

**MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL  
REPORT FOR INFORMATION**

**Committee:** Citizenship and Inclusion Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2009  
**Subject:** **Advice Services**  
**Report of:** Director of Adult Social Care

---

**Purpose of Report:**

To inform members about the review of external advice services.

**Recommendations:**

N/A

**Contacts**

Name	Department	Tel	Email
Neela Mody	Adult Social Care	219 6362	neela.mody@manchester.gov.uk

**Background Documents Review of Advice Services in Manchester**

**Wards Affected: All**

**Implications for:**

Anti-Poverty	Equal Opportunities	Environment	Employment
Yes	Yes	No	Yes

## 1 Background and Context

- 1.1 Manchester City Council, through the Adult Social Care budget, invests almost £3 million in social welfare law advice services in the city. Social welfare law advice is related to civil matters and broadly encompasses the following categories
- Debt and money advice
  - Housing
  - Welfare benefits
  - Consumer rights
  - Immigration
  - Employment
  - Community care
  - Education
  - Mental health
- 1.2 The ASC spend consists of £1.4 million to the Council's in-house provider service, Manchester Advice, and £1.5 million to voluntary sector providers. It can be said with confidence that Manchester is consistently in the top quartile of expenditure on these services. Although there is a national indicator (BVPI 226) in place, which it was hoped would allow a better assessment of advice provision and an ability to compare local authority spending; this has not been achieved because of the broad interpretation of the guidance relating to this indicator. There is no statutory duty for local authorities to fund these services except in relation to the prevention of homelessness.
- 1.3 Investment in these services has proved valuable particularly during the economic downturn currently being experienced. Advice services have always reported a greater demand than supply and are now experiencing even higher demand for debt, employment, housing and welfare benefits advice. The Council recognizes the valuable work being undertaken by agencies too assist residents and is working with agencies to lever in additional funding to enable residents to cope with, for example, debt recovery and possession action in the County Court. Officers have been active in securing accommodation in Manchester's Civil Justice Centre to enable this to be provided and are working with the advice sector on a number of initiatives outlined below.
- 1.4 The other main funder of advice services in Manchester is the Legal Services Commission, which provides funding of approximately £1.4 million to six voluntary sector agencies in Manchester. The Legal Services Commission is the successor body to the Legal Aid Board and is responsible for all legal help spend, both civil and criminal. This is the most substantial source of funding after local authority support. The Legal Services Commission have, in response to the economic downturn, made more resources available to contracted agencies to offer advice in debt, housing, employment law and welfare benefits.
- 1.5 Local authority funding has been used by the most enterprising agencies to lever in additional funding from other sources, including government programmes such as Sure Start and the Financial Inclusion Fund, charitable trusts such as Macmillan Cancer

Care and other public sector investment, for example the NHS Manchester. In addition some agencies earn additional income from training and publications.

## 2 Current Provision

- 2.1 In 2007 Manchester City Council commissioned an external review into externally funded advice services from Michael Bell Associates, who have previously conducted reviews into advice services in other major cities. A full copy of the review is available at [http://www.manchester.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents\\_info.php?documentID=3697](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/site/scripts/documents_info.php?documentID=3697) and the key recommendations have been appended to this report.
- 2.2 The Review of Advice Services in Manchester provided a strategic overview of legal and advice services funded by the ASC budget. The review concluded that;
- Manchester's high level of deprivation justified the City's intensive investment in advice services;
  - Investment in advice services can, if properly focussed, underpin key priorities for Manchester and can support the delivery of LAA targets;
  - There are particular synergies between advice and early intervention and prevention strategies, pathways to employment and health promotion;
  - The lack of an overall commissioning strategy for advice services has led to ad hoc growth, although the overall quality of services was found to be good in most cases;
  - There is a complex picture of advice need and level of support required, from basic information and signposting to casework, advocacy and representation;
  - There is a need to ensure that advice provision is focused on areas of highest deprivation;
  - Advice services should be available to all residents but may need, because of limited resources, to be targeted at the most vulnerable and socially excluded.
- 2.3 The report suggested that particular attention could be paid to a joined up model of delivery which will facilitate easier access to advice by residents and greater co-operation between providers. There is a triangle of need which recognizes that specialist advice and representation is in lower demand than general help, information and advice which is sought more regularly.
- 2.4 To this end, the advice sector, in a partnership led by Manchester Citizen's Advice Bureau, has successfully bid to the Big Lottery Fund for just under half a million pounds, payable over the next three years, to improve the infrastructure of advice services across the city. It is envisaged that the funding will be used to;
- Develop a telephone / electronic gateway point of access to advice services in Manchester
  - Establish a centralised electronic directory of advice service providers and a library of shared information resources
  - Develop an effective on-line facility for cross-referrals between advice agencies and private practice providers
  - Identify gaps in advice provision, extending existing provision, and creating new initiatives to meet need

- Develop an accessible web-site
- Develop a quality assurance system
- Develop a sector wide, effective and coordinated electronic system for collating data

- 2.5 The report concluded that a strategic approach to the commissioning of services will enable Manchester City Council to ensure that services are available to those who need them, and that resources are distributed and used more effectively. We recognise that there is a need to reconfigure provision to reflect the needs of Manchester residents, develop formal commissioning arrangements for advice services and to enable greater access to services throughout the city. The strategic recommendations made in the report will be considered in more detail by the lead commissioner for advice services once appointed in the newly configured structure for Adult Social Care.
- 2.6 A strategic commissioning framework will enable gaps and overlaps of services to be addressed and will allow appropriate targeting of resources to assist in meeting Manchester's aspirations articulated through the Community Strategy. However, any commissioning strategy developed by Manchester City Council will need to take account of other funders to maximise value for investment and to avoid duplication in provision.

### **3 Legal Services Commission**

- 3.1 The Legal Services Commission have indicated that they intend to review their procurement of services as outlined in the Community Legal Services Strategy, Making Legal Rights a Reality in 2006, and more recently in the Legal Services Commission's Strategic Plan 2008-2011. Some changes have already been made, such as the introduction of fixed fees, but the LSC intend more radical changes still and have outlined a procurement timetable, which it is envisaged will begin this year.
- 3.2 One area of interest to the LSC is to jointly procure services with local authorities under single contract arrangements broadly coterminous with local authority boundaries. There are clear advantages to both the Legal Services Commission and Manchester City Council in combining our considerable funding resources for social welfare law, to develop a joint approach to commissioning these services, providing that agreement can be reached on a broad framework of provision. We are currently proposing a series of meetings between our respective organisations to develop a detailed picture of what a joint commissioning strategy might look like, and the resources that both organisations could bring to the table.
- 3.3 In order to provide support to organisations to respond to a move away from grant funding and towards commissioning, a free programme of business support and development is being planned, to provide a business healthcheck for agencies and to identify areas where they may need further help to ensure that they are tender ready. Details are being finalised and will be circulated to relevant agencies once agreed.

### **4 Conclusion**

- 4.1 The approach described above will enable Manchester City Council to develop, with or without the Legal Services Commission, a broad commissioning framework for advice services in Manchester with support for agencies to respond to the greater rigours of the tendering process. In return, successful agencies will have the security of a longer contractual funding arrangement with the city council and more opportunities to use core funding to lever in additional revenue funding for targeted services.

## Appendix 1

### Strategic Recommendations

- R1 Manchester City Council should work with other key funders and current advice providers to develop an advice strategy. This should cover the period from 2008 to 2015<sup>1</sup>. This strategy should make clear and explicit links to the contribution that advice services are expected to make to the City's (and other funders) wider corporate objectives.
- R2 The advice sector should be represented through Manchester Partnership to ensure that the contribution that can be made by the sector to the achievement of the City's goals is understood by the sector and by the other partners.
- R3 The Manchester Advice Strategy should include reference to ensure:
- Advice is people focused and holistic - dealing with the many problems people face;
  - Residents have a choice in the ways they can access advice – face to face, telephone, web based solutions through the local authority or from independent advice providers.
  - Advice is right first time – accessible and quality services at the level needed to resolve their disputes.
- R4 The advice strategy should ensure advice services contribute to the delivery of Manchester's Community Strategy spines:
- Reaching full potential in education and employment; providing access to advice can enable residents to take advantage of education and employment opportunities and maintain them.
  - Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect; enabling people to better access to advice services enables them to exercise their rights and responsibilities.
  - To develop neighbourhoods of choice; enabling people to engage and participate in community living and be responsible citizens, creating more sustainable neighbourhoods.
- The strategy should also be clearly aligned with the corporate goals of other key funders such as NHS Manchester, for example, contributing to their commitment to tackle health inequalities as set out in the Local Delivery Plan.
- R5 The strategy should include an explicit set of principles or values underpinning future service provision. We suggest that this may include a commitment to:
- Equality and social inclusion – ensuring that resources are targeted to those most

in need.

- Maximises resources – ensuring that the most efficient and effective means of delivering services are applied that addresses gaps and avoids duplication, and, that Council resources provide a stable foundation that facilitates funding from other sources.
- A mixed economy of integrated provision – ensuring that a range of providers are available to meet different needs and ensure the future contestability of services whilst providing a seamless experience for service users.
- Quality of Advice – ensuring that services are competent to provide advice that is accurate, appropriate and timely, empowering individuals to take control of their own lives

R6 The City Council should seek to transfer responsibility for commissioning advice services away from Manchester Advice to another part of the Council as a priority or ensure that more robust arrangements are in place to minimise actual and perceived conflicts of interest between its provider and commissioner roles.

The City Council should explore the possibility of establishing a Joint Commissioning Body for advice with other key advice funders in the city. This body, if established, should have a formal relationship with the wider strategic planning structures within the Council such as the Local Strategic Partnership.

R7 The Council should encourage the existing law centres and neighbourhood advice centres to explore ways in which they could come together. The Council may wish to indicate that its future commissioning intentions will be to contract with a single law centre and a single network of neighbourhood advice centres.

R8 The future commissioning model should include provision of a single point of telephone access (and possibly e-mail) to all services providing a triage function with referral to neighbourhood services. All contracted providers should be required to co-ordinate opening hours and this should include provision of out-of-office drop-in and appointments across the City. The model should also be explicit about the areas of law and the level of work (information, case work, specialist help level) required by each service provider

R9 In addition to the single point of telephone and e-mail access above we suggest three other types of service.

1. City Centre Service – there should be a single city centre service providing a range of appointments and drop-in services from a single location. Advice should cover all key areas of social welfare law and provide advice at information and casework level.
2. District Services – there should be six district services providing a range of appointments and drop-in services from one location but with outreach surgeries and home visiting included. Advice should cover all key areas of social welfare law and provide advice at information and casework level. Provision of outreach should be provided on a pro-active model based on anticipated need in certain communities rather than demand.
3. Law Centre – there should be a single service providing specialist help level legal interventions from a range of locations across the City.

- R10 The City's wider corporate objectives attach particular priority to children and young people. Traditional advice centres are not well-placed to meet these needs as young people tend to prefer to access such support in generic youth settings. Consideration should be given to supporting a special young person's service as part of the advice strategy. This may be purely an access point to other advice providers, provider of case-work services or indeed operating at a specialist level.
- R11 To this end we recommend that funding for specific communities should be targeted at information provision and referral rather than a core part of the advice strategy
- R12 The City Council should examine the scope for locating advice providers within planned capital developments relating to Schools and primary care facilities.
- R13 The City Council and Advice providers must investigate alternative methods of externally assuring the quality of advice as a priority.
- R14 The City Council is to establish contract based service level agreements with key advice providers and should establish appropriate monitoring arrangements to ensure compliance. These should operate for a minimum period of 12 months.
- R15 Management training should be provided to all providers in relation to project management, reporting and tendering. The Regional Change Up Hub's assistance should be sought to support this work.
- R16 The needs assessment and recommendations for strategic priorities for advice services should be developed into a detailed Commissioning Intentions Paper and subject to consultation with the sector and with the public.
- R17 We recommend that the City works with advice providers to develop a new monitoring system that identifies value for money criteria, more outcomes based monitoring based on research to date and includes more user feedback on how users find access to and quality of advice services.