

**Manchester City Council  
Report for Information**

**Report to:** Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 8 February 2012

**Subject:** Update 2 on Locality Advice Services in Manchester

**Report of:** Liz Bruce, Strategic Director Adults, Health and Wellbeing

---

**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 July 2012.

---

**Wards Affected:** All

---

**Contact Officers:**

Name: Hazel Summers  
Position: Head of Commissioning  
Telephone: 0161 234 4994  
E-mail: [hazel.summers@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:hazel.summers@manchester.gov.uk).

Name: Mike Gorman  
Position: Lead Commissioner  
Telephone: 0161 227 3056  
Email: [mike.gorman@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:mike.gorman@manchester.gov.uk)

**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. 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

Report to Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee October 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. A report was submitted to Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 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.

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

- Manchester Advice services were closed in a phased and planned way over twelve months, ensuring there was 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 were 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.

2.3. The Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee received the first progress report on advice provision in October 2011 and requested a further update with particular reference to the following:

- An update on the use and effectiveness of Community Legal Advice Centres, including:
  - Complaint monitoring information and mystery shopper exercise
  - Access to advice services for disabled people
  - The likely effects of any further reductions in Legal Aid funding
- The implementation of the Equality Action Plan for Advice services and an update on the delivery of services due to finish in 2012.
- That the Community Legal Advice Services contract specifications be circulated to Committee members

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

3.1. The Directorate for Adults currently provides the following advice services with a mechanism for review in place:

- 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;

3.2 The following retained services will be reviewed by August 2012:

- The Benefits Appeal team which supports customers with a range of benefit appeals and to date has dealt with 133 cases
- Benefit and advice targeted to customers with Mental Health issues and to date the service has dealt with 148 cases.
- Benefit and advice targeted to customers with HIV and to date this services has dealt with 34 cases

3.3 The following services commissioned from external agencies will also be reviewed in August 2012:

- Macmillan targeted benefit advice to cancer patients; this service has dealt with 530 cases
- Christie advice services targeted advice services to cancer patients; this service has dealt with 411 cases
- PCT Advisor targeted advice services to identified South Manchester GP's and has dealt with 15 cases .

3.4 The Community Engagement Team to develop advice capacity within BME Communities is now in place and will be reviewed in January 2012.

#### 4.0 Equality Impact Assessment

4.1. The Equalities Impact Assessment on the closure of Manchester Advice identified the following actions within its Equality Action Plan:

Action required	Update
Monitor the CLAS in terms of their requirement to meet the needs of BME communities and customers with a long term illness or disability	The service is monitored monthly and this includes data on the number of people from the BME Community who have accessed the service (52.9%) and people with a long term illness or disability (26%).
Explore the provision of training and support delivered directly to individual communities	The Step Up Training Programme is now up and running and has exceeded its contractual targets for the first year of the programme. 105 organisations are accessing the training this financial year including 19 from BME Communities.
Creation of Community Engagement Officers to build capacity with current and emerging communities.	4.5 FTE officers are now in post and are aligned to Neighbourhood Services
Revision of the customer journey to include the identification of all areas of advice as part of the assessment process	The roll out of the new customer journey includes, as part of the assessment, the identification of advice needs and has now begun in the south of the city. Wythenshawe went live on the 9 January with further roll outs planned until April 2012.
Retain the Benefit Appeals team in the short term	The benefits team has been retained and is operating with a revised terms of reference. The Team Is focussed on assisting people with disabilities e.g. to access Attendance Allowance  The service is monitored and reviewed via monthly review meetings and the Lead Commissioner for advice services is a key member of this review group. The information obtained through these meetings will inform future commissioning intentions.
Retain the IDVA service to sit elsewhere within the Directorate for Adults, Health and Wellbeing	The IDVA service is still managed within the Directorate under the Homelessness Structure.
Establish internal management structures	Management structures are now in place

for the transition year	with the service overseen by the Head of Customer Access, supported by a Strategic Lead Officer who manages operational matters.
-------------------------	--

## 5.0 The Community Legal Advice Services (CLAS) provision

5.1. 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).

5.2. 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.

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

## 6.0 Consolidated Advice Services Offer

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

6.2. 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 and reducing the impact of domestic abuse.

6.3. 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 includes the Commissioning Lead for Advice services and representatives of the Acute Trusts and Public Health. As part of

its remit, the steering group is reviewing current provision and will take the service forward. The steering group's minutes and actions will be further monitored at the monthly Advice Services review meetings chaired by the Head of Customer Access.

- 6.4. Community Engagement Officer Posts have been developed in conjunction with BME Communities. Role profiles and person specifications were successfully developed for the posts with a contribution from BME communities. Interviews have now been held and 4.5 FTE of the 5 posts have been appointed. A representative of the BME communities was a member of the appointment panel and a further recruitment panel of the same configuration was held on the 16 January of which the appointment is yet to be made.
- 6.5. Successful negotiations have now concluded with colleagues in Neighbourhood Services and the service is aligned with the already well established Customer and Community Engagement service. Management protocols have been agreed, as have respective roles and remits, with ideas for how the community volunteer role will be shaped currently being explored. Representatives from BME communities will continue to be involved as the service develops. The newly appointed staff began their roles in the week beginning 16 January starting with their induction. This service will be reviewed in 12 months.
- 6.6. The 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 show that on average 255 customers are signposted to a range of other providers each week.
- 6.7. The procurement of three advice kiosks is underway. Two locations have now been confirmed and agreed as the most effective:
  - Wythenshawe Forum
  - City Library
- 6.8. These locations were established following an analysis of projected footfall, demography, levels of deprivation and the availability of other advice services. The final location is still under discussion with partners and it is planned that all three kiosks will be operational before the end of this financial year.
- 6.9. The Directorate for Adults, Health and Wellbeing has established a 12 month task and finish work plan. Quarterly reviews will be undertaken to ensure outcomes are achieved and any adverse impacts in relation to equality issues are highlighted with appropriate mitigation identified. We will ensure all options for taking services forward are regularly reviewed to avoid 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.

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

7.1. At the request of the Committee in October 2011 the Service Specification for the CLAS has been distributed to Committee members. This details that general advice 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 Mystery Shopping

8.1. The Directorate for Adults, Health and Wellbeing undertook “mystery shopping” to assess the effectiveness of the CLAS provision. This involved visits to four CLAS sites and accessing the telephone advice helpline. In respect of the CLAS sites, officers’ overall experiences were very good. However recommendations were received from officers to enhance the experience for residents accessing the service and these are identified in the table below.

CLAS Service / Telephone Advice.	Recommendation
Withington CLAS	Improvements to the signage and checking-in system
Wythenshawe CLAS	Increased marketing in the local community and with the professionals who should be making referrals to the service.
Ben Brierley CLAS	Displaying waiting times to be seen by residents e.g. as per a GP practice.
Longsight CLAS	Improved communication for residents presenting for advice before the interview i.e. explaining advice process/ waiting times,
Telephone Advice Helpline.	Reduced reliance on automated messaging system and an increase in personnel to operate as telephone advisors.

8.2. In respect of the telephone helpline, issues have been reported in relation to access to an advisor and only being able to receive an automated message. This is a capacity issue and reflects an increasing trend in resident’s preference for telephone access.

- 8.3. The mystery shopping exercise commissioned by the Directorate and the independent evaluation of the CLAS was undertaken by Manchester Metropolitan University and, along with monitoring information from the CLAS, has demonstrated that telephone access is an increasing choice for residents and that the CLAS' proposed model with extended opening times (Evenings and Weekends) has not attracted the anticipated take up of the service during the trial period of extended opening.
- 8.4. The proposals are now to retain one evening and weekend session in each of the CLAS locations in North, Central and South localities with their resources being deployed to increase telephone access. This will enable evening telephone access on three evenings per week (Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday) from 5.30pm to 7.00pm and refocus the reinvestment of 115 adviser hours to a more suitable time when the CLAS face to face and telephone services are at peak demand. This revised arrangement will be subject to quarterly reviews.
- 8.5. Elected members raised issues with the location of some of the originally identified CLAS outreach locations. Negotiated alternative venues have now been agreed with the CLAS in order to maximise accessibility of the service to local communities.

## **9.0 Complaints Monitoring**

- 9.1. As the lead partner in the delivery of the CLAS, the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) operates a complaints policy (reviewed six monthly) which is a requirement of the:
- Community Legal Advice Service tender
  - National Citizens Advice Bureau Membership Scheme
  - Retention of the Legal Service Commission (LSC) Quality Standard Mark,
- 9.2. Twelve complaints have been received during the first year of the CLAS and relate to the services delivered by the CAB, no complaints have been recorded by the CLAS' partners. Each complaint was acknowledged within 5 working days with an investigation conducted and a substantive response issued within 20 working days.
- 9.3. The complaints related to the following:
- Customers perception of staff attitude
  - CLAS being unable to provide legal representation at court / tribunal
  - Lack of satisfaction with advice offered
  - Customer confidentiality
  - One complaint was forwarded by the Executive Member for the Directorate for Adults, Health and Wellbeing, alleging racial discrimination by the CAB.

## **9.4. Complaints Outcome Summary**

Eight of the twelve complaints were not upheld and no further action was pursued by the complainants on receipt of a response from the Director of the



CAB. The complaint regarding racial discrimination was found to be unfounded. One complainant pursued their complaint through all 4 stages of the procedure:

- Investigation by Casework / Senior Manager;
- Review by Trustee;
- Review by Citizens Advice nationally and finally
- Reviewed by an Independent Adjudicator.

However, this complaint was rejected.

9.5. One complaint was upheld on investigation with an apology issued to the client. The CLAS service was able to rectify the error, with no impact to the complainant who was satisfied with the action taken.

### **9.6. Complaints - Further Action**

Whilst no discernable trends were identified, the CAB have instigated the following actions following the review of the complaints received in the first year of the CLAS:

- To re-emphasise throughout the organisation that customer care should be at the heart of everything the CAB do;
- Ensuring that all staff / volunteers are fully trained in matters relating to bankruptcy advice;
- To review with Commissioners how the CAB are able to represent clients at Tribunal.

### **10.0 Disability Issues**

10.1. It was reported at Overview and Scrutiny Committee October 2011 that 26% of customers who accessed CLAS services had a disability and requested more information. This figure was solely based on CLAS figures,

10.2. it is also worth noting the work carried out by the retained advice services within the Council. The Benefits team specifically focus on the following linked to disability:

- Disability Living Allowance (DLA)
- Attendance Allowance (AA)
- Incapacity Benefit (IB)

Furthermore, the retained services also target people with Long Term Conditions, such as Cancer, as well as services for people with HIV and people with mental health issues. These services have opened 1283 cases and have dealt with 2342 live issues.

10.3. Manchester CAB and its partners have delivered 528 home visits over the past 12 months (including visits to Registered Care Homes) to people who were unable to access the service because of mobility problems.

10.4. We will continue to monitor performance of the CLAS specifically with regard to protected groups as defined by the Equalities Act.

### **10.5. Welfare Reform Bill**

Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is currently paid to disabled people of working age to help them cope with the extra costs they face in their daily lives. However, under the Welfare Reform Bill, due to be passed in May 2012, this will be replaced by Personal Independence Payments (PIPs) which would see claimants taking up-front disability tests and then undergoing regular assessments. It is anticipated that implementation will begin April 2013. This is likely to impact on demand for advice services; therefore we will be working with the CLAS to ensure assistance is available during this period and will monitor the outcomes.

### **11.0 Legal Aid Reform**

11.1. Previous reports have informed Committee of the Government's review of Legal Aid. The Legal Aid, Sentencing, and Punishment of Offenders Bill, continues its passage through the House of Lords / Commons. The potential impact of the scale of what will remain "in scope" for legal aid, continues to have implications for the joint funding of the CLAS and especially the Legal Services Commission (LSC) funding of the Legal Aid component.

11.2. The government have confirmed a delay until April 2013 of the introduction of the revised Legal Aid funding arrangements. The current CLAS contract has an initial three year end date of October 2013, with a potential two year extension option. Current contractual arrangements between the joint purchaser's (LSC and MCC) require a six month notice period to be served in terms of termination of these arrangements. This may be activated by the Legal Services Commission on the above Bill receiving royal assent.

11.3. Representatives of both the LSC and MCC continue to monitor developments as lobbying at a national level may yet influence which elements of Legal Aid are retained within the Legal Aid, Sentencing, and Punishment of Offenders Bill.

### **12.0 Training Update**

12.1. Training commissioned from specialist advice providers through City South Housing Trust (accredited to the Information, Advice & Guidance Award by the Open College Network) have attracted nominations from 105 individual organisations (18 representing BME communities). As the Community Engagement Officers become established we will focus the training on identified volunteers.

### **13.0 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 July 2012.