LeicesterShire CAB County Generalist Service Proposals for post 2014

“LeicesterShire CAB” provides advice and information services to the whole of Leicestershire (apart from Charnwood) and the City. This report refers to those County areas served by LeicesterShire CAB.

The overarching aim of the LeicesterShire CAB (LCAB) Service is to offer very high quality advice to the most vulnerable residents in the most cost effective manner. To achieve this, the LCAB service delivery for 2014 and beyond will focus on three main principles:

1. Devolving the majority of face to face generalist services to smaller locality based access points positioned closely to the greatest need and working alongside other providers.
2. Moving away from a universal offer to targeted services and clients thereby supporting the priorities identified in partnership with the local authorities.
3. Developing the County wide Contact Centre as the initial access point for services delivering telephone and online triage and information services; thereafter expanding this service to include full advice by phone or email where appropriate.

2 Background and Development of New Model

In May 2013 LCAB held a briefing session with representatives from all of the County Districts, County Council, Health and other stakeholders regarding the remodelling of LCAB Services within the County (again excluding Charnwood).

The current delivery model reflects that fact that LCAB developed as individual charities within Leicestershire but through a process of merger commenced in 2010 is only now functioning as one coordinated organisation.

A presentation in July from LCAB to the District Chief Executives and a joint stakeholder meeting to further consider the future established a smaller working party of representatives from the districts of Harborough/Hinckley/NW Leicestershire and Charnwood, the latter although not directly receiving services from LCAB was keen to be involved in the process. The County Council convened and supported the process.

This smaller group considered information on client profile and advice needs provided by LCAB as well as reflecting on their own research within the community particularly relating to issues...
concerning Welfare Reform, loss of Legal Aid and Supporting Leicestershire Families. LCAB were also able to provide district maps that measured client access to services against areas of deprivation.

This information and mapping identified that the fixed LCAB offices require service users to travel due to the historically located seven county outlets. The locations are fixed and therefore not able to react easily to change. In additional the premises are costly to maintain and none are used to full capacity. The smaller working party also identified certain areas of legal advice and client need as being paramount and therefore prioritised.

3 Face to Face Service

LCAB and the working party have therefore suggested that the following two fundamental changes are made to the local service delivery.

1. It is proposed that we replace current offices with smaller Community Access Points (CAP’s), from which face to face services will be delivered. The nature, location and frequency of the CAP’s will be a matter to be determined in partnership with the relevant District/Borough Authority and within the constraints of the budget available. We will seek to make best use of Local Authority Hub buildings, health/medical centres and other community buildings that negate the need for service users to travel and where travel is required to link in to public transport networks.

2. We will target our advice services at those legal areas/problems that are agreed as priority, including Welfare Benefits, Initial Debt, Housing, Employment, Relationships and as otherwise agreed with the relevant local authority again seeking to support the statutory objectives of the Leicestershire Together Commissioning Executive and the Districts.

This new model offers local targeted service provision, ensures a partnership approach and avoids centralising services and importantly, diverts financial resources away from office costs to maintain front line delivery.

We will be able bring services into areas where there is the greatest deprivation, and embed those services in the community.
We will continue to develop the relationship with statutory front line staff (such as Supporting Leicestershire Family caseworkers) to ensure we are closely aligned to statutory provider priorities and equally ensuring access to those needing our service the most.

These services will concentrate on delivering face to face services for those who find it difficult to access assistance through other channels, with some triage but mainly full advice. Trained LCAB staff will be available at each Community Access Point.

We will ensure that the quality of our service is maintained and enhanced by directing our staffing resources towards supporting and monitoring the quality of advice which is being given largely by well trained and experienced volunteers. We are also increasing our training capacity to extend and broaden the profile of our volunteers through a successful external funding bid, and this will also provide a resource for more extensive post qualifying training for volunteers.

4 Contact Centre

The current operation will be developed to ensure sufficient capacity to deal with the new extended role. The Contact Centre will have the ability to deal with all the initial enquiries/gateway assessments from across the County as well as delivering full advice via telephone or online when required.

The initial triage (gateway) and information services will be offered on all legal/social problems as currently provided. However as part of the contract with the local authorities clients will only be passed on for full advice in the legal areas that reflect the greatest need (as above suggested Welfare Benefits, Initial Debt, Financial Literacy training, Housing, Employment, Relationship/Family and Discrimination).

If more assistance is required outside of these areas, clients will be signposted to other, more appropriate organisations. Where full advice is required, this can be delivered via telephone, online or face to face. An appointment will be offered that recognises the appropriate capacity/circumstances of the individual. Within the Contact Centre, there will be a dedicated team of trained volunteer advisers to deliver full generalist advice via the telephone or online options.
The Contact Centre will also offer a valuable training resource in call centre skills which can be delivered to both volunteers and work placements referred by programmes supporting the economic regeneration of the County by ensuring the work readiness of those who work within it.

5 Common Outcomes and Reporting Framework

Underpinning all of the above will be a Common Reporting Framework which all of the Districts and County Council will agree and implement with LCAB. The historically separate development of LCAB within the County has created a number of individual reporting requirements (where they exist at all) which often have little relevance to the significant social and economic impact that LCAB’s work has, or indeed what is required or prioritised by the funding authority.

A major part of this process has therefore been to develop a Common Outcomes Framework which will be applied across all the funding authorities to demonstrate how LCAB contribute to the local statutory and strategic objectives within Leicestershire.

6 Funding

Assuming that the current level of County and District funding is maintained, this will meet the cost of the services described above for Local Authority districts covered by LCAB provided that we limit expenditure on maintaining full-time offices and reduce our overall management costs. It is by reducing this latter figure that we believe we can direct more resources directly to giving advice to clients through the maintenance of the Contact Centre and the use of alternative and cheaper outreach bases.

This core funding has been critical to us being able to secure additional income to ensure enhanced support for LeicesterShire residents.
7  **Specialist Debt Advice**

The current funding for all specialist debt work in the County is due to come to an end on 31st March 2014. Given the continuing economic issues facing the population, the reforms to the welfare benefits system are beginning to impact on residents of the County with more changes to come.

Debt Advice will be crucial in ensuring that “Supporting Leicestershire Families” is successful as high levels of Debt/money issues are already being identified by the project workers. Without the current funding being replaced there will be little or no access to Debt casework in the County.

There will be a continuing if not growing need for high quality specialist debt and financial literacy work, and we have a core group of highly trained and experienced specialist caseworkers whose expertise will be lost should funding cease. The cost of delivering money advice casework is set at a fixed fee per client of £160 and includes individual financial literacy work and where necessary the application process for Debt Relief Orders.

The present Countywide funding of £112,000 per annum provides for a service to 700 clients and is outside of the funding above. We would be keen to work in partnership with other service providers to extend our work to include more financial literacy work with small groups and our staff are trained to deliver this. We will continue to look for other funding opportunities to deliver this work.
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