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**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 19 October 2011

**Subject:** Locality Advice Services in Manchester

**Report of:** Liz Bruce, Strategic Director Adults

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**Summary**

This report provides Members of the Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update in respect of advice provision in the City.

**Recommendations**

- a) Committee are asked to note the content of this report
- b) Request a further update report in February 2012.

**Wards Affected:** All

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**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

Report to the Executive, July 2009

Report to Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee, February 2010

Report to the Executive, February 2010

Report to Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee, February 2011

Report to Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee, March 2011

Report to Council on petition against the proposed closure of Manchester Advice, May 2011

Report to Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee June 2011

Equality Impact Assessment – June 2011

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1. This report to Committee provides an update regarding the provision of locality advice services across the city. It includes information on advice services retained under the management of the Directorate for Adults as well as the externally commissioned Community Legal Advice Services (CLAS), procured in partnership with the Legal Services Commission.

## **2.0 Background**

2.1. At the Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 22 June 2011 it was recommended that:

- Manchester Advice services are closed in a phased and planned way over the next twelve months, ensuring there is a sufficient transition from the current service to the future Community Legal Advice Services "offer" and ongoing monitoring on the impact on vulnerable customers as the services are withdrawn and to ensure that there is sufficiency of alternative supply.
- The front office service in the customer service centre is retained for the first twelve months to support the introduction of self serve, where appropriate, for some customers.
- The benefit appeals team is retained and evaluated in the next twelve months
- Community engagement resources are identified for use in the short term to medium term to build capacity in diverse communities

In addition:

- Externally funded and commissioned services provided by the Adults Directorate will be retained and reviewed before the expiration of the existing contracts.
- Three self-help kiosks will be trialled in accessible community settings and evaluated in the first twelve months.

2.2. A report was submitted to Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee March 2011 providing an update on the outcome of the joint procurement between the City Council and Legal Services Commission, of Community Legal Advice Services (CLAS). Services commenced in October 2010 and became fully operational citywide in January 2011.

## **3.0 Directorate for Adults provision.**

3.1. The Directorate for Adults currently provides the following advice services:

- The Independent Domestic Violence Advisory Service (IDVA) offering a range of advice to victims of domestic abuse;

- Advice for residents at risk of losing their homes; this Court Service is based in the Civil Justice Centre;
- Online self help service in the customer service centre based at One First Street;
- The Benefits Appeal team supporting customers with a range of benefit appeals;
- Benefit and advice targeted to customers with Mental Health and HIV issues.
- Community Engagement team to develop advice capacity within BME Communities

3.2. The benefit and advice services commissioned from external agencies are:

- Macmillan targeted benefit advice to cancer patients;
- Christie advice services targeted advice services to cancer patients;
- Willow Park debt and benefit advice service to tenants;
- PCT Advisor targeted advice services to identified South Manchester GP practises.

#### **4.0 The Community Legal Advice Services (CLAS) provision**

4.1. Comprehensive advice provision is now available across the city. The Council and the Legal Services Commission (LSC) have jointly commissioned six CLAS centres across the city, providing the following advice to all Manchester residents free of charge:

- Debt;
- Housing;
- Welfare benefits;
- Employment;
- Community care;
- Family;
- Immigration (low level).

4.2. Each CLAS centre, run by the Citizens Advice Bureau on behalf of the Council and the LSC, provides Manchester residents with access to:

- A one stop service (which will prevent people being signposted to alternative services across the city);
- Extended opening times (evenings and weekends);
- A telephone and e mail gateway;
- Modernised and new premises;
- Outreach services across the city.

4.3. Legal Aid services funded through the Legal Services Commission are provided to those with more complex cases in the advice areas outlined above.

#### **5.0 Consolidated Advice Services Offer**

5.1. Mainstream Manchester Advice services are now closed; the closures were phased and carefully monitored to ensure all active cases were seen through to closure.

5.2. There were 112 people in post prior to closure of the service; of these 36 staff left on VER/VS and 46 staff obtained new positions via the M people pathway as follows:

- 35 members of staff transferred to other posts within the Directorate of Adults;
- 11 members of staff obtained other posts in the Council.

Of the remaining staff:

- 29 members of staff will remain in the new services;
- 1 member of staff is awaiting a match from M people.

5.3. The Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service, Court service and the Debt Advisor for Willow Park Housing Association have now been transferred to the management of the Directorate's Homelessness Services. These services were not included within the original closure proposals as it was clear that these advice services enhance and improve the directorate's initiatives in relation to the prevention of homelessness reducing the impact of domestic abuse.

5.4. Governance arrangements have been agreed for the advice services commissioned from Macmillan, through the formation of a steering group. The membership of the steering group is to include the Commissioning Lead for Advice services, representatives of the Acute Trusts and Public Health. As part of its remit, the steering group will review current provision and evaluate options to take the service forward. The first steering group meeting will take place in November 2011.

5.5. Community Engagement Officer Posts are being developed in conjunction with BME Communities. Discussions are ongoing to position the service alongside the well established Customer and Community Engagement Service within Neighbourhood Services. These discussions will be concluded early October and it is envisaged that the service will commence in November 2011.

5.6. The front line service based in the Customer Service Centre in One First Street is operating and supporting customers to self serve their advice needs using a range of on line solutions. Monthly activity reports will be produced to inform the regular monitoring process.

5.7. The procurement of three advice kiosks is underway. Discussions are taking place with our partners in Health with regards to establishing the most effective location with particular analysis of projected footfall, demography, levels of deprivation and availability of other advice services.

5.8. The Directorate for Adults has established a 12 month task and finish workplan; quarterly reviews will be undertaken to ensure outcomes are achieved, any adverse impacts in relation to equality issues are highlighted and appropriate mitigation identified. We will review options for taking services forward in light of any possible duplication of work carried out by the CLAS or any other

commissioned advice services. Furthermore, we will explore opportunities for working with Public Health to link up externally commissioned services.

## **6.0 Community Legal Advice Service**

6.1. Community Legal Advice Services (CLAS) were procured in partnership with the Legal Services Commission and are delivered by the Manchester Citizens Advice Bureau (MCAB) and their partners, Shelter, Platt Halpern Solicitors, Glaisyers Solicitors and Cheetham Hill Advice Centre.

## **7.0 Service specification within the CLAS contract.**

7.1. The specification for the delivery of general help incorporates the requirement to assess an individual's advice needs across all categories of civil law and either provide that advice directly or make appropriate referrals to other CLAS advisors where more specialist legal advice is needed. General help includes:

- Provision of information;
- Provision of options available to the customer;
- Identification of further action the customer can take;
- Provision of brief initial assistance (e.g. filling in forms, helping the customer draft letters, contacting third parties to seek information on the customer's behalf and supporting customers to reach early agreement on a dispute through negotiation);
- Liaising with third parties to identify non-contentious ways of resolving the dispute (including via interagency working);
- Establishing eligibility for legal aid where further (specialist) advice is needed.

## **8.0 CLAS Performance to date**

8.1. The Directorate for Adults monitors the CLAS monthly and evidence shows:

- 57,535 episodes of advice have been delivered from the commencement of the service on 15 October 2010 to 31 August 2011.

Within the month of August 2011:

- 6299 episodes of advice were delivered in Debt, Housing, Welfare Benefits, Employment, Community Care and Level 1 Immigration advice;
- 58.5% of advice episodes were provided to Black Minority Ethnic Communities;
- 26% of customers were recorded as being disabled;
- 49% of people were male and 51% female.

## **9.0 CLAS Locations, Outreach provision and Annual Evaluation.**

9.1. Appendix 1 provides details of the main CLAS locations and outreach provision. These services are all up and running and these locations will form an integral

component of the annual evaluation of the CLAS service. The objective is to establish:

- The appropriateness of locations;
- The hours of opening are reflective of local need and improve and increase access to advice,
- That the presenting advice needs of residents are reflective of contractual requirements and to determine if second year contractual variations are required, to reflect emerging or changing advice trends in local communities.

## **10.0 Volunteering Opportunities for Manchester Residents**

10.1. The MCAB have a successful record of attracting and training volunteers in the provision of high quality advice. Following commencement of the CLAS in October 2010, 80 volunteers have been recruited. Volunteers primarily work as advice triage interviewers, but also enter roles as receptionists, administration, social policy and information technology assistants. Work has also been undertaken with the Manchester Metropolitan University and the Advice Plus project, resulting in training and volunteering placements to 15 Law Students in addition to hosting six Future Jobs Fund trainees.

## **11.0 Trainee Solicitor Post.**

11.1. The procurement exercise in partnership with the Legal Services Commission incorporated the establishment of three trainee Solicitor posts funded for two years at no cost to the Council. Employees are scheduled to commence employment in September 2011.

## **12.0 Outcome Contract Monitoring**

12.1. The tender specified a requirement for the development in the first twelve months of reporting on outcomes achieved for individual customers to establish the effectiveness of advice provision delivered by the CLAS. An outcomes framework supporting key priorities for the city, including tackling worklessness and child poverty, will be incorporated into monthly contract monitoring requirements and reported to future committees.

## **13.0 Attracting additional Income.**

13.1. The CLAS tender specification sought a demonstration from potential bidders of their previous success in attracting additional funding. MCAB successfully demonstrated this and continue to attract and identify new alternative funding opportunities. In the period of the CLAS contract the following key areas of funding have been secured:

- The United Utilities Trust and The British Gas Trust Funds have awarded £200,000 over two years to employ advisers to deliver debt, energy advice and carry out preventative and financial literacy work.

- £250,000 over three years commencing in September 2011 to provide one of only four Physical Telephone Contact Centres in England and Wales. From September 2011 telephone advice will become a further alternative accessible advice option for Manchester residents.

13.2. Other funding currently complimenting the CLAS advice offer includes:

- One Stop Advice - £500k Big Lottery Funding over three years to 2013, funding four full time posts, telephone triage service, information assisted technology e.g. electronic diary and self help electronic information kiosks.

#### **14.0 Legal Aid Reform**

14.1. Committee have previously been aware of the Government's proposals to achieve savings from the Legal Aid budget; the scheduled implementation date for any changes is October 2012. Depending on the final outcome, this may impact on the level of the financial contribution from the Legal Services Commission to CLAS contracts. A future report will be submitted to Committee providing clarity on the Government's position relating to what remains in scope for Legal Aid funding from the passing of the Legal Aid, Sentencing, and Punishment of Offenders Bill.

#### **15.0 Training Update**

15.1. Training, which has been commissioned from specialist providers through City South, begins in November 2011; the training will be accredited to the Information, Advice & Guidance Award by the Open College Network. There is an initial training programme in place from November until March 2012 and includes:

- Money Matters
- Welfare Reform
- Housing

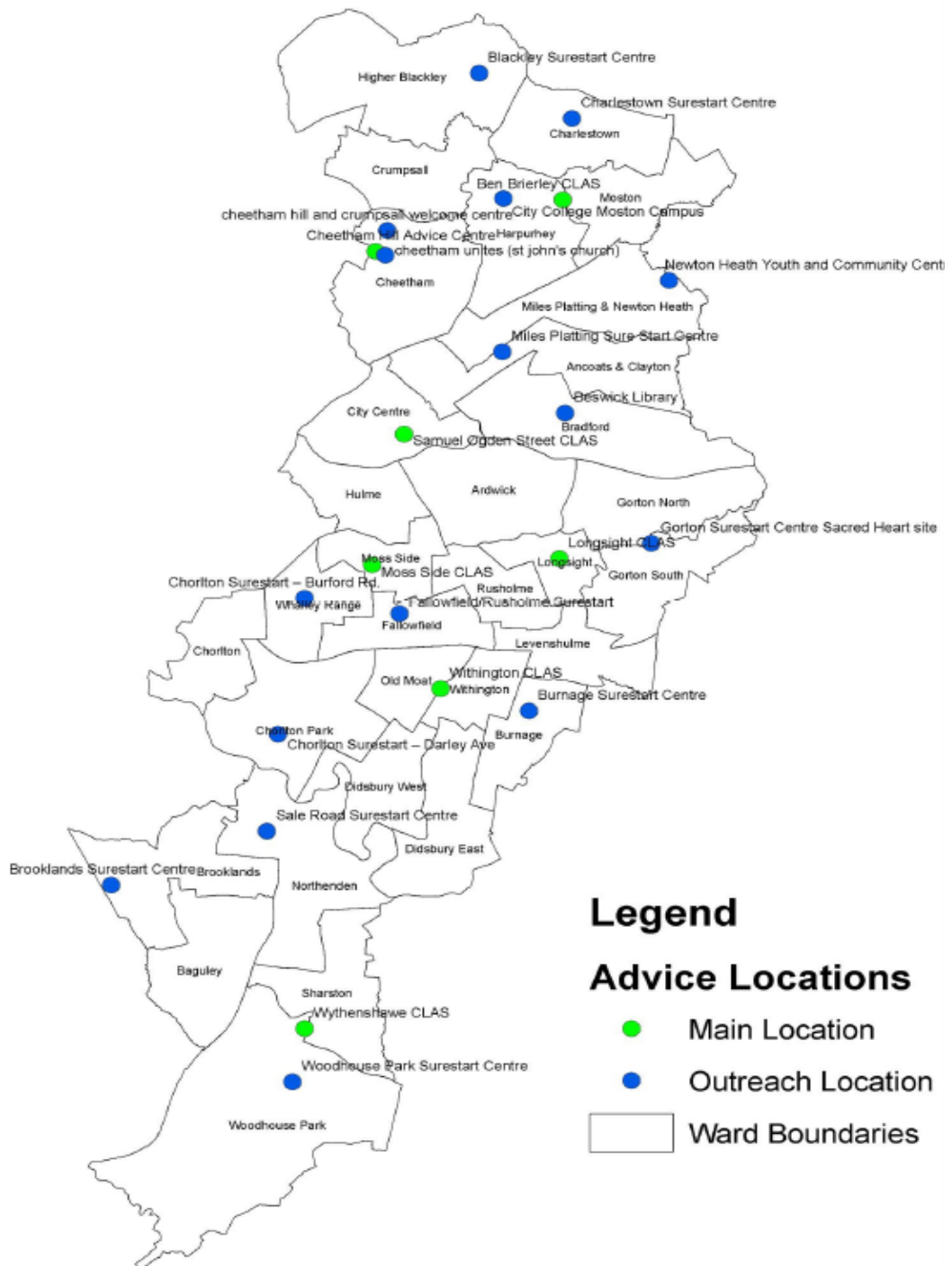
All training is being provided through accredited providers and will be targeted on staff in the Voluntary and Community Sector, BME groups and Registered Providers.

#### **16.0 Recommendations**

- a) Committee are asked to note the content of this report.
- b) A further report will be submitted to the Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee in February 2012.

**Appendix 1**

**Advice Locations**



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