

**Information and Advice Strategy and Proposal for Specialist Advice Service -
Response to the Consultation
September 2015**

Introduction

1. This report sets out our response to the report of the public consultation on the information and advice strategy and proposal for specialist advice service, and should be read in conjunction with the strategy and service proposal as well as the consultation report.
2. The consultation took place from 13th July to 11th September and was available on the online portal on the Council's public website. A weblink to the consultation was sent out to over 30 identified stakeholders and the consultation was also promoted to all staff in the Adult Social Care Directorate via the 'Weekly Round-Up' e-mail.
3. The consultation attracted only 13 responses, received via the online consultation portal and by letter.

Response

4. Overall, the strategy and specialist service proposal were supported by respondents, who welcomed the recognition in the strategy of the importance and preventive value of prompt and accurate information and advice.
5. There was support for the components of the proposed service model service that involve direct work with people (telephone advice, outreach and support with appeals), in particular for face to face outreach support for more vulnerable people who would not be able to access telephone support or online information and advice.
6. Respondents to the consultation highlighted some particular concerns which are outlined below, together with the council's response.

- | Concerns | Response |
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| 7. The suggested proportion of funding to be allocated to outreach work was felt to be too low, and target numbers were not felt to be achievable within the likely budget | As a result of these concerns, the proposed percentage allocation of budget for the components of the specialist advice service have been reviewed and adjusted to give greater weight to the outreach component, which will provide face to face access to specialist advice for the most vulnerable residents countywide |
| 8. The strategy needs to be adequately funded in order to be effective and reduced funding for | We believe that the level of county council funding allocated more broadly to a wide range of information and |

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information and advice was a risk to the delivery of the strategy, especially given the new Care Act responsibilities

advice services is adequate to deliver our statutory duties

9. Focusing on statutory responsibilities may cause greater pressures as the ability to support people before they are most vulnerable could be reduced; the County Council also has a broader remit to increase the wellbeing of all Oxfordshire residents

The council is also investing in services to identify and support people to remain independent and connected to their communities, to prevent, reduce or delay the need for formal social care input.

10. The loss of council funding from local advice centres could cost the council more in the longer term and also undermines the aim of preventing or delaying needs for care and support

Whilst the county council is not the sole or main funder of many of the existing providers, we recognise that the loss of any funding as a result of county council grants and contracts ending will have an impact on existing providers' abilities to continue to provide current levels of service

However, we are confident that the majority of services will have sufficient resources to continue to support Oxfordshire residents, possibly with a reduced service offer

11. The assumption that these local advice centres will carry on providing specialist advice but the withdrawal of county council funding will impact this

The council is proposing to commission a single specialist advice service. We are confident that this will enable us to meet our statutory duty

We recognise that this may have an impact on current providers but, as with any procurement, our intentions to purchase a single service does not necessarily mean that a single organisation would provide the service and does not assume that local advice centres could not be involved as the council would welcome tender applications from a range of potential providers

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12. The interdependency with other information and advice services, many of which are also subject to review and/or closure

We would expect any provider of the new specialist service to work collaboratively with the range of information and advice provision in Oxfordshire. We recognise that, over time, this will change in response to need, commissioner action, and available funding