

Specialist advice service proposal

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council currently both provides and commissions a range of information and advice services related to care and support issues for adults and carers, and a number of these services are also used by families and young people.

The implementation of the Care Act 2014 coupled with challenging financial and demographic circumstances have required us to examine our existing provision and priorities, and our aim going forward is to make the best use of available resources so that Oxfordshire residents get the information and advice they need and we meet our statutory obligations.

Service model and description

We are proposing to develop a **specialist advice service** for Oxfordshire, jointly funded by Adult Social Care and Children Education and Families, that is focused on meeting the needs of people for whom we have a statutory responsibility: older people, adults with learning disabilities, adults with mental health problems, adults with physical and sensory impairments, adult and young carers, young people aged 16+ and families with young children (particularly those with disabled children).

The holistic advice service will provide free, independent advice to assist people with benefits, debt, budgeting and other financial and welfare issues.

The service will have four key components:

- a) a **telephone advice line** staffed by specialist workers to provide advice and guidance on benefits, entitlements and other financial matters, undertake benefit/entitlement 'checks' over the phone and signpost callers on to other sources of help where this is required
- b) an **outreach service** for people who are unable through poor health or disability to access advice services in their communities at venues such as local neighbourhood centres or Citizens Advice Bureaux, or who are unable to seek or make use of advice and information available online or over the phone. Trained and experienced specialist workers will visit people face to face in their own homes, in GP surgeries or in other settings to provide advice and guidance, give practical assistance with benefit claims etc.
- c) a **training and consultancy service** on benefits/debt/financial matters for advisers in other settings such as local neighbourhood advice centres, charities, local government and other organisations providing support with benefits and financial issues. The service should include:
 - o a programme of training sessions, seminars and workshops to communicate and advise on basic benefits and financial issues, including key legislative/policy/casework changes; we would expect the service to provide

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a minimum of 8 days of training to providers and community groups to build general community capacity to provide low level preventative benefits and financial information

- a telephone consultancy service for professionals and advisers from other organisations providing advice on complex benefits, entitlements and welfare rights issues

d) an **appeals and representation service** - tribunal and court work, assisting with appeals e.g. regarding benefit cessation or unsuccessful new claims

The suggested breakdown of costs for the different components of the proposed specialist advice service is:

- Telephone advice line: 30%
- Outreach (including appeals and representation): 60%
- Training and consultancy: 10%

The service will be available Monday - Friday; ideally the telephone advice line and outreach elements to be available on Saturdays also to facilitate access to the service by people working traditional 'office hours'.

It is not essential that the service has an office base that can be used for 'drop-in' or planned appointments as it is expected that outreach face to face interventions will usually take place at the service user's home.

Service outcomes

The overall aim of the service is to support people to live their lives as independently, successfully and safely as possible within the community by maximising income, helping to make the best use of the money available to them and managing debt, which will improve people's choice and control and enhance wellbeing.

The service should deliver measureable outcomes for individuals in terms of additional benefit income, resolved financial issues, decreased debt, customer satisfaction and enhanced wellbeing.

We anticipate that the new service will deliver face to face support to around 800 people a year. The number of people supported via the representation element of the service will depend on the volume of relevant referrals, but is anticipated to be at least 50 people per year.

Client profile and service eligibility criteria and referral process

The telephone advice line and outreach service is primarily aimed at older people, adults with learning disabilities, adults with mental health problems, adults with physical and sensory impairments, adult and young carers, young people aged 16+ and families with young children (particularly those with disabled children).

Whilst the telephone advice line can be accessed universally, the face to face, countywide outreach service is for people who because of health or disability issues or the complexity

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of their situation require this form of intervention and are unable to access a similar service from a neighbourhood advice centre, CAB or other venue.

The service provider will be expected to use discretion to judge a person's eligibility for a face to face intervention according to the information available about the person's needs and their circumstances.

Referrals to the outreach service may arise as a result of a person contacting the telephone advice line, or may be made by other advice providers, health professionals, OCC social care/client finance staff etc.

Staff competencies

It is important that staff delivering all the elements of the proposed service have up to date knowledge and experience of: benefits and entitlements; personal financial management e.g. dealing with debt, budgeting; how care and support system works (for adults and children, particularly children with disabilities who are transitioning to adult social care) and are experienced in working with vulnerable people and people who may be distressed and in crisis.