

LEICESTER COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE PARTNERSHIP

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Damon Gibbons
Head Of Advice Services
Leicester City Council
A10 New Walk Centre
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29th January 2002.

Dear Damon

Leicester City Council Advice Strategy 2002

Leicester Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP) was established to help improve the quality and accessibility of legal advice and information services for the residents of Leicester. The Partnership brings together funders, providers and community organisations to help plan services more effectively.

Leicester CLSP welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Advice Strategy.

A lot of progress has been made and a new strategic partnership approach (reflected in the Advice Strategy) is developing which offers the potential to deliver more effective quality assured advice solutions to the problems which are most important to people's lives – housing, benefits, debt, family, discrimination, and consumer disputes. Leicester City Council is to be commended for its contribution to this new approach.

Leicester CLSP supports the recommendations contained within the Advice Strategy and believes that if they are effectively implemented that Leicester City Council and its partners within Leicester CLSP will be able to deliver significant improvements in the management and delivery of services for local residents. The Partnership, however, feels that the recommendations contained within the strategy will require additional management support if they are to secure the desired strategy outcomes in the proposed timeframe. The establishment of new commissioning arrangements, development of new advice performance indicators, adoption of the CLS Quality Mark for WERAS, shared responsibility for the support and functioning of the CLSP, and levering in of additional external resources will require a strengthening of management support within the new commissioning section beyond the current proposals.

The jointly commissioned MORI Survey Of Leicester Residents' Legal Advice Needs found that a significant proportion of Leicester residents (30 %) found it difficult to obtain information and advice; two thirds of residents would find it convenient to obtain information by the telephone and almost one in five residents (18%) by e-mail or internet.

Leicester has relatively few services that advertise and provide information and advice by the telephone. Moreover, those that do provide such services offer limited hours and have limited capacity to manage calls. Similar services are not joined up to provide better coverage and capacity.

There are few e-mail information services available locally and although there are a number of national websites providing information and details of where to go such as just.ask.co.uk, these are not promoted locally.

Leicester City Council in conjunction with the CLSP need to start to consider how best to develop telephone and internet/e-mail facilities as part of the City Council's e-government strategy and in the context of regional and national initiatives.

Finally, Leicester CLSP is surprised that SHARP has been omitted from the single commissioning arrangements. SHARP was part of the BVR of Social Welfare Advice Agencies, provides a specialist housing advice service as part of the CLS and receives funding from the Legal Services Commission. Inclusion of SHARP within the proposed commissioning arrangements would assist the City Council in achieving an overarching strategy for advice services.

On behalf of Leicester CLSP I hope that these brief comments are helpful and look forward to a productive next three years.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Mansfield
Planning & Partnership Consultant