

## “Who will help me if I’m the victim of a scam?” Consumer advice chiefs open up debate about the future

### Cambridgeshire initiative spearheads national consumer advice debate

Earlier this month, Advicehub, a Lottery funded initiative run by the CABs of Cambridgeshire working to provide greater access to advice for the county’s citizens, hosted a high level breakfast briefing in Cambridge to examine some of the issues facing the future of consumer advice.

Around 100 of the county’s senior players in charities, local authorities and businesses gathered at Murray Edwards College to hear a panel of experts give their views on the government’s proposed reforms to current institutional arrangements aiming to simplify the consumer landscape. The panel comprised: **Gillian Guy**, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice; **Dianne Jeffrey**, Chair of Age UK; **Leon Livermore**, Chairman of The Trading Standards Institute; and was chaired by **Alex Plant**, an Executive Director of Cambridgeshire County Council and interim Strategic Director of the Greater Cambridgeshire Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership.



From April 2012, the Citizens Advice service will take over the work currently done by Consumer Direct – one of the first examples of public and voluntary sector organisations working in partnership. But will it improve the service to the consumer?

**Alex Plant** is enthused by this new partnership between Citizens Advice and Trading Standards. He said: *“This is an important step on the way to finding the appropriate way to provide a better public service, looking after the specific needs of consumers to support economic growth, social inclusion and the development of well-functioning communities.”*

The new service will be delivered through a variety of communications mechanisms, including face-to-face, email, online and also via a new in-depth general telephone service, ‘Adviceline Plus’. Anyone with complex problems in need of specialist consumer advice will be referred to partners, such as Trading Standards, as they are now. **Gillian Guy** said, *“The changes to the consumer landscape herald an exciting time for consumers and Citizens*

*Advice alike. By bringing together consumer advice and advocacy under the Citizens Advice wing, we'll be able to campaign for and help more people than ever before. Consumer problems are already one of the top five issues that we advise on, and the last year saw us helping people with over 400,000 consumer problems, of which 6,500 were in Cambridgeshire."*

**Dr Livesey, Chairman of the Advicehub Partnership Forum**, commented, *"This is a good example of the partnership between the public and the voluntary sectors and how they have the opportunity to work together more efficiently and effectively in the best interests of consumers. This new alliance between Citizens Advice and Trading Standards is just the first step towards smarter sharing of resources and experiences at a time when there are going to be increasing demands for advice."*