

DRAFT SCHEDULE 1

ADVICE COMMISSIONING - SERVICE SPECIFICATION 2015 - 2018

This document describes the services Oxford City Council is commissioning from the Advice Sector in order to support customers seeking independent advice on the problems they face. The services being commissioned support the delivery of the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy and associated Action Plan as well as the Council's wider corporate objectives. Together with the Council's Standard Funding Agreement, these documents provide the framework for advice commissioning for the period 2015- 2018.

1. Overview

The Council is committed to a three year funding cycle in order to provide certainty to funded organisations. However, the outcomes commissioned will be reviewed and agreed on an annual basis and may change year on year to reflect changing customer needs.

On an annual basis and in consultation with the sector, an area of priority activity will be identified for the subsequent financial year together with associated outcomes.

Monitoring of outcomes will be undertaken on a half yearly basis, with priority outcomes being monitored quarterly to enable the Council and partners to better understand trends and issues. Where new and emerging issues are identified, the Council may request additional data where available to help understand the impact on service provision and inform service improvement and future commissioning.

Funding for subsequent years will be reviewed annually based on delivery of the previous year's outcomes.

2. Required outcomes and Measures:

The following required outcomes and measures will be monitored as appropriate depending on the services commissioned from independent organisations.

- a) **Reduce Debt** among socially excluded and vulnerable people and those on a low income.

Measures: The number of clients (and amount of debt) who have repayment agreements made, amounts written off, and the number of clients advised on debt issues.

- b) **Improve skills and confidence in money management** among socially excluded and vulnerable people and those on a low income.

Measures: Number of clients assisted to prepare a household budget.

- c) **Increase Income from Employment** for those on a low income, or with debt issues, where appropriate.

Measures: Number of clients referred to organisations which can help in overcoming barriers to work and/or accessing employment as appropriate to individual client need

- d) **Help to Tackle Fuel Poverty** by providing advice to help reduce the cost of energy bills and increase household income.

Measures: Number of clients advised on fuel issues, number of clients signposted or referred to relevant sources of additional information and support

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in reducing energy consumption, and the number of clients provided with information on how to get a better tariff.

- e) **Improve Access to Online Services** among socially excluded and vulnerable people and those on a low income as appropriate to their needs.
Measures: The number of clients directly supported to access online services (e.g. helping someone fill a benefit application in online), the number of clients receiving formal training in digital capability, the number of clients referred to courses in online capability.
- f) **Reduce Homelessness** as a result of interventions made to support people at risk of losing their home.
Measure: Number of homelessness preventions.
- g) **Increase Uptake of Welfare Benefits and Tax Credits** for those not working and/or on a low income.
Measures: Number of claims made for clients, Number of increases in benefit obtained for clients, Number of clients represented at court (and success rate), number of clients represented at tribunal and in challenging mandatory revisions (and success rate) and Number of Discretionary housing payment referrals.

3. Service Delivery

Organisations will provide advice where appropriate on the following issues (this list is not exhaustive):

Consumer & general contract issues
 Crime & community safety
 Debt & Money Management
 Education (including literacy)
 Employment
 Housing
 Immigration & nationality
 Mental health
 Welfare benefits & tax credits

Organisations will make onward referrals as appropriate where another organisation is deemed to be better able to meet the needs of the client.

Organisations will discuss any significant proposed changes to the service provided (where this is funded wholly or in part by Oxford City Council) with the designated Contact Officer at Oxford City Council.

Access:

Organisations will clearly specify how customers can access their service, including the times different services are available, and the process to follow where making an appointment is required.

Organisations will discuss any significant proposed changes to opening hours with the designated Contact Officer at Oxford City Council.

DRAFT SCHEDULE 1**A Partnership Approach:**

Organisations will need to publicise the fact that they are part funded by the City Council, and include the Council's logo on all promotional material. Logos in different formats can be provided on request by the Council's Nominated Officer. Organisations will also promote key Oxford City Council leaflets in their reception areas.

In situations where Organisations are helping a client with a problem that involves Oxford City Council they will work jointly with the Council to resolve the problem. In situations where conflicts cannot be resolved the Council's complaint procedure should be followed where appropriate.

Organisations will provide bespoke reports to the City Council in relation to specific issues as they arise. If required, focus groups may be convened, and survey data gathered to help inform all parties understanding of issues. The City Council will also be consulted on the content of future outcome surveys which Organisations undertake.

Organisations will work with Oxford City Council to deliver new Government or Council initiatives to their clients where appropriate. Organisations will work with the Council to mitigate the impacts of policy or practice change where there is a detrimental effect on clients. Organisations will also make new information available to their clients where appropriate.

To ensure a good two way flow of information and be kept up to date with all of the latest changes to debt and welfare benefit advice, attendance by Organisations is requested at the Voluntary Sector Liaison Meetings, and City Council representatives will attend the Oxford Advice Forum. The Council will also meet quarterly with Organisations to review the trends identified in monitoring information, and to look for opportunities to improve service provision in partnership. These meetings will include identifying system failures in the City Council, or in other local public sector organisations, and considerations of recommendations to address these.

4. Standards

Organisations will ensure that all paid staff and volunteers who advise the public reach and then maintain a good working knowledge of the theory and best practice in relation to any area in which they are providing advice. They will also know how to access further information in response to clients' needs and keep up to date with the appropriate organisations to refer clients into.

Organisations will ensure that staff are paid at least the level of the Oxford Living Wage.

Training needs will be identified at regular supervision and appraisal sessions and Organisations will ensure that paid staff and volunteers participate in appropriate training.

The quality of advice given and record-keeping of all paid staff and volunteers who advise the public will be monitored by Organisations on a frequent and regular basis.

Organisations will be mindful of the needs of people for whom English is not the first language; who have low levels of literacy and numeracy; who have disabilities including sensory impairments and those who come from groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and will endeavour to accommodate their needs and

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provide them with the best possible service, to include as far as resources allow the use of interpreters and translation services as required.

Organisations will maintain up-to-date policies on equal opportunities, health and safety, lone working, dealing with aggression, staff recruitment, training, supervision and support, sickness and absence, disciplinary and grievance procedures, confidentiality and complaints procedures (this list is not exhaustive). A copy of each policy will be supplied to the designated Contact Officer at Oxford City Council at the commencement of the operation of this agreement.

All policies and procedures will be reviewed by Organisations at least every two years and a copy of each policy or procedure in which any changes have been incorporated will be supplied to the designated Contact Officer as soon as it comes into effect.

Organisations will observe the principles of the Data Protection Act 2003 in how they handle, process and share their clients' data.

5. Monitoring Arrangements

Monitoring will be conducted on a half yearly basis for all outcomes bar priority outcomes which will be monitored quarterly. Data will be submitted in full to the designated Contact Officer at Oxford City Council within 21 days of the end of each monitoring period.

Half Yearly Monitoring Periods:

- 1 April – 30 September
- 1 October – 31 March

Monitoring periods for Priority Outcomes:

- 1 April – 30 June
- 1 July – 30 September
- 1 October – 31 December
- 1 January – 31 March

Failure to submit the required monitoring material may result in suspension of grant. If the monitoring material is unsatisfactory or incomplete, or the standard of the service is in question, a meeting involving the Service Manager, a Trustee and the Nominated Officers from the City Council will be held and an action plan to rectify the situation agreed. Failure to comply with the Action Plan may also result in the suspension of grant.

Please see the separate Monitoring Form attached at Schedule 3 for a more detailed breakdown of the information required.

6. BIDDING REQUIREMENTS AND ANNUAL REVIEW:

Bidding Process

Organisations are required to state how they will achieve the outcomes outlined in Section 2 above, and what steps are being taken to deliver value for money: reduce their cost base, and work in partnership with other providers.

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Organisations will be required to provide the following information on an annual basis:

Annual report relating to the activities of the organisation.

Independently examined or audited accounts (in accordance with paragraph 9.7 of the Standard Funding Agreement.

Business Plan (or annual update of existing Business Plan) including detailed budgets, cash flow projections and exit strategies for time-limited funding streams

Organisation Structure

(including numbers employed in each capacity). These provisions include the use of volunteers as well as paid staff and Management Committee members

Copies of current insurance certificates, quality mark certificates, quality assurance reports and audit reports

Customer feedback survey and Outcomes survey, to include whether clients were satisfied with the service and what suggestions for improvements were made.

Complaints

Documentation regarding any complaints received during the monitoring period, including details of how they were handled and the outcomes

Monitoring Meetings The Council will have a minimum of one monitoring meeting with each Organisation per year. Additionally the Council will meet jointly with Organisations every three months to keep up to date with developments in each other's Services and to review trends in customer requirements for advice.