

Annex B



Department for

Communities

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Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services

Consultation Report

April 2026

Contents

Background.....	3
Methodology	4
Section 1 - Respondent Details.....	4
Section 2 – An Ambition for Future Service Delivery	10
Section 3 – Investment Priorities	17
Section 4 – Support and strengthen the Independent Advice and Debt Sector through effective regional support.....	40
Equality Screening	45
Rural Needs Impact Assessment	47
Appendix 1: Questionnaire.....	49

Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Services

Background

The Department for Communities has put forward draft proposals to support the delivery of independent advice and debt services in Northern Ireland. The proposals set out how the Department will work with local government and independent advice providers to ensure that people can access consistent, quality advice regardless of where they live in NI, with a focus on ensuring that the Department's investment:

- supports independent advice and debt service providers to meet the needs on the ground;
- balances the need for regional services and for supporting frontline community delivery;
- supports collaboration and joining up of services to minimise duplication, maximise resources and improve outcomes for clients.

The proposals seek to achieve of a cohesive relationship between DfC, the District Councils and the independent advice and debt services sector, underpinned by 'Guiding Principles' that are a reference framework for how services should be delivered. The document has been produced with engagement from Councils and a multistakeholder Reference Group. It has benefitted from the contribution of over 200 individuals providing lived experience and input from three Task & Finish groups on key areas: Quality Standard, Appeals and Tribunal Representation and Measuring Impact. The document also been informed by policy and practice insights from across the UK and Ireland.

A consultation to gather views on these draft proposals was launched on 11 August 2025 and published on the Department's consultations webpage ([Consultations | Department for Communities](#)). To support the consultation, two online engagement events were hosted by the Department for Communities on 9 and 14 October 2025. An overview of the consultation responses is presented in this report. It does not list all comments received. Departmental staff have endeavoured to summarise the responses without judgement or interpretation. In preparing this report, we have identified common themes and issues raised in response to each question.

The results of the consultation have been analysed and collated in this document and will inform the development of a final Northern Ireland Support Framework for

Independent Advice and Debt Services, subject to Ministerial agreement. It is anticipated this work will be completed during 2026/27 and will include a implementation plan which will be taken forward on a phased basis.

Methodology

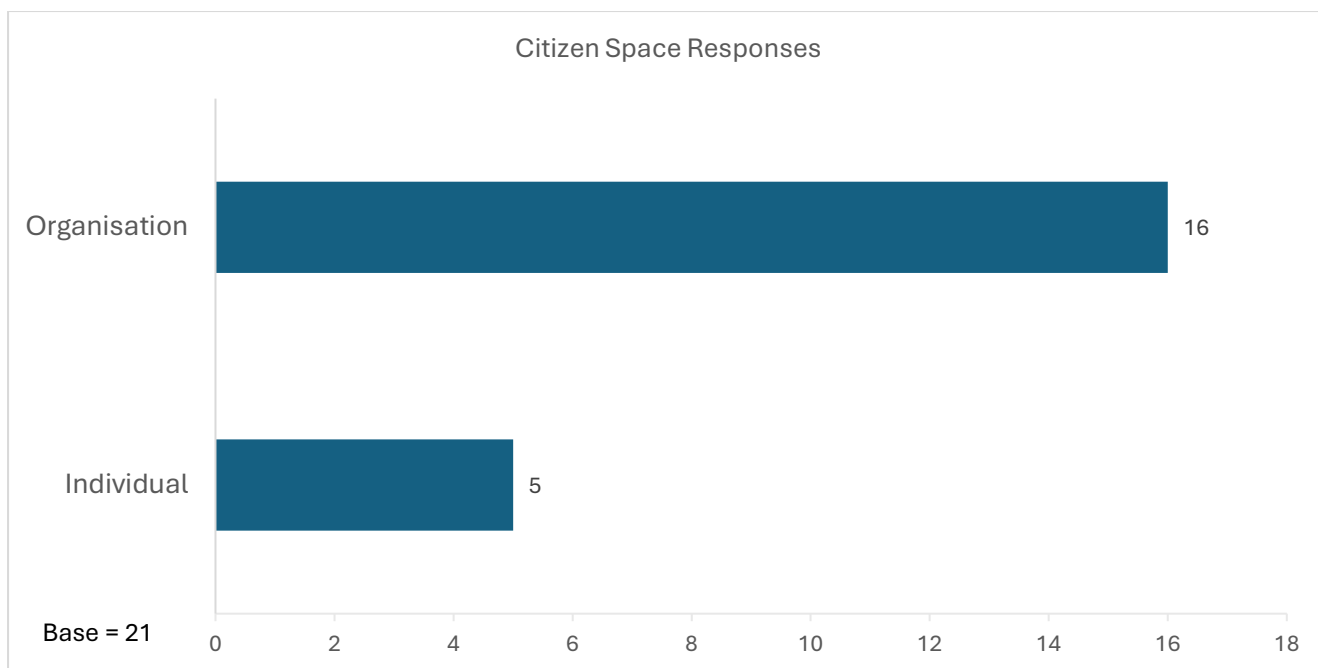
The consultation was conducted via Citizen Space and ran from 11 August 2025 to 3 November 2025. Responses were also welcomed via email. The online questionnaire was completed by **21** respondents and a further **18** respondents submitted email responses. The consultation included both closed and open-ended questions to gather quantitative and qualitative feedback and, where possible, the quantitative and qualitative content of the emailed responses has been incorporated into the analysis presented in this report. It was not mandatory to answer all questions in the survey and therefore the base numbers presented in the charts may differ for each question.

A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix 1.

Section 1 - Respondent Details

Analysis of Results

1: Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?



Of 21 respondents who completed the online survey just over three-quarters (16) were responding as an organisation. Just under one-quarter (five) were responding as an individual.

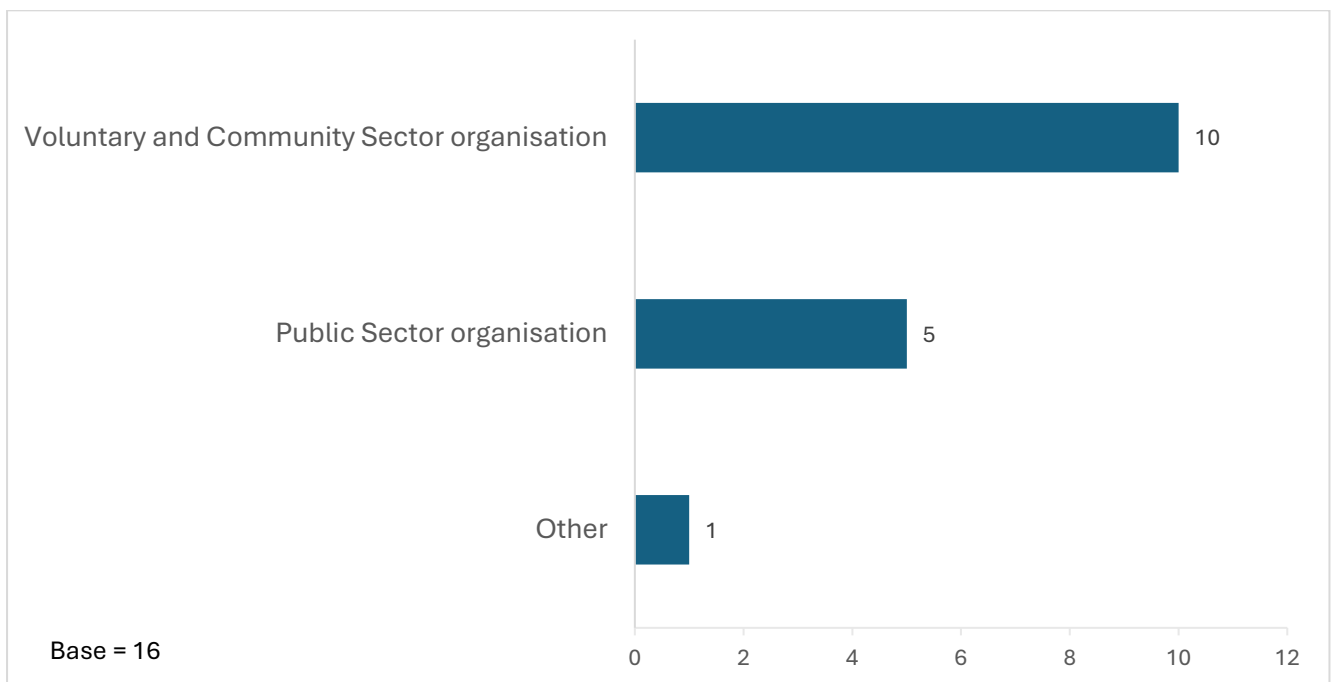
All 18 emailed responses were submitted by organisations.

2: What is the name of the organisation?

Name of Organisation
Advice NI
Advice North West
Advice Space
Ardoyne Association
Ards & North Down Borough Council
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council
Ballynafeigh Community Development Association
Belfast City Council
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council
Centre for Cross Border Co-operation
Christians Against Poverty
Commissioner for Older People for NI
Community Advice Antrim & Newtownabbey
Community Advice Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Ltd
Community Advice Causeway
Community Advice Lisburn & Castlereagh
Community Advice Mid & East Antrim

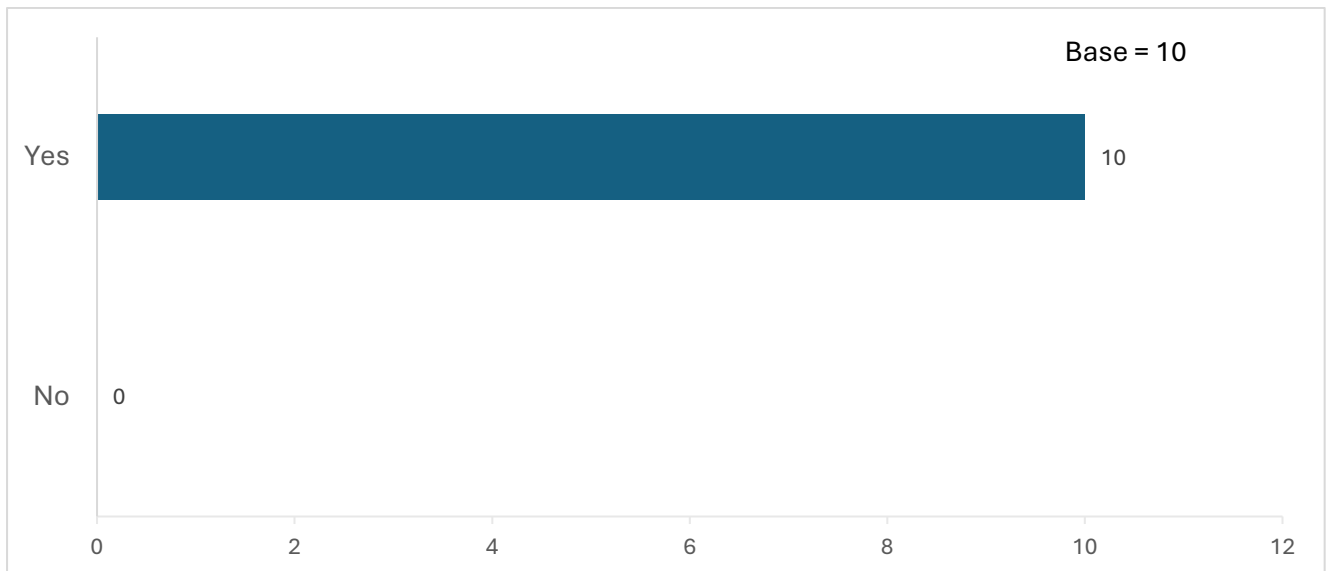
Consumer Council
Derry City & Strabane District Council
Eglinton Community Limited
Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Glenshane Community Development Limited
Independent Community Advice Managers
Law Centre NI
Mid Ulster Council
Migrant Centre NI
National Secular Society
Newry, Mourne & Down District Council
Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO)
Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)
Stepchange Debt Charity
Trussell
Vine Centre

3: Which of the following best describes your organisation?



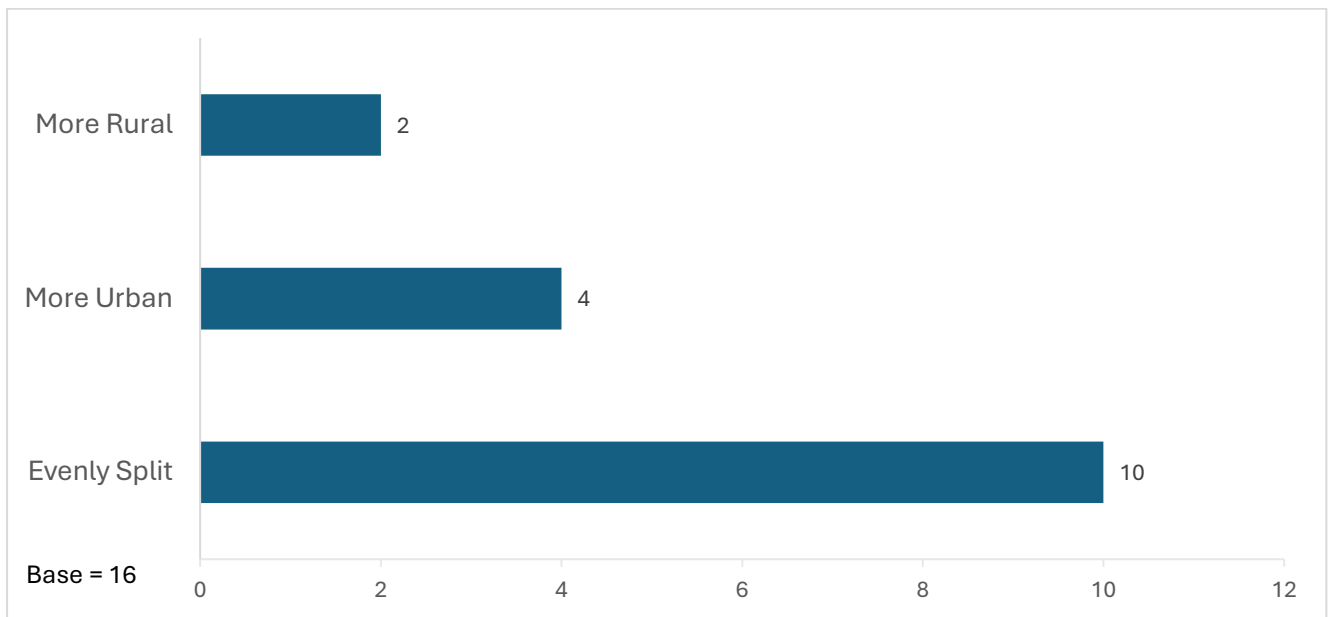
Of those organisations who responded online over one-half (10) described their organisation as being within the 'Voluntary and Community Sector'. Over one-quarter (five) described their organisation as a 'Public Sector organisation' and one response came from an organisation described as 'Other'. None of the online respondents described their organisation as being a 'Funder' or a 'Private Sector organisation'.

4: Does your organisation provide independent advice and debt services?



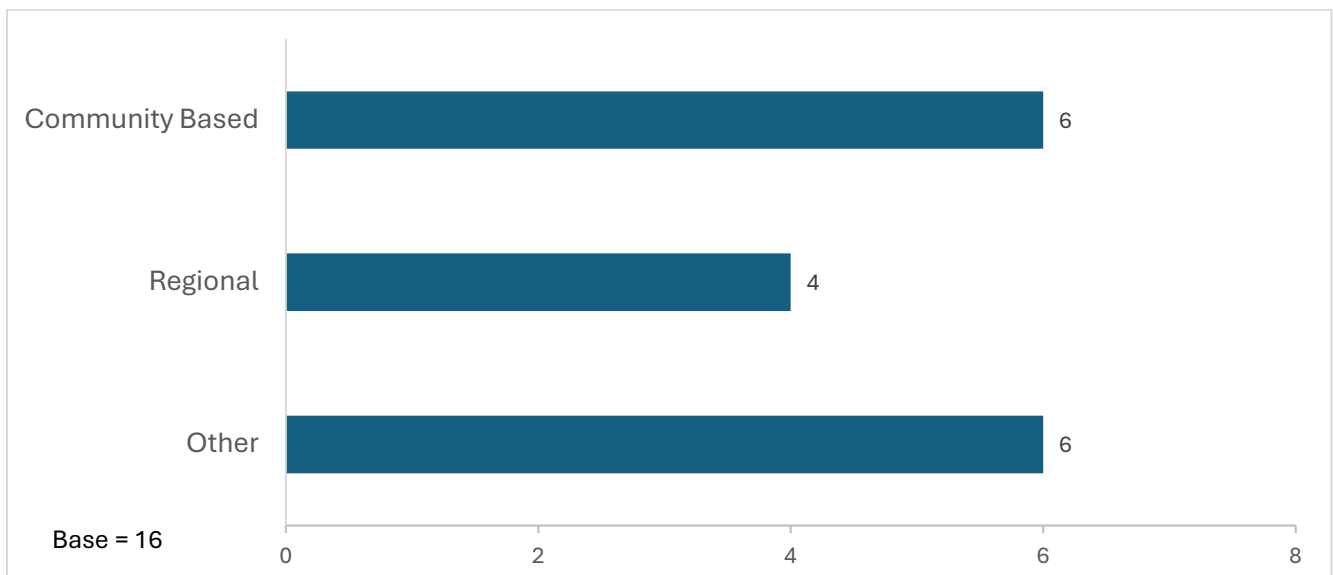
Respondents who identified their organisation as part of the Voluntary and Community Sector were asked whether their organisation provided independent advice and debt services. All ten respondents from this sector confirmed that their organisation offers these services.

5: Does your organisation operate more in urban or rural areas?



More than one-half (10) of the 16 organisations who responded online reported operating equally across both rural and urban areas. One-quarter (four) said their organisation operates more in urban areas while one-eighth (two) confirmed they operate more in rural areas.

6: Is your organisation a regional organisation / community based or other?



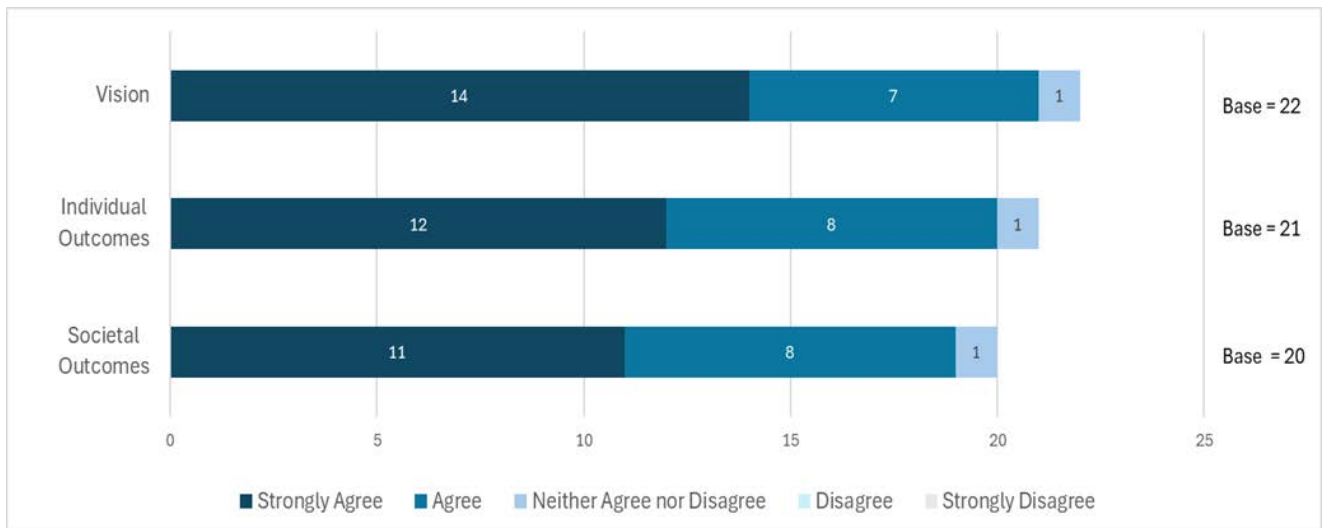
Of the 16 organisations who responded online, six were community-based organisations and four were regional based. Six respondents chose 'Other' which included an organisation that provides an outreach facility, a national advocacy organisation, two district councils and an organisation which provides advice services

across Belfast as well as bespoke advice services with partners across Northern Ireland.

Section 2 – An Ambition for Future Service Delivery

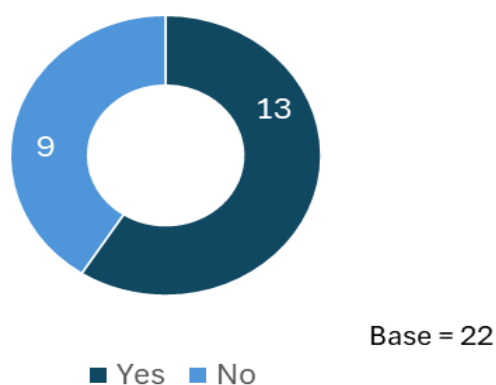
Analysis of Results

7-9: Agreement with the proposed vision, individual outcomes and societal outcomes



When asked about the proposed vision, individual outcomes and societal outcomes, responses were favourable, with no respondents disagreeing with any of the three. More specifically, almost two-thirds of respondents (14 out of 22) strongly agreed with the proposed vision, while just under one-third (seven) said they agreed. On the proposed individual outcomes, over one-half of respondents (12 out of 21) strongly agreed while over one-third of respondents (8) said they agreed with the outcomes. Similarly, just over one-half of respondents (11 out of 20) strongly agreed with the proposed societal outcomes, while a further eight respondents agreed. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with each of the proposed vision, individual outcomes and societal outcomes.

10-11: Are there any gaps in the proposed outcomes for individuals and society or anything else that you would like to see included?



Just under three-fifths (13) of respondents identified gaps in the proposed outcomes for individuals and society or wished to see something else included. The remaining two-fifths of respondents (9) did not perceive any gaps in the proposed outcomes.

Below is a range of suggestions which respondents submitted in relation to the individual and societal outcomes as well as the eight principles:

Individual Outcomes:

- “More emphasis in the 1st individual proposed outcome could be better: People are supported with advice and empowered to resolve their problem/s”
- “2nd individual proposed outcome could have more emphasis such as: People are able to maximise their income rights and entitlements”
- “people can access free independent advice in a timely manner”
- “Worth considering greater linkage between the individual benefits and societal benefits, for example, consider reduction in debt/those facing issues with benefit take up etc”
- “People know how to access support and advice”

Societal Outcomes:

- “Societal impacts should mention impacts on those most disadvantaged.”
- “the language should be more inclusive. Instead of people of NI, it should say Everyone living in Northern Ireland.”

Principles:

- “it would then make sense to include a 9th - 'empowerment'”
- “Principles should include reference to supporting the dignity of those accessing services”

Key Themes:

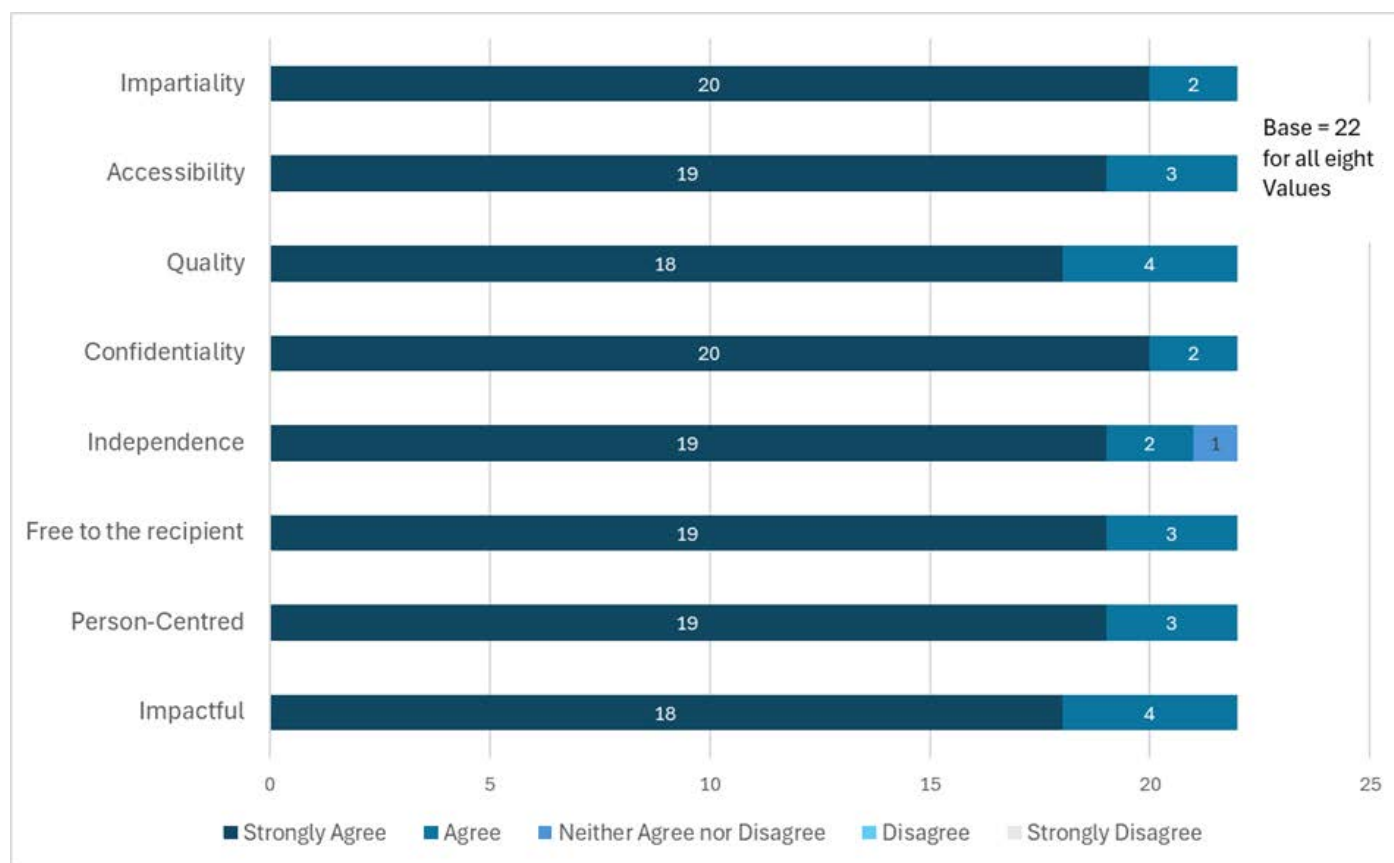
Funding Gaps – Several respondents highlighted the need for increased and longer-term funding for the sector, noting that this would assist with capacity issues in the sector, provide greater stability and enable more competitive pay, which was seen as essential for retaining skilled staff. One respondent highlighted specific funding gaps, particularly in ensuring accessibility for users of British Sign Language (BSL) and other languages, as well as in the provision of immigration advice across Northern Ireland. Another respondent noted a perceived imbalance in funding between regional and community advice services, which they felt should be addressed.

Regional Support – A few respondents stated that “effective local advice must be underpinned by effective regional support services” and they felt this should be recognised within the outcomes framework.

Resourcing – A few respondents highlighted the importance of adequate resourcing in the sector to ensure access noting that this applies to both community based and remote services.

“Local services and regional specialist services need to continue to sit alongside each other – outcomes and resourcing should reflect that.”

12-13: To what extent do you agree that these principles are correct?



Responses to the principles were all favourable with no respondents disagreeing with any of the eight. Respondents were also asked to share anything they would like to add specific to each of the values:

Impartiality

The majority of respondents (20) strongly agreed that the principle of 'Impartiality' is correct while a further two respondents agreed.

There was strong agreement among the respondents that 'Impartiality' belongs at the core of independent advice services.

"This is a central tenet of an independent advice service."

Accessibility

The majority of respondents (19) strongly agreed that the principle of 'Accessibility' is correct while a further three respondents agreed.

Several respondents noted that additional resources and funding would be necessary to ensure services are accessible to everyone when needed, including individuals with a wide range of diverse needs.

"Resources will be necessary to ensure accessibility for service users with disabilities, hearing and visually impaired, neurodivergence as well as interpreter services".

One respondent emphasised the importance of providing support outside standard working hours while another emphasised that services should operate independently of political parties, statutory bodies, and government.

Quality

The majority of respondents (18) strongly agreed that the principle of 'Quality' is correct while a further four respondents agreed.

It was widely agreed that maintaining quality is essential when supporting vulnerable clients with complex needs. There was strong backing for the introduction of a recognised quality standard, with many respondents emphasising that this should be independent from the advice sector.

"Any recognised quality standard must be independent from the sector to have any credit."

A few respondents suggested that the quality of advice services should be audited regularly to ensure standards are maintained.

Confidentially

The majority of respondents (20) strongly agreed that the principle of 'Confidentiality' is correct while a further two respondents agreed.

It was agreed that confidentiality is a fundamental principle within the advice sector and that all services must uphold the highest standards of privacy.

"All service should be highly confidential including the fact of a clients visit and will not be passed on to anyone outside the service without express permission from the clients."

Independence

The majority of respondents (19) strongly agreed that the principle of 'Independence' is correct while a further two respondents agreed. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed.

There was strong consensus that independence is vital within the advice sector so that public confidence in services can be maintained with advisers acting solely to benefit the client.

"Services are free from bias or external influence, with advisers acting solely in the best interest of the client."

Free to the recipient

The majority of respondents (19) strongly agreed that the principle of 'Free to the recipient' is correct while a further three respondents agreed.

Respondents agreed it is essential that independent advice services be free at the point of delivery to ensure that all those who need to access the services can do so. Many respondents highlighted the importance of adequate funding for the sector to ensure that advice services remain free.

"Our users are often living in poverty and it is crucial that funding is sufficient to enable advice to remain free at an adequate level to meet demand."

Person-Centred

The majority of respondents (19) strongly agreed that the principle of 'Person-Centred' is correct while a further three respondents agreed.

Respondents emphasised the importance of a person-centred approach within the advice sector, noting that its primary purpose is to meet the needs of those seeking support. Several respondents also reiterated the need for adequate funding and resources to ensure demand can be met effectively.

“A person-centred approach must underpin every aspect of this proposal. The advice sector, in partnership with government, exists fundamentally to meet the needs of those we serve.”

Impactful

The majority of respondents (18) strongly agreed that the principle of ‘Impactful’ is correct while a further four respondents agreed.

Respondents noted that high-quality advice can have a profound and meaningful impact on an individual’s life. Several emphasised the importance of collecting data to measure this impact, as robust measurement can help demonstrate the value of advice services. It was noted that the impact measures should be meaningful and that resources will be required to collect the data.

“Capturing the evidence of impact is important and there needs to be some recognition of the resource implications of doing this effectively.”
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Other comments:

Several respondents suggested additional values they felt should be included in the framework. These included ‘effectiveness’, ‘empowerment’, ‘supporting the dignity of those accessing services’, ‘inclusion’ ‘accountability’ and ‘non-judgmental’.

One respondent emphasised the need to incorporate input from individuals with lived experience of using advice services when developing person-centred approaches as well as assessing impact and they felt this was missing from the framework.

Department’s Response:

We welcome the strong levels of agreement across all three areas and that the overall direction has been broadly endorsed.

We recognise the issues raised, including requests for more inclusive language, clearer linkages between individual and societal benefits, and additional emphasis on accessibility, empowerment and dignity. We also note the points highlighted around the need for strong regional support, funding, and resourcing.

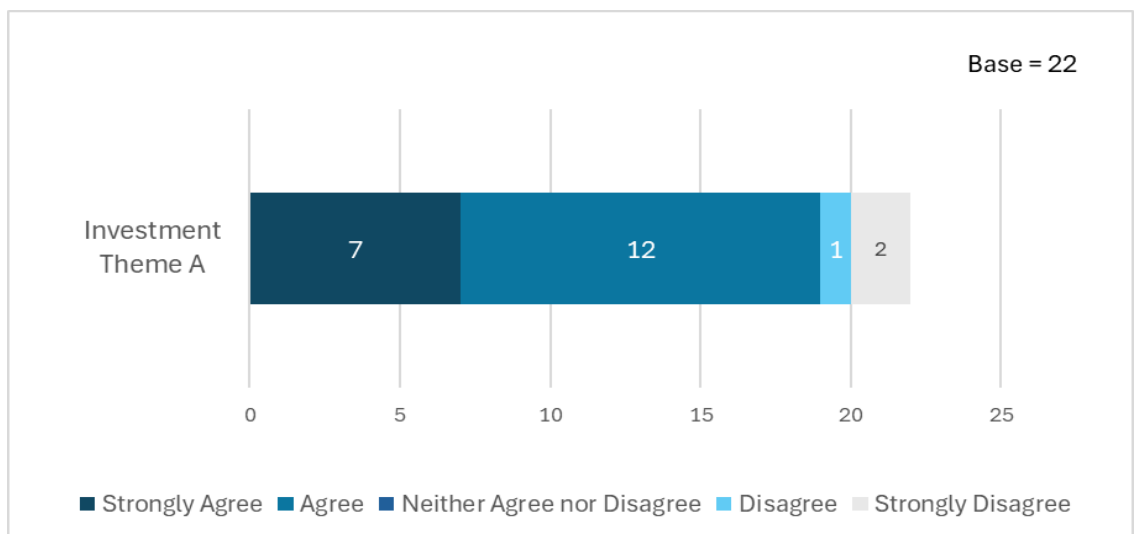
In light of this feedback, the Department will review and strengthen the wording within the final Framework to ensure it is inclusive.

Section 3 – Investment Priorities

Investment Theme A: Joining up to improve outcomes

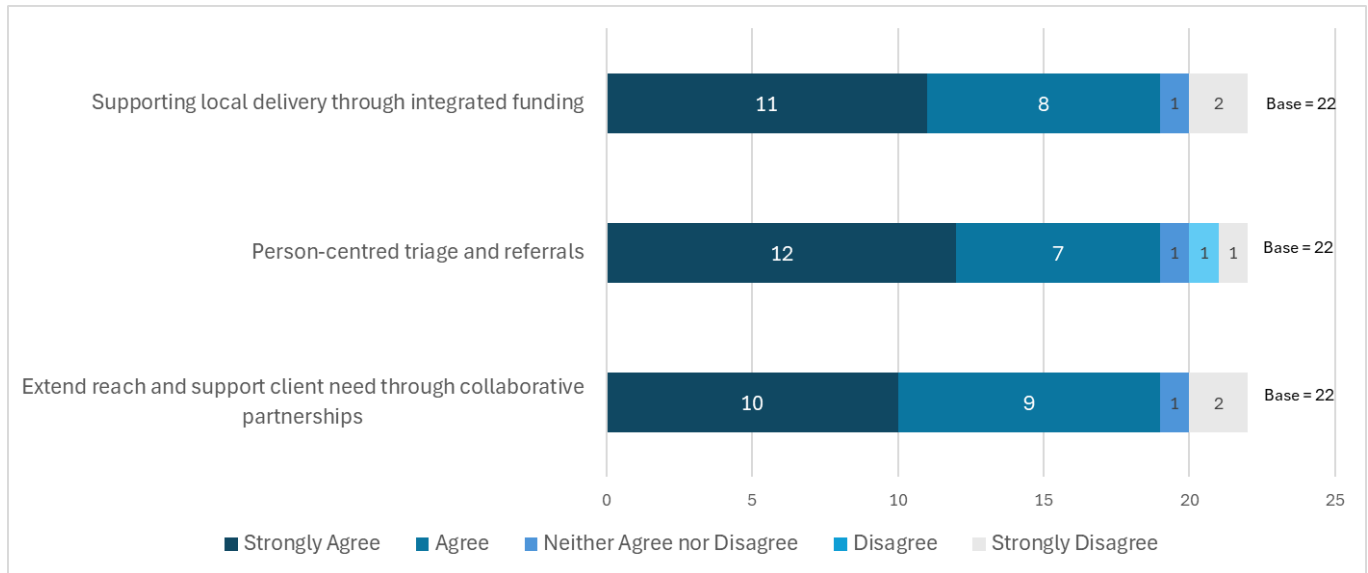
Analysis of Results

14: To what extent do you agree with the headline Investment Theme A: Joining up to improve outcomes?



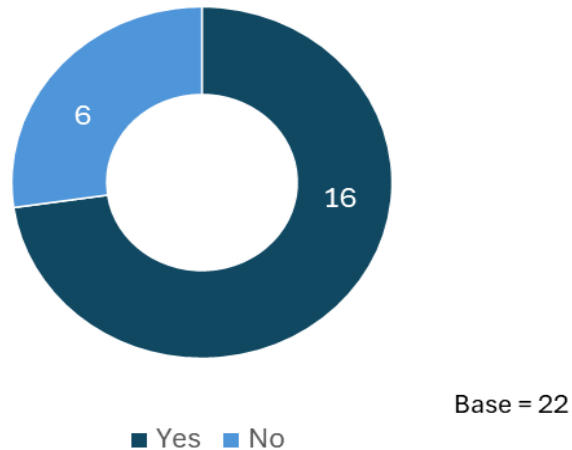
The majority (19 of 22) of respondents agreed with the headline Investment Theme A: Joining up to improve outcomes, with seven strongly agreeing and a further 12 agreeing. However, one respondent disagreed and a further two respondents strongly disagreed.

15: To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?



When asked about the key priorities for investment under Theme A responses were largely favourable. One-half of respondents (11 out of 22) strongly agreed with the “Supporting local delivery through integrated funding” priority and a further eight respondents agreed. However, two respondents strongly disagreed with this priority. More than one-half of respondents (12 out of 22) strongly agreed with the “Person-centred triage and referrals” priority and a further seven respondents agreed. Two respondents either disagreed (1) or strongly disagreed (1) with this priority. Almost one-half of respondents (10 out of 22) strongly agreed with the “Extend reach and support client need through collaborative partnerships” priority and a further nine respondents agreed. However, two respondents strongly disagreed with this priority. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with all three key priorities.

16-17: Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included?



Of the 22 respondents just under three-quarters (16) identified gaps or wished to see additional content included in the proposed investment priorities and headline Theme A. Just over one-quarter of respondents (6) did not perceive any gaps.

Key Themes:

❖ **Supporting local delivery through integrated funding**

Funding issues – Although respondents widely supported integrated and longer-term funding, they also called for future funding to recognise some key challenges.

- Respondents highlighted significant concerns regarding recruitment and retention within the advice sector, noting that advice roles require high levels of technical expertise. They felt current salaries in the sector do not reflect these demands, creating inequity and high turnover rates. They emphasised that fair pay and recognition are essential to ensure staff retention and sector stability.

“The new funding framework must incorporate the flexibility to benchmark salaries across the sector and include annual uplifts to ensure fairness and sustainability.”

- Disparity - Respondents highlighted concerns about an imbalance of funding allocation between regional organisations and local advice providers. They called for the new model to review resources to ensure fairness, sustainability and a frontline service which is adequately resourced.

“There is a widespread perception that there is an imbalance in resourcing between regional organisations and frontline providers, and this is an opportunity to review and prioritise resource allocation to ensure that the service, as experienced by the client, is properly resourced and focused towards delivering good outcomes at the point at which services are accessed.”

- Inflation-proof funding – Several respondents emphasised that the multi-year funding model must include annual inflationary and cost-of-living adjustments to maintain service quality and sustainability over time.

“This new model must recognise the current demands on services in terms of inflation and cost of living rises, the sector has been significantly underfunded for years, we would hope this new model starts to address this gap in support and management costs.”

Council considerations – A number of respondents who voiced their support for integrated funding through councils stressed the need for this to be rolled out across all councils consistently and that all councils must be required to comply with the approach. Respondents felt this would promote fairness across the sector and strengthen its ability to demonstrate collective impact.

“We fully support the integration of funding through local councils. However, to ensure equity across all services and to produce consistent data and management information, it is essential that all councils are required to comply with a unified model.”

It was suggested by a few respondents that Councils would need to be given adequate time and support to implement any new arrangements to ensure that they are implemented consistently across all areas.

“In terms of integrated funding which is welcome, local integration increases local management, reporting and service-management responsibilities so it will be important to ensure each of the 11 Councils has adequate support to operationalise consolidated funds in a uniform way.”

“However we do have concerns over the timeline for transferring to Council, and what transition arrangements will be put in place.”

Regulated Debt Advice – Several respondents noted that, because debt advice is a regulated service, integrating its funding with generalist advice provision could present challenges.

“The delivery of Debt advice is a form of regulated advice requiring registration with external regulatory bodies. And if funding is merged with generalist advice, it may exclude community-based generalist advice services from accessing a joint up fund since they will not be registered with the regulated bodies....”

❖ **Person-centred triage and referrals**

Expert-led Triage – Respondents strongly supported this priority, with several emphasising that triage should be carried out by experienced advisers, as their knowledge and expertise enable them to assess clients appropriately and determine the best course of action for each individual.

“Our experience has been that effective triage is best done by trained advisers, with local connections and relationships, equipped to identify the most appropriate way to support the client’s needs.”

Guided referrals – Although some respondents noted that independent community centres already adopt a person-centred approach, they agreed that a more structured model is needed and highlighted the importance of supported handovers when referring clients.

“..we agree that a more formalised approach, particularly one that includes warm handovers, is necessary.”

Collaborative monitoring design – It was suggested by a few respondents that input from frontline staff should be incorporated into the design of any future monitoring arrangements.

“In terms of monitoring, frontline staff should be engaged when designing relevant reporting.”

❖ **Extend reach and support client need through collaborative partnerships**

Stakeholder commitment – Respondents widely agreed with the principle of collaborative partnerships but stressed that success depends on full commitment from all stakeholders, including councils, the Department and other agencies. The growing complexity of client needs was highlighted by one respondent, which requires coordinated, holistic services and genuine collaboration built on trust, transparency and active referral practices.

“..this needs buy-in from all services, councils, DfC and other government agencies, to ensure that advice can work effectively and efficiently on behalf of people accessing our services.”

Adequate Funding – it was noted by some respondents that resources are required to expand and maintain collaborative partnerships and therefore adequate funding should be provided to facilitate this.

“Additional funding in the 2025/6 year for integrated partnership work, has increased our capacity to expand and strengthen partnership working, but the increased demand upon local services will need ongoing funding to be sustainable.”

Regional Partnership – There was strong support for establishing a Regional Advice Partnership or forum, with many respondents requesting that it be co-chaired by representatives from the independent community advice sector.

“To build confidence in this new initiative, we would ask the Department to consider appointing a representative from the frontline as co-chair of the Partnership and providing suitable representation from managers and advisors.”

Department’s Response

The Department welcomes the strong levels of support expressed for Investment Theme A and its associated priorities. We note that the majority of respondents agreed with the overarching theme and each of the key investment priorities, particularly the value placed on integrated funding, person-centred triage, and strengthened partnership working.

We also recognise the concerns raised. Respondents highlighted issues relating to recruitment and retention in the sector, including points made about salary levels. It is important to clarify that the Department is not the employer of staff in any independent advice organisations and has no role or remit in setting salaries or employment terms and conditions.

We acknowledge concerns about the balance of funding between regional and local provision, the need for greater consistency across councils, and potential resource implications of new arrangements. The Department will consider these issues as we progress as part of the work to design a new overarching outcomes framework and service specifications.

In addition we will establish a Regional Advice Forum, comprising representatives from key stakeholder groups. This will be utilised as a vehicle to engage and seek feedback on proposals arising from the refreshed support framework.

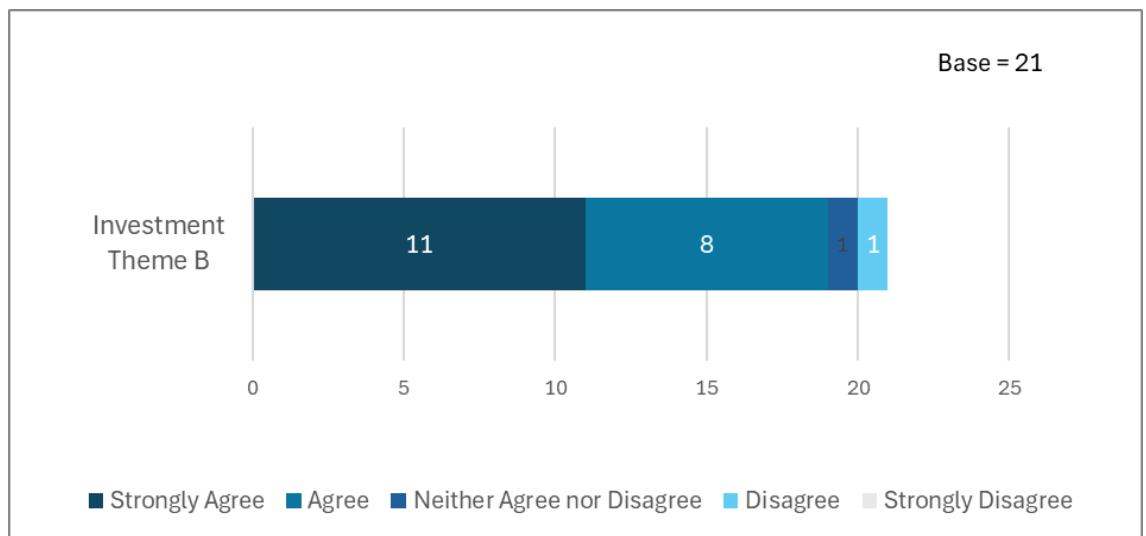
In relation to debt advice funding, we are aware of the specific issues raised regarding regulated activity and the potential risks of integrating funding streams to enable Councils to commission all community-based advice services, including debt advice.

To address this, the Department will take a careful and considered approach engaging with relevant stakeholders, ensuring that any changes introduced are incremental and monitored closely. We will focus on evidence-based adjustments that protect service quality and maintain appropriate regulatory compliance.

Investment Theme B: Enhancing Visibility and Accessibility of Services

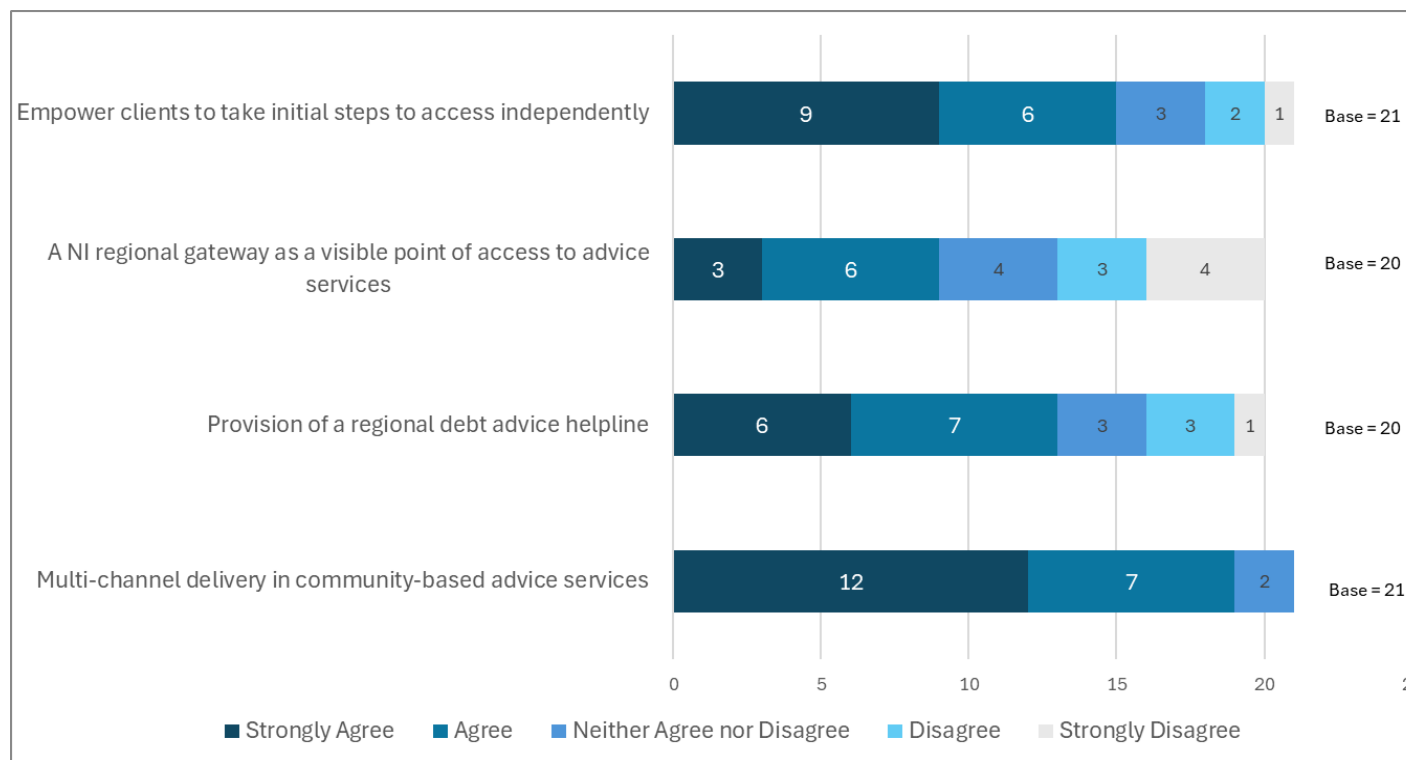
Analysis of Results

18: To what extent do you agree with the headline Investment Theme B: Enhancing visibility and accessibility of services?



Slightly more than one-half of respondents (11 out of 21) strongly agreed with the headline Investment Theme B: Enhancing visibility and accessibility of services. A further eight respondents agreed. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed and one respondent disagreed.

19: To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?



When asked about the key priorities for investment under Theme B responses were mixed.

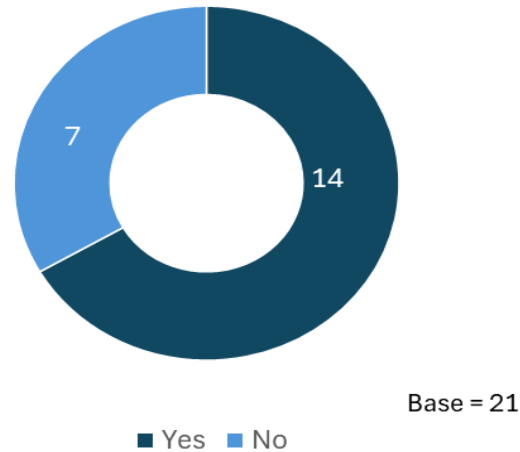
The most positive responses were in relation to the ‘Multi-channel delivery in community-based advice services’ priority, with no respondents disagreeing with this priority. More than one-half of respondents (12 out of 21) strongly agreed and one-third of respondents (seven) agreed. Two respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Almost one-half of respondents strongly agreed with the ‘Empower clients to take initial steps to access independently’ priority (nine out of 21) while just under one-third (six) said they agreed. Three respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, two respondents disagreed and one respondent strongly disagreed.

For the ‘Provision of a regional debt advice helpline’ priority just over two-thirds of respondents (13) agreed, with six respondents strongly agreeing and seven respondents agreeing. Three respondents disagreed and a further one respondent strongly disagreed to this priority. Three respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

The priority ‘A NI regional gateway as a visible point of access to advice services’ received the lowest level of agreement of the four priorities in Theme B. Slightly under one-third of respondents (six out of 20) agreed with the priority and a further three respondents strongly agreed. However, a fifth of respondents (four) strongly disagreed with this priority while a further three disagreed. A fifth of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed (four).

20-21: Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included?



Of the 21 respondents, two-thirds (14) identified gaps or wished to see additional content included in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme B. One-third of respondents (seven) did not perceive any gaps.

Key Themes:

❖ **Empowering clients to take initial steps to access advice independently**

Increased barriers for some groups – Although respondents recognised the importance of empowerment, many expressed concern that prioritising this without sufficient in-person support could create obstacles for vulnerable groups lacking the capacity or confidence to act independently (e.g., individuals with limited literacy or IT skills, older people, people living with mental health conditions, and people for whom English is not a first language). Respondents therefore emphasised that frontline services must be properly resourced to meet the demands of all clients, ensuring readily available, person-centred assistance for issues that are often complex and require ongoing support.

“..on a daily basis we see clients who are not able to help themselves and who come to us because they struggle to navigate the information which is already available online.”

Risks of duplication – Several respondents felt that investment should not be allocated to potentially duplicating existing online resources but rather be directed towards strengthening frontline services.

“..it is important to recognise that there is already a wealth of material available online, including platforms such as NI Direct and MoneyHelper. Allocating funds from the advice budget to duplicate these resources would be an inefficient use of limited funding.”

❖ **A NI regional gateway as a visible point of access to advice services**

Gateway limitations – Several respondents who supported this priority emphasised that, for a gateway model to be effective, robust and efficient referral processes would need to be in place. However, some respondents felt that establishing a regional gateway would not represent the best use of funds, preferring instead that investment be redirected towards frontline services where a more person-centred approach can be delivered.

“..it must be supported by effective referral protocols that ensure seamless connections between regional systems and community-based services.”

Role of the gateway - Some respondents noted that any gateway should operate solely as a referral tool and that it should not be used as a triage service or to deliver advice as it was felt that this could potentially leave clients at a disadvantage. They suggested that any triaging or advice should be delivered by local advice services who possess the expert knowledge to support clients holistically.

“The proposed regional gateway must act only as a routing mechanism, not as a parallel advice provider.”

Promotion of services – Some respondents suggested that a more effective and cost-friendly method of increasing visibility would be through the coordinated promotion of independent community advice services by councils, NI Direct and regional services.

“..there is a gateway model that can be built by involving Councils to promote access to advice services through a joined up coordinated way especially if this is the future integrated funding vehicle. This, rather than potentially creating an additional touchpoint for clients than exists currently, may be better.”

❖ **Provision of a regional debt advice helpline**

Mixed responses - While several respondents strongly supported the retention of the helpline others expressed concerns that helplines do not meet the needs of all clients and could create barriers. These respondents emphasised that helplines should not replace local, face-to-face services.

“..the current set-up with debt helpline and Digi team, works extremely well, this is specialist advice, and has a well-established internal referral process.”

“A regional helpline may be a barrier to people at a local level.”

Mobile debt service – Several respondents suggested that, as debt advice is a specialist service delivered by a relatively small number of advisers, a mobile debt advice service should operate across multiple locations alongside the debt advice helpline. It was felt this approach would improve frontline accessibility for debt advice clients throughout Northern Ireland.

“To ensure comprehensive coverage and accessibility in addition to the frontline advisers, both the helpline and a mobile peripatetic service are essential.”

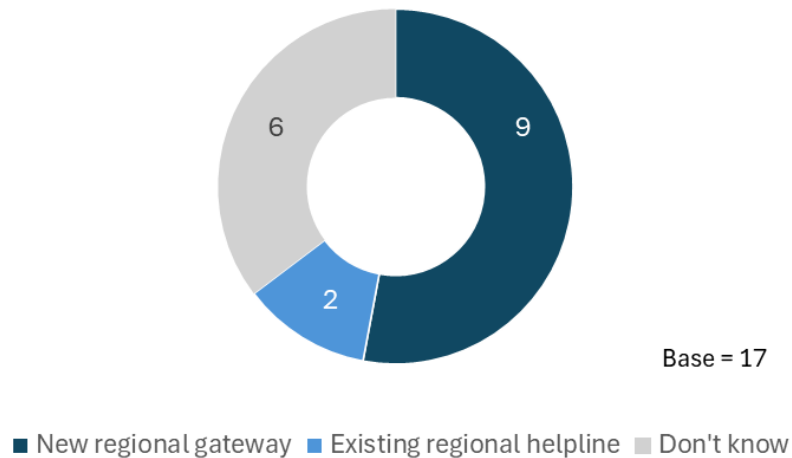
❖ **Multi-channel delivery in community-based advice services**

Meeting diverse needs – There was strong support for this investment priority, however, some respondents stressed that it must prioritise in-person, local services. Again, respondents reiterated that vulnerable clients with complex situations are best served by local advisers. Several respondents noted that insufficient consideration had been given to the accessibility of services for migrants who may be unable to communicate in English or those clients with low literacy levels.

“the increasing diversity of the population should also inform delivery and factor in the language and cultural barriers that people may face in accessing the service.”

“It also does not consider users of low level of literacy in English which can include members of the local community and Irish travelers and some individuals from BAME background.”

22: Do you think Northern Ireland would be better served in the future by the existing delivery model including the regional helpline, or by the new proposed model which includes a regional gateway?



Slightly over one-half of respondents (nine out of 17) thought Northern Ireland would be better served in the future by a 'New regional gateway'. Two respondents expressed a preference for the 'Existing regional gateway' while six respondents stated they did not know.

Key Themes:

Prioritise Frontline Delivery- Respondents strongly supported directing resources toward expanding the capacity of frontline and local advice providers, as they are seen as best placed to deliver holistic, person-centred support.

“Resources must go to the front line Advice Services to support the most vulnerable in our society.”

Helpline ineffective – A few respondents felt that the current helpline model is not effective with some feeling that that it fails to refer adequate numbers of people to local advice services.

“The existing model is ineffective, with limited referrals to local advice services and inadequate in the delivery of holistic advice, casework, or advocacy. Consequently, clients who rely on the helpline are placed at a disadvantage compared to those accessing local advice services.”

Support for gateway - Those who supported the proposed model, including a regional gateway, believed it could help improve service efficiency and reduce duplication. One respondent noted that a gateway could offer valuable anonymous support options for users who prefer them. However, it was strongly emphasised that any new gateway should first undergo a pilot phase and be developed in full collaboration with frontline advice service providers.

“The proposal to establish a regional gateway to provide a telephone and digital platform for incoming enquiries will increase the efficiency and efficacy of the service currently available. This will enable all prospective clients to determine their next steps and access the service which best meets their needs (for example - community-based advice services or other support services)”

Others who expressed support for a regional gateway emphasised it should function *solely* as a referral mechanism, directing clients to local advice providers who are best placed to fully address their needs.

Potential barriers – Several respondents expressed concern that introducing a regional gateway could create additional barriers to accessing advice services by adding another step to the customer journey, putting further distance between clients and their local advisers.

“Moving to a single regional line could mean losing the local, trusted phone number that people already know. This might make someone less likely to call if they think they’re reaching a call centre rather than a familiar local service.”

Department’s Response

The Department welcomes the broadly positive feedback on Investment Theme B, particularly the strong endorsement of multi-channel delivery within community-based advice services and the general support for empowering clients to self-serve where appropriate.

We also recognise the mixed views and concerns raised regarding the regional gateway. Respondents highlighted potential risks around duplication, accessibility, and creating additional barriers, as well as the importance of maintaining person-centred, local advice provision.

In light of this feedback, the Department intends to assess options around a regional gateway in greater depth, including examining regional delivery models used in other jurisdictions and assessing different approaches to access, referral, and specialist support.

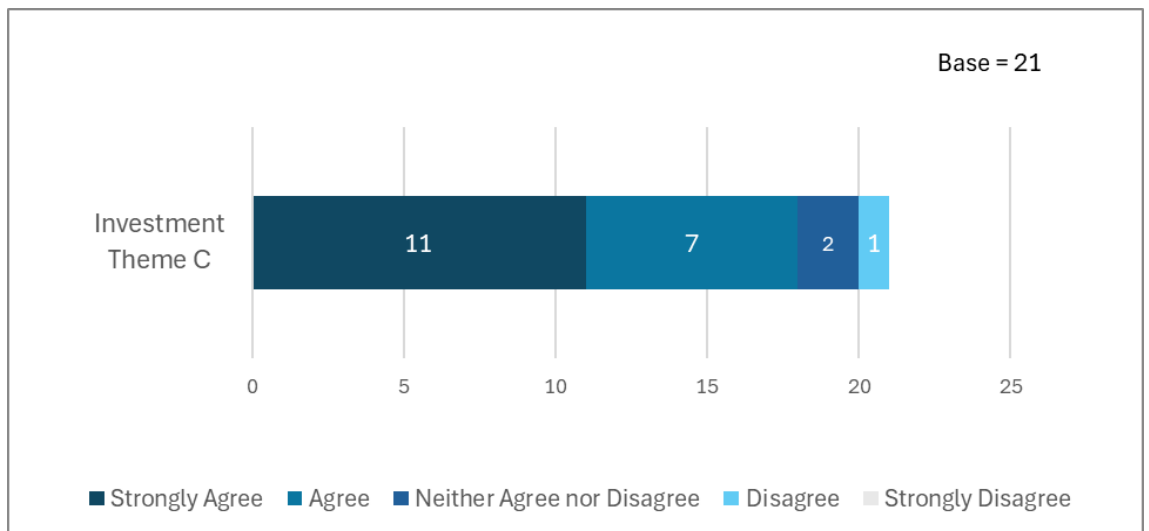
However, to protect service continuity, current services will remain in place while this work is taken forward. This approach ensures stability for clients and providers while allowing the Department to evaluate options carefully, avoid unnecessary disruption, and identify evidence-based improvements.

We remain committed to working collaboratively with the sector to strengthen visibility, accessibility, and the overall client journey across advice services in Northern Ireland.

Investment Theme C: Quality and Innovation in Services

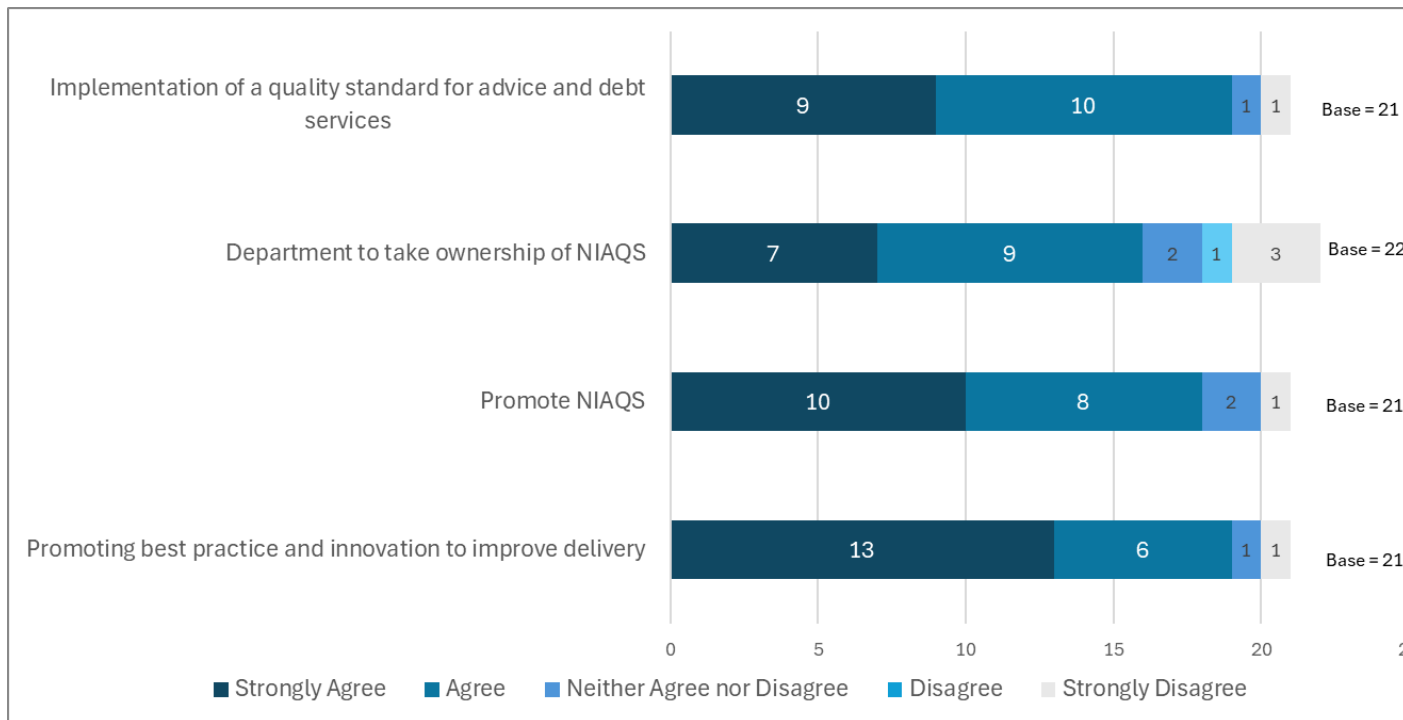
Analysis of Results

23: To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme C: Quality and Innovation in Services?



Most respondents to this question (18 out of 21) agreed with Investment Theme C: Quality and Innovation in Services with 11 respondents strongly agreeing and seven respondents agreeing. Two respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and one respondent disagreed.

24: To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?



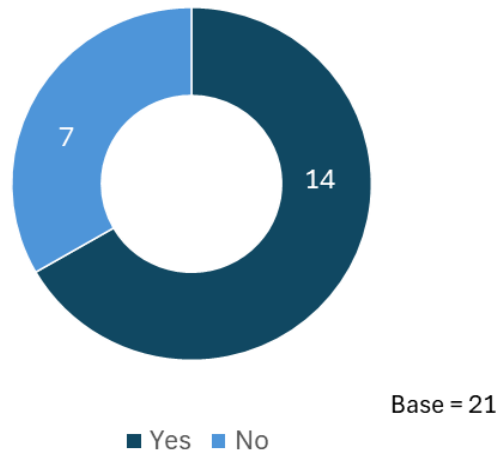
There were high agreement levels across all four suggested key priorities for Theme B.

For both the ‘Implementation of a quality standard for advice and debt services’ and the ‘Promoting best practice and innovation to improve delivery’ priorities, almost all respondents (19 out of 21) expressed agreement, with nine and 13 respondents, respectively, strongly agreeing. However, one respondent disagreed with each of the two priorities.

Most respondents (18 out of 21) expressed agreement with the ‘Promote NIAQS’ key priority, with almost one-half (10) strongly agreeing and a further eight agreeing. However, one respondent strongly disagreed and two respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this priority.

Just under three-quarters of respondents (16 out of 22) expressed agreement with the key priority ‘Department to take ownership of NIAQS’ with seven respondents strongly agreeing and nine respondents agreeing. However, this priority had the highest level of disagreement in this theme, with three respondents strongly disagreeing and one disagreeing.

25-26: Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed headline theme or investment priorities, or anything additional you would like to see included?



Two-thirds (14) of the 21 respondents identified gaps or wished to see additional content included in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme C. One-third of respondents (seven) did not perceive any gaps.

Key Themes:

❖ **Implementation of a quality standard for advice and debt services**

Co-design with frontline – Respondents agreed that any new quality standard should be developed with frontline advisers to ensure practicality, consistency across councils, and minimal administrative burden.

“The current standards require a complete review and should be co-designed with frontline providers to reflect the realities of service delivery.”

Independence – Respondents generally agreed that ownership of the quality standard should be independent, though responses varied on whether this meant independence from both regional organisations, the advice sector entirely, and government. While many respondents were comfortable with the Department holding ownership of the quality standard, one respondent requested clarification on how this would operate.

There was also consensus that accreditation of the standard should be carried out by an independent assessor with relevant expertise in advice provision.

“Ownership and assessment must be entirely separate from the advice sector to guarantee impartiality and credibility.”

“any quality control measures should be independent of the government”

“..accreditation of the quality standard, and subsequent monitoring of it, should be conducted by an independent organisation with the required level of expertise and experience in this field.”

Resources/Funding – Several respondents highlighted that consideration must be taken of the additional staff and resources required to implement and maintain a new quality standard. It was suggested by one respondent that for the standard to be effective the full cost of developing, implementing and monitoring should be determined so that the Department can commit to the level of long-term investment required. Other respondents also suggested that clear, appropriate timelines or phased introductions should be put in place to ensure effective delivery.

“Consideration should be given for having a phased introduction of a new Quality Standard, and to the resource implications of preparing and supporting advice providers to achieve it.”

“More resources and staff are required at independent community provider level, to support us in meeting QS standards and embed into everyday advice provision.”

Client-focused – A few respondents recommended that the quality standard should prioritise the experience of service users as well as the resulting impact and the quality of the advice provided.

“However, any standard needs to be focused on a person’s experience of the service, the quality of advice provided and the impact of the advice.”

❖ **Promoting best practice and innovation to improve delivery**

- One respondent proposed that the Innovation fund should be used to invest in service improvements while another highlighted its potential to foster an innovative culture aimed at reaching groups currently not accessing support. A further respondent who supported the proposal of the Innovation fund stressed that the fund must be adequately funded in order to enable genuine innovation in service delivery.

“Use the Innovation Fund to invest in service improvements Coordinate to replicate effective innovations NI-wide.”

“Promoting an innovative culture will hopefully provide opportunities to design outreach targeting particular groups in need who aren’t yet accessing support.”

- However, one respondent expressed concern that prioritising innovation could lead to centralisation or reduced face-to-face access for those vulnerable clients.

“The Department’s priority should be to safeguard and strengthen proven, community-based advice services that meet people where they are, rather than introducing new processes that create barriers and uncertainty.”

Department’s Response

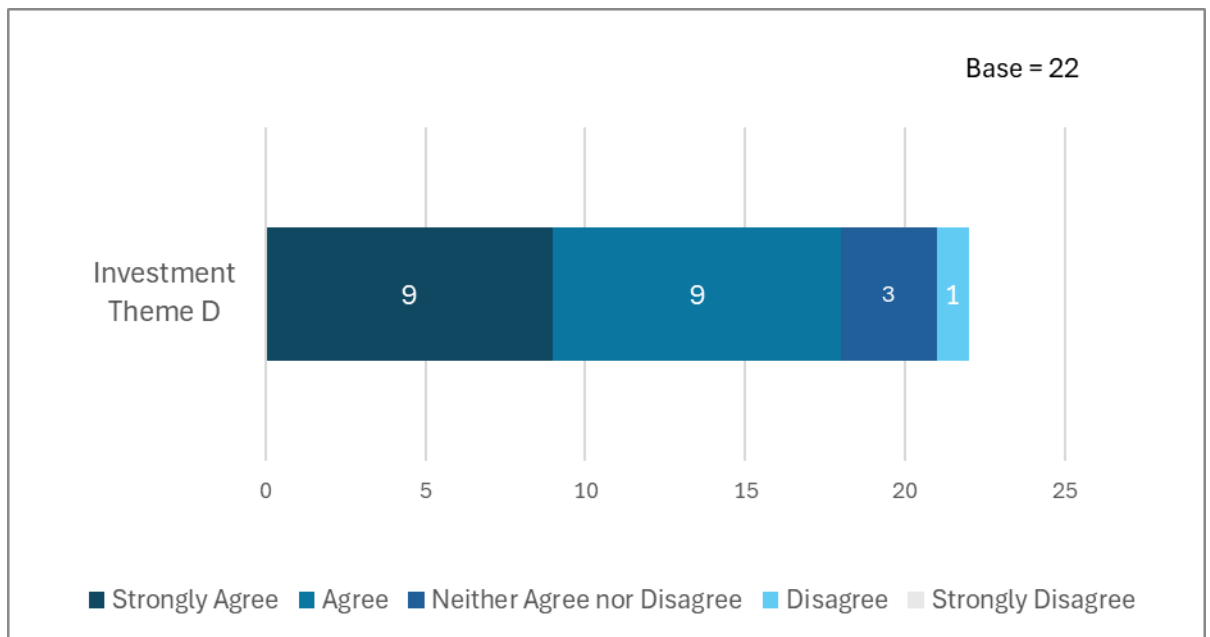
The Department welcomes the strong support expressed for Investment Theme C and the clear endorsement to review the existing quality standard for advice and debt services. We recognise the importance respondents place on ensuring that people in Northern Ireland can access high-quality, accredited advice, and we agree that this will provide reassurance and confidence to those seeking support.

We also note the feedback on the need for the views of frontline providers to be factored into the design of the standard and for it to be independently accredited. The Department is committed to taking forward work in 26/27 to update the existing standard so that it is practical, proportionate and reflective of the size and capacity of the advice sector in Northern Ireland. We acknowledge the resource implications raised and will ensure that any implementation approach takes account of these pressures, including opportunities for phased introduction where appropriate.

Investment Theme D: Measuring Performance and Impact of Services

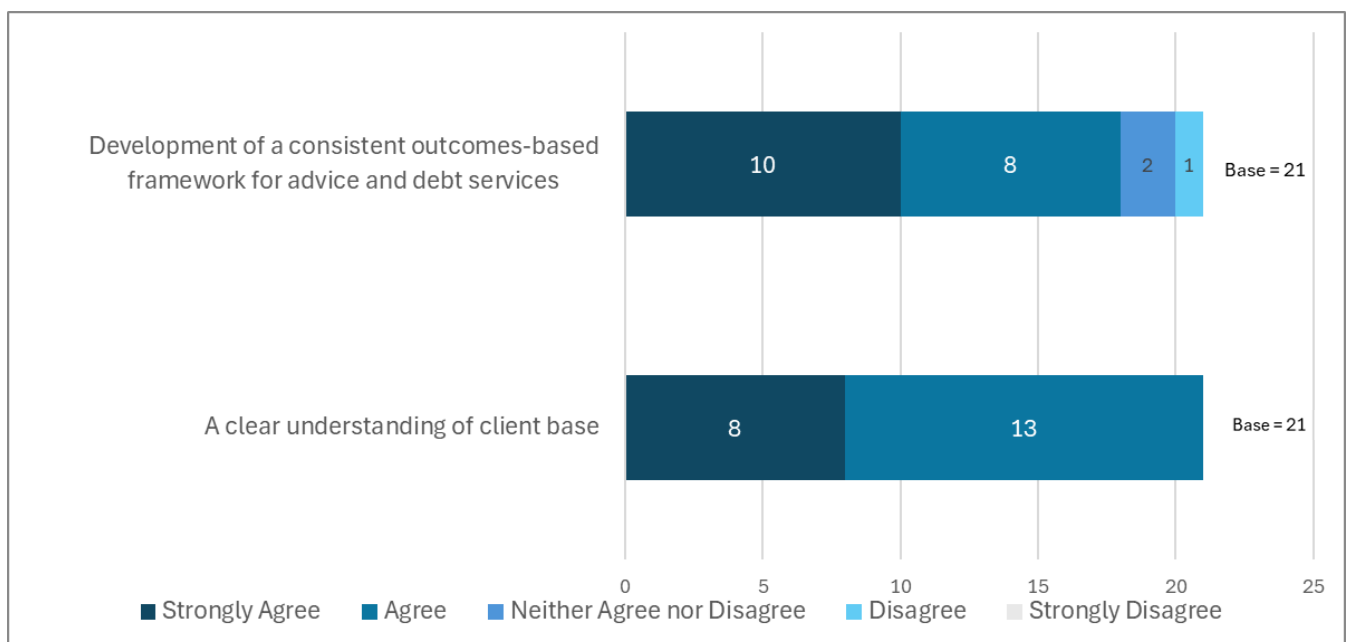
Analysis of Results

27: To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme D: Measuring Performance and Impact of Services?



Most respondents who answered this question (18 out of 22) agreed with Investment Theme D: Measuring Performance and Impact of Services, with nine respondents strongly agreeing and nine respondents agreeing. One respondent disagreed and three respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

28: To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?

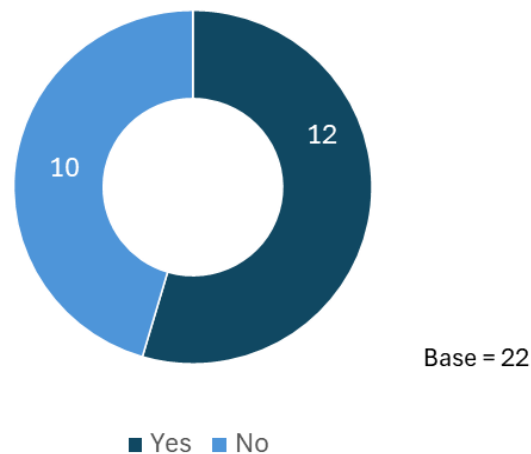


When asked about the key priorities for investment under Theme D responses were mostly favourable.

Notably, all respondents (21) agreed with the key priority ‘A clear understanding of client base’. Eight respondents strongly agreed while 13 agreed.

Most respondents (18 out of 21) agreed with the key priority ‘Development of a consistent outcomes-based framework for advice and debt services’ with almost one-half (10) strongly agreeing and eight agreeing. One respondent disagreed and two neither agreed nor disagreed with this priority.

29-30: Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed Investment priorities and headline theme, or anything additional you would like to see included?



Of the 22 respondents, more than one-half (12) identified gaps or wished to see additional content included in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme D. Ten respondents did not perceive any gaps.

Key Themes:

❖ **Development of a consistent outcomes-based framework for advice and debt services**

Collaboration – There was strong consensus among respondents that the outcomes-based framework should be developed through a collaborative process, ensuring participation from the Department, local councils, and, critically, frontline advice providers.

“Collaboratively designed: Involving Community Advice providers, DfC, and councils to ensure it reflects operational realities and strategic priorities.”

“Before any OBA/performance framework can be initiated, DfC and Councils must work with the advice sector providers to agree a reporting framework..”

Meaningful measurement – Several respondents highlighted the need for the data collected to be evidence-based and provide meaningful insights for all parties. It should not only demonstrate the impact of advice services but also inform funding decisions and continuous service improvement. A few respondents suggested that key indicators should include ‘referral pathways and partnership working’, ‘staff training and development’ and ‘client experience and outcomes’.

“this report must be viable, beneficial, provide evidence-based data, and help to build the quality of advice with key indicators such as referral partners, staff training and client experience, this should create a robust OBA that clearly demonstrates the impact and value of independent advice.”

One respondent highlighted the need for flexibility in defining outcomes, noting that success can vary depending on context. This approach would acknowledge that for clients facing complex challenges, even a small step forward can represent significant progress, despite a longer journey ahead.

Not onerous – There was consensus that outcome reporting should not create an administrative burden for frontline services. Several respondents suggested integrating reporting into the case management system and leveraging data that advisers can automatically capture during their routine activities. Furthermore, one respondent noted that any new reporting approach will need to take potential resource implications into account (e.g. “technology, time, staff training etc”)

“Whatever data is going to be required must be manageable and achievable and not create an unrealistic administrative burden on frontline services.”

Consistency – Respondents welcomed the development of a unified outcomes-based framework, as it would promote consistency across the sector and enable more meaningful comparisons. They also reiterated the importance of consultation with the advice sector during its development to ensure the framework is practical, consistently applied, and fit for purpose.

“Consistent across the sector: Creating a unified approach that enables meaningful comparison and benchmarking while reducing duplication and administrative burden.”

Advice Pro – Some concerns were raised regarding AdvicePro with a few respondents suggesting that the system should be reviewed to decide its suitability as a case management tool under a new reporting approach.

“We support the aspiration to strengthen data capture and data reporting mechanisms but reflect the concerns of local advice partners with the existing Advice-Pro system. There would be benefit in reviewing whether this system will continue to meet service needs under the new support framework.”

❖ **A clear understanding of client base**

One respondent expressed support for conducting additional research into the needs of the broader Northern Ireland public, with particular attention to hard-to-reach groups, to identify any unmet requirements (e.g. families impacted by imprisonment) alongside those already represented among current service users.

Another respondent emphasised that to fully understand the client base, the development of the framework should actively involve frontline staff who have direct experience working with clients.

“To reflect lived experience and understand client base there should be provision for input from those with the expertise of experience.”

Department’s Response

The Department welcomes the broadly positive response to Investment Theme D and the strong support for both a clearer understanding of the client base and the development of a consistent outcomes-based framework for advice and debt services.

We recognise the importance respondents placed on collaboration. A reporting framework will be developed jointly with the sector, including regional organisations, frontline advisers, councils and other partners. This collaborative approach will form a central part of how we take forward the design of the performance and impact measures within the final Framework.

We also acknowledge concerns about the potential administrative burden of reporting. While we are committed to ensuring that any approach is proportionate and manageable, it is important to note that the Department has a statutory requirement to have due regard to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations which will require the collection of Section 75 data. This information is essential to improving future policy decisions and ensuring services meet the needs of all groups. Our aim is therefore to make reporting more consistent, streamlined and integrated, drawing as far as possible on data already captured through case management systems.

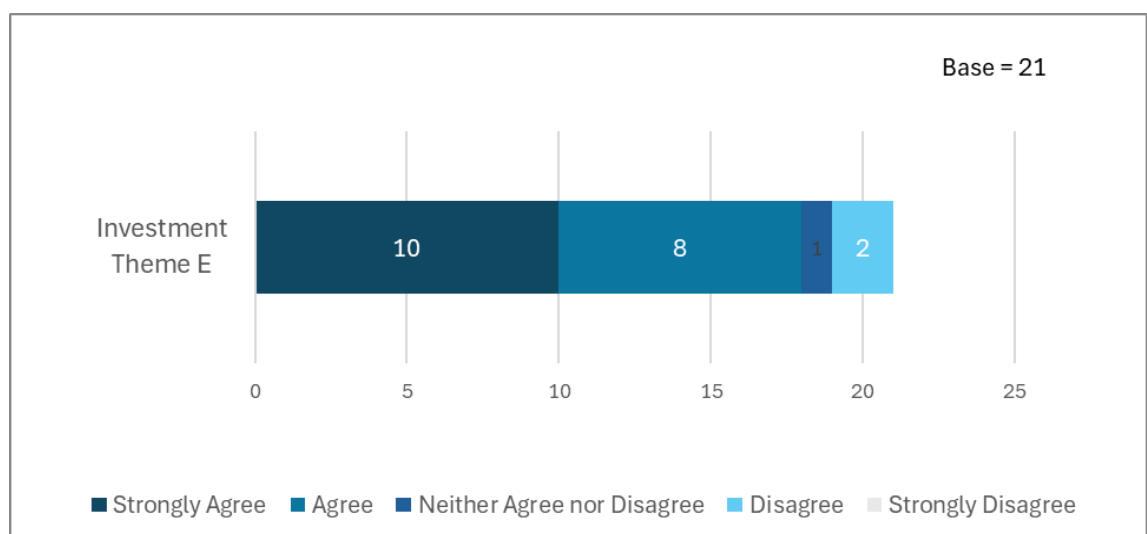
The Department will continue to engage on the reporting framework throughout the 2026/27 financial year, with implementation planned to commence on a phased basis from April 2027.

Section 4 – Support and strengthen the Independent Advice and Debt Sector through effective regional support

Investment Theme E: Support and Strengthen the Sector

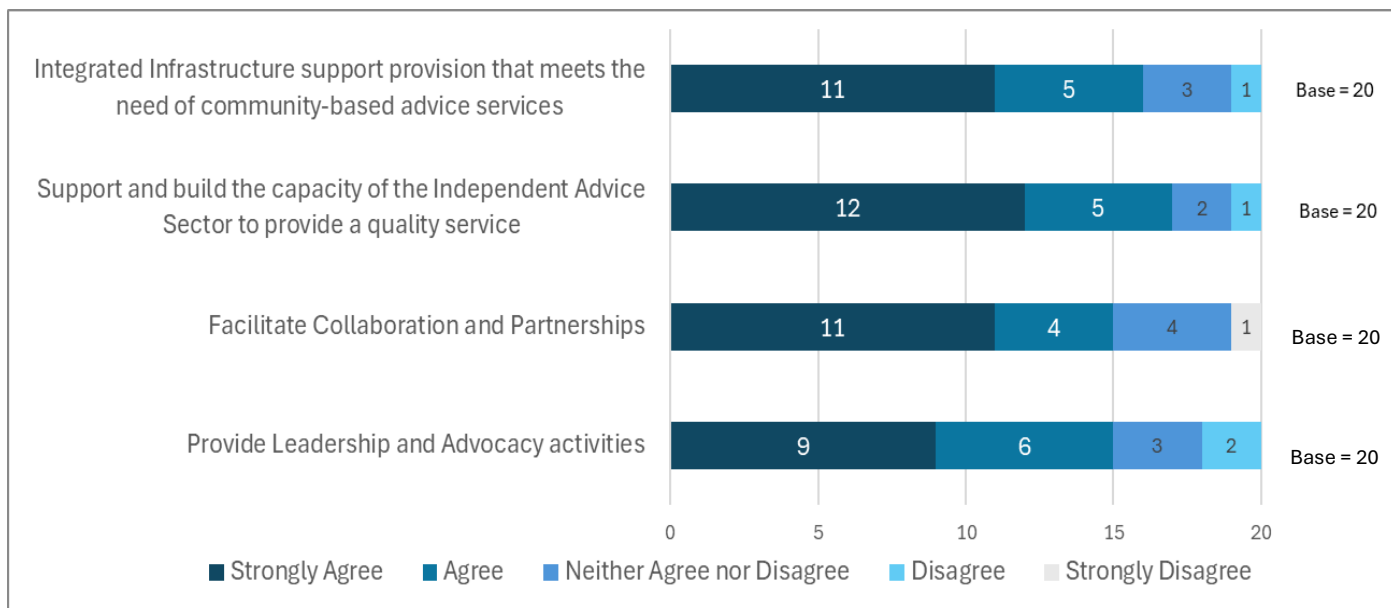
Analysis of Results

31: To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme E: Support and Strengthen the Sector?



Of the 21 respondents, almost one-half (10) strongly agreed with Investment Theme E: Support and Strengthen the Sector. A further eight respondents agreed. Two respondents disagreed with the theme while one respondent neither agreed nor disagreed.

32: To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment?



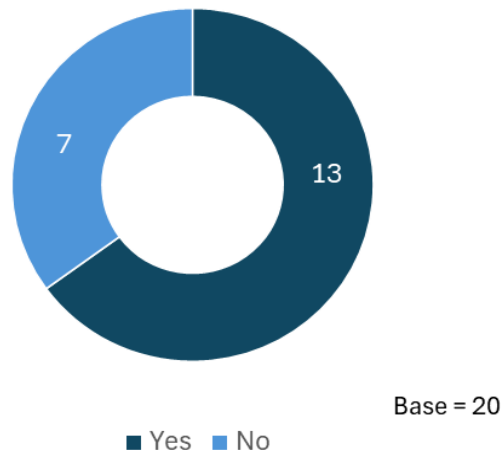
When asked about the key priorities for investment under Theme E responses were mostly favourable.

More than one-half of respondents (12 out of 20) strongly agreed with the key priority ‘Support and build the capacity of the Independent Advice Sector to provide a quality service’. One-quarter of respondents (five) agreed while one respondent disagreed. Two respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Over one-half of respondents (11 out of 20) strongly agreed with the ‘Integrated Infrastructure support provision that meets the need of community-based advice services’ and the ‘Facilitate Collaboration and Partnerships’ key priorities. A further five and four respondents, respectively, agreed. However, one respondent disagreed with the ‘Integrated Infrastructure support provision that meets the need of community-based advice services’ priority and one strongly disagreed with the ‘Facilitate Collaboration and Partnerships’ priority.

Just under one-half of respondents (9 out of 20) strongly agreed with the key priority ‘Provide Leadership and Advocacy activities’, with a further six respondents agreeing. However, two respondents disagreed and three respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with this key priority.

33: Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included?



Of the 20 respondents, just under two-thirds (13) identified gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme E or wished to see something else included. Slightly more than one-third of respondents (seven) did not perceive any gaps.

Key Themes:

- ❖ **Integrated infrastructure support provision that meets the need of community-based advice services**

Defined Roles – Respondents called for the roles of the two regional organisations (The Law Centre and Advice NI) to be more clearly defined, outlining the responsibilities of each. It was strongly felt that the current lack of clarity leads to significant duplication in the sector.

“Over the years the lines between both ADNI and LCN have become blurred, as independent advice services we need clear lines as to who is responsible for providing what support service, there is a clear need to reduce the duplication, maximise the resource more effectively and to build a high skilled sustainable workforce.”

Genuine Collaboration – To effectively meet the needs of frontline advice services, respondents emphasised the need for deeper and more meaningful collaboration between the two regional organisations.

“Genuine collaboration between both organisations is essential to ensure effective support for Community Advice services.”

Funding Concerns – Some respondents highlighted concerns about the current funding split between regional organisations and local providers, calling for a review to ensure funding is fair and directed where it will have the greatest impact. One respondent also noted that the draft framework lacked any proposed priorities for longer-term investment, which they believe was essential to provide stability and security for the sector. Furthermore, another respondent stated that there was no investment priority focused on safeguarding local advice services from potential funding cuts.

“The current funding split between regional organisations and local providers is unfair and needs to be reviewed so that resources follow demand.”

“There is no priority focused on directly protecting local delivery points from funding cuts or policy changes that undermine their ability to operate. Without safeguarding local access, no amount of regional infrastructure will make a difference to the people who need it most.”

❖ **Support and build the capacity of the Independent Advice Sector to provide a quality service**

Training – Respondents highlighted the need for well-coordinated, timely, and affordable training that avoids duplication, including regular in-person AdvicePro sessions to improve case recording and system use. Equal access to training (as well as expert support for complex cases) for frontline providers was noted as being essential.

“Training needs to be available on a regular programme to respond to the needs of local providers - this is critical and does not always happen. It needs to be affordable and practitioner led.”

AdviserNet Access – Concerns were raised by a few respondents regarding access to AdviserNet which is a resource used daily in the provision of immigration advice. They emphasised that regional support for continued AdviserNet access is essential, as losing access would significantly affect services for ethnic minority clients.

“We understand that there are current concerns in relation to future access to Citizens Advice Advisernet, which advisors rely on daily and which supports the ability to provide Level 1 Immigration advice. We hope that this concern will be addressed.”

Remote Services – One respondent expressed concern that the investment priorities appear to focus solely on community-based services and stressed that remote services should also be included.

“..we believe remote provision has a key role to play in Northern Ireland and call for remote charitable services to be in scope for investment under Theme E.”

❖ **Facilitate Collaboration and Partnerships**

Effective consultation of sector - Several respondents agreed that meaningful consultation with frontline providers requires clear and effective communication from regional support, with input actively being sought from those delivering services. One respondent also stressed the importance of engaging both regional providers and the wider sector in any decision to establish partnerships, noting that lessons should be learned from previous unsuccessful attempts at partnership working in the sector.

“Any proposed partnership needs to be a joint arrangement with no organisation seen as the ‘lead partner’.”

“Facilitation of Collaboration and Partnerships is to be welcomed, that will effectively support and involve frontline advice providers.”

Defined recipients of support – Some respondents noted that, as regional support organisations have memberships extending beyond frontline advice services, the framework should clearly specify who the intended recipients of support are.

“..it is essential that the support framework clearly defines the intended recipients of support to ensure transparency and accountability.”

❖ **Provide Leadership and Advocacy activities**

Collective Effort – Respondents agreed that frontline services, who see systemic challenges firsthand, play a vital role in advocating for change and must have their views actively sought and represented. They also emphasised that both Advice NI and the Law Centre hold important responsibilities in this area, and stronger collaboration between them would help strengthen the sector. Additionally, it was noted that a unified approach should recognise the contributions of all stakeholders, particularly frontline providers, rather than allowing one organisation to dominate publicity.

“Publicity and policy work should acknowledge the collective contribution of all stakeholders and highlight the critical role of frontline services, where advice is actually delivered.”

“Both Advice NI and the Law Centre play vital roles in this effort through their engagement with frontline services, and deeper collaboration between them would bring significant advantages to the sector and the communities they support.”

Department’s Response

The Department welcomes the strong levels of support for Investment Theme E and the clear endorsement of the priorities aimed at strengthening the independent advice and debt sector. We recognise the importance respondents placed on ensuring that the sector is adequately resourced, and we remain committed to supporting this within the constraints of the Department’s budget.

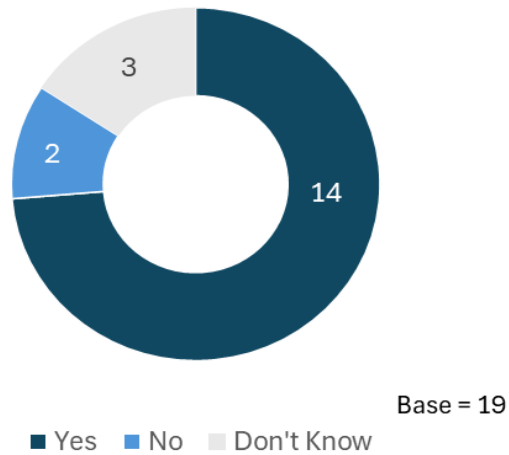
We note the concerns expressed about duplication between regional partners and the need for clearer roles. The Department has started engagement with regional organisations to ensure clear delineation of roles and responsibilities, to support a coherent system.

We also recognise the feedback about training, access to specialist tools, and the need for strong collaboration across all parts of the sector. Remote services were highlighted as an area requiring continued support. The Department recognises that ensuring a multi-channel service model including in-person, telephone, and digital support is central to enable people access advice in the way that best meets their needs.

Equality Screening

Analysis of Results

35: Do you agree with the conclusions of the Equality Screening exercise?



Just under three-quarters (14) of the 19 respondents confirmed they agreed with the conclusions of the Equality Screening exercise. Two respondents did not agree and a further three respondents did not know.

If no, please provide your reasons:

- A few respondents noted that “full implementation will require additional resources”. These respondents recommended conducting a scoping exercise to identify gaps and ensure resources are allocated to meet Section 75 requirements. Furthermore, two of these respondents stated that the integrated funding model “will require clarity over ownership of Section 75 data collation and reporting across councils and Gateway.”

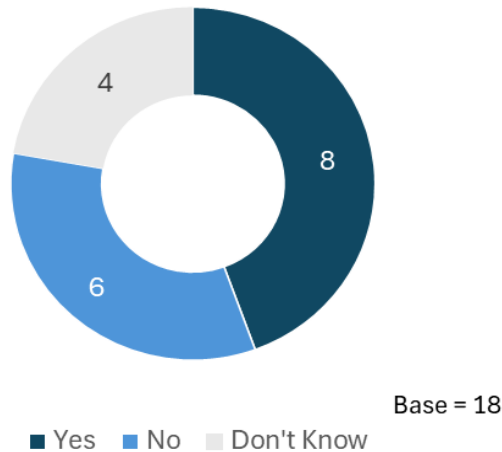
Department’s Response

The Department welcomes the broadly positive feedback on the Equality Screening exercise and notes the constructive points raised. We remain committed to ensuring that all sections of society have equal opportunity to access independent advice services, and we will consider the suggestions regarding resources and clarity around Section 75 responsibilities as the Framework develops.

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

Analysis of Results

36: Do you think the proposed draft framework presents any other issues for rural communities?



Of the 18 respondents, just under one-half (eight) indicated they thought the proposed draft framework presents other issues for rural communities. One-third of respondents (six) did not think other issues were presented and a further four respondents did not know.

If you wish to expand on your answer you may provide further comments:

Key Themes:

Adequate Funding - Several respondents emphasised the importance of securing adequate funding for local advice services and outreach workers to meet the additional costs of delivering support in rural areas. They noted that factors such as higher transport expenses and limited access to broadband or reliable phone coverage can make accessing advice services in these areas more challenging and costly.

“It is important to note that to deliver face to face advice services within the Rural DEAs it is more expensive and this should be taken into consideration when funding local advice providers to ensure that they are adequately funded to be in the position to provide an equitable service to rural dwellers so that no-one is disadvantaged because of where they live..”

Outreach Services – A few respondents expressed support for expanding outreach services to help address the higher travel costs faced by people living in rural communities.

“The issue of rural access to services can be addressed locally via the provision of appropriate outreach locations and adequate telephone resources.”

Pilot Recommended - Several respondents indicated that any transition from a helpline to a gateway should be preceded by a pilot, with a thorough evaluation of its impact on rural users prior to full implementation.

“Of course any move from a Regional Helpline to a Regional Gateway may well impact on the nature of the service received, which is why we recommend piloting any new arrangements and carrying out a robust evaluation before any final decisions are made.”

Department’s Response

The Department recognises the issues highlighted in relation to rural communities, including funding, effective outreach, and the importance of understanding the practical barriers faced in more remote areas. These insights will inform our ongoing work to ensure that advice services are accessible, equitable and responsive to the needs of rural citizens.

Other Comments

The quotes below highlight some further points noted in the consultation responses:

- “It is not clear how the views of users/clients have been factored into the vision/priorities, or whether there are plans to engage specifically with service users / citizens during the further development of the framework.”
- “Many individuals living in NI work in and/or entitled to benefits from ROI, their financial, employment, tax and social-security entitlements (and debts) can span both jurisdictions. Services must be designed so that cross-border status does not become a barrier to independent advice and debt support.”
- “The ongoing commitment to investment in regional infrastructure support should include provision for capacity building within the independent advice sector on immigration matters. This recognises that all frontline advisers need a good grasp of key immigration principles in order to provide an accessible and equitable service.”
- “In essence, while it is important that actions are taken to guarantee sustainability, best practice and efficiency of debt and advice services, it is crucial that none of these actions hinder the capacity of older people to access

these services at a time of growing need. Older people, as the fastest growing group of people in Northern Ireland, should be at the centre of any design of service delivery.”

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Section 1: Introduction

1. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? (Required)
 - Individual
 - Organisation
 2. What is the name of the organisation? (Required)
 3. Which of the following best describes your organisation? (Required)
 - Voluntary and Community Sector organisation
 - Public Sector organisation
 - Private Sector organisation
 - Funder
 - Other
- If other, please specify:
4. Does your organisation provide independent advice and debt services? (Required) Yes/No
 5. Does your organisation operate more in urban or rural areas? (Required)
 - More urban
 - More rural
 - Evenly split
 6. Is your organisation a regional organisation /community based or other? (Required)
 - Regional
 - Community Based
 - Other

If other, please specify:

Section 2: An Ambition for Future Service Delivery

7. To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
8. To what extent do you agree with the proposed individual outcomes? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
9. To what extent do you agree with the proposed societal outcomes? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
10. Are there any gaps in the proposed outcomes for individuals and society or anything else that you would like to see included? Yes/No
11. You said that you either see gaps in the proposed outcomes for individuals and society or that there is something else that you would like to see included. Please provide details below:
12. To what extent do you agree that these principles are correct? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
 - Impartiality, Accessibility, Quality, Confidentiality, Independence, Free to the recipient, Person-Centred, Impactful.
13. Please share anything you would like to add specific to the individual values:
 - Impartiality, Accessibility, Quality, Confidentiality, Independence, Free to the recipient, Person-Centred, Impactful.

Section 3: Investment Priorities

Investment Theme A: Joining up to improve outcomes

14. To what extent do you agree with the headline Investment Theme A: Joining up to improve outcomes? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
15. To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
 - Supporting local delivery through integrated funding
 - Person-centred triage and referrals
 - Extend reach and support client need through collaborative partnerships
16. Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included? Yes/No
17. You said that you either see gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or that there is something else that you would like to see included. Please provide details below:

Investment Theme B: Enhancing visibility and accessibility of services

18. To what extent do you agree with the headline Investment Theme B: Enhancing visibility and accessibility of services? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
19. To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
- Empower clients to take initial steps to access independently
 - A NI regional gateway as a visible point of access to advice services
 - Provision of a regional debt advice helpline
 - Multi-channel delivery in community-based advice services
20. Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included? Yes/No
21. You said that you either see gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or that there is something else that you would like to see included. Please provide details below:
22. Do you think Northern Ireland would be better served in the future by the existing delivery model including the regional helpline, or by the new proposed model which includes a regional gateway?
- Existing regional helpline
 - New regional gateway
 - Don't know

If you want to expand on your answer, please do so below:

Investment Theme C: Quality and Innovation in Services

23. To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme C: Quality and Innovation in Services? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
24. To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
- Implementation of a quality standard for advice and debt services
 - Department to take ownership of NIAQS
 - Promote NIAQS
 - Promoting best practice and innovation to improve delivery
25. Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed headline theme or investment priorities, or anything additional you would like to see included? Yes/No

26. You said that you either see gaps in the proposed headline theme or investment priorities or that there is something else that you would like to see included. Please provide details below:

Investment Theme D: Measuring Performance and Impact of Services

27. To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme D: Measuring Performance and Impact of Services? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
28. To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
- Development of a consistent outcomes-based framework for advice and debt services
 - A clear understanding of client base
29. Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed Investment priorities and headline theme, or anything additional you would like to see included? Yes/No
30. You said that you either see gaps in the proposed Investment priorities and headline theme or that there is something else that you would like to see included. Please provide details below:

Section 4: Support and strengthen the Independent Advice and Debt Sector through effective regional support.

Investment Theme E: Support and strengthen the Sector

31. To what extent do you agree with Investment Theme E: Support and Strengthen the Sector? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
32. To what extent do you agree with the following key priorities for investment? Strongly Agree/Agree/Neither Agree nor Disagree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree
- Integrated Infrastructure support provision that meets the need of community-based advice services
 - Support and build the capacity of the Independent Advice Sector to provide a quality service
 - Facilitate Collaboration and Partnerships
 - Provide Leadership and Advocacy activities
33. Do you think there are any gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or anything additional you would like to see included? Yes/No

34. You said that you either see gaps in the proposed investment priorities and headline theme or that there is something else that you would like to see included. Please provide details below:

Equality Screening

35. Do you agree with the conclusions of the Equality Screening exercise?

Yes/No/Don't know

If no, please provide your reasons:

Rural Needs Impact Assessment

36. Do you think the proposed draft framework presents any other issues for rural communities? Yes/No/Don't know

If you wish to expand on your answer, you may provide further comments: