

AM Plenary Session

Nezahat Cihan began by welcoming all the attendees and guests and then introduced herself and James Sandbach.

They outlined the partnership between Advising Londoners and the Advice Workforce Development Fund, as well as the collaboration between the London Legal Support Trust and London's Citizens Advice.

Nezahat highlighted the role that collaboration plays in improving and strengthening the advice sector. She further stated that working together in this capacity creates the necessary strategic change.

Nezahat spoke about the importance of celebrating the workforce, also mentioning the issues that commonly effect the workforce. In order to overcome this collaboration is required, as well as conversations around lived experiences and different views on ways to move forward.

Nezahat introduced Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard.

Debbie thanked the London Legal Support Trust and London Citizens Advice for planning the conference and highlighted how the event will be celebratory of the advice sector.

She stated that this conference is a chance to stop and think about the work carried out by the sector. She spoke about the lack of understanding by the public and other bodies on how many people truly need the support offered by advice agencies and similar bodies.

Debbie spoke about the nature of London as a welcoming place where many people wish to seek safety and sanctuary, however that these people often face many difficulties.

She discussed the huge gap in advice funding for those who face issues of these nature.

Debbie went on to say that every individual in the lecture theatre delivers expertise to people who are at their lowest point and that this can require presenting the advice in an understanding format.

She stated that the ability to do so requires a large level of skill, care and people skills, in order to help people facing issues of this nature.

She went on to outline that this needs to be celebrated, however we must also consider the impact that work of this nature has on the sectors. 75,000 people have received this support, which has consequently generated £30 million.

Debbie spoke on how work of this nature saves lives, as people are felt wanted and heard.

She went on to speak about the health and PIP reforms and the fear and stress that can cause to individuals who may be affected by these. She mentioned that advice workers are often the only ones supporting people facing these difficulties.

Due to the nature of this work it is important that wellbeing procedures are in place to ensure that those offering this help are also supported. She mentioned that this can led to the retention issues faced in this sector, as will spoken about throughout the day.