



We are proposing to change the way we provide social welfare advice in Leicester. This consultation sets out our proposals and asks for your thoughts.

What is social welfare advice?

Social welfare advice relates to welfare benefits, debt, employment, housing, community care, immigration and family issues.

People either need basic advice and information or they have complex issues which they need help to resolve. Although the council is not required to fund the majority of this advice by law, we feel this is an important service for local residents.

Why are we consulting?

The council continues to face funding reductions and we need to make savings of £40 million by 2020. We currently fund advice through five voluntary sector agencies (Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland, Citizens Advice LeicesterShire, Mosaic: Shaping Disability Services, Somali Development Services and The Race Equality Centre). We also fund one council advice service: the welfare rights service. The voluntary sector contracts will end in spring 2018, which gives us an opportunity to look at new ways of providing advice while making savings.

What will stay the same?

We want to ensure that vulnerable city residents can access the advice they need. Under the proposals, advice services will continue to provide free, independent and confidential advice to those people who need it most.

General advice will be available across the following categories: welfare benefits, debt, employment, housing, community care, immigration and family issues. More specialist advice, which includes representation at appeals and tribunals, will continue to be provided for welfare benefits, debt, housing and employment.

Under the proposals, advice services will continue to provide:

- free, independent and confidential advice to those people who need it most
- general and specialist advice, including appeals and tribunals work
- a fast track service for clients in crisis or immediate need of advice
- advice across the existing seven categories including: welfare benefits, debt, employment, housing, community care, immigration and family
- outreach advice in community locations
- home visits for people who need advice but are unable to leave their home.

What we are proposing to change

Last summer we spoke to the social welfare advice sector to understand the demand for advice, the challenges faced in the city, and to gather expert opinion on the way forward. We held an advice seminar in August 2016 and we also held meetings with 21 organisations. Feedback received has helped to inform our belief that a partnership of advice agencies working together, with one agency taking the lead, would provide a co-ordinated advice service. All partners would use the same access and referral arrangements.

We are proposing:

- To contract with one organisation to provide social welfare advice services across the city. Advice will be delivered through a partnership, with one organisation taking the lead. This will ensure that people access the right advice service first time.
- The city-based main advice provision will be located in the council's Customer Service Centre at York House, 91 Granby Street.

- Advice is currently provided across the city, using ten council and community buildings. We propose to deliver this from eight council centres, where a range of services will be available.
- All advice organisations will be required to have the appropriate qualifications they need to provide the correct advice to local residents.
- We will support some people to help themselves by giving them basic information, signposting to other services or online support. They will have free access to computers and wi-fi in our Customer Service Centre and in city libraries, leaving more appointments available for vulnerable clients with complex issues.

Will I still be able to get advice?

Some people are able to help themselves if they have the right information. However, people in crisis will continue to receive face-to-face support to resolve their issues.

How you can give us your views

This consultation is open from 31 July to **6 October 2017**.

This information and questionnaire are available online at consultations.leicester.gov.uk

If you cannot answer the questions online, fill in this form and return it to any city council library or the Customer Service Centre.

You can also post it to:

Freepost RTRE-HTRJ-CSSJ
Revenues and Customer Support Service
Social Welfare Advice Consultation
York House
91 Granby Street
Leicester
LE1 6FB

Further information

Information on social welfare advice is available on our website:

leicester.gov.uk/benefitsadvice

What happens next?

We will look at all the responses and will publish the results of our findings online at consultations.leicester.gov.uk

This will help councillors to make a decision on the proposals before the end of the year.