

## Appendix 2: Impact of the Review on Service Delivery

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the Strategic Planning & Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2004, Members requested that further information be provided concerning the “effects of the proposals on existing agencies including those organisations facing cuts and the waiting list times for those organisations still taking on clients.”
- 1.2 The Advice Services proposals were issued for public consultation in February 2004, and were subject to a 12 week consultation period. The consultation paper detailed proposals to either cease or reduce funding for agencies as below. It also highlighted the legal position with regard to the need to serve notice on agencies in order to bring about the proposed reductions in funding.

Agency	Proposals	Notice period required
Leicester Law Centre	Reduce funding for specialist casework from £190,300 to £50,000. Funding for General Help service to be used to support telephone based service from April 2005 onwards.	3 months from decision
Hitslink	Remove all funding (£142,600)	None – immediate from decision
Age Concern*	Remove all funding (£31,400)	None – immediate from decision
Money Advice Ltd	Reduce funding by £35,600 but offset with funding for a caseworker from the Housing Revenue Account	None – immediate from decision
Bangladeshi Youth & Cultural Shomiti	Remove all funding (£13,200)	None – immediate from decision
Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual Centre	Remove all funding (£33,900) but effective from 1 <sup>st</sup> October 2004 to provide opportunity for alternative funding to be found	None – immediate from decision
Saffron Resource Centre	Remove all funding (£21,700)	None – immediate from decision

\*This proposal has been removed from the final recommendations.

- 1.3 A letter was sent to the above agencies at the time of the publication of the proposals, that drew their attention to the fact that their agency was identified for budget reductions and advised them to take any necessary action to restrict their liabilities. In particular, advice was given that staff may need to be served with notices of redundancy during the consultation process. This stemmed from the fact that many of the contracts held by advice agencies had expired on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 and there was no legal duty placed on the Council to extend these. However, it had chosen to extend on a monthly basis pending

the outcome of the review so as to ensure that agencies had an opportunity to engage in the consultation process.

## **2. Impacts of the Review on Service Delivery**

- 2.1 During the consultation period a number of agencies served redundancy notices on staff, and within directly delivered Council services, vacancies were frozen. The impact of the review on waiting times and access to advice appears to have been limited, however. The following information has been gathered from interviews with staff at the affected agencies during the course of annual monitoring visits or by direct contact concerning the issues.
- 2.2 An initial impact was felt as a result of the review proposals. For example, Hitslink took the decision to close its doors to all new enquirers in April 2004, and Mosaic reported that a large number of new callers to their advice line were being directed to them from Hitslink. This had the initial effect of raising waiting times for an appointment at Mosaic to between 8 to 10 weeks.
- 2.3 However, the effect of Hitslink's closure to new clients was short-lived, and by the end of May 2004, the waiting list at Mosaic had reduced significantly to between 4 to 5 weeks.
- 2.4 The impact of the review on other General Help level services does not appear to have been serious. Leicester Law Centre reports that it is able to offer an appointment with its General Help service within 2-3 weeks of contact, but that some appointments remain available at one weeks notice. The Healthy Income Project remained able to offer appointments within the space of 1 week in the PCT East area, and within 1 to 1.5 weeks in PCT West. General help sessions run by WERAS in the St. Matthews area continued on a drop-in basis but did not demonstrate significant increases in numbers. At the appointment based sessions conducted in New Parks, waiting times remained constant at 1 week.
- 2.5 Some slight increase in waiting times was experienced at Age Concern, which reported waiting times of 3.5 weeks in April but again witnessed a reduction in these to between 2 and 3 weeks by early June.
- 2.6 Saffron Resource Centre has continued to operate drop-in sessions for new enquirers throughout the period of the review, but instead stopped taking on specialist casework in order to reduce its caseloads over the period of the review. As at the end of May the Centre had approximately 20 people on the waiting list and had 6 cases that would potentially need to be transferred to other specialist providers for Tribunal representation.

- 2.7 The waiting times for specialist services do not appear to indicate a crisis of under-supply as a result of the review either. This is despite the closure of Saffron and Hitslink to new specialist work during the period. For example, WERAS reports that it is able to offer appointments for specialist welfare benefits advice to new cases within 1 week, and for employment cases within 2 to 3 weeks. Waiting times for these specialist services are the same at Leicester Law Centre, which also continues to offer specialist housing advice within one week of telephone contact.
- 2.8 A reduction in capacity has taken place in respect of Immigration Advice, due to the loss of an immigration advice worker at Leicester Law Centre, and there is no capacity at that organisation to take on new immigration work at this time.
- 2.9 However, it should also be noted that despite the uncertainties caused by the review to a number of voluntary sector agencies, the reported performance of a number of those agencies actually increased in the fourth quarter of the year. For example, Hitslink's 4<sup>th</sup> quarter monitoring return reported that the number of enquiries dealt with in the last quarter was 34% higher than that of Quarter 3, with a 41% increase in the numbers of cases closed over the same period. Financial gains for clients rose by 71%. At Leicester Law Centre, the financial gain in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter was 222% higher than that reported for quarter 3.

### 3. **Conclusion**

- 3.1 From the evidence available, it is apparent that an initial impact was felt – predominantly as a result of Hitslink's decision to close its doors to new clients in April 2004. However, this appears to have been short-lived with waiting lists for appointments at other agencies falling back to between 1 and 4 weeks.
- 3.2 In respect of specialist casework services there does not appear to be a significant increase in waiting times with the exception of immigration advice at Leicester Law Centre.

Damon Gibbons  
Head of Advice Services  
28<sup>th</sup> June 2004