

ADVICE COMMISSIONING - SERVICE SPECIFICATION 2018-21

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 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 2018-21.

The commissioning process has been informed by an independent review of services provided under the Advice and Money Management commission theme. The review was undertaken by Advice UK, with fieldwork carried out in May to June 2017. The review made a number of recommendations to develop services, and this specification has been designed to support these.

1. Overview

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

Monitoring of outcomes will be undertaken on a half yearly basis, to enable the Council and partners to better understand trends and issues. The Council will meet with commissioned services on a quarterly basis to discuss monitoring data and gain feedback on service delivery. 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. These outcomes are derived from relevant parts of the Council's Financial Inclusion Strategy.

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

Measures:

- Number of clients (and amount of debt) who have repayment agreements made
- Amounts of debt written off per customer
- Number of clients advised on debt issues
- Number of clients advised on debt issues who have previously sought advice on managing problem debt

- 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

- Number of clients supported to reduce their regular outgoings
- 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
 - Number of clients referred to training and education providers
- 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 provided with energy advice
 - Number of clients signposted or referred to relevant sources of additional information and support in reducing energy consumption
 - Number of clients provided with information on better tariffs and/or how to switch tariff or supplier
 - Number of clients referred to Warm Homes Discount
 - Number of clients referred to Priority Services Register
 - Number of clients accessing energy/water bill support grants
- e) **Improve Access to Online Services** among socially excluded and vulnerable people and those on a low income as appropriate to their needs.
- Measures:**
- Number of clients directly supported to access online services (e.g. helping someone fill a benefit application in online)
- Number of clients receiving formal training in digital capability
- Number of clients referred for support in improving their online capability
- f) **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 success rate)
- Number of clients supported in challenging mandatory revisions (and success rate)

Measuring longer term impact of advice

Commissioned services will develop the work that has been undertaken to understand the longer term impact of the advice they provide. An annual survey has been established to gain feedback from service users on the longer term impact of the support they received. This should be improved so that it monitors whether the intervention led to a sustained improvement for the customer (e.g. if they received support with debt, are they still free from problem debt), whether the intervention improved the customer's wellbeing, and the customer's satisfaction with the service they received. The outcome of this work should be reported to the Council on an annual basis

3. Service Delivery

Commissioned services 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 & Employability
- Housing
- Immigration & nationality
- Mental health
- Welfare benefits & tax credits

Commissioned services will make onward referrals as appropriate where another organisation is deemed to be better able to meet the needs of the client. When making referrals, commissioned services should pass on sufficient details about the customer, so that the customer doesn't have to repeat their story. The customer's consent is required in order to do this.

Commissioned services 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.

The above information should be available on the commissioned services' websites and/or on the Advice Oxford website, and this information must be kept up to date.

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

A Partnership Approach:

Commissioned services 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. Commissioned services will also promote key Oxford City Council leaflets in their reception areas.

In situations where commissioned services 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.

Commissioned services 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 commissioned services undertake.

Commissioned services 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 commissioned services is requested at the Voluntary Sector Liaison Meetings, and City Council representatives will attend the Oxford Advice Forum where appropriate. The Council will also meet quarterly with commissioned services 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. Such issues should be raised at the earliest opportunity.

4. Standards

Commissioned services 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.

Commissioned services will ensure that staff are paid at least the level of the Oxford Living Wage. Services should take proactive steps to recruit staff and volunteers from a range of ethnic backgrounds.

Training needs will be identified at regular supervision and appraisal sessions and Commissioned services 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 Commissioned services on a frequent and regular basis.

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

Commissioned services 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 commissioned services 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.

Commissioned services will observe the principles of the Data Protection Act 2003, and General Data Protection Regulation (from 25 May 2018) in how they handle, process and share their clients' data.

Commissioned services will need to provide evidence that appropriate training has been given to frontline advisers on energy related topics including energy bills, switching meters, tariffs and energy providers, accessing energy related incentives such as Warm Homes Discount and the Priority Services register, and accessing grant funds to alleviate energy debt. This should also be included in the induction process for new advisers.

5. Monitoring Arrangements

Monitoring will be conducted on a half yearly basis. 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

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.

The monitoring information required will be reviewed by the Council in partnership with commissioned services, prior to the commencement of the new contracts from 1 April 2018. The review will ensure that all monitoring information provided is of use, and will facilitate ongoing development of services to provide the best outcomes possible for customers.

6. Development of services

The Council is making funding available to develop commissioned services in line with recommendations of the review of advice services, referenced above. To fund this, 5% of the core grant provided to services will be allocated to a development fund. An additional £20,000 will be contributed by the Council on an annual basis, to create a development fund of £44,918 for each year of the contract. This will be available for commissioned services to bid for to undertake work in the following areas:

- Work to reduce visits which are not of value to the customer
- Improving the outcomes obtained in the following areas:
 - Removing barriers to employment
 - Improving digital skills
 - Reducing fuel poverty
- Improving access to advice services for areas of the city without local provision
- Developing digital advice services

Officers will develop a short application form to be used for bidding for this funding, and applications will need to be made in partnership by commissioned services.

7. Bidding requirements and annual review

Bidding Process

Commissioned services are required to state how they will achieve the outcomes outlined in Section 2 above, how they will deliver the service in accordance with Sections 3 and 4 above, and what steps are being taken to deliver value for money: reduce their cost base, and work in partnership with other providers.

Commissioned services 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

SCHEDULE TWO

(Insert name or funded organisation) Payment and Monitoring Schedule

Oxford City Council has awarded grant funding to (Insert name of funded organisation) to enable the organisation to carry out the activities as detailed in the Service Specification (Schedule 1).

The funding the period in which grant assistance has been approved is for each financial year from 2018/19 until 2020/21.

Annual Grant Assistance Payment £(Insert amount of funding)

Payment & Monitoring Schedule

Date	Payment	Conditions of payment
April 2018	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receipt of signed funding agreement • Provide a breakdown of your organisations funding for the coming year, from all sources, and its purpose • Provide a copy of staffing structure (including numbers of paid staff in each capacity) at the commencement of this agreement.
October 2018	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring information completed and returned. • Provide a copy of your signed annual accounts for financial year 2017/18..
April 2019	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring information completed and returned. • Provide a breakdown of your organisations funding for the coming year, from all sources, and its purpose • Provide a copy of staffing structure (including numbers of paid staff in each capacity) at the commencement of this agreement.
October 2019	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a copy of your signed annual accounts for financial year 2018/19 • Monitoring information completed and returned.
April 2020	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring information completed and returned. • Provide a breakdown of your organisations funding for the coming year, from all sources, and its purpose • Provide a copy of staffing structure (including numbers of paid staff in each capacity) at the commencement of this agreement.
October 2020	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a copy of your signed annual accounts for financial year 2019/20 • Monitoring information completed and returned.
April 2021	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring information completed and

		returned..
October 2021	£XXX	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide a copy of your signed annual accounts for financial year 2020/21