to find a legally qualified solicitor operating in a CIC, and I think that makes social workers, other local authority professionals and third sector referral organisations more comfortable about working with us in the third sector, as opposed to referring matters on to a private business."

Tom acts as Deputy for Emily-Rose, whose level of independence, despite her brain injury, has been steadily improving over recent years.

"Emily's case is great in that it illustrates the fact that many people who do have mental capacity issues can be supported to live independent and fulfilling lives if given the right support," said Tom.

For more information, contact [tomevans@qualia-law.org](mailto:tomevans@qualia-law.org) or [www.qualia-law.org](http://www.qualia-law.org)

*Tom Evans*



by Qualia Law CIC, which provides expert safeguarding and financial management support to people who are vulnerable or have lost mental capacity.

Set up by solicitor Tom Evans in August last year, it offers specialist advice on mental capacity and is the only non-profit company in Wales to provide Court of Protection deputyship by solicitors.

It also provides free, impartial advice and support to families, carers, social care professionals and other third sector organisations, including advice and information providers. It has been awarded National Lottery funding which will allow it continue this work into 2022.

Tom said he used to work a lot in private practice on safeguarding issues, often pro bono, and became interested in it as an area.



# Fran Targett

## A vision for advice in Wales

Fran Targett OBE was appointed Chair of the National Advice Network in 2019 after retiring from her role leading Citizens Advice Cymru as Wales Director. She began her career in the advice sector as a volunteer adviser in Citizens Advice Ynys Môn, where her work included representing clients at social security tribunals, complex debt work and employment advice and tribunal preparation. Here, she sets out her approach to her role, advising the Minister and ensuring Welsh Government policy continues to support and strengthen the advice sector across Wales.

*I am passionate about delivering access to high quality advice for all people and ensuring equality and diversity is achieved.*

I have always believed that access to justice through advice includes essential work to increase the provision of that advice and to influence public policy. We need to ensure that policy impacts on people are both monitored and challenged, reducing avoidable demand failure.

That belief has been, and continues to be, the driving force of all that I have striven to achieve as chair of the National Advice Network.

Currently, the NAN is made up of a range of people from within and outside the advice sector who are committed to driving their vision of a quality national advice service, free and accessible to all, and improving the well-being of people in Wales.

Priority work for National Advice Network this year has included responding to the consultation on the Welsh Government's race equality policy work. This has meant advising Government on their actions and activities, as well as identifying a role for the advice sector and what we need to do to improve race equality in service delivery.

The Regional Advice Networks are in place to make the vital connections between local delivery and national policy advice, and the NAN will be continuing work with them to support high quality delivery of advice services across Wales.

*I have always believed that access to justice through advice includes essential work to increase the provision of that advice and to influence public policy.*

We will be updating work on the needs analysis and taking account what we have learnt about how to quantify unmet need. We will also want to capitalise on the learnings of the Covid-19 experience, where the sector responded very quickly and with true innovation to continue service delivery, and give further consideration on how to measure effectively the impacts and outcomes of advice.

We look forward to working together, across the Networks, to make our vision a reality.

*The National Advice Network Wales has a vision for the future where free and impartial advice services will deliver quality assured information, advice and support to all who need it, in a Wales where everyone understands their rights and responsibilities and knows how to access them.*

*We place particular emphasis on ensuring that those people with the greatest need for such services, and those who otherwise find it most difficult to access support services, are able to benefit from them.*

*Early interventions and wider preventative work are essential to the fulfilment of this vision as they reduce the likelihood of issues arising and minor problems escalating.*



*"The Regional Advice Networks are in place to make the vital connections between local delivery and national policy advice"*



# Anglesey community advice hub project leads the way



A groundbreaking project on Anglesey which has helped thousands of people to access a range of support services has just had its funding renewed into next year.

The community support hub has been so successful that it has now been expanded across North Wales, and has the potential for replication across the whole of Wales.

Working closely with Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board and Anglesey County Council to set up the initiative, Ynys Môn CAB piloted the hub concept in May offering lateral flow tests to the local population and then engaging with individuals who came forward to identify any other needs they may have.

Co-ordination with partner organisations locally meant people could be quickly and efficiently offered a range of services including debt management and benefit advice, fuel and heating support, and mental and physical health support.

The hub is promoted through pharmacists, GPs, leisure centres as well as social workers, the probation service, and the police. People are able to visit the CAB offices in Holyhead by appointment, and also phone a contact number to arrange to pick up LFT kits and access advice and referrals.

The concept has since been expanded by

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, and support hubs now operate in Bangor, Colwyn Bay, Denbigh, Shotton and Wrexham as well as Holyhead, with services delivered through a network of approaching 100 delivery partners.

Ynys Môn CAB chief executive Jackie Blackwell said the Anglesey community hub had now

*"This is a really exciting project which brings an invaluable holistic service to the heart of our community."*

secured funding for the initiative for a further 12 months.

"This is a really exciting project which brings an invaluable holistic service to the heart of our community. We are delighted to be the first of these centres to be set up in North Wales," she said.

"Residents of Holyhead can simply pick up lateral flow tests from our Holyhead office by appointment, and if they have other urgent matters one of our trained advisers will be available to assist, and to link in with other services for additional support."

Lisa Goodier, who has led the development of the hubs across North Wales for Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, said the hubs were helping to break the cycle of multi-generational poverty within families.

"The objective of the service is to work with communities, whilst supporting residents to become more resilient to long-term social and economic impacts. Residents will be supported and empowered to make positive, sustainable choices over time."

For more information, contact [jackie.blackwell@ynysmoncab.org.uk](mailto:jackie.blackwell@ynysmoncab.org.uk) or [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/ynys-mon](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/local/ynys-mon)

# What's new at the RANs around Wales

After being set up in 2019, the progress of the Regional Advice Networks was quickly halted by the pandemic. However, they are now up and running. The goal of the RANs is to connect local organisations, facilitate discussions about the issues facing the local communities and the solutions being put forward. They are a great networking tool and we hope they will continue to grow.

**Rhwydwaith Advice Network Wales**  
Cynghori Cymru | North Wales Region

The North Wales network is very active and constantly looking to develop their meetings to meet the needs of the local advice providers. They run very interactive meetings on a regular basis. The most recent was a 'Communities of People and Need' meeting on the 31st of March.

**Rhwydwaith Advice Network Wales**  
Rhanbarth Abertawe Castell-nedd Port Talbot | Swansea Neath Port Talbot Region

The Swansea Neath Port Talbot network has run multiple successful meetings. It is looking to expand its Neath membership, so if you are part of an organisation in that locality, please get involved so that your communities can receive as much representation as Swansea. Swansea Law Clinic has become the host of a new pilot scheme (see page 8) trialling an easy to use referral system, and the progress of this is discussed at meetings.

**Rhwydwaith Advice Network Wales**  
Rhanbarth Caerdydd a'r Fro | Cardiff and Vale Region

The Cardiff and Vale network has recently expanded its Steering Group membership who are really excited to continue developing the connections being made in the region. The next meeting will be on the cost of living crisis.

**Rhwydwaith Advice Network Wales**  
Rhanbarth Cwm Taf Morgannwg | Cwm Taf Morgannwg Region

The Cwm Taf Morgannwg network held a great meeting in March, with speakers from the Food Prosperity Network, Welsh Water and Citizens Advice attending. A variety of speakers on current issues provides so much value to the discussions on the help available, and deciding what more could be done.

**Rhwydwaith Advice Network Wales**  
Rhanbarth Gwent | Gwent Region

The Gwent Network held a fantastic meeting in February, with good attendance and great discussions. It was a wonderful first meeting back and demonstrated a strong desire for networking and sharing of resources and information. We hope to build on this with future meetings.

**Rhwydwaith Advice Network Wales**  
Rhanbarth y Canolbarth a'r Gorllewin | Mid and West Wales Region

With a new Steering Group, the Mid and West Wales Network is hoping to see the development of regular meetings in the upcoming year.

If you are interested in attending RAN meetings, please email [advicenetworks@gov.wales](mailto:advicenetworks@gov.wales) to sign up to the mailing list.



## Caring about welfare advice quality

The Care & Repair movement in Wales has made a major commitment to quality with all of its 13 agencies on track to be Advice Quality Standard accredited in the coming months.

Care & Repair staff are heavily involved in giving welfare advice to their thousands of often vulnerable clients, and the move aims to assist them in developing a consistent approach focussed on meeting their needs – wherever they are in Wales.

The Advice Quality Standard for legal advice services incorporates the requirements of the Quality Mark which has been developed by Welsh Government as part of its Information & Advice Quality Framework (IAQF).

Care & Repair Cymru Policy & Research Officer Faye Patton is co-ordinating the work across the 13 agencies. She says the organisation isn't necessarily known for giving advice, but has always done so since "it's not just the building, it's the person that lives in it".

"It's really important for us to meet the local needs of our clients to stay warm and independent and safe – someone living in a flat in a city, for example, will have different needs to someone who lives in a detached rural property," she says.

"One of the challenges we have in meeting these diverse local needs is ensuring that the standard of what we deliver stays the same across Wales. The AQS accreditation process is invaluable to us in achieving that.

"If you are giving advice, you are inherently helping someone who is in a vulnerable position so it's really important that our staff are working

in a way which protects our clients. It gets to the heart of what they need from you."

Each Care & Repair agency is a

member of its local RAN, which they see as a way of getting up to date information and advice about the sector, and learning about innovative new ideas and projects.

They are just some of the many and diverse range of organisations involved in the delivery of welfare advice in Wales who are members of the regional networks.



"It's really important for us to meet the local needs of our clients"

## Call goes out for digital legal advice project ideas



A new £4.9M project which aims to make community access to legal advice as easy as online banking is up and running in Swansea.

Legal Innovation Lab Wales, part of Swansea University, has been set up to widen access to justice by working with partners to create online platforms which will allow users to – for example – draft a legal contract or get tailored advice on employment or housing law.

One of its particular remits is to develop digital products and services that help communities to access legal guidance and information – and the lab is calling for individuals and organisations to come forward with suggestions for projects.

Funded by the European Regional Development Fund, the lab is already working with Innovate UK and Meic, the helpline service for children and young people.

Ben Riseborough, Project Manager, Legal Innovation Lab Wales, says the project has a full team of software developers, academics and project support staff on board ready to take up the challenge.

For more information and to contact Ben, go to [www.legaltech.wales](http://www.legaltech.wales) or email [legalinnovation@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:legalinnovation@swansea.ac.uk).

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Please keep an eye out for any emails from [advicenetworks@gov.wales](mailto:advicenetworks@gov.wales) to stay up to date with events and RAN meetings. The following are events in progress, with dates and sign-ups to be sent out closer to the time.

19 May – Cost of Living National Webinar

15 June – National Webinar

13 July – National Webinar



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