

LATAN

Annual Report 2023



Liverpool Access to Advice Network



Contents

Introduction	3
Achievements – 2023	4
Network activities	5 - 6
Surveys and consultations	7
LTAN Conference 2023	8
Governance and the work of the Committee	9
Reporting to our funders	10
Priorities for 2024	11 - 12
Key actions for 2024	13



Introduction

The Liverpool Access to Advice Network (LATAN) exists to protect and improve access to free quality, independent advice for residents. We aim to achieve this by enabling a thriving community of practice to develop skills, knowledge and infrastructure within the advice sector, helping to maximise capacity. We try to enable a collective voice for advice providers, advice gateways and the residents which they support, both to promote and demonstrate the vital social and economic value of advice and to influence key areas of social policy.

2023 has seen advice providers and gateways come under increased sustained pressure, as the scale, urgency and complexity of advice needs continues to grow during the cost of living crisis. Shortfalls in capacity have also grown and, as a consequence, waiting times have increased in many areas. Despite these difficulties, network members have continued to invest valuable time in working together on our collective aims.

With over 125 member organisations, and 250+ individuals from these member organisations, LATAN has grown considerably since it's start in 2020. Partnership working with Citizens Advice Liverpool (LATAN's accountable body) and the University of Liverpool remain key to the work of the network, along with the commitment, energy, and input of Committee members, and wider Network members.

This annual report highlights the key achievements, activities and future priorities of LATAN.

Benefits of LATAN Membership:

Increased networking and collaboration

Unique knowledge and skills

Collective voice

Stronger influence

3 types of Membership:

Advice Provider members

Gateway members

Associate members

For information on membership, eligibility and joining LATAN visit the LATAN website:

www.liverpoolaccesstoadvicenetwork.org.uk/

Achievements - 2023

- Regular network meetings incorporating information sharing and training opportunities.
- Building and launching a new website to provide the network with a central information hub.
- A high profile national conference focused on access to advice and links to reducing health and food inequalities which provided a unique space for collaboration, innovation and policy development.
- A survey of advice providers exploring the extent and nature of demand, pressures on services and the experience of clients and staff. The resulting report provides a striking picture of the state of the advice sector in Liverpool and the risks to provision and has been widely distributed with stakeholders.
- The LATAN Committee has grown and developed during 2023 and includes experienced and authoritative sector representation. This year has seen the building blocks of improved governance established with revised Terms of Reference, new membership structures and other key policies formulated and agreed for implementation.
- The network has continued to engage with local politicians and policy makers to encourage them to adopt the Liverpool Advice Strategy agreed by network members in the autumn of 2022.



Network activities

As a community of practice, LATAN aims to deliver a range of activities that builds collaboration, enables the sharing of knowledge and best practice, as well as being a collective voice for advice and gateway organisations.

LATAN Network Meetings & Information Sessions

Network meetings are a fundamental part of the work of the network. Participants at meetings appreciate the sharing of information, the ability to update others on new developments, or current challenges, and sometimes, just knowing that other organisations are facing the same pressures of increasing levels of demand.

During 2023, LATAN reviewed the frequency, timings and locations of meetings. From the review, a move to bi-monthly network meetings, with bitesize learning opportunities in between was established.

Workshops & Training Sessions

Workshops and training sessions in 2023 included:

- Starting to Measure Impact – 3 workshops during March to June 2023
- Recognise, Respond, Refer – October 2023
- Introduction to Immigration Advice – December 2023

LATAN activities during 2023:

5 Network Meetings
with 122 participants in total

6 Information Sessions
with 78 participants in total

"I have left the meeting feeling inspired and made lots of notes listening to other participants."

5 Workshop / Training sessions
with 54 participants in total

"Being new to the benefit service I found this extremely useful. Explained what questions I needed to ask to get the best results for signposting."

Network activities (contd)

Email updates to LATAN Members

LATAN circulates regular email updates to members, enabling members to update each other on their services and new projects, as well as the sharing of wider news that affects the advice sector in Liverpool. In 2023 45 Email Updates were shared with Network Members (just under one a week).

Online Referral System – Refernet

During 2023 LATAN funding for a Referral Engagement Lead post enabled dedicated support for organisations wanting to join Refernet, and for those existing user organisations who needed support.

The review of key documents including the Data Sharing Agreement, were lengthy processes that postponed joining for some new Refernet user organisations.

The Referral Engagement Lead worked with 20+ organisations, which resulted in 5 organisations joining Refernet in 2023.

With the Referral Engagement Lead leaving the post in August 2023, a review of Refernet established that the system wasn't being used to best effect. Coupled with the increasing level of demand for advice making referrals difficult to manage, these issues, in addition to the cost of the system, have led to the difficult decision to decommission Refernet in 2024. LATAN will be exploring alternative referral routes with members during 2024.



Surveys and consultations

In June and July 2023 LATAN invited members to participate in an online survey about their current situation including demand, capacity and the experience of clients and staff. The survey also sought information on funding and sustainability.

The survey provides a stark picture of a level of demand which is unprecedented in its scale, complexity and urgency and the consequential impact on clients as well as the organisations. Key drivers for increasing demand included the cost of living, the housing crisis and debt.

The survey confirmed that demand is significantly outstripping capacity and that many organisations have needed to develop a range of responses to cope, including restricting or delaying access and spreading resources more thinly. Early and easy access to advice is critical to ensuring that clients problems do not become compounded, allowing crisis situations to worsen.

The survey provides stakeholders with powerful insights into the pressures on advice providers and the growing risks to residents which this represents. It also demonstrates the continuing commitment and determination of providers to deliver timely, high quality, free, independent advice wherever possible. You can find full details of the survey at www.liverpoolaccessstoadvicenetwork.org.uk/research.

LATAN hopes to conduct another survey during 2024 to provide an updated picture.

Demand for Advice and Capacity Survey 2023

95% identified an increase in their demand over the last 12 months

Most reported an increase in excess of 20%

84% reported an increase in the number of complex cases

64% were encountering more clients at immediate risk of homelessness and/or destitution

68% stated they did not have enough staff to meet demand

"Fundamentally - there are insufficient resources to recruit enough staff to meet demand."

Survey respondent

LATAN Conference 2023

Aimed at advice practitioner organisations, support organisations, policy makers, academics and those with an interest in legal advice, health inequality, or anti-poverty work, this national conference focused on fresh thinking, collaboration and sharing ideas.

Delivered in partnership with the University of Liverpool School of Law and Social Justice and Citizens Advice Liverpool, the conference brought together a diverse range of organisations from across the country for positive discussions about increasing access to advice.

90 delegates attended from advice, health, academic, network and support organisations (64% were from LATAN member organisations), and the conference harnessed the passion, commitment, and collaborative nature of all who attended. Delegates shared their collaborative and innovative approaches, inspiring each other to make change happen. An important focus was on the co-location of advice and other services to work towards reducing health and food inequalities.

Following keynote speeches from Professor Sir Michael Marmot, and Kim Johnson MP, the conference focused on 6 themed workshops, as many networking opportunities as possible, and inspiring 'Lightning talks' from local advice providers and a University of Liverpool Law Student. Links between organisations were made during the day, with collaborative working planned between Liverpool and London based organisations, universities, and other regional advice networks.

A summary report on the conference is available to download at www.liverpoolaccessstoadvicenetwork.org.uk/news/latan-conference

Access to advice: collaboration, innovation & reducing health inequalities

23rd November 2023

*"Great conference
– really motivating
and productive"*

Keynote speakers: Professor Sir Michael Marmot and Kim Johnson MP



Governance and the work of the Committee

The LATAN Committee is comprised of representatives from a range of advice and support organisations who are network members. The Committee is an interim Committee, until such time a new Committee is democratically elected.

Key work in 2023

During 2023 LATAN worked towards key tasks to strengthen the governance of the Network:

Additional Committee members – the addition of representation from Merseyside Law Centre and Liverpool Law Society strengthened the Committee in terms of the range of advice providers represented, and in the building of stronger, collaborative relationships between organisations.

Development of a new Terms of Reference – with an outdated Terms of Reference which hadn't been reviewed since 2020, the development of a new Terms of Reference was a key part of the LATAN governance work in 2023. The new Terms of Reference was adopted in October 2023, and, crucially, included details on the 3 types of members of the Network, as well as processes for democratic elections to the LATAN Committee.

Development of LATAN policies and procedures – during 2023 LATAN developed a range of policies to strengthen governance, membership processes, and to ensure LATAN Values remain key, especially in relation to conduct, collaboration, respect, equity, diversity & inclusion. Policies developed during 2023 include: Code of Conduct; Complaints Policy; Dispute Resolution, and; Removal of LATAN Committee Member and LATAN Member.

LATAN Committee Members

The interim Committee is chaired by an Independent Chair, and has representatives from the following organisations:

Citizens Advice Liverpool

Liverpool Law Society

Merseyside Law Centre

LCC - Our Liverpool

Raise Advice

Shelter

University of Liverpool

Your Housing Money Advice Team

Retiring members in 2023 include:

Mary Seacole House

The Brain Charity

Thrive CIC

The LATAN Committee is grateful for their involvement.

Reporting to our funders — The Legal Education Foundation

LATAN is currently funded by The Legal Education Foundation for 3 years – from January 2023 to December 2025.

As part of the funding, LATAN has a 3 year project plan in place. The plan sets out key work for the network including: improved governance (including a new Terms of Reference); a Communications Strategy (including developing an improved website); a Training Needs Analysis; exploring options for a legal entity; developing a fundraising and sustainability strategy; and social policy / research and campaigns work.

There are 3 outcomes that LATAN reports on:

Outcome 1 - Improved communication, partnership working and co-ordination between organisations providing advice and support in Liverpool

Outcome 2 – The sustainability of the network is secured

Outcome 3 – Increase in evidence-based social policy and campaigning work among LATAN members

Reporting to The LEF is required every 6 months, and LATAN has completed reporting requirements to deadline in August 2023, and February 2024, with LATAN achievements, and progress on key tasks reported. The LEF are interested in finding out what LATAN learns during the development of the network, and we continue to gather feedback from LATAN members on the range of activities and work that is delivered.



The
Legal
Education
Foundation

Priorities for 2024

The priorities for LATAN in 2024 are:

New Membership process

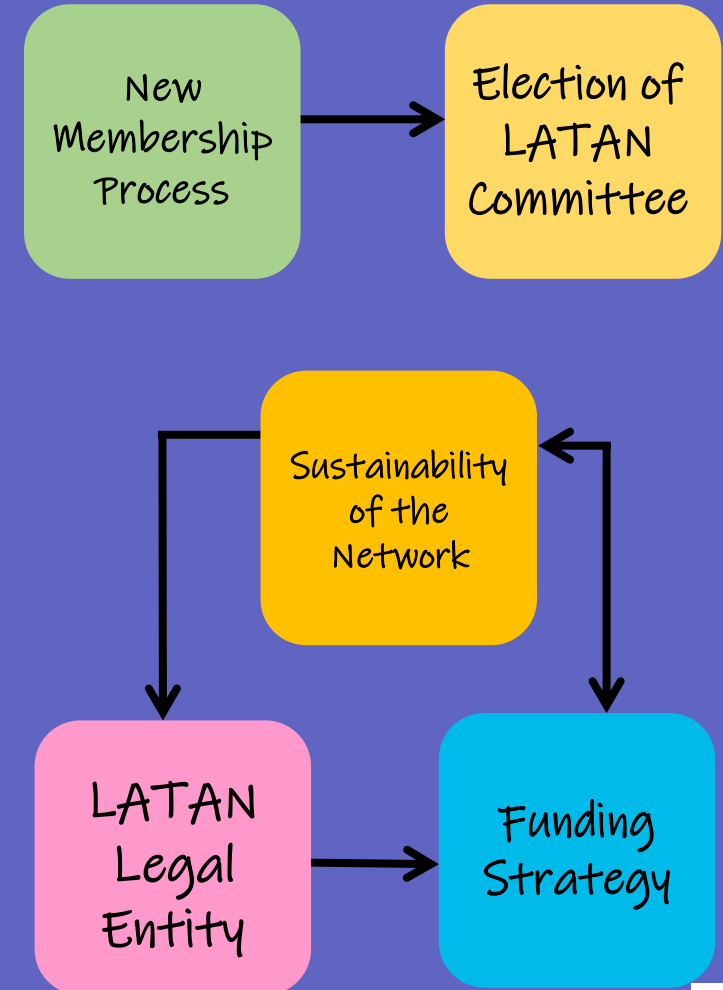
Whereas previously joining LATAN was very informal, as we move towards holding elections for LATAN Committee members, there is a need for a more formal Membership joining process.

Following the development of the new Terms of Reference (October 2023), which details 3 types of membership and their voting rights, LATAN has developed a new Members Form and Contact Form, for all member organisations to complete. Circulated late 2023, members are being encouraged and supported to complete the online Members Form.

Election of LATAN Committee

The election of LATAN Committee Members has been something that LATAN has been working towards for some time. The current LATAN Committee members are essentially an interim Committee, until such time as the elections take place. Once members have completed the new Members Form, elections can be scheduled. The new elected Committee make-up is detailed in the Terms of Reference and will include a mix of Advice Provider and Gateway members, to ensure there are diverse voices membership on the Committee.

2024



Priorities for 2024 (contd)

Sustainability of the Network

The sustainability of the Network is a key priority for 2024 and 2025. The two factors that impact on the sustainability of the Network are:

LATAN Legal Entity

LATAN is not a legal entity, and has Citizens Advice Liverpool as its accountable body. Whilst having Citizens Advice Liverpool as the accountable body is hugely beneficial in terms of support and commitment, there are drawbacks to the arrangement.

Due to the level of income of the organisation, there are some charitable Trusts and Foundations that LATAN is not eligible to apply to, and others where Citizens Advice Liverpool is likely to make their own applications (and funders will not accept 2 funding applications).

The LATAN Committee have started to explore the options for the future legal status of LATAN, and once all options have been evaluated, they will make recommendations to the membership, and ask the membership to decide on the future legal status of LATAN.

Development of a Fundraising Strategy

The development of a Fundraising Strategy will assist in the sustainability of the network. Once the legal entity issue has been resolved, a Fundraising Strategy will be developed to enable funding applications to be made for more resources for LATAN work, and for funding for beyond 2025.



Key actions for 2024

Other key actions for 2024 include:

Decommissioning of Refernet & Interim Arrangements

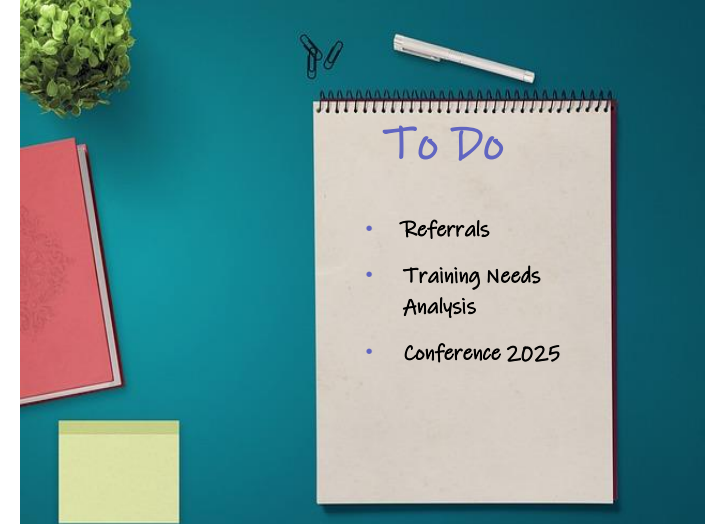
As Refernet is being decommissioned (by end of April 2024), LATAN is exploring alternative ways that members can make cross-referrals. As LATAN doesn't have sufficient budget to pay for a licence for an online referral system, it will identify interim arrangements until such time as funds, and an appropriate system can be identified.

Training

During 2024 LATAN will be exploring ways that we can co-ordinate training opportunities for members. A short Training Needs Analysis will help to inform plans for developing approaches to training and development. As LATAN has no dedicated budget to buy in training, it will look to develop ways that members can share training opportunities, as well as investigating ways that LATAN can arrange for joint training sessions that members can pay for. As part of this, the LATAN website will be developed to include a Training section in the Members Area of the LATAN website, where members will be able to make bookings.

LATAN Conference 2025

The LATAN Conference in 2023 was a huge success, but due to plans to attend other organisation conferences and events, and following initial planning and changes to the LATAN Conference format, we hope to do another conference in spring of 2025 instead.





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