

Public Document Pack

**Late item for Scrutiny Board (Resources and Council Services) on Monday,
23 February 2015**

Pages 1-16: Agenda item 7 – To consider a report from the Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities) providing the context for the recent reconfiguration of advice services undertaken by Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau.

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Report of Assistant Chief Executive (Citizens and Communities)

Report to Resources and Central Scrutiny Board

Date: 23 February 2015

Subject: Reconfiguration of advice services

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of the main issues

- 1 Funding for the provision of city-wide advice was placed on a contractual basis from 2014/15. This replaced the previous position where funding was based around annual grants from different services across the council.
- 2 The key elements of the new contractual arrangement are the need to significantly increase the numbers able to access advice and to deliver maximum value for money for the contract price. This requires a reconfiguration of the way advice is provided and the adoption of more modern ways of working, including telephone, web and email. The new ways of working need to continue to build on an advice service that has increased the numbers accessing advice from around 8,000 in 2008/9 to around 18,000 in 13/14. The expectation is that the reconfiguration will support further growth in people accessing advice to around 35,000.
- 3 Leeds CAB has carried out a review of its bureaux network and this will see replacement of drop in facilities at Otley, Crossgates, Pudsey and Morley with appointment-based outreach work in those areas to complement the extended telephone service and the range of face-to-face services at Children's Centres and Healthcare locations
- 4 The new service, which is expected to come into effect from April 2015, may also be affected by a funding cut. This is being considered as part of the Council's budget proposals.

Recommendations

Scrutiny Board is asked to:

1. Note the information in this report

2. Receive a future report that updates in the development and performance of advice services across the city

1. Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The report provides the context for the recent reconfiguration of advice services undertaken by Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau. The reconfiguration has seen the further development of telephone-based services and the 'drop in' facilities provided at Bureaux in Crossgates, Otley, Pudsey and Morley replaced by appointment-based outreach services in these areas.

2 Background information

- 2.1 In 2012 Environments and Housing carried out a review of advice provision across the city with the aim of informing the development and commissioning of a new advice service for the city. At that time, the funding for advice services was based around annual grants from services across the council and this was not seen to be helpful for long-term planning of advice provision.
- 2.2 Following a market testing exercise, a report was taken to Executive Board seeking agreement to award a contract to the Leeds Advice Consortium subject to negotiations around the specification. The report highlighted a number of issues that needed to be addressed within the new contract. These included:
 - Not all advice services are based in the areas of most demand
 - Lack of capacity within current services to meet demand for telephone advice and face-to-face advice
 - Need to embrace new ways of working
 - Need for service to be remodelled to meet the needs of substantially more people
- 2.3 The new contract brought together funding from across council services and provided much greater certainty of funding for the duration of the contract. This helps to provide the confidence for the advice services to invest in new technology and embrace new ways of working.
- 2.4 The specification for the advice service had a strong focus on increasing telephone access. The specification is aimed at delivering maximum value for money and ensuring that as many citizens as possible are able to access advice. In particular, the specification requires:

A single point of access via a free telephone service which offers a triage assessment ... available 9am to 5pm during the week.... It is anticipated that the phone service will answer 40,000 calls per annum.

In relation to location of services, the emphasis is on an accessible City Centre location alongside a maximum of 4 further access points in areas of high demand, with the expectation that access points should also be open from 9 to 5. Importantly, the specification also states that:

Access points must have some capacity for 'drop in' and emergency appointments. The demand for this should be reduced as the telephone service is expanded... It is expected that the consortium will seek to make efficiencies within the service to rationalise costs, for

example, through consolidation of services into fewer centres, to use council facilities where appropriate and through the use of shared back office facilities.

2.5 The specification is necessarily demanding and not all aspects of the specification can be met. However, the advice service is now delivering on increasing telephone access and is progressing with new ways of working including a shared appointments booking system.

2.6 The performance of Leeds CAB over the last few years is shown in the table below. This shows that the demand for advice is increasing with the City Centre branch being the main driver for the increase with the outlying bureaux seeing a smaller percentage of callers. The number of face-to-face callers increased by 2,081 from 12/13 to 13/14 with the City Centre branch seeing 84% of this increase.

	12/13	% of cases	13/14	% of cases	14/15 to date	% of cases
Leeds	3771	51%	5513	58%	4023	56%
Crossgates	1218	16%	1199	13%	991	14%
Morley	464	6%	542	5%	428	6%
Otley	1158	15%	1266	13%	943	13%
Pudsey	883	12%	1055	11%	818	11%
Total	7494	100%	9575	100%	7203	100%

2.7 The Board will be aware that a major programme of welfare reforms came into effect in 13/14 and this appears to have been the main driver of the increase in demand for advice. In 13/14, over 40,000 telephone calls for advice were received but only 8,214 (20%) were answered. The number of calls answered has increased in 14/15 to 10,252 as at the end of Q3 but there is still a need to significantly increase telephone capability. The need to increase telephone access, along with expectations set out in the specification, has led to the reconfiguration of advice services.

2.8 A further report was taken to Executive Board in July 2014 making it clear that there would be a reconfiguration of services delivered from across the CAB network with an emphasis on telephone services and appointment-based outreach.

3 Main Issues

3.1 Leeds CAB has undertaken a review of face to face advice across the city and has decided to put in place revised processes for accessing advice. The main element of the service will be based around a telephone service that is expected to cope with between 30,000 and 35,000 calls a year with around 70% of enquiries resolved at the first point of contact.

3.2 The telephone service will be complemented by the following services:

- Extended face-to-face and drop in facilities at Leeds CAB City Centre branch and Chapeltown CAB
- Outreach facilities that provide appointment-based face-to-face advice, including specialist debt appointments which are currently only available in the city centre. The outreach service will be available at the following places:
 - Crossgates: outreach will continue to use the facility at The Methodist Schoolroom, Austhorpe Road,
 - Otley: outreach will continue to use the facility at the Courthouse

- Morley: outreach will be available at the Morley One Stop Centre
- Pudsey: outreach will be available at the Pudsey One Stop Centre
- Free to use telephone facilities will be available at all One Stop Centres and Community Hubs to access Leeds Advice Consortium
- Customers may call the Welfare Rights advice line 3760452
- Customers can make an appointment to see a Welfare Rights Worker at their local One Stop Centre This can be arranged by calling 3760452, emailing Welfare.Rights@leeds.gov.uk or by calling into their local One Stop Centre.
- Welfare Rights will continue to provide a home visit service for customers unable to leave their home and who have a welfare benefit enquiry which cannot be dealt with over the telephone
- The option of making an enquiry by email to either the CAB or Welfare Rights Unit is also available
- Outreach surgeries will offer face to face appointments at over 30 Children's Centres and Healthcare settings across the city. A list of current venues is attached at appendix 1.

3.3 Leeds CAB has discussed the reconfiguration programme with key stakeholders including CAB staff, CAB volunteers, ward councillors, town councillors and MPs. A briefing note for staff and volunteers was also provided that set out the reasons for the reconfiguration and the options available to staff and volunteers. The note, which is attached at appendix 2, made it clear that volunteers would be welcomed at the Leeds City Centre branch if they wished to continue to volunteer for the Bureau.

3.4 In addition to the need to reconfigure services in order to increase the numbers accessing advice, the Leeds Advice Consortium has also had to prepare for the prospect of a reduction in funding in 15/16. This has been necessary because of the latest finance settlement for the council – the potential reduction has been kept to a minimum in recognition of the importance of advice at this time. The reconfiguration programme, which was necessary anyway, will also help the Leeds Advice Consortium deal with the reduction.

4. Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and engagement

4.1.1 The report is for information only and does not require any formal consultation.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 The process of the award of the contract for advice to Leeds Advice Consortium was itself subject to an equality impact assessment.

4.3 Council Policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 Extending the provision of advice supports the Children & Young Peoples Plan, the Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Safer and Stronger Communities Plan and is a key contributor to the on-going work in responding to the changes to welfare benefits

4.4 Resources and Value for Money

4.4.1 The new service will deliver improved value for money by reaching more clients

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report. .

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 A reconfiguration of services is required in order to help meet increased demand for advice across the city. Without this reconfiguration, many people would not be able to get the advice they need to help them deal with welfare reform.

5. Conclusions

5.1 There is a need to significantly increase accessibility to advice in order to enable more people to get the advice they need. The reconfiguration exercise enables resources to be focused on the growth of the telephone service whilst also supporting the provision of face-to-face advice through the City Centre bureau, outreach facilities, Children's Centres and Healthcare settings. The reconfigured service will ultimately see the number of people accessing advice increase from around 18,000 in 13/14 to around 40,000 by the end of the contract.

6. Recommendations

Scrutiny Board is asked to:

1. Note the information in this report
2. Receive a future report that updates in the development and performance of advice services across the city

Background documents¹

None.

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.

Appendix 1

One Stop Centres

Aireborough Micklefield House, New Road Side, Rawdon, LS19 6DF

Armley 2 Stocks Hill, Armley, LS12 1UQ

City Centre 2 Great George Street, Leeds LS2 8BA

Compton Centre 322 Harehills Lane, Leeds, LS9 7BG

Dewsbury Road 90 Dewsbury Road, LS11 6PF

Garforth 1–5 Main Street, Garforth, LS25 1DU

St Georges Centre St George's Road, Middleton, Leeds, LS10 4UZ

Morley Morley Town Hall, LS27 9DY

Osmondthorpe 81a Wykebeck Mount, Leeds LS9 0JE

Otley 8 Boroughgate, Otley LS213AH

Pudsey Pudsey Town Hall, Robin Lane, LS28 7BL

Reginald Centre 263 Chapeltown Road, Leeds, LS7 3EX

Rothwell Marsh Street, Rothwell LS26 0AD

Seacroft (North) Irford House, Seacroft Cres, LS14 6PA

Seacroft (South) 91–95 Moresdale Lane, Leeds LS14 6GG

Wetherby 24 Westgate, Wetherby, LS22 6NL

Outreach advice in health settings - provided by LCC Welfare Rights Unit

Kirkstall Health Centre 15 Morris Lane, Kirkstall, LS5 3DB

York Street Health Practice 68 York Street, Leeds, LS9 8AA

Craven Road Medical Centre 60 Craven Road, Leeds, LS6 2RX

Ireland Wood Surgery Iveson Approach, Ireland Wood, LS16 6FR

Hunslet Health Centre 24 Church Street, Hunslet, LS10 2PT

Oakwood Lane Medical Practice, 2 Amberton Terrace, LS8 3BZ

Outreach advice services provided by Leeds Advice Service (Leeds CAB, Chapeltown CAB and Better Leeds Communities)

Children's Centres

Chapeltown, Leopald Street, LS7 4AW

Bramley, Fairfield Street, Bramley, LS13 3DT

Castleton, c/o Castleton Primary School, Green lane, LS12 1JZ

City and Holbeck, Hunslet Hall Road, Beeston, LS11 6TT

Gipton North, Thorn Walk, Gipton, LS8 3LP

Harehills, Cowper Terrace, Harehills,LS9 7BA

Hollybush, c/o Hollybush Primary School, Broad lane, LS13 2JJ

Hunslet, Whitfield Avenue, LS10 2QE

Kentmere, Kentmere Avenue, LS14 1BW

Little London, 169a Meanwood Road, LS10 4HU

Middleton, Middleton Family Centre, 256 Sissons Road, LS10 4JG

Osmondthorpe @ Doreen Hamilton, 129 Rookwood Road, LS9 0LX

Two Willows, Cardinal Square, Beeston, LS11 8HS

GP Practices/Health Centres

Bellbrooke Surgery, Burmantofts, Leeds, LS9 6AP

Chapeltown Health Centre, Spencer Place, Leeds, LS7 4BB

Carlton Gardens Surgery, 27 Carlton Gardens, Leeds, LS7 1JL

Meanwood Health Centre, 548 Meanwood Road, Leeds LS64JN

St Martins Surgery, 319 Chapeltown Road, Leeds, LS7 3JT

Thornton Medical Centre, Green Lane, Tong Road, Leeds, LS12 1JE

Armley Moor Health Centre, 95 Town Street, Armley, LS12 3HD

Bramley Clinic, 255 Town Street, Bramley, LS13 3EJ

City View, Beeston Hill Community Health Centre, 123 Cemetery Road, Leeds, LS11 8RH

Leeds City, Beeston Hill Community Health Centre, 123 Cemetery Road, Leeds, LS11 8RH

Parkside, 311 Dewsbury Road, Leeds, LS11 5LQ

Lingwell Croft, 16 Shelldrake Drive, Middleton, Leeds, LS10 3NB

Seacroft Clinic, Seacroft Avenue, Leeds, LS14 6PF

East Leeds Health Centre, 78 Osmondthorpe Lane, Leeds, LS9 9EF

Mental Health Services

Choice Centre

Dial House

Hunslet-The Vale

Leeds MIND

Lovell Park Centre

Seacroft Hospital

Stocks Hill Day Centre

St. James's Hospital

St. Mary's Hospital

The Mount

Touchstone Drop-In

Debt Advice (funded by Money Advice Service)

Burley – Better Leeds Communities, Burley Lodge Centre

City Centre – Leeds CAB, Westminster Buildings

Crossgates – Methodist Schoolrooms, Austhorpe Rd

Morley – One Stop Centre, Morley Town Hall

Otley – Otley Courthouse

Pudsey – Pudsey One Stop Centre

Middleton – St George's One Stop Centre

Housing Advice

Burley – Better Leeds Communities, Burley Lodge Centre

City Centre – Leeds CAB, Westminster Buildings

A new advice service for Leeds

Update 22.12.2014

In recent weeks a number of meetings have been held with Leeds CAB volunteers and staff, local Councillors and MPs, to discuss the proposed changes to our services. There has been a range of responses to the proposals including profound concerns about loss of access to local face to face advice services and the potential impact on vulnerable people. Amongst volunteers, some have expressed reservations about a perceived move from face to face advice to a telephone service, while others have expressed enthusiasm for increasing access by telephone and the potential for providing advice by email, webchat and other channels.

In response to the concerns raised, Leeds CAB is working with Leeds City Council to ensure that access to face to face advice will still be available in any location where a local bureau may close. We will be putting in place a number of services that in some cases represent an improvement on the current level of local access, including:

- Face to face debt advice appointments will be provided by Leeds CAB in Crossgates, Morley, Otley and Pudsey. This service has not been provided in Morley, Otley or Pudsey in the past and means that clients from these areas will no longer have to travel to the city centre for face to face debt advice.
- For the first time, members of the public will also be able to telephone the CAB via a freephone facility in One Stop Centres, with access available Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.
- Leeds City Council's Welfare Rights Unit will continue to provide face to face welfare rights advice in the One Stop Centres and to provide home visits for clients where appropriate.
- We are working with Leeds City Council and other agencies to explore options to provide additional outreach advice services focussed on vulnerable client groups who may struggle to use our other services.

More recently, we have learned of Leeds City Council's budget proposals for 2015/16, which include a 10% cut to funding for the Leeds Advice Service (which includes Leeds CAB, Chapelton CAB and Better Leeds Communities). Although final decisions cannot be made about Council funded services until budget proposals are confirmed, in the meantime Leeds CAB has other funding issues to manage. With some projects coming to an end and others starting, Leeds CAB will have to start a redundancy consultation process in January 2015. This does not pre-empt decisions about Council funded services but in order to be fair to our employees, we must ensure that all those who are at risk of redundancy have the opportunity to transfer to new roles.

More detailed responses to some of the questions that have been raised are provided in the updated FAQs below. A further update will be circulated once Leeds City Council's budget for 2015/16 has been confirmed.

Dianne Lyons
Chief Executive

Frequently Asked Questions 22.12.2014

(Question numbering continues from the FAQs dated 21.11.2014 which can be found below.)

Q.15 We help people in our local Bureau who will not be able to use the telephone service or travel into the city centre. How will they access advice in the future?

In all the areas where Bureaux may close we are taking steps to ensure that face-to-face advice services will still be available, such as:

- Leeds CAB will provide face-to-face Debt advice appointments in Crossgates, Morley, Otley and Pudsey. This will be a new service in Morley, Otley and Pudsey meaning that local clients will no longer have to travel to the city centre for this advice.
- Leeds CAB is also in discussion with a number of agencies throughout Leeds about potential locations for additional outreach advice services targeted to vulnerable client groups.
- Leeds City Council's Welfare Rights Unit will continue to provide face-to-face welfare rights appointments in the One Stop Centres and to provide home visits for clients where appropriate.
- Leeds City Council will provide freephone access in the One Stop Centres to the CAB telephone service.

Q.16 How will capacity for face-to-face advice services be increased if you close local Bureaux?

At present Leeds CAB's resources for supporting volunteers are spread across five Bureaux. This limits the number of volunteers we can train and support in each Bureau, in turn limiting our capacity to provide advice. By pooling resources into a lesser number of Bureaux we could increase capacity for training volunteers and provide increased opening hours.

By carrying out the majority of Gateway interviews by telephone we will be able to divert advisers' time into carrying out more in-depth advice interviews with clients.

By making it easier for people to contact us we also hope to be able to resolve more people's problems at an earlier stage, which is better for clients and makes better use of CAB resources.

Q.17 Will there be any staff redundancies?

Apart from our Leeds City Council funding, Leeds CAB has a number of other projects delivering advice services in Leeds. With some projects coming to an end in 2015 and others starting, Leeds CAB is in the position of having to start a redundancy consultation process in January 2015. This does not pre-empt decisions about Council funded services but in order to be fair to our employees, we must ensure that all those who are at risk of redundancy have the opportunity to transfer to new roles. (See also Q.13 below.)

Frequently Asked Questions 21.11.2014

(Question numbering continues from the FAQs dated 7.11.2014 which can be found below.)

Q.6 Are face-to-face advice services being replaced by the telephone service?

Leeds CAB remains absolutely committed to providing free, independent and quality marked advice through face-to-face services.

Over the last 10 years however, our face-to-face advice services have been diminishing with cuts to legal aid and other funding resulting in the loss of caseworkers and reduced opening hours in the Bureaux. We are now in a position where paid staff resources in the Community Bureaux are at an absolute minimum and opening hours have been reduced to 6, 9 or 12 hours a week.

Instead of continuing down this path and seeing local Bureaux shut one by one, we are proposing pooling our remaining resources so that we can increase face-to-face opening hours and our telephone service.

Instead of seeing our services shrink at a time when people need our help more than ever, we want to increase access to advice and aim to double the number of people we help by 2017. As part of that development we intend to train more volunteers in a range of roles, increase our capacity to undertake in-depth advice and provide clients with the help they need as quickly as possible.

Q.7 Why isn't it always possible to get through on the public telephone number?

Demand for our telephone service is extremely high and until quite recently we were only answering less than 5% of those calls.

Over the last 3 years and with support from Leeds City Council we have been able to greatly increase our telephone service. We are now answering around 15,000 calls a year to our public telephone number, compared to the hundreds we could answer a few years ago. Those 15,000 calls represent nearly 50% of calls made to the telephone service and our goal is to answer 35,000 calls a year by 2017.

We're finding that around 65% of telephone enquiries can be resolved in the first call. For those enquiries that need more in-depth advice we arrange a follow-up appointment with the most suitable organisation. This means that more people can access the advice they need more quickly and that we're able to help thousands of people who previously couldn't access our services at all.

Q.8 Will there be a reduction in the numbers of people helped through face-to-face advice?

That is not our intention, we want to provide more face-to-face advice, not less.

In recent years Gateway interviewing has been introduced in the CAB service nationally as a way to quickly identify the nature of a client's enquiry and what level of advice and support they need. Some enquiries can be resolved at the Gateway interview while others need to be referred for more in-depth advice. This is helpful in managing demand when services are under pressure but still takes up a lot of adviser time.

Our intention is that in future most Gateway interviews will be carried out by telephone, releasing adviser time to provide in-depth advice to those clients who need it most. Face-to-face Gateway interviews will also be provided so that clients who cannot use the telephone will still be able to access advice.

The feedback from clients who have used the telephone service has been excellent, with the same high levels of client satisfaction that we see in our face-to-face services.

Q.9 Will the increase in client numbers mean a reduction in the quality of advice we are able to provide?

Leeds CAB will continue to meet the quality of advice criteria required by Citizens Advice and the Advice Quality Standard as we always have.

In the last 5 years Leeds CAB has already doubled the number of clients we help (from approximately 10,000 to 20,000 clients p.a.) and over the same time period we have improved our performance in quality of advice audits.

Q.10 The City Centre and Chapeltown Bureaux are both in the centre of Leeds; why are only the outlying Bureaux being considered for closure?

The highest levels of financial deprivation in Leeds are in the inner areas of the city. The City Centre and Chapeltown Bureaux between them are assisting large numbers of people (more than 10,000 clients in 2013/14) from these areas where financial hardship has increased significantly in recent years.

Of course financial hardship exists outside these areas and we will be continuing to deliver face to face advice services in over 40 locations across Leeds in Children's Centres, GP surgeries and other centres. We are also working with Leeds City Council Welfare Rights Unit and other partners to ensure that face-to-face advice provision will continue to be available in Crossgates, Morley, Otley and Pudsey.

By making it easier to contact us by telephone we are also able to provide help to thousands of people who are not able to access any of our face-to-face advice services.

Q.11 What information is being used to make decisions about where advice services should be located?

A range of evidence is being looked at in deciding how best to shape advice services for Leeds, including:

- Surveys of people who have used Leeds CAB and other local advice services.
- National surveys carried out by Citizens Advice and MORI.
- Analysis of data about where people are travelling from to get advice.
- Indicators of local needs including numbers of Benefits claimants, levels of child poverty, etc.
- Locations of other advice services in Leeds.

Decisions will also be informed by the level of funding that will be available in 2015/16 and beyond.

Q.12 If my local Bureau does close can I volunteer somewhere else?

Volunteers are vital to the CAB service and of course we hope that Leeds CAB volunteers will want to continue to contribute to the service. Everyone who wants to

volunteer at another location in Leeds will be supported in making that transition and of course we will continue to pay travel expenses.

We also understand that some volunteers will not want to move to a different service and any volunteer who does decide to leave will do so with our profound thanks for the contribution they've made and our best wishes for the future.

Q.13 Will there be redundancies?

In reorganising our services there will be changes to job roles which mean that some posts will become redundant. Leeds CAB has unfortunately been through several redundancy processes over the years and we always seek to avoid compulsory redundancies and to redeploy as many staff as possible. We want to focus as much of our resources as possible on frontline services and that will be our priority in any redundancy process.

We will of course follow our redundancy policy which includes extensive consultation with staff and the possibility of taking voluntary redundancy. We do not yet know what our funding will be in 2015/16 and we do not intend to start a redundancy consultation process until we have that information.

Q.14 How will the additional opening hours be staffed? Are you expecting volunteers to work 9 to 5?

Leeds CAB's resources are currently spread across the City Centre Bureau and the 4 Bureaux in Crossgates, Morley, Otley and Pudsey. By reducing the number of Bureaux we will be able to make savings on premises costs and pool resources so that we can increase face-to-face opening hours. If we don't take action of this kind we are likely to see the local Bureaux close one by one in the coming years, with a consequent reduction in the number of people we are able to help.

As described above, we want instead to increase the number of people we help and focus as much of our resources as possible on frontline services. That includes training more volunteers in a range of roles, increasing our capacity to undertake in-depth advice and providing clients with the help they need as quickly as possible.

We have already increased opening hours to 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday, at the City Centre and Chapeltown Bureaux. We have not placed additional demands on volunteers in order to do this and in practice increased opening hours offer volunteers more flexibility as to the hours they do work. Some volunteers prefer to come in earlier, others to work in the afternoons. As well as improving access for clients, the increased opening hours also provide opportunities to new volunteers who were not available during the previous opening times.

Q.15 Will volunteers be expected to work on the telephone service instead of providing face-to-face advice?

We will remain dependent on volunteers to provide face-to-face advice and no-one is expected to carry out a role they're not happy with.

As the telephone service has developed in recent years we've been able to train and support more volunteers to contribute to the service and a lot of volunteers alternate between the telephone service and providing face-to-face advice. Some volunteers prefer working on the telephone, others prefer giving face-to-face advice.

Volunteers work alongside paid staff in the telephone service team and feedback from volunteers and staff is very positive about how the team work together and support each other.

Frequently Asked Questions 7.11.2014

Q.1 How will decisions be made about changes to services?

We've been working with Leeds City Council and other partners to look at how we can best provide help to local people who are facing the greatest financial difficulties and to those who face additional difficulties such as a disability or mental health problem.

We've asked people to tell us what's the best way for them to contact Leeds CAB and we've looked at national research undertaken by Citizens Advice into how people want to access advice. We've also looked at a wide range of information sources about Leeds to help us better understand local needs for advice and information.

We then have to take account of what financial and other resources are available and how these can be used to best effect. We're now talking to local stakeholders in our services including clients, staff, volunteers, elected representatives and others, to discuss what options are available.

Q.2 Are you planning to close any services?

Staffing resources have been stretched increasingly thinly across our services over a number of years. We have already closed or cut back on many services in the last 10 years, including specialist advice in Housing and Employment and local services in Armley, Crossgates, Garforth, Pudsey and Otley.

Against this background local volunteers and staff have done tremendous work in keeping services running but we are now at a stage where we have to consider whether maintaining 6 separate Bureaux is providing the best service to local people.

One option being considered is to combine resources to run advice services from 3 Bureaux (including Chapeltown CAB) that can offer increased opening hours. Along with our much improved telephone service we will be able to assist twice as many clients than can currently be achieved separately.

This would mean:

- 3 Bureaux in Leeds open for 126 hours per week, instead of 6 Bureaux open for 84 hours per week;
- 40,000 people receiving advice and assistance by 2017, compared to 21,000 in 2014.

Q.3 Where will people go for help and advice if their local Bureau is closed?

As well as doubling the number of people we help by 2017, our aim is to provide better access to advice for all Leeds citizens regardless of where they live. We believe we can achieve this by making advice available through:

- 3 Bureaux (including Chapeltown CAB) that are all open at least 9am to 5pm, 5 days a week.

- A telephone service that is open at least 9am to 5pm, 5 days a week and which answers 35,000 calls a year by 2017.
- Outreach advice services available in more than 40 locations across Leeds, including GP surgeries and Children's Centres.

We are also working with other organisations to improve access to advice across the city by, for example:

- Working with Chapeltown CAB to increase face-to-face opening hours and the telephone service as part of the new Leeds Advice Service.
- Working with Better Leeds Communities to deliver outreach advice sessions in Children's Centres as part of the new Leeds Advice Service.
- Providing more help to people in claiming Benefits and appealing incorrect decisions in partnership with Leeds City Council Welfare Rights Unit.
- Developing a joint telephone appointments booking system with members of the Advice Leeds partnership.

Q.4 A telephone service isn't suitable for everyone. What about people with hearing difficulties or language problems?

We know that not everyone is comfortable or able to talk on the telephone and that's why we are also increasing opening times at our face-to-face services as well as continuing to provide outreach advice sessions in GP surgeries, Children's Centres and other local venues.

One of the reasons for changing the way we do things is that many people find it very difficult to access our services as they are. By telephoning Leeds CAB and Chapeltown CAB people will be able to receive advice in the way that suits them best, which could be a home visit or an appointment at a Bureau or GP surgery. By making it easier for people to contact us by telephone we'll be able to help many more people, including those who are elderly or have a disability.

Q.5 What will happen next?

During November and December we'll be talking to local stakeholders including clients, staff, volunteers, elected representatives and others, to discuss what options are available.

We are waiting to hear from Leeds City Council about what level of funding is available for 2015/16, which we expect to know by January 2015, and from there we'll be able to take decisions about the development of the Leeds Advice Service.

We will provide updates as information becomes available, through these FAQs, our website and at meetings with staff and volunteers.

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