

ITEM 7



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

COMMUNITY COMMISSION
30 March 2009

Report of the Corporate Director of Corporate and Adult Services

Derby Community Legal Advice Centre - Progress Report

RECOMMENDATION

1. To note the progress of the Derby CLAC and the key issues identified for 2009/10.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 At the meeting of 16 September 2008 the Community Commission received a report on the first few months of the operation of the Derby Community Legal Advice Centre - CLAC. The Commission asked to receive a further progress report in six months time.

2.2 Audit of the CLAC service

A comprehensive audit of the CLAC service was undertaken jointly by the Council in partnership with the Legal Services Commission - LSC, from 9-11 December 2008. The outcome of the audit is that the contract with Derbyshire Access2Law will continue and any corrective action is being completed and reported to the Liaison Board.

The key findings from the audit were:

Generalist service: this aspect of the audit was undertaken by the Council, which provides the funding for the generalist service. The findings from the audit were positive. In particular, the initial interview, or 'triage' stage, was found to be working well. The client journey from the triage stage through to other parts of the service was clear. Case notes and case file supervision were found to be good. A few corrective actions were needed, which have already been addressed by the CLAC.

Specialist service: this aspect of the audit was undertaken by the LSC, for each of the categories of law. Again, there were several issues requiring corrective action, but these are being satisfactorily progressed. The only critical quality concern for the contracted CLAC service was in the Debt category of advice, where there were found to be weaknesses relating to the effective supervision of a caseworker. Appropriate actions have been taken to address these concerns and this category will be re-audited in May.

The only significant issue for Derby Advice was in the Welfare Benefits category, which had not been meeting the supervision requirements for the previous year, owing to maternity leave and a staffing shortage. However, the audit found that the quality of the case files had not been affected. The advice supervisor is now in place and this category will be re-audited in June.

2.3 Access for priority groups and wards

The service is continuing to meet the needs of identified priority groups and wards. Statistics have been provided by priority group and by ward for both generalist and specialist advice. 54% of clients accessing the service at the generalist level between April 2008 and February 2009 were from priority wards (Alvaston, Arboretum, Chaddesden, Derwent, Mackworth, Normanton and Sinfin). Over 60% of clients receiving specialist advice were from priority wards. The target for both generalist and specialist advice is 50% of clients from a priority group or ward.

2.4 Capacity of the CLAC service

The service has experienced additional pressure owing to increasing levels of need in the current economic climate. This has been reflected in increased waiting times for non-urgent appointments for specialist advice. The LSC has responded by providing additional funding for more cases in certain categories of law. Waiting times for appointments are now being monitored closely, with the Centre Manager reporting on a two weekly basis any waiting times exceeding the 10 working days target. Over recent weeks, waiting times have been reducing and, at the time of writing this report, the 10 day target is being met in all categories apart from Debt, where the target is being slightly exceeded. The Council funding for the generalist advice service will increase by 2.5% from April 2009 to help keep the service sustainable.

2.5 Relationship with Derby Advice

The relationship with Derby Advice is continuing to work well. For the past few months a Welfare Rights Caseworker from Derby Advice has been based at the main CLAC building, Stuart House, for three days a week. In addition, a Derby Advice Money Adviser has been sited at Stuart House one day a week, to help deal with the high demand for debt advice. These developments have further strengthened the referral process and the relationship with Derby Advice. It is anticipated that during the course of 2009/10, consideration will be given to co-locating the Derby Advice service with the contracted CLAC service at Stuart House.

2.6 Research on CLACs and CLANs

The Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC) is the research division of the LSC and is currently undertaking some research on Community Legal Advice Centres and Networks (CLACs and CLANs) across the country.

Alongside this, the Local Government Association has also commissioned some research on CLACs and CLANs and has asked Derby to be involved as a case study.

The findings from this research will help to inform the future direction of the Derby CLAC.

2.7 Future priorities

- An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken over the coming months. This will need to consider the impact of the service across diverse groups and identify any gaps in services, including meeting the language needs of people from new and emerging communities.
- Some initial work has been undertaken to develop a referral protocol for outside information and advice agencies to refer to and from the CLAC. This will need to be further progressed in 2009/10.

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Background papers:

None

List of appendices:

- A. Case Starts Summary Apr08-Feb09
- B. Generalist Advice Statistics Apr08-Feb09
- C. Specialist Advice Statistics Apr08-Feb09