



Citizens Advice LeicesterShire City Advice Services Contract Performance 2015-16

For consideration by:
Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement
Scrutiny Commission

Date: 5th October 2016

Lead director: Alison Greenhill

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: Priority Wards
- Report author: Caroline Jackson
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1. Purpose of the report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the Social Welfare Law and Advice (SWLA) contract outcomes for the city, highlight key outcomes and identify any risk or issues which may have arisen during 2015/16.

2. Recommendations

2.1 NSCIC is invited to note the observations on the contract adherence, comment on the recommendations and, to make additional comments particularly from a community perspective.

3. Background

3.1 The authority awarded a contract for three plus one, plus one years for the annual value of a £370,700pa from April 2013. This contract is to provide SWLA for the residents of the city and was awarded to the Citizens' Advice LeicesterShire (CAL). CAL is a voluntary organisation. Citizens Advice LeicesterShire's objectives are to promote any charitable purpose for the public benefit by the advancement of education, the protection and preservation of health and the relief of poverty, sickness and distress in particular, but without limitation, for the benefit of the community in Leicestershire, Leicester City and surrounding areas.

Their contractual remit is to provide a service:

- for all
- to include social welfare law at all levels
- from initial signposting and assisted information
- generalist advice and generalist advice with casework to
- Specialist representation.

This is the largest amount of funding provided for advice and assistance to any voluntary organisation which had been considered as part of the 2011/12 Social Welfare Advice review.

3.2 There are various definitions of what social welfare law and advice is and also what constitutes advice and at what level. However, following the Social Welfare Advice Review 2011/12, the Council adopted the definitions set out in the new Quality Mark (NQM) for Legal Advice 2010. In 2012/13, Advice Services Alliance took over ownership of the Standard, known as the current Advice Quality Standard (AQS).

- 3.3 The AQS demonstrates that an agency has a well-managed service, ensures staff have relevant and up to date knowledge and the quality of advice given remains high. In 2014, the AQS received full accreditation against the Money Advice Service (MAS) quality framework.
- 3.4 Social welfare law generally refers to those categories of law which govern entitlement to state benefits and public housing;
- the management of personal and business debt;
 - an employee's rights at work and access to redress unfair treatment.
 - Additionally, access to appropriate care and support for people with particular health problems.
- 3.5 The contract states they provide this advice through a city centre location operating 5 days per week. 8.30am -4.30pm, with an out of hour's service (to be agreed by the commissioner in response to demand) and an 'outreach' offer to priority groups across the city.
- 3.6 The contract was varied in 2015/16 to include the provision of Personal Budgeting Support, in relation to Universal Credit, for 55 clients from January 2016 to March 2017.
- 3.7 CAL is required to supply the authority with an annual report detailing their performance, outcomes and concerns. This is attached in Appendix 1.

4. Overview of the contract expectation and performance against outcomes:

- 4.1 Revenues & Customer Support formally meet with CAL on a monthly basis to review contract deliverables, understand current contract risks and issues plus to discuss future developments.
- 4.2 CAL fulfils the requirement for social welfare law at all levels through three tiers of advice with the third tier being specialist and includes representation in legal proceedings. A definition of the three tiers is supplied in appendix 2.
- 4.3 The table below outlines the contract requirements and demonstrates where CAL have met the contract advice outcomes for 2015/16.

Social Welfare Law and Advice Contract Outcomes 2015/16			
Tier	Description of activity	Target year 15/16	Actual
1	Assisted information and signposting	19,600	19,674
2	Generalist advice & casework	9,800	10,240
3	Specialist advice, multiple needs, representation in court, tribunals, assessments	600	670
Outreach	10 session ran across the city per week for 50 weeks	500	500

- 4.4 Tier 1 offer is delivered through face to face triage reception at their Charles Street office, outreach sessions and on the telephone. A 24/7 advice website enables those who can serve themselves to do so. The council promotes this website on its Advice page, a link is provided as appendix 3. The webchat pilot is an interesting development and aligns to the council channel shift model and promotes assisted service for clients who struggle to navigate websites. Signposting includes referral to other specialist agencies.
- 4.5 Tier 2 offer is often triaged through tier 1 and delivered through the outreach provision and Charles Street. Predominately casework based including form filling and assisting clients to help themselves. The offer is contract compliant and clients are aware the service is accessible and available.
- 4.6 CAL refers into the Councils Discretionary funds. They are one of the primary referral sources. They have user tested our e-forms, change of circumstance e-forms and act as third party agent directly referring their clients to the Crisis fund minimising stress and time for the individual seeking assistance for food, fuel and furniture. This demonstrates a proactive working partnership leading to better outcomes for their clients.
- 4.7 The outreach provision is part of the contract arrangement and is delivered in partnership with AgeUK. This provision was commissioned late due to the late award of the contract. It began in September 2013 and because of this had a faltering start in the first year; year 2 saw significant resourcing issue from the partner organisation, together with technical difficulties with locations. The poor communication of provision from the outset resulted in CAL failing to meet contract expectations and as a direct consequence poor service delivery to clients. However through contact management these teething issues have been overcome and provision improved from 2014/15 and in 2015/16 has settled, meeting contract outcomes running 500 sessions and seeing 2,544 clients. Appendix 4 details the outreach outcomes for the city. CALs' delivery partner AgeUK undertakes home visits, where appropriate, for any age provided they are housebound and vulnerable. 210 home visits were undertaken in 2015/16.
- 4.8 The contract requires that the Commissioner annually reviews the priority groups and priority wards for outreach. This exercise has been carried out. It has been identified both priorities remain unchanged however to improve the facilities and unify the locations going forward the locations for the sessions will be undertaken through the Using Building Better programme.
- 4.9 CAL operates two advice sessions in the Granby Street Customer Service centre. This has expanded the customer offer and experience in the centre. Advisors are proactive and floor walk for clients. They are present during the summons/court days to directly assist charge payers and support the council tax recovery position.
- 4.10 Tier three casework is delivered through employed specialist advisers. Tier three delivery 2013/14 was challenging with overall resources failing to meet demand and clients not receiving the service as promptly as the contract and need would demand. Through robust contract management by the authority and CAL 2014/5 has seen the provision stabilise, been delivered in-house to CAL and subsequently improve. For 2015/16 CAL have met contract expectations. Tier

three has an specific contract expectation that the advice supports predominately (95%) priority groups, these are:

- People with long term illness or disability
- Older people
- Families and lone parent on low incomes
- People with Mental Health Problems
- Carers
- People moving into work or training
- Vulnerable young people
- New arrivals

The tier three contract outcome as detailed in appendix 5.

It may relevant to note that the contract also states that Leicester Citizens Advice should assume that these Priority Groups (and the Priority Wards) may change during the term of the contract, and that, as the Service Provider, Leicester Citizens Advice will be expected to adapt their service to cater for those changing needs.

4.11 The advice client demographics in appendix 6 demonstrate the service provided. It should be noted this data is only available where the service user is willing to share their details. This information demonstrates the contract demographic profile which is reflective of the community it serves.

4.12 CAL are an active partner in the Social Welfare Advice Partnership group undertaking a significant co-ordination role in networking, strategic planning and support of advice organisations in the city.

4.13 The authority are satisfied the client feedback and complaints handling process is in place and acted upon appropriately. Customer satisfaction survey carried out annual customer satisfaction survey. This was carried out throughout October 2015. The contract asks the provider to meet a satisfaction level of 85%. The CAL has exceeded this contracts expectation. However it should be noted they have not conducted canvassing client satisfaction in the outreach sessions.

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire 2015/16 Customer Satisfaction Survey Summary of Results		
Service Area	Number of Respondents	Satisfaction %
Overall service delivery	550	93%
Gateway (triage) Tier 1	250	95%
Contact centre (Tier 1 & 2)	115	98%
Generalist advice (Tier 2)	124	98%
Specialist Advice	62	97%
Outreach	Not undertaken	Not undertaken

4.14 CAL has received 6 formal complaints during 2015/16. Of these 100% were resolved. 1 was upheld and 5 were found to be unfounded. The authority has received two formal complaints regarding service delivery in 2015/16. These were resolved within the terms of the contract. The outcome found the complainants cases to be unfounded.

4.15 The CAL service is predominately supported through volunteers. This is a requirement of the contract. The authority is satisfied volunteers are appropriately trained, the training programme is effective, the quality assurance process in place and has been audited by the CA Bureaus auditors. Volunteers are supported in their role; they are canvassed for the opinion of the support annually with the Leicester branch returning a score of 4.9 out of 6 with 6 being the highest. They ask questions such as

- *Over the past 12 months I have had the opportunity to express or contribute ideas or suggestions for improving our services for clients or the way we work and these have been listened to.*

4.16 CAL have provided the authority with all supporting business contract requirements including their business plan, business continuity plan, insurance compliance. In addition they have offered us the opportunity to view their risk register should this be of assistance.

5. Risks and issues identified through contract management.

5.1 With every contract there will be elements of business delivery which require monitoring; this is what contract compliance is all about. Here I have identified the headline contract limitations and delivery risks going forward. It should be noted that the requirements of the contract specification are not robust and are currently being reviewed. Therefore, where there are aspects of improvement, this may not necessarily be entirely directed at the provider.

- Advertising and communication of provision. Little or no evidence of a take up campaign or promotion of provision.
- There is some evidence of outcomes, benefit take up amounts declared and breakdown of main areas of advice given however the contract does not specify outcomes therefore the providers are not asked to report on such provision benefits.
- Little or no evidence of neither targeting of advice in key areas nor development of self-reliance provision (future proofing clients). The contract does not specify outcomes therefore the providers are not asked to report on such provision benefits.
- Outreach sessions are spread across the city, within key locations however delivery is fractured and communication of the advice offer is, as a result, ineffective, confusing. It is very difficult to identify when outreach would be available.
- The business continuity plan is in the process of being refreshed. This progress will be monitored.
- They have an on-going volunteer training plan. They have a high turnover of volunteers, as many are young and move into education/work, therefore they have supervision/monitoring in place to ensure the information they provide is correct and appropriate. However this holds inherent risks.
- The potential development of an online referral process with ALP (Advice Leicester Partnership) has yet to come to fruition.
- CAL perceived reputation, outside the client and contract management arena, is poor. Their profile, take up campaigns and press presence needs to be raised in

the city.

- Client experience needs to be tested independently.
- Identify future plans / priorities for the provision

5.2 The monitoring (in addition to contract targets) follows these aspects of provision:

- Understanding demand, delivering an effective take up plan for the city and how CAL will assist this objective
- Self-access and referrals from other agencies
- Quality of advice and outcomes for clients
- Customer satisfaction
- Partnership work with LCC and TNS project
- Communication plan

5.3 The authority is satisfied this demonstrates the contract is overall compliant and clients are aware, in the main, that the service is accessible and available.

6. Financial, legal and other implications

6.1 Financial implications

There are no significant financial implications for the Council arising directly from this contract overview report – Colin Sharpe, Head of Finance, ext. 37 4081.

6.2 Legal implications

There are no legal implications arising as a result of the recommendations of this report. - Emma Horton Head of Law (Commercial, Property & Planning, Ext 37 1426

6.3 Climate Change and Carbon Reduction implications

Where clients of the services in this report have needs relating to fuel poverty and affordable warmth, the Commission should note that the Council's Home Energy Team is able to receive referrals from Citizens Advice LeicesterShire. The Home Energy Team can offer specialist advice on steps people can take to stay warm on a limited budget, including help to access funding for insulation measures where this may be available. Advice of this kind can help Leicester households to stay warm without increasing carbon emissions.

In addition, the provision of local advice sessions around the city may help to minimise clients' need to travel, in turn preventing congestion and resulting carbon emissions from vehicles.

Duncan Bell, Senior Environmental Consultant, Environment Team. Ext. 37 2249.

6.4 Equalities Implications

The high level of customer satisfaction reflected in the report demonstrates that the service is of value to the user. Given the socio-economic profile of Leicester's residents, there is a need for the service. While appendix 1 gives some headline outcomes for users of the service, it gives no indication of the extent to which the service has promoted 'equality of opportunity' to some, most or all of its users in successful outcomes being achieved, an aspiration reflected in our Public Sector Equality Duty. If outcomes could be presented, particularly for the different priority groups, that would be useful evidence in determining how this service is directly benefiting users.

Irene Kszyk, Corporate Equalities Lead, ext. 374147.

7. Background information and other papers:

None

8. Summary of appendices

Appendix 1: CAL Annual Report 2016-2017 (separate document)

Appendix 2: Advice Tier definitions

Appendix 3: Link to LCC Advice page.

<https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/benefits-and-support/advice-and-guidance/>

Appendix 4: Summary of outreach outcomes

Appendix 5: Tier three contract work profile by priority group

Appendix 6: Advice client demographics (separate document)

9. Is this a private report (If so, please indicated the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

10. Is this a "key decision"?

No