



**advice** *ni*

*the independent  
advice network*



- is a membership organisation
- provides leadership, representation and support to its members to facilitate the delivery of high quality, sustainable advice services
- Our member's work is informed by a community development model focussed on overcoming social exclusion

# Our members work with

- older people
- lone parents
- minority ethnic communities
- the unemployed
- people with disabilities
- ex-prisoners



An online forum for frontline  
advice workers to participate in  
social policy formulation

[www.adviceni.net](http://www.adviceni.net)



# Project Objectives

- Expand the advice<sup>ni</sup> website beyond referral site
- Train advice workers to use an interactive web site to discuss and formulate responses to government social policy initiatives.
- Raise skills and knowledge levels of advice workers with regard to web interaction to enable them to take advantage of e-government service delivery targets.
- Provide opportunity for advice workers to engage with mainstream policy makers (civil servants & politicians) on social policy issues, involving them in the governance of their own communities.
- Incorporate more extensively the views of advice workers into advice<sup>ni</sup>'s own social policy stances.
- Secure active and enduring engagement of local communities in planning, policy development and decision-making.

# What did we do?

- Held 2 focus groups
- Created the forum (using Web Wiz)
- Trained a pool of 7 Hansard Society accredited e-moderators
- Ran 3 e-consultations
- Commissioned an external review



# Our 1<sup>st</sup> e-consultation

- Pension Credit – the First 60 Days
- ran from 3rd December 03 until the 17th December 03
- 24 advice workers signed up
- 11 took an active role
- 39 messages were posted
- A report was sent to the Pension Credit Service



# Barriers to participation

- Lack of Internet access
- Time commitment
- E-consultation period was too short
- Targeting the wrong people
- Unease about the depth of the digital divide
- Concerns as to how representative feedback from the e-consultations were



# Participation

- General and specialist advice-givers participated equally
- 60% of all comments posted involved some information or knowledge exchange
- Almost 1/3 of all contributions involved the formulation of conclusions or recommendations

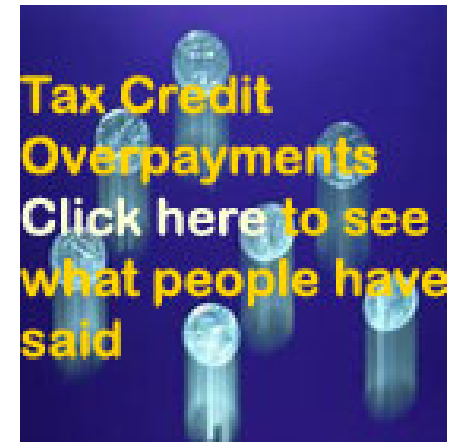
# Recommendations

- Need to address the digital divide within the advice<sup>ni</sup> membership
- Facilitate engagement with a variety of audiences
- Draw up e-consultation guidelines for the independent advice sector
- Profile advice<sup>ni</sup> members

# Public e-consultation

4 week public e-consultation aimed at gathering the views and experiences of those who have been in any way affected by Tax Credit overpayments.

Tax Credit Overpayments  
Click here to  
have **your** say



# Gathering Participants

- advicelink
- Radio and local TV interviews
- Email messages
- Private messages from the forum
- Press releases
- Emails to political parties
- Emails to other network organisations

# Who participated?

- 78 new users registered
  - 66 users participated in the e-consultation
  - 182 messages were posted
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- 20 advice workers
- 40 members of the public
- 4 moderators / advice<sup>ni</sup> staff
- 1 local journalist
- 1 local political party policy worker

# Who did the talking?

- Moderators and advice<sup>ni</sup> staff 78
- Members of the public 55
- Advice workers 47
- Political party policy worker 1
- Journalist 1

Total of 182 messages posted

# How were contributors engaged?

- Personal stories - > 47 replies
- Advice workers experiences – 28 replies
- What should be done? – 13 replies
- Where did you get help? – 4 replies

*Janey* - PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE  
someone help me I cant sleep at night  
worrying about this and I am really  
desperate

*Joanne* - hi janey, i really do understand  
how desperate you feel right now, my  
parents are in the same situation they are  
a couple in their late 50's and they owe  
the inland revenue a lot of money too.



*TonyW* - The point is that most of my time now seems spent revolving around tax credits, dealing with the cases I have, doing what if calculations for clients which take appreciably longer than calculations used to preTC. I'm starting to feel de-skilled in other areas and losing touch. Anyone feel the same?

*Totally Fed Up* - I sent in my story on the 7th March. today I logged on to find that the subject is closed. Has the administrator decided that the problem is too great to carry on with people desperate to have their say on this issue? .... All I can say is God help us all who have overpayment demands.