

## **Appendix 3: Advice Provision Across the Council**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Advice Services Review has concentrated on those aspects of advice services that were originally scoped within the Best Value Review of Advice Services undertaken in 2001. However, a wide variety of the Council's services offer advice which should be considered as a general context for the review. This note sets out in broad terms the range of other advice and information provision funded or delivered by the Council.

### **2. Housing Options Service**

2.1 In the financial year 2003/04, the Housing Options Service saw approximately 39,000 clients across its two sites in Bishop Street and New Walk Centre. The service also delivered over 5,000 dedicated housing options appointments, which examine in detail the needs of individuals to re-housing.

2.2 Customers accessed a wide variety of housing options with advice, referrals and signposting on a range of housing issues including: finding somewhere to live, paying for accommodation, moving to a new home, advice about repairs, understanding legal rights and obligations, housing an welfare benefits, dealing with bills and debt, Leicester City Council's homelessness allocation policy, the Housing Register, how to avoid becoming homeless, emergency accommodation and support schemes – including those provided through the Supporting Peoples' Programme.

### **3. Consumer Protection Service**

3.1 The Consumer Protection Service undertakes Leicester City Council's statutory duties associated with maintaining a fair trading environment in Leicester and ensuring a level playing field for businesses. The Consumer Protection Service is the 'trading standards department' for the city of Leicester and its advice function is in line with those of other cities and counties.

3.2 The service provides information, advice and support to businesses and the public on consumer protection issues ranging from advertising and labelling, equity of contractual documents, product and service quality. Most of the CPS work with the public is the result of unsatisfactory purchase or poor service. The whole product/ service spectrum falls with the remit of the CPS: including insurance, building work, holidays and travel, electrical products, and food.

3.3 The service receives around 13,500 requests for help from the public every year. As a result of the Budget Strategy 2004/05 the service

stopped its active mediation of disputes. Around 600 people were receiving this support previously.

- 3.4 The Consumer Protection Service is located in Bishop Street, next to the Post Office, and is open 9.00 to 17.00 Mon – Thursday, and 9.00 to 16.00 on Fridays. The advice centre has a high public profile as a result of its location and long-standing within the city centre. Referrals/signposting from advice agencies, libraries and other bodies accounts for a tiny proportion of the clientele.

#### **4. Customer Services**

- 4.1 Customer services provide information, advice and access to services via the New Walk Centre and New Parks Customer Service Centre (both face to face) and the Customer Service Line (telephone contact centre).
- 4.2 All areas can provide advice on a diverse range of council services, from how to apply for a concessionary travel pass, how to obtain a recycling box, opening hours of leisure services, to more detailed advice on such subjects as Housing Benefit claims, Council tax or rent accounts.
- 4.3 Last year the 2 centres dealt with approximately 140,000 enquiries from the public (113,000 at New Walk Centre, and 26,000 at New Parks) and the Customer Service Line which has been in operation since November and officially opened in June 2003 is dealing with on average 18,000 calls per month (excluding calls made to the switchboards).

#### **5. Education & Lifelong Learning**

- 5.1 Every school in Leicester is supported by a trained Education Welfare Officer who can provide advice and support on school attendance issues, bullying, school exclusions, procedures relating to child protection, special educational needs and child employment.
- 5.2 All of Leicester's libraries have obtained the Community Legal Service Quality Mark at Assisted Information level, and can help users to obtain basic information leaflets on a range of subjects issued by the Legal Services Commission. Through the Peoples' Network, all 21 libraries provide access to the internet and to e-mail facilities for free, and staff are available to provide guidance and to advise on where computer skills based training can be obtained.

#### **6. Social Care & Health**

- 6.1 The department offers a wide range of services to support people of all ages who, perhaps because of frailty, mental distress or illness, are in need of personal care services. Support is provided to adults, parents

of children with disabilities and young people who care for someone who is unable to manage by themselves.

- 6.2 Services are designed to promote independence and this requires partnership working with the health community, housing agencies, other council departments such as education, and with many voluntary and private organisations. Services provided include the provision of benefits advice and casework services through the Benefits Support Team, to maximise the incomes of the most vulnerable residents in the city and to support the provision of care packages.