

LeicesterShire Citizens Advice City Advice Services Contract Performance 2014 - 2015

1. Summary of provision

The council has commissioned social welfare law advice for the city. Leicestershire Citizens Advice was awarded the contract in 2013 and has operated from 3rd floor, 60, Charles Street, Leicester.

28,198 enquiries were dealt with under the contract for 2014 - 2015.

A definition of the advice offered through the tier structure is explained in Appendix A.

Table to show the CA performance against Advice & Support targets 2014/15		
Tier	Target	Actual outrun
1	17,600	18,027
2	8,800	10,171
3	600	595

2. Contact Channel

Table to show the Advice & Support contact by delivery options 2014/15				
Tier	Charles Street Bureau F2F	Contact Centre Telephone, Email & Webchat	SHARP & Employment. (referral)	Outreach sessions & Home Visits
1	9,350	7,618	-	1,059
2	8,530	0	-	1,641
3	0	0	595	-

The primary choice of contact option for our clients is face to face (F2F) at our contact centre centrally located at 60, Charles Street seeing 18,000 clients over the year.

The contact centre is now providing a webchat facility, supporting clients who are accessing our web pages which is another growing strand of self-serve supported enquiry access. This is part of a nationwide pilot project and we have been able to provide 2 apprentices with a position under this funding to support this offer for the city. The contact centre continues to provide valuable work experience to the long term unemployed, and we have seen over 30 candidates move into paid employment after participating in the scheme. During their time with us, they have the opportunity to work towards a NVQ level 1 in Customer Services; this has been a success with 9 achieving the certificate, along with the training provided by Citizens Advice. We continue to encourage law students and have a high demand from both Leicester and De Montford University; the students find the practical situation of providing advice at face to face invaluable for experience.

We are working with Leicester Ageing Together to provide advice, income maximisation and guidance to isolated older people in the following wards: Thurncourt, Latimer, Evington and Spinney Hills. There are 17 partners within the project, which is funded by The Big Lottery and managed by Vista. We have a project worker in post and currently arranging venues to interview clients. We are also providing a 'problem noticer'¹ training to the partners and volunteers within the project.

Why do clients seek advice?

The top three requests for advice in the city are Welfare Benefits including tax credits at 33%, debt advice represents 15% of the requests and employment advice is 11%. Leicester's top three contacts are reasonably reflective of the national advice picture from CA perspective. However within the national picture the highest contact is debt advice, predominately council tax recovery. In Leicester the CA work with the Council and operate two drop in sessions, one on summons days; at the Customer Service Centre on Granby Street to support clients manage their finances.

Where are the advice pressure points in the city?

We have seen an increase with European Economic Area (EEA) nationals, due to the new ruling of proving a genuine prospect of work. We have adapted the information from the Leicester City Council website to produce a leaflet, which is less wordy and provides clear instruction to clients with limited language skills. We are also seeing clients who are in work and needing advice regarding employment problems, linked to Tax Credits. Employment Support Allowance (ESA) is another priority for clients, where they will be submitting a mandatory reconsideration (challenge about an award decision) due to suspension of the benefit.

Welfare benefits continue to be our largest area of work reflecting the extent and impact of current benefit changes. Debt is lower than anticipated, however this might be masked by how our enquiries are categorised by the initial presenting problem. For example, a person who seeks help for a benefit problem which has caused a debt problem would only be recorded as benefit as opposed to a debt issue, although advice would be provided for both.

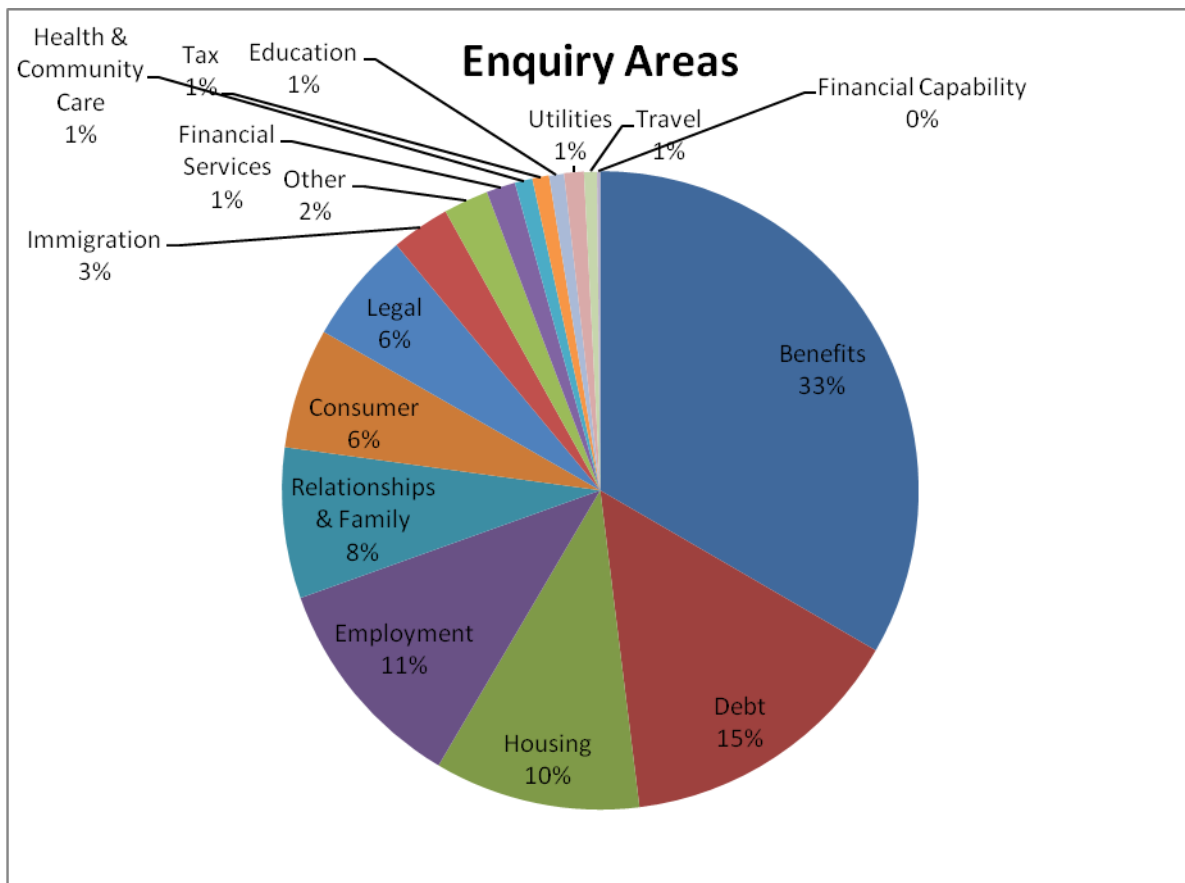
¹ Problem noticer's are volunteers or employees out in libraries, food banks, surgeries who are trained to spot individuals who require sign posting to advice or other services such as mental health drop in sessions in the city

Within the category of welfare benefits advice we are seeing increasing numbers of clients needing help with benefit applications (increasingly online), handling the new appeal process (reconsiderations are now mandatory prior to appeal), and coping with the impacts of sanctions or disputing the decision to apply a sanction. This often leads to further appointments for financial capability and debt advice.

For example a client wishing to claim ESA would need support with an initial application over the telephone, plus a further hard copy form for an assessment of their work capability a few weeks later. The client is then sent for a medical assessment and then awaits a decision. If this decision is unfavourable, they would then require assistance with a mandatory reconsideration form as well as a JSA application for financial support during this time as they would receive no ESA. If the mandatory reconsideration request is also unfavourable, they would then need further support with an appeal form.

One of the areas of growth is the increase in the number of clients we are referring for food parcels and hot meals. However, we are pleased to be one of the pilot organisations chosen by the Council's Community Support Team to be able to distribute Co-op vouchers for food or fuel under the terms of the Community Support Grant scheme. We have been doing this since December 2013 and have made 110 awards so far.

The following graph gives a breakdown of the enquiry areas with which we have been presented.



There continues to be an increase in the proportion of clients seeking help with family law since the changes to civil legal aid in April 2013. We are seeing more people unable to access and receive legal aid help for court action in relation to divorce or child custody/access issues. This is not one of the areas in which we are able to provide Tier 3 help. There is family law advice provision in the city however this advice is chargeable.

By Demographic - Disability

Our demographic data shows that 26% of clients identify as having a disability or long term health problem (52% identify as having no health problems and 22% do not disclose anything about their health). Nationally about 17% of UK residents describe themselves as disabled, which suggests people with disabilities have a disproportionate need for our service. This is to be expected given the ongoing changes to sickness and disability benefits.

By Demographic - Age

The majority of our clients are of working age (around 70%), with around 20% being over 65. Given that Leicester is a young city, we need to do more to market the service you young adults. Only 10% of our clients are under 24. We are expanding our social media presence and online offering to appeal to this age group.

By Demographic - Ethnicity

Our biggest single group of clients identify as White – British. The next largest groups identify as Asian or British Asian – Indian and Black – African. Around 10% of clients do not disclose their ethnicity.

Outreach Delivery

Outreach sessions are offered in ten wards across the city. This comprises 10 half day sessions per week, one in each ward. In Braunstone & Rowley Fields, Humberstone & Hamilton and Spinney Hills the outreach takes place at alternating venues to cover the ward area.

The outreach is delivered by two advisors supplied by our partners AgeUK. Their workers see anyone of any age.

2,700 people have been seen at our outreach sessions. We are currently encouraging people to book appointments for outreach by contacting the city centre office, through councillor referral or by using our contact centre phone or email as this has proven to be the most effective way to achieve maximum use of their sessions, but there remains some facility for drop in.

We have been providing an outreach service at York House since April 2015, on a Monday and Wednesday morning. This is proving to be successful, we have seen 24 clients from the end of April to the end of June 2016, and we aim to build on this, the council staff can now book clients into see us, which will also allow for drop in's.

Leicester City Citizens Advice continues to work with the Advice Leicestershire Partnership (ALP) group and we took part in the conference held in March, Breaking Leicester's Poverty Cycle. Over 80 people attended from the voluntary and statutory sectors. Workshops explored the effects of poverty and the impact of advice services on children and families; health and well-being; prospects of gainful employment. We also contributed to the Fairer Finance Leicestershire consultation on financial pressures and risks in the city in March 2016.

Alt –alternative weeks

This table details the current list of locations, times and venues for the outreach sessions across the city. 2014/15		
Braunstone/Rowley Fields	Brite Centre	Alt. Mon 9.30 - 12.30
	Oak Centre	Alt. Mon 9.30 - 12.30
Spinney Hills	Wesley Hall	Alt. Tues 9.30 - 12.30
	St Matthews TARA	Alt. Tues 9.30 - 12.30
New parks	New Parks Library	Wed 2pm - 5pm
Beaumont Leys	Beaumont Leys library	Tues 2 - 5pm
Abbey	Tudor Centre	Tues 9.30 - 12.30
Stoneygate	Open Hands	Thurs 9.30 - 12.30
Humberstone and Hamilton	Netherhall Community Centre	Alt. Fri 10am - 1pm
	Hamilton Library	Alt. Fri 10am - 1pm
Charnwood and Coleman	St Barnabas Library	Tues 2 - 5pm
Eyres Monsell	Southfields Library	Wed 2 - 5pm
Rushey Mead	Woodbridge Sure Start Centre	Thurs 2 - 5pm

Surgeries provided by third parties

- We have a pro bono solicitor, Josiah Hincks, who attends once a month to provide a free half hour in family law. They see 6 clients per session
- Community Advice and Law Service (CALs) also provides 2 sessions per week to provide debt case work up to bankruptcy and Debt Relief Order level. They see 3 clients per session
- Community Legal Services (CLS) attend 2 sessions a week providing a free half hour appointment to advise on benefits, immigration and employment law. They assist with application forms, assessment forms and mandatory reconsiderations within this free half hour and have been delivering this free service since October 2014. They see 9 clients per session.
- In addition to their free service, CLS also offer a 'no win, no fee' service for tribunal representation in the areas of employment and benefits. Clients are given details of this service along with details of services offered by other agencies, both free and fee charging.

In the period 1st October 2014 to 30th June these three organisations have assisted clients in the numbers given below. The numbers reflect both the number of sessions provided and the number of clients able to be seen in the session which is influenced by the complexity of the work:

- Josiah Hincks - 72 clients
- Community Advice and Law Services – 122 clients
- Community Legal Services – 205 clients

In addition to the numbers assisted by the free services, 3 clients have used the 'no win, no fee' service provided by Community Legal Services. All three were seen by our generalist service and presented as needing assistance with a benefits tribunal. All three told us that they had already approached the City Council's welfare rights service but were unable to access assistance from that service.

They opted to use the 'no win, no fee' and we have had feedback on the outcome from one of those clients. The client's working tax credit had been suspended and she was also being pursued for a supposed £10,000 overpayment. CLS represented the client at tribunal and was able to get the £10,000 overpayment written off and her working tax credit reinstated and backdated to the date of its suspension.

The table below shows the client content of third party organisation dealt with what subject area and the numbers involved between October 2014 and June 2015:

Subject Area	Organisation	Number of clients
Debt	CALS	122
Family Law	Josiah Hincks	72
Employment	CLS	21
Benefits Tier 2 SSCS1 assistance	CLS	36
Benefits Tier 2 Mandatory Reconsideration	CLS	113
Benefits Form filling – ESA50/PIP2	CLS	32
Total	Total	205

Communications

The media team have been very busy in the last few months, with raising the profile of our service with Leicester residents and to highlight the campaigning work we undertake. Recent press coverage through radio and tv has included pieces on payday loans, rogue landlords, consumer queries, Employment Support Allowance appeals and the summer budget. We are also increasing our social media presence through Facebook and Twitter, and can provide information through the television set in the waiting room. There is a monthly newsletter produced to highlight the work done both across the City and County. The team are currently compiling a series of videos to show on the television in reception, which will provide step by step guidance on subjects such as, form filling and enforcement agents. We hope that while clients are waiting they will find these presentations informative.

Social Policy Work

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire has been very active in research and campaigning in Leicester City. Below is some of the work we have and are currently undertaking.

- Voters rights

In the run up to the general election, we were active in promoting voter registration in Leicester. This involved canvassing students to register to vote, and assisting with sign up with the help of a tablet computer.

- Scams Awareness

Scam awareness month ran in July. During this national campaign, we collected cases and published a press release which demonstrated how we had seen 149 scams in a year in Leicester City.

- Registering with General Practitioner's

We assisted with a national campaign to find out about the registration procedures with GPs in Leicester. The purpose of this was to see if GPs were helpful in assisting individuals who may lack some paperwork or ID in trying to register themselves or their children. This was an important campaign which highlighted that many GPs in Leicester are accommodating, and many have registration procedures which are easily identifiable and accessible.

- Carers Week

During Carer's week, Citizens Advice LeicesterShire was active in promoting our services at events in Leicester. We tried to demonstrate our presence amongst a range of other charities.

- Europeans Economic Area migrants

We are currently researching into the effects of welfare reforms on European Migrants in the city. New regulations on welfare entitlement have meant we have seen increased European migrants expressing financial hardship, because of these regulations.

- Tax credits

A national research interest is looking at the difficulty people have had calling the tax credits helpline in the past few months. We have had many people who have tried to renew their tax credits but been unable to contact them. Therefore, we are currently investigating how many of our clients have been affected.

- Zero Hours Contracts

A long term investigation is looking how zero-hours contract affect individuals. This research has shown that many people express severe financial hardship and debts as the result of not having fixed hours. It has been very difficult for clients to budget accordingly, with little idea of how many hours they can expect to have worked.

Author:

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Leicester City Manager

21st September 2015

Appendix A:

TIER 1: Information & Signposting

An information service involves giving clients the information they need, for them to know and do more about their situation. It can include information about rights, policies and practices; and about national and local services and agencies. Responsibility for taking any further action rests with the client.

TIER 2: Generalist Advice

A generalist unaccredited advice service includes a diagnosis of the client's enquiry and their financial circumstances, giving information and explaining options, and identifying further action the client can take. Some assistance is provided, for example contacting third parties on the client's behalf, form completion and drawing up a budget or action plan.

This level of service may be provided either by self-contained interviews following which the customer takes responsibility for further action, or ongoing casework support including all of the above and taking action on behalf other client, with the advice provider taking responsibility for follow-up work.

TIER 3: Specialist Advice

A specialist service accredited by the Financial Services Authority undertakes advice and casework at a level where detailed knowledge of the law is required. This would involve intensive one-on-one support and casework up to litigation and advice on Court hearings, including bankruptcy, insolvency, Debt Relief Orders and appropriate financial products.

Existing '**Tier 3**' services include LCC Welfare Rights, Community Advice Legal Services (CALs), CA and two other **voluntary agencies**.

Appendix B:

What can you do?

Rules around benefits are complicated. If you need assistance to demonstrate your right to the DWP, you can get free advice support from Citizens Advice Leicestershire.

Citizens Advice Leicester is located at 60 Market Street (LE1 1FB).

Opening times:

Monday – 4.30pm
Tuesday – 4.30pm
Wednesday – 4.30pm
Thursday – 4.30pm
Friday – 4.30pm

Please be aware that our reception is extremely busy and appointments are given out on a first serve basis.

Appointments will be given for emergencies.

For more information, please contact us by telephone on 01530 1025.

Other Advice Services in Leicester



We provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

Citizens Advice Leicestershire

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Explanation of Brexit Regulations EEA Nations in the

