

REGENERATION AND CULTURE EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

DIVISION

Regeneration Division

SERVICE GROUP

Advice Services

SERVICE AREA OR POLICY TO BE ASSESSED

Advice Services Review Proposals

LEAD OFFICER

Damon Gibbons, Head of Advice Services

OFFICER COMPLETING THE ASSESSMENT

Damon Gibbons

NAME OF OTHER STAFF INVOLVED IN ASSESSMENT

DATE

25th June 2004

ONCE YOU HAVE COMPLETED THIS FORM PLEASE SEND A COPY TO DAXA PATEL, STRATEGIC EQUALITY, A11

SCOPE THE AREA /POLICY TO BE COVERED

CONSIDER-

- What is the scope of the assessment*
- Is it all aspects of the policy or limited areas?, state reasons for inclusions and exclusion*
- Does it link to other services or other EIA?, if so ensure there is adequate cross working*

This assessment covers the proposals of the Advice Services Review 2004, and examines the consequences of the proposed budget savings. It examines the impact of the proposed withdrawal of funding for Saffron Resource Centre, Hitslink Management Co-operative, Leicester Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Centre and the Bangladeshi Youth & Cultural Shomiti; and the proposed reductions in funding for Leicester Law Centre and Leicester Money Advice Limited, and within directly delivered advice services budgets. In doing so, it assesses the likely impact of providing main programme support for previously externally funded pilot projects – the Healthy Income Project, and new services such as the Rent Arrears Reduction Project.

The assessment has been conducted with reference to the Council's Community Cohesion Strategy and Race Equality Scheme. Reference has also been had to the Regional Legal Services Commission's Regional Report for 2003/04 and consideration given to the funding priorities of the RLSC.

IDENTIFY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY /SERVICE

What do we want to achieve through this policy /service function?

Support for the following corporate plan goals:

Help people with disabilities and the growing number of older people to experience more independence – specific reference is made to providing welfare benefits advice services to the users of primary care services, particularly the elderly.

Promote prosperity and new jobs, while safeguarding people's health and development interests – specific reference is made in the Corporate Plan to provide advice and assistance to claim in-work benefits and increase knowledge of rights at work.

Build on Leicester's history of including people from all backgrounds in a cohesive community free to pursue peace and prosperity – reference is made to ensuring all citizens are able to access information and advice services on their rights, entitlements and responsibilities with a need to target advice services at specific groups.

Invest in continuous improvement in a well managed organisation – to optimise the use of Council resources in support of service delivery by maximising rent and Council tax receipts through the provision of debt advice services, and reduce the pressure on housing stock caused by homelessness resulting from rent and mortgage arrears.

What needs is the policy /service designed to meet /does it affect the public directly or indirectly?

Advice services assist people to obtain information, advice and assistance to realise their rights and entitlements. The purpose of the review is to deliver the required level of budget savings from this service area whilst focussing the remaining revenue on those aspects of advice provision that can most effectively contribute to the Council's corporate priorities (as stated above). We have also had regard to the responsibilities of the Legal Services Commission to provide for access to specialist advice services for people eligible for legal aid.

During the course of the review we have prioritised the need to address the gaps that exist in advice provision at a General Help with Casework level – for example, form filling services, and benefit take-up campaigns. Evidence suggests that Council resources will have a greater impact on benefit take-up levels in these services than if they were directed into specialist advice services. Where residents are able to access advice via the telephone then they may be referred to national or regional services if their problems are complex. Local specialist provision will be focused on the most vulnerable groups that are referred from the proposed general help services, and from intermediary services dealing with vulnerable client groups (e.g. social workers, tenancy support

services, and primary care services).

Advice services interface directly with the public and also take referrals from professionals operating in a variety of agencies. The review supports a re-focusing of provision to move away from fixed point community based provision in the Highfields and Saffron areas of the city, towards greater use of referrals based services. These referrals services will be focused on the most vulnerable residents – those using social services, housing support or primary care services – or in the case of debt services, those with repossession and county court actions pending, or residents facing problems with rent and council tax payments. Employment advice services will be focused on low paid groups and non-unionised workplaces.

However, community based provision and self referral will also be maintained for some advice services. This provision is particularly intended to meet the needs of people whose first language is not English .

Does the policy /service relate to other functions and policies?- i.e. partnership ,does it affect other services

Yes, advice services assist in the following ways:

- (i) Raising income for people with disabilities (e.g. through the take-up of disability living allowance) and the elderly (Attendance Allowance) allows them to buy in home care services from the Social Care & Health Department and contributes to the Formula Spending Share of the Local Authority. Welfare benefits services also increase take-up of Housing and Council Tax benefits and impact on the ability of the Council to collect revenue from rent and Council Tax.
- (ii) Providing Debt advice services reduces the number of evictions and repossessions, for both Council tenants and residents in other forms of housing tenure who may then present to the Council for re-housing. Focusing more of the provision of debt advice on Council tenants could increase Council revenues.
- (iii) Employment advice services form part of the package of support necessary to break down barriers of access to the labour market for disadvantaged groups and to raise rates of economic activity.

Are the aims consistent with the Corporate Plans e.g. Corporate Equality plan, Community plan, Corporate plan?

Yes, the review has been conducted in order to focus advice services on the priorities that are set out in the Corporate Plan and the Community Plan.

How does this Policy impact on disadvantaged groups i.e. Race, Gender, Disabled

- (i) Advice services are used by a slightly higher proportion of women than men, reflecting gender disparities in the labour market, and women's historical role as carers. The proposals will therefore have a general impact, with a short term reduction in capacity identified for enquiries and a reduction in overall casework capacity at the local level. Capacity to deal with enquiries will be offset by the creation of a telephone entry point in April 2005. The creation of an employment unit, which targets employment rights at people moving into work from previous economic inactivity, is likely to benefit women as they will form a significant proportion of the target group for these services – again as a result of the higher levels of economic inactivity amongst women generally.
- (ii) Disabled people are likely to benefit from the proposals, as these maintain services such as Mosaic which offer a holistic service to disabled people and support the provision of services taking referrals directly from Primary Care Services, or which identify people with disability, health problems, or caring responsibilities for support in accessing employment and with realising their rights at work.
- (iii) Overall we consider that the proposals will be neutral for BME communities, although specific actions will need to be taken to ensure that they are able to access the proposed new configuration of advice services. At the current time only 40% of users of advice services are White, and provision is centred on the Highfields area of the city. The reconfiguration aims to create a city-wide service that can address high needs for advice in a number of areas, including both the inner city wards of Highfields and St. Matthews and the predominantly white outer estates of Beaumont Leys and New Parks. The risks associated with the proposed development of the telephone entry point, include potential access problems for people who have little or no English.
- (iv) The proposals also seek to withdraw funding from the Leicester Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Centre. Current funding supports a manager's post and some of the core costs of the organisation (e.g. premises), and the loss of this would affect the viability of the Centre if replacement funding could not be found. A number of additional projects, including those funded to meet E&LL priorities are provided by the Centre.

Consultation /involvement on equality implications

What are the policy /service implications race, gender, disability, age, sexuality, religion, social exclusion, community cohesion? Involve people who will give you a view on the policy or service. You could involve representatives from local communities /groups partners, colleagues ,employee group reps, equality staff

- *Are there any access to service issues? think about physical access, access to information, language , etc*
- Are there any other barriers?*

The proposals have been subject to consultation over a 12 week period running to the 10th May 2004. Consultation has included presentations at the Leicester Forum for Older People and the Highfields Area Forum. Questions from advice agencies affected by the review have been invited on two occasions by the Strategic Planning and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee. A summary of consultation responses and the officer response to these has been attached to the final recommendations as Appendix 1. Consultation within the Council has been facilitated through the creation of a Corporate Advice Services Review Group, on which all departments have been represented.

The concerns of respondents to the consultation primarily focus on access issues. These include concerns relating to physical barriers to advice services – e.g. as a result of sensory impairment, and the need to maintain face to face advice services that can respond to users who have little or no English. Respondents did not consider that the provision of information materials on rights matters should take precedence over the provision of face to face advice services.

There are currently access problems at Leicester Law Centre – whose premises are not wheelchair accessible, and significant variance in customer care standards, as evidenced by a mystery shopping exercise conducted in 2003. A MORI survey of residents conducted in 2001, found that people in the city often did not know where to go for advice, and that a third wanted more information to be made available over the telephone.

In addition, there has been a tendency to restrict drop in access to advice services in the voluntary sector in the past year and greater reliance on the telephone as the first point of contact. The mystery shopping report and MORI survey indicate that the provision of a number of different telephone advice lines, operating for different client groups and at varying times of the week, may run contrary to the aim of facilitating access to advice services. Our proposals aim to provide a single phone entry point from April 2005 and to increase awareness of this number by promoting this widely across the city.

- Where do you think improvements can be made?

See above in respect of the telephone entry point and publicity surrounding how to access advice services.

There is also an identified need for the provision of information materials in emerging community languages. This was specifically referred to in the Somali Community Development Report and given the dispersal of asylum seekers to the city is also needed in other languages such as Kurdish, Farsi, Dari and Arabic.

At the present time there is no consistent mechanism for referring on those users of advice services who would be able to utilise regional or national telephone services, with the result that local advice services funded to provide specialist casework services are dealing with everything from basic information requests through to Tribunal representation. The proposals therefore seek to make a more effective use of local specialist services and to target these on those groups most in need of face to face specialist advice provision.

Are we already addressing any of the issues identified e.g. is it in your improvement plan?

The Advice Services Improvement Plan arising from the Best Value Review in 2001 primarily concentrated on establishing performance management systems for advice services, and brought together the commissioning of voluntary sector advice services within a single commissioning department to assist with this. The improvement plan has led directly to the current review which seeks to link services more closely to the Corporate Priorities of the Council and to allocate resources for advice services provision accordingly.

Assess any service information, consider monitoring data , consultation data, complaints, satisfaction data

Monitoring data

Do you have data on who uses your services/policy, complaints, satisfaction, outline what you monitor and the categories you use?

Assess how you have used data In service planning?

Yes, the performance management information from the year 2003/04 has been used to assess the current usage of services in respect of ethnicity, ward, age, and disability of users of advice services. We have also ensured that satisfaction data has been obtained for both directly delivered and voluntary sector services. The latter shows uniformly high levels of customer satisfaction indicating that services are appreciated once accessed.

Monitoring of casework utilises the full CRE categories, with monitoring of enquiries using the recommended short codes. Age is monitored in the bands used in the 2004 census, and disability is monitored according to self identification – with users asked whether or not they consider themselves to be disabled.

We have looked at the proposals and their impact on the likely reductions in capacity to deal with enquiries and casework and assessed the proportionate impact on BME communities, the elderly and people with disabilities. For example, the proposals to withdraw funding for Hitslink and the Bangladeshi Youth & Cultural Shomiti would reduce capacity of provision for BME communities by 34% for users of Asian origins and 66% of African and Caribbean origins.

However, we have then factored in the likely increased capacity of providing a dedicated service to Refugees in the city, and of providing services through primary care venues , and drop in community based sessions in the Highfields and St. Matthews areas of the city. This reduces the overall loses of capacity in enquiries in these wards and for BME residents by over 50%. Additional efforts are proposed to provide information on advice matters in new community languages and to ensure that the proposed telephone advice service would be able to deal with enquiries in languages other than English.

CONSULTATION

Consider who your customers (direct and indirect) and stakeholders are, what consultation have you undertaken, out line all consultation exercises carried out (including any with hard to reach groups)

See above for details of the consultation process. Also note that the proposals were press released, and featured in the Leicester Link and were covered in the Leicester Mercury and by BBC Radio Leicester including broadcasts targeted at the African and Caribbean communities in the city.

If there is no Consultation data then-

-Need to consult

-Draw up an Action Plan of actions that you will need to undertake to collect, monitoring & consultation data

Not applicable – consultation responses have been received and assessed.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND EVIDENCE

What does the monitoring and consultation information tell you, are there any trends that can be identified? Is there any positive or negative impact? Can these be justified?

The consultation responses revealed a significant level of concern relating to the potential impact of the proposals on the ability BME groups, and the elderly to access advice provision in the future. References were also made to people with sensory impairments and people with learning difficulties.

In relation to BME groups concerns included problems that people with poor English language skills would have in accessing telephone based services, and the need to ensure that face to face advice provision was maintained, particularly in the Highfields and St. Matthews areas of the city.

Concerns were similar in respect of the elderly, and the proposal to withdraw funding for Age Concern was a particular worry for respondents. This proposal has been withdrawn as a result of representations made during the consultation process.

However, the data in respect of the provision of telephone advice services at Mosaic and through the Welfare & Employment Rights Advice Service indicated that these services were used by BME communities, and the elderly in proportions that reflected the demographics of the city. The disparity between the monitoring data and the qualitative information obtained via the consultation appears to be explained as a result of the use of the CRE short codes when monitoring phone enquiries (i.e. recording Asian or Black) and this hides problems that specific communities have in accessing phone services. For example, it appears that settled Asian communities, particularly younger members of these do not have problems using phone services. By comparison the elderly in those communities, and particularly in the Bangladeshi community do have problems in this respect. So too do members of the more recent BME communities such as the Somali community. Whilst the proposal to provide a phone entry point is valid and will be accessible to most people in the city, some measures do need to be taken to ensure that face to face advice is provided to those groups who are least likely to be able to use the phone.

Aspect of policy /function	Positive impact	Adverse /negative impact	Unmet need	What is the justification
Withdrawal of funding for Hitslink		Will reduce capacity to deal with enquiries and provide casework services. The services provided are currently focused on the Somali community (Black users make up 78% of Hitslink's client group)		The Somali community have identified a specific need for lower level interventions in the Somali Community Development Plan. Access to other drop in and face to face advice services will be provided for (see below)
Increased provision of information in new community languages	This has been highlighted as a need within the Somali Community Development Plan and packs have been produced with European Funding. Staff are running group sessions with new arrival communities to provide a base level of knowledge about rights and entitlements. The packs are also translated into Dari, Farsi and Arabic and are therefore able to be used by new emerging communities in the city as well as the Somali community.			See above. Needs have also been identified for information from the operation of the Refugee & Asylum Seekers Advice Project.
Increased hours of drop-in advice in Highfields and St. Matthews (from 6 to 9 hours per week)	The drop-in sessions will be targeted at those groups with poor English language skills in order to provide an initial access point to advice services. Sessions will take place on benefits and employment matters. The NRF employment project will also offer additional sessions from community based venues across the city and these will be targeted to disadvantaged groups including refugees and people from BME			The proposal to withdraw funding for Hitslink and the Bangladeshi Youth & Cultural Shomiti would otherwise result in a loss of capacity in an area of high BME population and with high needs. This measure is designed to ensure that there is a continued means of access to advice services for people with poor English language

Withdrawal of funding for the Bangladeshi Youth & Cultural Shomiti	communities with low skills levels.	The service reports that most of its service users require face to face advice services, and have problems with welfare benefits issues.	skills. The provision of advice through fixed point delivery and to single communities does not provide an optimum use of resources, and is not flexible enough to ensure that access to advice provision is available in other high need areas of the city – we will offset the impact of this cut by increasing the hours of drop-in available in the Highfields and St. Matthews areas of the city (see Above).
Continue to fund Age Concern	The provision of face to face services for the elderly is a priority arising from the consultation process. The funding from the Council will also allow Age Concern to draw down an additional £120,000 from the Community Fund for work with elderly BME residents over the next three years.		Consultation responses indicated that this was a priority and the proposed changes (e.g. provision of the Healthy Income Project) would not have been sufficient to offset the impact of a cut in provision to Age Concern. The additional funding from the Community Fund will offset some of the problems forecast as a result of the proposal to withdraw funding from the Bangladeshi Youth & Cultural Shomiti.
Continued funding of Mosaic and SSAFA	These services provide home visits to people with disabilities (Mosaic provides in excess of 500 per year) and promote the take-up of benefits and grants to support independent living. They have a major impact on the need for social services use and reduce demand in this respect.		The Corporate Plan priority of supporting people with disabilities and the elderly to live independent lives and the needs of the Council to reduce the demand for social services involvement.
Centralisation of specialist	Improved links will be made between		The reduced budget for advice

welfare rights services within in-house Council provision	these teams and Council staff dealing with the most vulnerable residents – including social workers and housing support workers. Housing benefit data, identifying underclaiming of disability benefits, will be used to support targeted take-up campaigns.		services requires us to target the resource at the most vulnerable residents. Improvements in the take up of housing, council tax and disability benefits have a direct impact on the Council’s finances.
Withdrawal of funding for Saffron Resource Centre		There is a possible impact on the elderly in the Saffron area, although age monitoring is not conducted by the centre so this is difficult to assess. The provision of the rent arrears reduction project in the area will offset the impact for those Council tenants in most need of services.	The withdrawal of funding will result in the loss of 0.8 fte post at Saffron Resource Centre, however this will be replaced by 1 fte working in the area through the rent arrears reduction project, which will be targeted at Council tenants in rent arrears, and tenants requiring support in order to maintain their tenancies. The STAR team also operates in the area and will provide benefits and debt advice to any tenant or resident that is in need of housing support services.
Withdrawal of funding for Leicester Lesbian Gay & Bisexual Centre		The current funding provides for a managers post and some contribution towards core running costs. The centre then delivers a range of services with other sources of funding. There is a risk that the Centre’s core costs would not be met and that this would impact on the services that it was able to deliver.	The Advice services budget is not an appropriate source of funding for the core management costs of this agency. The proposals provide for the Centre to be funded until the end of October 2004 to find alternative sources of funding.
Provision of Healthy Income Project	The project takes referrals from primary care services in Beaumont Leys, New Parks, Highfields and St. Matthews and		The service is partly funded by the Primary Care Trusts and will provide for an evaluation of advice

	<p>raised over £700k in additional benefits in 2003/04. The bulk of this was in disability benefits take-up.</p>		<p>services on the health outcomes for users in 2004/05. If positive, this could result in further services being developed along this model and the inclusion of advice provision in the proposed Healthy Living Centres for the city.</p>
<p>Creation of an Employment Unit</p>	<p>The employment unit will contain 7 fte's, providing a critical mass with which to raise awareness of the issues across the city. It's focus will be on refugees, BME residents with low skill levels, the low paid (more likely to be from BME communities and women), and people with health problems and caring commitments.</p>		<p>At the present time, employment rights advice is supported by way of 3 fte's split across 3 agencies. There has been a failure to make the linkages between rights work and the welfare to work agenda, particularly in relation to people from disadvantaged groups moving into the labour market.</p>
<p>Creation of a telephone based entry point from April 2005</p>	<p>The phone entry point will increase the capacity to deal with enquiries and evidence from other phone lines indicates that the proportions of BME users will be in line with the demographic of the city. Overall, the service will therefore increase the availability of advice for BME residents, although additional services as outlined above will be required to ensure that those with the greatest need for face to face advice can still access this.</p>	<p>Some groups may have problems using phone services as a result of language difficulties or sensory impairments. Alternatively face to face advice may be required as a result of the complexity of the problem and the need to see documentation.</p>	<p>Providing a phone based entry point will reduce the demand currently placed on specialist services to deal with information requests and basic enquiries, and free up the resource to concentrate on the provision of specialist casework services at a local level to those residents that could not use regional or national phone based services.</p>
<p>Reduction of funding for Leicester Law Centre</p>		<p>This includes a withdrawal of funding for immigration casework services, housing advice and employment rights work. The Law Centre has a high proportion of BME users, particularly in Immigration</p>	<p>The proposals to concentrate employment rights work and welfare benefits casework in-house are detailed above. With reference to immigration casework, the Regional Legal Services Commission reports that</p>

<p>Reduction in General Fund contribution to Leicester Money Advice Ltd.</p>	<p>matters.</p>	<p>there is currently an over-supply of specialist services in Leicester. Housing advice is also not as great a priority as housing related debt advice (again as indicated by the Regional Legal Services Commission).</p> <p>No impacts identified at this stage – Money advice services tend to have poor penetration into BME communities and to be used by people below pension age. Further work will need to be undertaken to research the needs of the local BME populations for debt advice.</p>
<p>Provide funding to support the Refugee and Asylum Seekers Advice Project</p>	<p>The service provides advice and assistance to 700 refugees per year, raising income through benefit take-up and providing assistance with housing once NASS support comes to an end.</p>	<p>The continued dispersal of asylum seekers to Leicester creates pressure on mainstream services, and refugees require assistance to integrate into the city. RASAP also links to an employment support worker funded by the DWP which seeks to facilitate refugees entry into the local labour market – a specific PSA target exists for the authority in this respect.</p>

EQUALITY ISSUE	ACTION	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	PROGRESS & PERFORMANCE MEASURES	TIMESCALE	RESPONSIBILITY	RESOURCES NEEDED	ANY RISKS
DISABILITY	Provide Healthy Income Project, continue support for Mosaic, SSAFA, and Age Concern	In excess of 900 home visits conducted and advice provided to over 5000 disabled people	Raising £2.5 million for disabled people and their carers in 04/5	Amount raised – quarterly reports	Immediate	Damon Gibbons/ Darren Moore	Budgeted for in the review proposals	None, funding for Healthy Income Project committed by Primary Care Trusts
RACE	Funding to support the Refugee and Asylum Seekers Advice Project	700 refugees advised of rights to benefits and housing	£1 million per annum raised in additional benefits for this client group	Amount raised and housing outcomes – quarterly reports	Immediate	Damon Gibbons/ Leicester Racial Equality Council	Budget of £18,500 identified in the review – contingent on ERF bid	Failure to secure external funds from ERF. Decision expected imminently
	Establishing community based drop in sessions with language specific advertising and delivery	9 hours per week of drop in in the Highfields and St Matthews areas	800 people advised on benefit entitlements and employment rights - £250k in additional income for residents	Monthly monitoring of take up at the sessions and outcomes	To start August 2004, 6 hours per week – October 2004 – 9 hours	Damon Gibbons	Staffing – 1 post to be recruited	Failure to recruit would limit drop in sessions to 6 hours per week for longer period.
	Provision of information packs in new community languages and dissemination through group sessions	5000 packs disseminated and 10 groups sessions conducted	Improved awareness of basic rights and entitlements	Monthly progress reports	Started	Bob Blyth	None – externally funded	None, project proceeding to target

	Creation of employment unit and NRF funded Job service partnership	500 residents from disadvantaged groups supported into work and provided with advice on rights and entitlements	Targeting of BME communities to improve employment rates and knowledge of rights at work	Monthly progress reports to project milestones	Project confirmed for funding and Steering Group established. Service to be operational October 2004	Leicester Economic Regeneration Partnership/ Damon Gibbons	External funding and main programme – identified within the review	Recruitment delays would affect operational start date.
GENDER	No specific actions identified as required.							
AGE	Funding for Age Concern and Healthy Income Project	Age Concern provide a holistic information service to 30,000 elderly people per year	Outcome measurements included under disability, above as mainly relate to take up of disability benefits	Separate break down of outcomes for elderly people to be provided as part of quarterly monitoring	Immediate	Damon Gibbons	Identified within the review	None
RELIGION	None identified							
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Assistance to be provided to Leicester Lesbian Gay and Bisexual Centre to find alternative sources of funding		Finding alternative sources of funding to support core costs		By October 2004	Damon Gibbons	None	Failure to find alternative sources leads to loss of manager and inability to sustain the centre.

SOCIAL EXCLUSION	The review details a range of services that seek to further economic and social inclusion. Details are available within the report. If the proposals are confirmed by Members then the Advice Services Business Plan for 2004/05 will set out specific targets and outputs.							
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