



Leicester
City Council

**WARDS AFFECTED
ALL WARDS (CORPORATE ISSUE)**

**FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:
CABINET**

29 JANUARY 2001

**BEST VALUE REVIEW - YEAR ONE
ADVICE SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Report of the Director of Social Services

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet endorsement of the draft Improvement Plan put forward as part of the Advice Best Value Review, in the context of the criteria for Best Value Reviews set out in the Audit Commission's guidance "Seeing is Believing".

2. **SUMMARY**

- 2.1 Reports to the Scrutiny Committees in August of this year noted the role of Scrutiny in ensuring the rigour of the Best Value Review process. A second report in November presented information on the progress of this Review and some process issues that had arisen, how they had been managed and any implications there may be in respect of the review outcomes. This Improvement Plan was considered by the Housing Scrutiny Committee on 10 January 2001. The Committee supported the proposed Improvement and their comments are incorporated in this report.
- 2.2 This report sets out the results of the Advice Service Best Value Review based on an Improvement Plan which takes account of the service assessment, identified options for change and the views of key stakeholders. Key supporting information is appended. The standard documentation, as adopted by the Council this year and completed to date, has been placed in the Members Library.
- 2.3 Members are aware that the reviews have been undertaken this year against a very tight timetable and using a process that was unfamiliar to all parties. In addition, as will be evident from the Improvement Plan, the approaches taken by the three Departments to provision and commissioning are very different and there is a lack of internal coherence to performance information. Similarly as a crosscutting theme we struggled to find meaningful external comparators to benchmark spend, performance or outcomes.
- 2.4 In order to expedite progress on this review, it is proposed that the current work in support of the Improvement Plan be concluded as quickly as possible, incorporating Members' comments. The main plank of the findings is the need for the Council to adopt an overarching strategy on Advice Services and that this should be led and commissioned by one Department (in our view Environment and Development). We recommend that the Improvement Plan should be consolidated by that Department into an Implementation Plan with clear actions for the three Departments involved in providing or commissioning Advice Services.

2.5 We recommend that this Implementation Plan should be endorsed by the Cabinet and implementation is monitored by the Scrutiny Committee to which these issues most closely relate, (in our view Regeneration).

3. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 The Cabinet is asked to agree that:

- (i) the draft Improvement Plan recommendations as set out in this report;
- (ii) the proposals for completing the review and for progressing the action identified in the Improvement Plan; and
- (iii) the Review Process adopted and how future Reviews can be improved.

4. **REPORT**

Process

4.1 Members of the Housing Scrutiny Committee considered a progress report on the process of the Review at its meeting on 22 November 2000. For ease of reference an updated summary is set out as Appendix 1. The Committee endorsed this report and the Improvement Plan at its meeting on 10 January 2001.

4.2 This Review has overlapped with the major national programme associated with setting up the new Community Legal Partnership. Their work in mapping demand and supply, as a prelude to their key funding decisions, is central to the future of advice services in the City. Where possible we have drawn on their findings and used them as an independent consultant. We strongly recommend that the City Council's suggested strategy is delayed until the need and supply mapping exercise has been completed.

Headline Findings and Draft Improvement Plan

14.7 The main findings of the Review to date are summarised in Appendix 2 to this report. The Draft Improvement Plan is drawn from this and from the meetings with the Consultation and Challenge Panels, and with our independent adviser, Mark Mansfield from the Community Legal Service.

4.4 The main elements of the draft Improvement Plan are:

PROPOSAL No.	IMPROVEMENT PROPOSALS
1.	<i>The authority can justify the continued provision of advice services in support of its statutory duties and the achievement of its priority aims of regeneration, poverty and social inclusion.</i>
2.	<i>The Cabinet and Council should adopt an overarching strategy on advice services (answering the what, where, who, when and how questions). This should be led by one Department (probably Environment and Development) and should report to a relevant Scrutiny Committee (probably Regeneration). The strategy should distinguish between general; service enquiries, services in support of the statutory duties of Housing and Social Services, and should concentrate on those relating to regeneration, poverty and social inclusion. This strategy should be judged against our benchmarked authorities and should be informed by the Community Legal Services review exercise. This Strategy should assist determining the future role of the Council's own Advice Services. (A decision on the inclusion of Energy and Consumer Advice in this strategy is required).</i>

3.	<i>The lead Department should be the sole commissioning Department for core advice services from the voluntary sector, acting as an agent for Social Services and Housing, with appropriate technical budget adjustments.</i>
4.	<i>There is a need for greater clarity in the level of demand for services and the authority's contribution towards meeting that demand. Demand for services may need to be assessed in a number of different ways (e.g. by client group, locality, or cultural considerations). This should draw on the work of the Community Legal Services Partnership</i>
5.	<i>The (relatively) large level of funding to voluntary sector advice providers may indicate a different strategic approach to the funding of the voluntary sector than that being pursued by other authorities. This should be investigated further as it could free up resources for strategic reinvestment in support of advice or other priorities.</i>
6.	<i>Council funding from the three Departments appears to lever in different levels of external funding (Social Services, Housing and E&D in descending order). The reasons for this and the scope to increase such leverage should be explored.</i>
7.	<i>Directly provided Housing Advice and Welfare Rights Services currently benchmark their performance with other Councils. The absence of common monitoring arrangements elsewhere affects the Council's ability to determine the level of supply and prevents informed decisions about where to place resources. These should be developed.</i>
8.	<i>The Council should seek to adopt a common (preferably a single set of) service standards and contractual requirements for all funders. The Community Legal Service Quality Mark may provide a model.</i>
9.	<i>There are important issues about the advice workforce to address. This includes supervision, support and consultancy; issues of cover and isolation for staff in smaller organisations; the need for developing accredited training for new entrants and current staff</i>
10.	<i>The views of service users should be sought regularly and consistently to assist in the monitoring of performance and the continued relevance of services.</i>
11.	<i>There is confusion about the role of the Social Services Welfare Rights Team which does not offer a direct service to the public. This core function in support of the Department's charging and financial assessment roles should be retained in the Department and renamed to prevent confusion. The Strategy should explore further the benefits of integrating expertise in policy development and training across the Council.</i>

4.5 We recommend that this draft Plan is endorsed and that it should be consolidated by the nominated Department (Environment and Development) into an Implementation Plan with clear actions for the three Departments involved in providing or commissioning Advice Services.

Consultation with Service Users

4.6 This Review did not undertake a new survey of the views of service users. Evidence drawn from previous surveys is described in the relevant sections of the Best Value Forms. The most systematic approach to this has been taken by Housing Advice and Tenancy Relations. A general survey was part of the Social Services Joint Review. Individual surveys will also have been undertaken by many of the 109 organisations referred to in Appendix 2. We recommend that this should be a key part of the Council's future strategic approach (see (10) above).

Consultation with External Service Providers

4.7 We circulated information on the Review and the Service Profiles developed to advice organisations in the City, inviting responses on the current pattern of provision and how it should be improved. We invited representatives from the voluntary sector, including specialist advice

providers, Leicester Law Society, Leicester Advice Compact, Voluntary Action Leicester, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Leicester Law Centre and a representative from the Federation of Indian Organisations, to participate in the two half day workshops, the Consultation Panel and the Challenge Panel. Their views are incorporated in the Appendix 2 and recorded in the relevant Forms.

Consultation with Staff

4.8 The key findings from our EFQM workshop were considerable concerns about policy and strategy and the need for a comprehensive strategy on a corporate basis. Comments included: “there is good advice going on, but this needs to be joined up”; there is a definite need to develop an overall advice strategy”; staff development, support and appropriate training is needed”; “we are sick of continually being reviewed – we need to decide the what, when and how and get on with it2; “we need to be clear about our involvement in advice services, on a corporate basis and develop common standards, policies and performance management”; “there is also a need to share good practice”.

Consultation with Trade Unions

4.9 Trade Union representatives participated actively in the Core Review Group meetings and the two Panels. They support the recommendations and their comments are attached as Appendix 4.

Comments of Independent Adviser

4.10 Comments have been sought on the final draft of this report from our Independent Adviser, Mark Mansfield. He supports the recommendations and his report is incorporated as Appendix 3.

Comments of the Housing Scrutiny Committee

4.11 The Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 10 January 2001, endorsed the process and the draft Improvement Plan. The Committee requested that consideration be given to the possibility of welfare rights and other advice being made available by means of information technology at local libraries and other community venues in the future.

Challenge, Comparison and Competition

4.12 We set out the statutory basis for Advice Services in Appendix 1 and our conclusions are set out in the draft Improvement Plan. There is limited comparative data across the whole of Advice Services and our recommendations reflect this. Over two-thirds of these services are already provided by external organisations. Further decisions about the balance of provision or commissioning services needs to be taken in the context of an overarching strategy.

Assessment against the Best Value Inspectorate Criteria

4.13 Members may wish to consider the key criteria which will be used by the Best Value Inspectorate to make judgement about services and our examination of them. The questions which will be asked by the inspectors are:

- Is it a Good Service?
- Is it Going to Improve?

INSPECTORATE QUESTIONS	RESPONSES AS A RESULT OF THE REVIEW
A Good Service?	

<p><u>Are the authority's aims clear and challenging?</u> Has the authority challenged the need for the service?</p> <p>Does the service support corporate aims and the Community Plan?</p>	<p>A fundamental challenge has been completed and the service commissioned or provided are underpinned by the Housing Act 1996 and key Social Services legislation including the NHS and Community Care Act 1990 and the Children Act 1989.</p> <p>Environment & Development funded activity is in line with the Council's strategic aims of regeneration, anti-poverty and social inclusion.</p> <p>Yes, in relation to Diversity, Jobs and Regeneration, Health and Social Care. There is, however, a lack of overall strategic direction for commissioning advice services.</p>
<p><u>Does the service meet these aims?</u> Is there effective performance management? Is the authority delivering?</p>	<p>We have examined the performance of the Council's in-house services and the findings of monitoring systems required of the voluntary sector through service level agreements where they exist. Our conclusions are that there is good in-house monitoring particularly in Housing Advice and Welfare Rights.</p> <p>There is a lack of consistency of approach or common monitoring or standards across the voluntary sector or the commissioning activity of the three Departments.</p> <p>We recommend action on this as a key part of the Improvement Plan.</p>
<p><u>How does its performance compare?</u> How does the authority compare with the top 25%? Has the authority demonstrated cost effectiveness?</p>	<p>Leicester Housing Department is an A rated Department in the top 5% of peer group authorities.</p> <p>Leicester Social Services has received a positive rating from its Joint Review in 1999. Its was rated one of the three most improved authorities in England in the 1999/2000 Performance Indicators. None related directly to Advice Services.</p> <p>There is limited national data on Advice Services to compare with. We anticipate that the Community Legal Service Partnership when developed next year will set both quality kitemarks and provide evidence of need, service response and comparative data nationally.</p>

INSPECTORATE QUESTIONS	RESPONSES AS A RESULT OF THE REVIEW
Going to Improve?	
<p><u>Does the BVR drive improvement?</u> Is the BVR process managed effectively?</p>	<p>We believe we have developed a pragmatic process fitted to the limited time available and the complexities of the Council's cross cutting approach.</p>

Has the authority fundamentally challenged what it does?	We have challenged the continuing need for Advice Services and recommend that the way it is provided is examined critically as part of the Improvement Plan.
Has the authority made rigorous comparisons throughout the review?	Comparisons are difficult and we will be recommending that this be revisited after the Community Legal Service Partnership is established in Leicester and as part of a new strategic approach to advice services funded by the Council.
Has the authority made good use of consultation?	We have generally relied on previous consultation exercises for evidence. Our Consultation and Challenge Panels have sought the views of stakeholders at two key stages.
How competitive is the authority's choice of procurement?	The Council has recently decided to tender for the service currently provided by the Law Centre and Citizens Advice Bureau. We recommend future procurement should be in the context of the overarching strategy and led by one Department.
<u>How good is the Improvement Plan?</u> Is the authority trying to improve the right things?	This is subject to Members' consideration in this report.
Are the improvements ambitious enough to get the authority into the top 25%?	There are no national indicators to judge this at present.
<u>Will the authority deliver the improvements?</u> Does the Plan have the commitment that it needs from Members and others? Is the Improvement Plan practical? Does the authority have a track record of managing both change and performance?	We are not yet in a position to demonstrate this. The Council has Beacon Status for part of the Housing Department. The Social Services Joint Review concluded the Department would continue to improve.

5. **FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Review has been asked to illustrate the following financial options:

(a) *The implications of a 2% reduction in costs.*

The total budget is around £3.5 million, of which just under £3 million is supporting voluntary organisations. The key recommendation in the Improvement Plan is for the Council to adopt a strategic position on what sort of advice it funds, where and how. In addition our findings suggest that the Council may be adopting a different strategic approach to the funding of the voluntary sector to that pursued by other authorities. We believe that the recommended overarching review could free up resources for strategic reinvestment in support of advice or other priorities.

(b) *The options for re-investing 2% in the service area.*

This should reflect the strategic direction the Council adopts on commissioning Advice Services. A key concern raised in the Consultation Panel was workforce planning in the sector. This

related to the need for recognised and accredited training of new and existing staff. This could be developed with a City further or higher education organisation.

(c) *The implications of re-aligning overall spend to comparator data where this is available.*

Further work is needed to identify comparative data which is difficult in relation to non-statutory activity. The issues are as in (a) above.

5.2 The Review Facilitator has been funded from corporate resources earmarked for Best Value Reviews. The costs of the Consultation and Challenge Panels were met from the Social Services budget. The independent consultant offered his services for expenses only. Other costs have fallen to the three Departments concerned. These are principally the heavy time commitment of officers working on a cross cutting theme basis.

5.3 Best Value Reviews are a statutory requirement. This report examines the statutory duties and powers that relate to advice services.

6. **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are three key equal opportunities dimensions to this Review: what is known about need and is this best met by specialist or generalist services; how accessible and culturally competent are existing services. A strong desire for an initial signposting from within a familiar environment was expressed by minority community representatives and older people generally. The latter was a finding of workshops held under the auspices of the Older People Review.

7. **SUSTAINABLE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 The Advice Strategy should be structured to take advantage, where appropriate, of Information and Communications Technology. These are being considered by the Customer Care Review. The use of ICT may affect the location of advice services and the need to travel. Links with public transport will determine the number of additional car journeys required. Advice on energy conservation and related consumer advice issues fell outside the scope of this Review (but are referred to in part 2 of the draft Improvement Plan).

8. **REPORT AUTHOR/OFFICERS TO CONTACT**

Lead Director:	Andrew Cozens, Director of Social Services
Lead Review Officers:	Chris Traill/Damon Gibbons, Environment & Development, Mike Hotson, Housing, John Bull, Social Services
Facilitator:	Geoff Payne, Chief Executive's Department

ADVICE BEST VALUE REVIEW
Summary of the Process Adopted

1. The new Council political management arrangements allocated one of the Best Value Reviews to each Scrutiny Committee in the first year. Scrutiny of the Advice Services BVR falls to this Committee. The Director of Social Services is the lead Director. It should be noted that his Department's Welfare Rights Service and funding to the voluntary sector falls within this review.
2. This Review, although apparently straightforward, has proved somewhat complicated in practice for five main reasons. These will, inevitably, impact on the main recommendations to arise from the report. These are:
 - Agreeing a tight and meaningful definition of advice services for the purpose of the Review (agreed by Policy & Resources Committee in July).
 - This Review is unusual in that most of the services considered are commissioned from the voluntary sector, with about 33% provided directly by the Council in three Departments (Environment & Development, Social Services and Housing).
 - There are different statutory bases for commissioning services across the Departments: we are therefore not comparing like with like within the Council and this also complicates external comparisons.
 - The external and national context for the Review is changing with the development of the Community Legal Service Partnership in Leicester. This will not be completed within this year's Best Value timescale.
 - The Council had already confirmed a major change in provision through its earlier decisions on the relationship with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Law Centre.
3. The Best Value Review process adopted by the Council requires the completion of a set of forms to ensure that a standard approach is taken across the authority. This is intended to assist the audit and external inspection process. This is particularly relevant for this review, as it is one of two Leicester City Council reviews chosen for close attention by the Audit Commission's Best Value Inspectorate.
4. In conducting this Review, I have tried to combine compliance with the process, with the development of a pragmatic approach to ensure that the "4 Cs" of Best Value (Compare, Consult, Challenge, Compete with the additional Q of Quality) were addressed and the forms used both as a *prompt* to ensure we covered all the angles, and as an *audit tool* to record what we did and when.
5. Our approach has had the following stages:
 - Establishing a Core Group with representation from relevant managers and joint trade union representation.
 - Defining the scope of the Review and confirming what should be included. Policy and Resources Committee confirmed this in July.
 - Completing detailed Service Profiles: initially by Department and then consolidated into a Council-wide view.
 - Reviewing outcomes of previous service user consultations: we did not feel we had time for a further exercise.
 - Seeking external comparisons, where available.
 - Issuing the Service Profile for comment to service providers in the Council and the voluntary sector, based on three key questions about current and future provision.
 - Convening a Consultation Panel with representatives from key providers and other stakeholders, with the Scrutiny Chair and Spokespersons invited as observers.

- Seeking the views of external consultants.
- Consolidating the findings into a working paper for consultation in Departments.
- Presenting headline issues to a Challenge Panel for debate and discussion.
- Convening an EFQM workshop for representatives from Departments.
- Scrutiny Committee consideration of progress report.
- Development of an Improvement Plan.

6. There are three remaining stages to the Review as we see it:

- Presentation of the findings to the Cabinet.
- Further consideration by Scrutiny Committee of the findings.
- Development of an Implementation Programme for the draft Improvement Plan, for confirmation by the Cabinet. The Programme will be implemented by the Director(s) of the Department(s) affected.

ADVICE SERVICES BEST VALUE REVIEW Headline Findings

Introduction

In August the Best Value Review Team drew up a profile of advice services currently provided by or commissioned by the local authority. This profile incorporated the activities of three Council Departments (Social Services, Environment & Development, and Housing) and was presented to the Consultation Panel meeting held on 21st September 2000. Comments made at that meeting highlighted the need for the following tasks to be undertaken:

- (i) For the authority to answer the fundamental challenge as to why it provides, or commissions others to provide, advice services at all;
- (ii) To assess the demand for advice services in Leicester;
- (iii) To provide greater detail with regard to the level of funding for advice provision;
- (iv) To assess the supply of advice provision; and
- (v) To identify the outcomes of advice for clients.

A further meeting of the Panel, as a Challenge Panel, took place on 2nd November 2000 at which an increased level of detail was provided. As a consequence, a number of key issues have now been identified as a basis for future work.

This paper sets out the current position with regard to the key issues that have emerged from the work undertaken to date and from the comments received from the consultation panel. Finally, it indicates the possible future direction of the review.

Why Provide Advice Services?

A key component of the Best Value process is to present a fundamental challenge to the authority as to why it undertakes the provision of services (whether directly or via a commissioning process). Comments made at the Consultation Panel meeting of 21st September indicated that there was a need to state the arguments as to why advice services were being provided and to evidence that services delivered those outcomes which justified provision. This information is presented in the table, below.

Department	Argument	Evidence
Housing	<p>The local authority has a legal obligation to ensure that advice and information is available to prevent homelessness (s.179, Housing Act 1996)</p> <p>Tenancy relations services are not backed by a statutory duty but an advisory report due for imminent publication by the DETR says that local authorities should have clearly identified officers whose role is to engage in a range of activity from advice to prosecution. It also advises that the authority should take steps to identify the extent of private sector landlord-tenant problems and make appropriate reference in their local housing strategy.</p>	<p>The provision of housing advice and tenancy relations services are clearly linked with key strategies of the Housing Department.</p> <p>The Housing Advice and Tenancy Relations Service have clear remits to prevent homelessness and, therefore, to reduce the pressures on the local authority that may arise under its duty to ensure that housing is available to those with rights under the homelessness legislation.</p>

Social Services	<p>There are a number of statutory powers that allow a local authority to provide advice services. These focus on the need to safeguard the welfare of different client groups (the elderly, children in need, people with disabilities). However, the provision of welfare rights also has a beneficial effect of raising revenue for the authority either by positively affecting the Standard Spending Assessment or by increasing revenues from charges for home care services.</p>	<p>Voluntary sector funding is focused on those agencies that serve the specific target groups (e.g. Age Concern, Mosaic, CLASP) falling within the local authority's statutory powers.</p> <p>A directly provided welfare rights service has clear targets for the raising of revenue to the authority in its service plan (e.g. £125,000 per year in increased home care charges; save the department £30,000 per year by maximising income for service-users in residential care).</p> <p>The Welfare Rights Service also clearly supports the statutory duties of the authority by assisting social worker teams to safeguard the welfare of service users by providing consultancy and support to maximise benefit entitlements.</p>
Environment & Development	<p>Services contribute to key local authority strategies (Regeneration; Anti-Poverty). Services provided include maximising income; safeguarding employment rights; assisting refugees and asylum seekers; preventing homelessness in rent/ mortgage possession cases and by advising on landlord/tenant law.</p> <p>Services have been focused on areas of the city with high levels of deprivation and have a positive effect on the local economy.</p> <p>Successful welfare rights work in Disability Living Allowance cases positively affects the Standard Spending Assessment of the local authority.</p>	<p>Voluntary sector agencies provide a wide range of advice on different areas of law including welfare rights, immigration, employment, housing and debt. These are recognised within Leicester's Community Plan as playing a key role in the addressing social exclusion.</p> <p>The directly provided service concentrates on welfare and employment rights. Service plan indicates success in raising over £750,000 of unclaimed benefit for city residents, contributing to the local economy.</p> <p>Employment advice on the national minimum wage and other areas of employment law (e.g. working time directive) contributes to local priorities with regard to regeneration and economic development.</p> <p>The directly provided service also manages contracts with the voluntary sector providers and has been successful in bringing in external resources for the funding of advice services by linking with regeneration initiatives.</p>

The Consultation Panel meeting of 2nd November accepted the proposal that the local authority had sufficient justification for the future funding of advice services in all of the above areas. The debate has therefore progressed from deciding whether or not advice services *should* be provided to issues regarding the *way in which* advice services should be configured.

Demand for Advice Services and Level of Funding

Members of the Consultation Panel commented on 21st September that the Best Value review should examine not only the level of funding for services but also the degree of demand for those services. The question arose as to whether or not there was a funding shortfall.

Assessing demand for advice services is a complex issue and much work has been done in this respect by the Community Legal Service Partnership for Leicester. As part of the Review evidence, the findings of the Community Legal Service Partnership are attached showing those areas of Leicester with the highest relative needs for different types of advice. These are currently subject to discussion within the Community Legal Service Partnership.

The Review Team had previously detailed the level of funding in respect of directly provided services. This is presented again below.

Directly Provided Advice Services (Funding levels)

Department	Funding (£'s)
Housing	226,000
Social Services	229,967
E&D	379,700
Total	835,667

A benchmarking club has been established with Nottingham City Council and Derby City Council which has started to provide comparable data in respect of the level of funding and performance of directly provided local authority welfare rights services. Funding comparators¹ are detailed below.

Local Authority Funding of Directly Provided Welfare Rights Services

Local Authority	Funding (£'s)
Leicester City	585539
Nottingham City	544942
Derby City	199270

The benchmarking club has also provided the Best Value Review with some data in respect of local authority grant funding to voluntary sector providers. However this relates to Nottingham City and Leicester City only.

Welfare rights services are provided in different ways by Nottingham and Leicester. In Leicester two distinct functions are separated across the Social Services and E&D departments (full details of the services being provided can be found in the Service Profile document).

Advice Services - Funding to Voluntary Sector Providers

Local Authority	2000/01 Funding for primary advice services	2000/01 Total funding for groups that give advice
Leicester	£1,352,705	£2,957,601
Nottingham	£486,837	£2,816,757

The above tables appear to indicate that Leicester and Nottingham have roughly equivalent levels of funding for direct welfare rights provision. However, Leicester appears to fund voluntary sector organisations², whose primary function is to give advice, to a far greater extent than Nottingham. When the number of agencies giving advice are looked at as a whole (i.e. projects are included which provide advice but do not consider that it is a primary function) then funding levels again appear to equate.

¹ The figures for Leicester differ from the full costs of services in the previous table as only comparable costs are being included in the benchmarking exercise (this excludes the costs of premises and central services).

² Note that figures relating to the voluntary sector relate to all types of advice not just welfare rights.

The question arises as to the nature of voluntary sector advice provision in each of the cities and how funding levels reflect different patterns of advice provision or indicate that the relative strengths of voluntary sector advice providers to access alternative funding sources.

At the meeting of 2nd November, the Consultation Panel raised concerns about the validity of comparing levels of funding given the different populations and degree of deprivation that might exist in the two cities. However, subsequent analysis indicates that the two cities have similar levels of population. Further to this, the Index of Deprivation 2000 suggests that deprivation levels are also similar.

An extract from the Index of Deprivation for the two cities can be found in the table, below.

Local Authority	Number of Employment Deprived ³	Number of Income Deprived ⁴	Rank of Income Scale ⁵
Leicester	22188	98175	12
Nottingham	25733	100600	10

Discussions at the meeting of 2nd November revealed that there was an issue as to how much 'return' could be identified for local authority spend on voluntary sector advice agencies. A number of commentators made the point that volunteer time (both in terms of advisers and management committee members) could be identified as a resource brought in by local authority expenditure.

In addition, it was felt that the ability of the two cities respective voluntary sectors to lever in sources of funding from other funders could also be benchmarked. A question arose as to whether or not the higher level of spend by Leicester City Council on voluntary sector agencies represented a lack of diversity in funding sources for the voluntary sector locally.

Patterns of Service Delivery

The Consultation Panel meeting of 21st September clearly indicated that whilst there was information available with respect to directly provided services, further work needed to be undertaken with respect to the services being provided within the voluntary sector.

The Community Legal Service Partnership for Leicester has now provided some details following a supply mapping exercise.

Results of Supply Mapping Exercise (Not for Profit Providers⁶)

Area of Law	General Help	General Help plus Casework	Specialist Help	Total
Welfare Rights	12	17	10	39
Debt	4	10	2	16
Housing	8	16	4	28
Immigration	4	7	2	13
Employment	4	7	2	13
Total	32	57	20	109

³ This is a count of individuals experiencing employment deprivation - defined as those who want to work but who are unable to do so through unemployment, sickness, or disability.

⁴ This measures the number of people who are on a low income (including those in employment).

⁵ This is the ranking of the most deprived local authority areas in the country. Nottingham is placed slightly higher (more deprived) than Leicester on this ranking.

⁶ The term "Not for Profit" includes both voluntary sector and local authority directly provided services

The above table begins to provide detail of the pattern of advice provision in the city, indicating that there are a large number of agencies in the city providing specialist welfare rights advice when compared to other areas of law.

However, further information is required in respect of the levels of funding given to each area of law and the capacity of each provider to deal with enquiries and casework before decisions can be made regarding the ability of providers to cope with demand. In addition, the issue as to whether or not many providers specialise in providing services to particular client groups has not been picked up in the exercise.

From records held for services commissioned by E&D it is possible to assess the number of cases dealt with by 6 advice agencies in the last financial year.

Area of Law	Total Enquiries
Immigration	1587
Welfare Rights	12536
Employment	4156
Housing	3034

The figures in the above table should be treated with some caution. As the Consultation Panel of 21st September indicated, there is a lack of uniformity in the way that monitoring information is being gathered by advice agencies. Added to this, there is an element of double counting involved where one agency refers an enquirer to another.

Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a far greater provision services in welfare rights than in any other area of law. Evidence from the Social Services Department Service Profile also supports this view - as services commissioned by that department are primarily related to securing welfare benefit entitlements for particular client groups.

The Challenge Panel meeting of 2nd November discussed the pattern of service delivery in some detail - focusing upon key issues relating to the critical mass of agencies to deliver services and the level of services being provided. In particular, the meeting discussed the need to ensure that there are training and consultancy services available that could support new workers and volunteers working in advice. This was not possible where specialist advice workers were spread too thinly throughout the city in a number of different organisations.

In effect, two options were put forward. Either the authority could support the development of individual agencies to build up their own teams of specialist advice workers, which would require investment in developing the capacity of agencies, or alternatively it needed to bring together specialist teams so that services could be provided to front-line agencies.

Historically, it appears that there has been a development of specialists within individual agencies (such that there were projects with only one or two specialist workers) and that this was insufficient a number of workers with which to provide additional services such as training. The repercussions were now being felt with problems being experienced by many agencies when trying to recruit to vacant positions.

The Challenge Panel identified a longstanding need for accredited training for advice workers in order to promote career progression and to ensure high quality of advice locally. NVQs in advice had been developed but there was little local support available.

Outcomes

The lack of a common monitoring system (see above) also makes it difficult to compare outcomes across different service providers. Whilst directly provided welfare rights services are currently

benchmarking their performance with Nottingham and Derby City Councils, greater difficulties exist when attempting to compare services commissioned by two different council departments.

The issue of outcomes has also been linked to quality assurance. The Community Legal Service Quality Mark was expected to play a key role in providing a base level of quality across all advice providers.

At the meeting of 2nd November discussion took place regarding the use of the Quality Mark as the appropriate measure of quality assurance for advice projects. At the present time, the Council's corporate grant aid contract required voluntary sector agencies to work towards PQASSO standards. However, many at the meeting felt that this was unhelpful for advice agencies and saw the CLS Quality Mark as of more relevance to their work. The authority therefore needs to consider whether or not to sign up to the development of the Quality Mark and make this a requirement for funding of advice agencies in the future.

Particular difficulties may arise for organisations who provide advice services but who do not see this as their main role. It may be that these agencies will not pursue a Quality Mark application. The authority needs to consider the impact of insisting on a commitment to apply for a CLS Quality Mark as a condition for funding in the light of this. This is an issue that is currently being discussed within the CLS funders group.

Strategic Issues

A number of key issues appear to be identifiable from the information that has been gathered to date, and from the Consultation and Challenge Panel meetings held with stakeholders on 21st September and 2nd November:

- (a) That the authority can justify the continued provision of advice services;
- (b) There is a need for greater clarity in the level of demand for services and the authority's contribution towards meeting that demand. The contributions of other funders also need to be clarified;
- (c) Demand for services may need to be assessed in a number of different ways (e.g. by client group and locality);
- (d) The (relatively) large level of funding to voluntary sector advice providers may indicate a different strategic approach to the funding of the voluntary sector than that being pursued by other authorities;
- (e) There are difficulties obtaining detailed information on the numbers of enquiries and cases that can be dealt with by advice providers due to a lack of common monitoring arrangements - this affects the ability of the authority to determine the level of supply and also prevents informed decisions as to where to place resources.

Both meetings of the Panels agreed that these issues needed to be taken forward. There was a need for an overarching advice strategy that took into account the different reasons for providing advice of each of the commissioning departments, but which nevertheless provided a framework for the commissioning of services that avoided duplication and made the best use of available resources. Any advice strategy would need to be linked to clear Performance Indicators (both for directly provided and voluntary sector agencies) and these should ideally be developed in conjunction with other funding partners and benchmark authorities.

The strategy would need to cover both directly provided and voluntary sector advice services and be keyed into the discussions with other funders of advice services via the Community Legal Service Partnership.

Making the best use of resources would invariably require an assessment of the separated directly provided welfare rights services in Social Services and E&D, although more information and benchmarking data would need to be gathered to inform any decision on this issue.

The strategy would also need to look closely at the performance of the local voluntary sector in levering in additional resources, and make recommendations for the pattern of service delivery - taking into account developments surrounding the Quality Mark and the demand for and supply of advice in Leicester.

Crucially, there was a need for the authority to identify those core advice services that it would resource, and detail the level of resources available. Some members of the Consultation Panel raised the possibility of bringing together the responsibility for the strategic plan and the commissioning of advice services into one department. Alternatively, one department leading on the strategy but with individual departments commissioning services from within their own budgets was proposed. The authority would need to discuss these options and signal their intentions at an early stage.

Finally, it was recognised that there had been an extremely limited amount of public consultation with regard to the planning of advice service delivery in the past. A clear recommendation from the consultation panel was for more members of the public to be engaged in the planning of advice services. To some extent, possibilities to test out models of delivery and consult with residents on their effectiveness now existed in respect of the SRB5 area. This could be used as a test bed for models of delivery and be used to inform changes throughout the city over the next three years.

Damon Gibbons
17/11/2000

BEST VALUE REVIEW – ADVICE SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

COMMENTS OF INDEPENDENT ADVISER

Background

I am currently employed as a Planning and Partnership Consultant for the Legal Services Commission and have specific responsibility for supporting the work of Leicester City Community Legal Service Partnership. Prior to joining the Commission I had previously worked in the field of debt advice for almost 15 years within both voluntary and local government sectors; been Chairperson of the Money Advice Association representing over 600 money advisers in England and Wales and been a consultant to the European Commission on Debt Collection Practices Across Europe. I am also involved in two other Best Value Reviews of Advice Services for Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council.

Best Value Review Process

I was invited to join the Best Value Review process part way through. The summary of the process detailed in Appendix 1 of the Best Value Review Report accurately describes the process adopted. I regard the process as sufficient and robust in terms of the tight timescales adopted and the difficulties in conducting a Best Value Review of Advice Services as described.

Best Value Review Recommendations

I am in broad agreement with the eleven improvement proposals detailed in the Draft Improvement Plan.

In addition I recommend that the City Council seeks to develop its improvement proposals in conjunction with Leicester Community Legal Service Partnership in order to encourage a more co-ordinated approach to the provision of advice and information services by bringing together funders, providers and consumers to develop local strategic plans. The City Council as the principal funder of advice provision should take the lead in developing the local strategic plans.

The Community Legal Service Quality Mark has been widely supported as the new advice sector standard of quality assurance and is independently audited by the Legal Services Commission. A number of City Council services and services that it funds have either gained the Quality Mark or are in the process of applying for the Quality Mark. This should be extended to all advice specific services as a performance indicator enabling more effective monitoring of advice provision and over time become a common requirement for funding of services.

Leicester has a rich and varied network of advice and information providers. The City Council should actively encourage these services to work more closely by advocating a common approach to referrals between providers as required under the Quality Mark. This could significantly improve the quality of service available to residents of Leicester.

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BEST VALUE REVIEW – ADVICE SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

COMMENTS OF TRADE UNIONS REPRESENTATIVES

The Trade Unions recognise the need for the City Council to adopt an overarching strategy for Advice and acknowledge the proposals for improvement. As regards to Improvement option 8 the Unions believe that the model adopted should consist of a single set of service standards and contractual requirements for all funders and must satisfy Equality, Health & Safety and Training requirements. Links must also be drawn with the emerging Procurement Strategy.

The Trade Unions would welcome clear distinction being drawn between the roles of the Social Services Welfare Rights Team and other business units providing advice directly to the public.

Good use appears to have been made of the EFQM workshops the information gained has been clearly evidenced in this report through staff comments.

The Trade Unions recognise the Equal Opportunity implications of this review and the links with other Best Value Reviews such as Services to Older People.

The approach adopted in interpreting the BV Management Guidelines has identified some good practice e.g. Stakeholder and Challenge panels, linking with other Best Value reviews.

Whilst the input from the independent adviser has been useful the Trade Unions are concerned about the temptation for external bodies to influence City Council's processes for their own ends.

S. Goligher
JTU Best Value Co-ordinator