

Executive Report to Scrutiny

Scrutiny Commission:

Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement

Date of scrutiny committee: 3rd September 2013

**Leicestershire Citizens Advice Bureau
(Community Legal Advice Service)**

Lead director: Director of Care Services & Commissioning

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All wards
- Report author: Akbar Sameja
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- Report version number: 1.0

1. Summary

1.1 The attached report from Leicestershire Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) sets out the current provision of community legal advice service

2. Main report:

- 2.1 The contract for the provision of Community Legal Advice Services was awarded to CAB as their tender was the overall the most economically advantageous tender.
- 2.2 The service commenced on 1st April 2013 for an initial period of three years (to 31st March 2016), with the provision to extend for a further two years.
- 2.3 The contract value is £370,700 per annum.
- 2.4 The contract requires CAB to provide 12,000 tier 1 (Assisted Information and Signposting) cases per year, 6,600 tier 2 (General Advice and General Advice with Casework) cases per year, 600 tier 3 (Specialist Advice) cases per year, and 10 Outreach sessions per week.
- 2.5 Performance data for the first quarter (April-June 2013) showed that the provider had supported 2,791 cases for Tier 1, 804 cases for Tier 2, and 115 cases for Tier 3.
- 2.6 There has been some under-performance for Tier 2, but CAB has a clear plan for increasing access to this level of the service. The outreach workers have been recruited and priority wards for outreach have now been confirmed, and CAB has also completed the final training for a further group of new volunteer advisers.
- 2.7 The service is being used across the city covering a range of enquiry types, with a prevalence of welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment and family issues.
- 2.8 In the first quarter, CAB assisted clients from every ward in Leicester. The top five wards from which clients come are were: Spinney Hill, Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields, Castle, Charnwood, and Abbey.
- 2.9 The Outreach service had not commenced during the first quarter, as the priority wards were being finalised. However, the wards and venues have now been confirmed, and CAB will be contacting the councillors of the priority wards to plan

their communication.

2.10 The attached report (Appendix 1) from CAB sets out the current provision of community legal advice service, with particular reference to the following:

- Services provided
- The outreach service
- Who is using the service
- Quality assurance
- Services gained/lost by the closure of the CLAC
- Future developments

3. Details of Scrutiny

3.1 This report has not been scrutinised

4. Financial, legal and other implications

4.1 Financial implications

4.1.1 No financial implications

4.2 Legal implications

4.2.1 No legal implications

4.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

4.3.1 No Climate Change implications

4.4 Equality Impact Assessment

4.4.1 N/A – the service will be continuing

4.5 Other Implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

4.5.1 No other implications

5. Background information and other papers:

6. Summary of appendices:

Appendix 1 – briefing report from Leicestershire Citizens Advice Bureau

Appendix 1

Leicester Community Legal Advice Service

Briefing for Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission Report, September 2013 Meeting

Our Service

The Leicester Advice Service is led by the LeicesterShire Citizens Advice Bureau. The Leicester City Council funded Leicester Advice Service is provided for Leicester city residents only. We also provide advice and information to residents of Leicester and the districts of Blaby, Oadby and Wigston, Hinckley and Bosworth, Melton, Harborough and North West Leicestershire.

Citizens Advice nationally is a membership organisation, and each bureau is an independent charity. As a Citizens Advice Bureau we aim to provide the advice people need for the problems they face, and to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. Our service is free at the point of access, confidential, independent and impartial.

The use of volunteers to deliver advice and information is fundamental to the Citizens Advice approach. We provide volunteers with comprehensive and recognised training and valuable experience of the workplace. Our volunteer staff are recruited from across the City and therefore reflect the diversity within the community. Volunteering also offers valuable work experience and is often a way into paid employment.

Other elements of the Leicester Advice Service are provided by local partner agencies on a sub-contractor basis. SHARP provide specialist advice, casework and representation in Welfare Benefits, Debt, Employment and Housing. AgeUK are delivering 10 outreach sessions per week and home visits, for clients of all ages.

What We Offer

The Leicester Advice Service provides information, advice and specialist help to Leicester city residents.

Tier 1

At Tier 1, clients have a 10-20 minute triage style interview to determine the nature of their problem. At that stage they may be given information relevant to their problem, usually taken from our publically accessible website www.adviceguide.org.uk. This resolves the problem in 50% of cases.

If the case cannot be dealt with at Tier 1, clients can be booked into Tier 2 appointments, or referred to Tier 3. If the client is in an emergency situation, for example facing bailiff action or imminent eviction, immediate action will be taken to deal with the emergency and it is likely an appointment will then be made to resolve the underlying problems.

At Tier 1 clients may also be signposted to a more appropriate agency.

Clients can access Tier 1 help at the Citizens Advice Bureau office at Apex House on Charles Street from 9-4.30, Monday to Friday, by telephone from our contact centre from 10-4 (0844 417 1025 from landlines, 0300 330 1025 from a mobile), Monday to Friday, and at the outreach venues during the scheduled sessions.

Tier 2

Tier 2 advice is usually provided by appointment following a Tier 1 assessment. At Tier 2 clients receive full advice and action. Action can comprise benefit and court form filling, telephone calls and correspondence on the client's behalf.

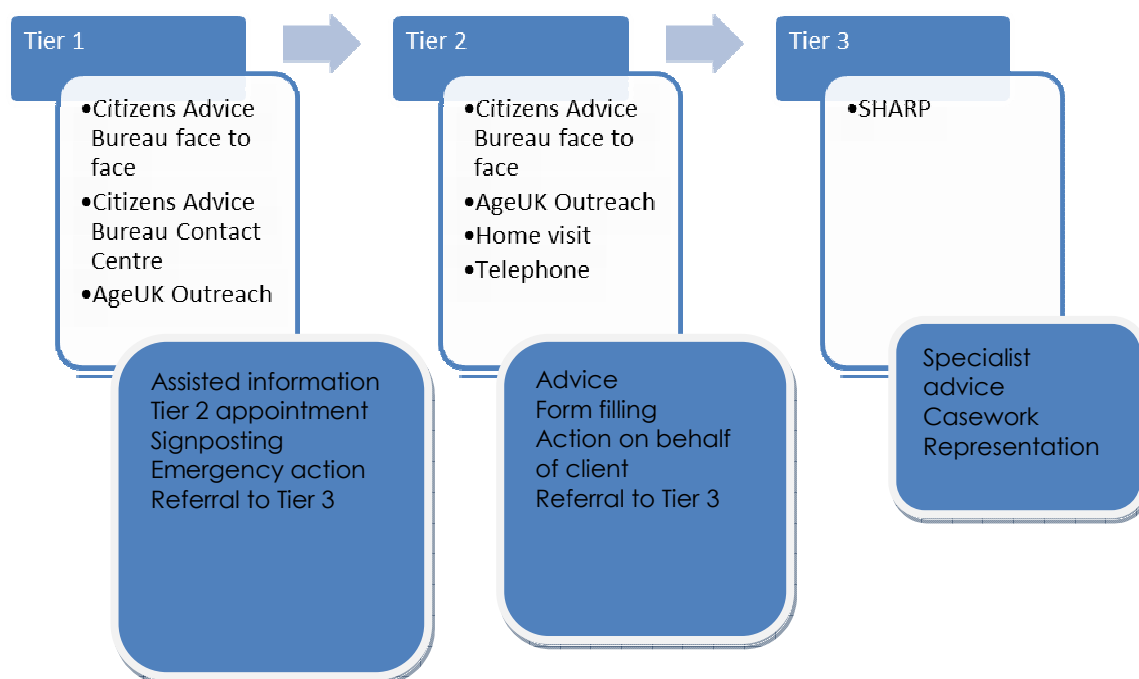
The majority of cases will conclude at Tier 2, but where specialist advice is needed and/or the client will need representation at court or tribunal in the areas of specialist advice within the contract, a referral can then be made to our Tier 3 provider.

Tier 2 advice is provided at the Citizens Advice Bureau office and outreach venues with some capacity for telephone appointments and home visits.

Tier 1 and Tier 2 help is provided in the areas of benefits, debt, housing, employment, immigration, family and community care under the Leicester Advice Service contract. As a Citizens Advice Bureau we also provide information and advice in consumer matters, education, health, financial capability, and travel and transport.

Tier 3

Tier 3 specialist advice, casework and representation is provided by SHARP at their offices in Welford Road. The service is provided in the areas of benefits, debt, housing and employment.



Outreach

Outreach sessions will run once a week in the wards assessed as having the highest need of local access to our service.

The outreach is due to begin by September.

The sessions will comprise some pre-booked Tier 2 appointments and some open sessions for clients who drop-in. Tier 1 and 2 services will be available at outreach, and referrals can be made to Tier 3.

How to Refer

Councillors and partner agencies in the statutory and voluntary sector are able to refer clients to the service, meaning a more streamlined service for the client who will be contacted by us directly, and will not have to give their details multiple times.

The referral process is currently by completion of a form which can be emailed or posted to us. As part of the Advice Leicester Partnership we are working on the development of an online referral system.

How to Access the Service

For clients accessing the service without a referral, we can be reached in the following ways:

Face to Face

Leicestershire Citizens Advice Bureau, Apex House, 4th floor, 74-76 Charles Street, Leicester LE1 1FB

Monday- Friday 9.00-4.30

Outreach venues (timings to be confirmed before September)

Braunstone & Rowley Fields – Brite Centre and Oak Centre (alternate weeks)

Spinney Hills – Wesley Hall and St Matthews TARA (alternate weeks)

New Parks – New Parks Library (weekly)

Beaumont Leys – Beaumont Leys Library (weekly)

Abbey – Tudor Centre (weekly)

Stoneygate – Open Hands, Trinity Life Church (weekly)

Humberstone and Hamilton – Netherhall Community Centre and Hamilton Library (alternate weeks)

Charwood and Coleman – St Barnabas Library (weekly)

Eyres Monsell – Southfields Library (weekly)

Rushey Mead – Rushey Mead Neighbourhood Centre (weekly)

Telephone

0844 417 1025 from a landline, Monday – Friday 10-4

0300 330 1025 from a mobile, Monday – Friday 10 – 4

Venues are all accessible. We have volunteers and staff who speak a range of languages, but where we cannot provide in-house advice in a language other than English, we have access to Language Line. We can also arrange signers for the hearing impaired.

Quality

Leicestershire Citizens Advice Bureau and Age UK are accredited providers of generalist advice, and SHARP has the Specialist Quality Mark.

All three organisations are audited regularly to ensure standards are maintained.

On a local level, quality is ensured through a stringent system of supervision during advice sessions, and case checking of written records of client contact. Paid Advice Session Supervisors are available whenever offices are open, and provide support to staff and volunteers as they advise clients. Assessors and advisers use quality checked sources to provide advice and information. Anyone providing advice or information has to undertake full accredited training before they are able to deal with clients, and once they are newly qualified all of their cases are checked by a supervisor.

Outreach workers are trained to a high standard and have access to information sources and supervision during their sessions. Like Tier 3 caseworkers, their cases are subject to regular file review to check for quality.

All organisations have a complaints process and carry professional liability insurance.

Who is using the service?

In the first quarter, we have assisted clients from every ward in Leicester. The top five wards from which our clients come are: Spinney Hill, Braunstone Park & Rowley Fields, Castle, Charnwood, and Abbey.

The majority of clients were not in paid work, and came from the lower end of the income spectrum. Clients came from all ethnic groups, although numbers from the Chinese community are noticeably lower than anticipated.

A third of enquiries concerned benefits, with debt, housing and employment making up a further third.

Services Lost & Gained

The service provided under the new Community Legal Advice contract is somewhat different to that provided by the Community Legal Advice Centre (CLAC). Our new service has increased volunteer participation in all areas of work, from reception and administration to specialist case work. This brings important community involvement and enriches the employability of Leicester volunteers. The new service also has improved telephone access through the contact centre.

In relation to lost services, the amount of specialist casework has reduced in this contract as a result of the severe restriction of access to civil legal aid.

Future development

The Citizens Advice Bureau are planning to move from our current premises to somewhere with space to expand our contact centre and interview space. The alternative premises will be secured by September. Once we are in new accommodation we will have an official launch.

We can currently take 12 calls at once, but we are looking to expand the number of seats in this financial year. We are also developing an automated queuing system in response to client feedback.

We are planning to deliver “problem notice” and welfare reform training to partners, and to widen our referral network. This is intended to help clients receive help earlier, and in a more streamlined fashion.

We will also be promoting the service more widely, especially by targeting groups who are under-represented in our service-users.