

Neighbourhood Services and Community Involvement Scrutiny Commission -12 July 2017

Responses to questions raised under agenda item 10 – Questions, Representations and Statements of Case.

- 1. Will the Scrutiny Committee recommend that the council conducts a full assessment of the current need for advice services, in Leicester, as well as an assessment of the likely increased need due to changes such as the full roll-out of Universal Credit and Brexit?**

Response: Revenues and Customer Support Social Welfare Advice Service Lead.

The Scrutiny Committee thanks Unison for their question.

For your reference the Council has supplied a short background which is pertinent to the question.

The council remains committed to providing free Social Welfare Advice (SWA) in the city. In the current climate it is even more important to enable our residents to access, first time, the right advice and to do this the council needed to understand SWA need and demand. The council has commissioned a review of contracted Social Welfare Advice which started in 2016/17. The reviews remit was widen in June 2017 by the Executive to include the council's internal Welfare Rights Service and consult the public on a proposed model for SWA from 2018-23. The statements of aims of the review are:

1. To ensure the continued provision of good quality, affordable and accessible advice across the City.
2. To explore and work with the City's social welfare advice sector to remove duplication and improve the efficiency, accessibility and quality of generalist and specialist social welfare advice. Ensuring the appropriate level of advice is given by a suitably qualified provider, in accessible locations.
3. To determine the location, frequency, opening hours and delivery method of social welfare advice.
4. To improve contract standards utilising the Tier 1/2/3 model of social welfare advice. Where:
 - a. Tier 1 provides assisted information and signposting;
 - b. Tier 2 provides general advice and general advice with casework; and,
 - c. Tier 3 provides specialist advice.
5. To ensure that all advice providers are suitably qualified and appropriate.
6. To ensure that referrals are made to the most appropriate social welfare advice provider, which is best placed to provide the required specialism or quality of advice, in accordance with an agreed referral framework.
7. To promote channel shift, wherever possible, at Tier 1, including self-help, in order to improve coordinated signposting and reduce face-to-face demand on advice services; whilst

recognising that face-to-face advice is still required for those customers who are most vulnerable and those unable to readily access these services.

8. To meet the multi-cultural needs of our diverse City by being responsive to existing and newly emerging communities; including managing language as a risk and defining at what level language should be provided within the scope of all contracts.
9. To review contracts in light of new or existing national Government schemes that may have replaced the need for local advice; or, consider implementing new local advice contracts where national schemes are withdrawn.
10. To ensure all contracts have Key Performance Indicators which are agreed in advance of contract, monitored and reviewed on a regular basis.

In order to predict or anticipate demand (to inform the proposed model) whether this is government-led legislative changes or local impacts, is a challenge. To do this the council has four key sources of research:

Firstly, we work in close partnership with the Advice Sector in the City through the Social Welfare Advice Partnership (SWAP). This partnership opportunity continues building and fostering relationships across the sector, sharing demand insight, knowledge, and, understanding the need of the client. SWAP has been invaluable in monitoring and sharing key advice demand indicators for the city such as Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Jobseeker's Allowance sanctions, and, DWP appeal monitoring. Their work has informed and influenced council policy.

Secondly, the council, in 2016 conducted a robust assessment of the current need for advice services in Leicester. Findings from this exercise have been fed back to the sector and the results have informed the Social Welfare Advice review, which is currently being conducted. The assessment included a questionnaire to all social Welfare Advice providers in the City exploring the demand and need in the City. In addition, we held a stakeholder engagement event on 1st August 2016 where the 21 organisations from the advice sector were consulted on what they saw as an ideal model of delivery, concluding that not one single organisation alone in Leicester could provide all the advice required. In addition the project manager visited all advice organisations in the City personally to understand the Advice offer available, gather client insight, and discover what good advice and outcomes look like.

Thirdly, we gathered and analysed relevant historical client data. As with all current contracts, contract management and service performance and monitoring takes place quarterly and trends in advice are monitored closely. These five contracts are with the following agencies: Age UK LeicesterShire & Rutland, Citizens Advice LeicesterShire, Mosaic Shaping Disability Services, Somali Development Services and The Race Equality Centre and the in-house council service is The Welfare Rights Service. This source data is incomplete across the 6 sources and therefore only partially informs the review's research.

Fourth, is research from professional bodies such as Citizens Advice (national organisation), Department for Work and Pensions own policy research and papers, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, LeicesterShire Diocese who have been monitoring impacts of welfare reform both nationally and locally and reporting upon their findings. The council continues to closely monitor updates in this research.

Our next step in the review, will be to consult with the public on the new proposed model of advice services from 31 July to 6 October 2017. Questions are posed to offer the opportunity for the public to comment on the proposed model and understand the demand for advice in the city from the perspective of those who may access it.

From this research position we will be able to make informed assumptions, based on current known demand, growth in demand year on year; plus any known/expected impacts informed by our four sources of research which will include anticipated demand from welfare reform and Brexit impacts.

2. Will the Scrutiny Committee ask the Council to have full regard to the Care Act statutory guidance regarding the need to provide adequate information and advice services to residents?

Response from Adult Social Care - Director of Adult Social Care and Safeguarding

Adult Social Care (ASC) is clear that it complies with the Statutory Guidance for the Care Act 2014, ensuring that people have adequate access to advice and information. This is directly provided, provided via services that we commission and we also signpost people to appropriate sources of advice, from specialist providers.

A full review of our advice and information provision was completed as we prepared for the Care Act to be implemented from 2015.

Universal Services – available to all

Leicester City Council (LCC) has updated the ASC web pages to ensure that the Information, advice and guidance is relevant and succinct. Where possible LCC pages will link to nationally recognised / trusted resources such as NHS Choices and Age UK/Citizen Advice Bureau materials, to ensure consistency of advice for customers. We are in the process of carrying out a wider review so as to make more improvements based on page usage and structure, to improve customer journeys.

Recognising that independent financial advice is often required, LCC has created a resource page that links to a range of providers to maximise choice for customers based on the area of financial requirement. Additionally, recognising that customers often require independent [and / or local] advice, the LCC pages include a page dedicated to “organisations that can help with information and advice” so as to maximise accessibility to quality information, advice and guidance across the city.

The ASC Customer Portal also acts as an entrance point to advice, as it directs customers to resources based on their needs [that they input], so as to maximise access to relevant information and advice. Likewise the online directory of services [Mychoice] is accessible for anyone looking to source local services and providers of care so as to maximise independence and support those that wish to self-help.

LCC also contract with niche providers (e.g. for the hard of hearing community) so as to ensure that advice is available as needed in accordance with the Accessible Information Standard.

Services provided to people who approach ASC in person

Many people contact ASC by telephone, to explore their needs, and the provision of information and advice is integral to both our telephone contacts and any follow up assessment outcomes.

All referrals received into our Contact and Response Service are provided with information, advice and guidance appropriate to the request. This can be provided over the telephone or in person, depending on the needs of the individual and we record the information and advice given, to inform any future requests. Support is given to individuals to make full use of the information to meet their needs as required.”