

Financial Inclusion Update October 2010.

Gloucestershire

Sally Middleton & Suzanne Wigmore ▶

What's News?

For the last 6 months Gloucestershire County Council has hosted the DWP strategic Financial Inclusion Champion for Bristol and Gloucestershire for part of the week.

Suzanne Wigmore is working closely with Sally Middleton the Recession Coordinator, and what follows is a short overview of what Financial Inclusion is, and what's going on in our County.

So what does a financially included Gloucesterian look like?

You are financially included if you:

- have a bank account
- are able to manage your money
- know where to get free debt advice.
- have home contents Insurance
- know where to borrow money legally and at an affordable rate

So how are we making this happen in Gloucestershire?.....

Credit Unions

There are 3 small Credit Unions currently based in Cheltenham, Gloucester and Stroud. In February of this year Stroud Credit Union was awarded growth fund money so it can now make instant loans to people in Stroud and the surrounding areas. However there are still large areas of the county – Cotswold, Forest of Dean and Tewkesbury – without any credit union coverage.

The DWP is funding a business development manager to help Gloucester Credit Union extend its common bond to the whole county so that anyone in Gloucestershire can join to take advantage of a savings account or loans at affordable rates.

This is the first time any Gloucestershire Credit Union has had paid staff and we hope it will help them to grow and provide a wider service.

The whole process is being overseen by a steering group of partners including the Primary Care Trust, housing providers, Job Centre Plus, district councils, the County Council and the credit unions.

We are hoping to be able to start the expansion by increasing the number of collection points that operate and are investigating the possibility of these being hosted by partners such as housing providers and children's centers.

Gloucester Local Strategic Partnership

Gloucester City has made Financial Inclusion a key part of their Safer and Stronger Communities agenda. They have a range of activities scheduled throughout the year and have already delivered two "How to Spot a Loan Shark Training" sessions. They are also committed to increasing the number of people in Gloucester who have a bank account, and are supporting the Severn Wye Energy Agency Warm and Well initiative.

Benefits and Revenues Services

Benefits, Revenues and Customer Service staff in both Gloucester and the Forest of Dean have had Financial Inclusion Training, and are working on plans to reduce the number of claimants who they pay by cheque, helping them to open bank accounts instead.



Benefit Take Up

The Gloucester City Council Welfare Benefits Team has now launched a county wide Benefit Forum, with representatives from across the county. They are working on a scheme jointly with the County Council to run a benefit take-up campaign, to make sure everyone in Gloucestershire gets the benefits they are entitled to.

Financial Capability

Gloucestershire now has its own financial Capability Forum which the County Council has helped to host. Additionally the County Council has hosted a Making The Most of Your Money Session and will be holding another in November. All staff in Shire Hall will receive a Making The Most of Your Money information booklet, and we are looking to roll out this free service, provided by the Consumer Finance Education Body, to other organizations in Gloucestershire over the next 6 months.

Coming Up

All these things have been delivered at nil cost to the county of Gloucestershire, and have brought in over £80,000 of national investment as well as leaving residents with more money to spend in their local community.

For the rest of this year we will be helping the PCT to deliver more advice sessions through GP's surgeries, Children's Centre's to provide credit union services, employers and advice providers to be part of the Work Zone in Gloucestershire Job Centers, the Princes Trust to support young people into work and enterprise, and schemes to help people in fuel poverty just to name a few.

If there is anything that you would like to know more about or you want to get involved please contact us.

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