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Meeting	Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny
Date	14 January 2014
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Community Advice Service Contract</b>
Report of	Cabinet Member for Adults
Summary of Report	This report provides an update on the provision of the Community Advice Service contract

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Officer Contributors	Mathew Kendall, Assistant Director, Community and Wellbeing Gary Johnson, Customer Finance Manager, Adults and Communities
Status (public or exempt)	Public
Wards Affected	All
Key Decision	Not applicable
Reason for urgency / exemption from call-in	Not applicable
Function of	Safeguarding and Overview Scrutiny Committee
Enclosures	None
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## **1. RECOMMENDATION**

- 1.1 That the Committee note the report and make comments and recommendations as appropriate.

## **2. RELEVANT PREVIOUS DECISIONS**

- 2.1 Cabinet Resources Committee, 30 July 2009 (Decision item 7) – authorisation of the procurement of a Community Advice Service.
- 2.2 Cabinet Resources Committee, 28 March 2011 – authorisation to provide £239,000 of grant funding to Barnet Citizens Advice Bureau and Barnet Law Service combined to subsidise provision of services from 1 April to 30 September 2011.
- 2.3 Leader of the Council, Delegated Powers (DPR) decision 27 October 2011 - the award of three-year contract for Community Advice Services to Barnet Citizens Advice Bureau.
- 2.4 Leader of the Council, Delegated Powers (DPR) decision 23 December 2011 - the extension of funding for another one month to enable commencement of three year contract with effect from February 2012.
- 2.5 Cabinet Resources Committee, 4 November 2013 - decision to extend Community Advice Service contract until March 2015.

## **3. CORPORATE PRIORITIES AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 The Council's corporate plan focuses on 3 priority areas:
  1. Promote responsible growth, development and success across the borough.
  2. Support families and individuals that need it promoting independence, learning and well-being.
  3. Improve the satisfaction of residents and businesses with the London Borough of Barnet as a place to live, work and study.
- 3.2 The Community Advice Service contract supports delivery in relation to these priority areas through providing an open access information and advice service for all Barnet residents, enabling them to find support and advice as appropriate.

## **4. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES**

- 4.1 The Community Advice Service contract secures the provision of social welfare advice for residents in the borough. It specifically provides advice to those most in need and targets support to those who most need it. The terms of the contract set out responsibilities to deliver a high quality Community Advice Service in the borough. It provides for protection and remedies in the event of failure to achieve core service objectives as set out in the contract.
- 4.2 The Community Advice Service contract mitigates risk relating to the effects of welfare reform and the need for social welfare advice for vulnerable residents

and those most in need of advice in the borough. Without the contract these residents would not be able to access advice and information about social welfare issues

## **5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

5.1 Pursuant to the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a legislative duty to have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in relation to the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy, and maternity, religion or belief and sexual orientation.

5.2 In addition to the Terms of Reference of the Committee, and in so far as relating to matters within its remit, the role of the Committee is to perform the Overview and Scrutiny role in relation to:

- The Council's leadership role in relation to diversity and inclusiveness; and
- The fulfilment of the Council's duties as employer including recruitment and retention, personnel, pensions and payroll services, staff development, equalities and health and safety.

5.3 The Community Advice Service contract provides that advice services for clients with special needs will be integral to service delivery. The Community Advice Service prioritises those clients with special needs and this is reflected in the contract and in the 'day to day' operational delivery of the Service.

## **6. USE OF RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS (Finance, Procurement, Performance & Value for Money, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)**

6.1 The contract to provide the Community Advice Service was awarded to Barnet Citizens Advice Bureau (BCAB) with effect from February 2012 for a three-year period, extended to March 2015. The total value of the Community Advice service contract over the period from February 2012 to March 2015 is £1,218,337.18. A year 1 payment of £446,030.12, followed by subsequent staged payments of £385,540.35 in year 2 and £386,766.71 in year 3 to March 2015.

6.2 Payments are made quarterly and linked to performance targets as set out in the performance agreement. The contract is structured to provide for a payment reduction in year 2 and 3, dependent upon changes in work practices leading to an increase in performance. These changes included the setting up of the triage Gateway Assessment through a number of access points to increase advice availability with the aim of early diagnosis of advice problems.

## **7. LEGAL ISSUES**

7.1 Local authorities have general duties to safeguard vulnerable adults and under the Children Acts 1989 and 2004, they have duties to safeguard children. The Government has issued statutory Guidance 'No Secrets' which requires local authorities to have in place appropriate policies, procedures and practices to be implemented locally and in collaboration with all agencies involved in the public, voluntary and private sectors and they should also consult service users, their carers and representative groups.

## **8. CONSTITUTIONAL POWERS (Relevant section from the Constitution, Key/Non-Key Decision)**

8.1 The scope of Overview and Scrutiny committees is contained within Part 2, Article 6 of the Constitution.

8.2 The Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees are in the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4 of the Constitution).

8.3 The Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee has within its terms of reference responsibility:

“To scrutinise the provision of Adult Social Care services (including those who have physical disabilities, sensory impairment, learning disabilities, mental health needs or other special needs) to ensure that residents are safeguarded and supported to lead as independent lives as possible in their own homes.”

## **9. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

9.1 The Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested a report on the provisions of the Community Advice Service contract. The primary aim of the Community Advice Service is to support people to be independent as possible by enabling them to deal with their own civil, legal, financial and welfare problems at the first point of contact. Those clients with special needs or who are vulnerable are referred for more in-depth advice and specialist support to resolve problems.

### **9.2 Service objectives**

9.2.1 The overall objective of the Community Advice Service is to support people to be as independent as possible by enabling them to deal with their civil, legal, financial and other related areas of law by providing high quality advice and advising people about their rights and as well as their responsibilities.

9.2.2 To achieve its overall objective, the Community Advice Service provides preventative advice at the first point of contact with the Service through an initial triage assessment of needs. Following this initial assessment, clients are either provided with appropriate advice and information to help themselves or referred for further advice. In addition to preventative advice, the Service seeks to provide and work with other services to provide community coaching, for example, financial capability training to improve personal management of finances.

### **9.3 Community Advice Service Contract**

9.3.1 The key elements of the contract in relation to service provision are that it: provides high quality advice; is free, independent and impartial; promotes self-help and is accessible through multiple access points. These access points include: telephone helplines; email; ‘drop in’ advice sessions; referrals from frontline services; training and community coaching. The Advice Service proactively targets advice to those most in need and the vulnerable.

9.3.2 The Community Advice Service has a clear focus on the provision of welfare benefits and debt advice. Welfare benefits advice can include an initial

diagnosis of a client's benefit problem through to advocacy to act on behalf of a client. Tribunal representation is undertaken by second tier or partner agencies. Money advice ranges from advice on basic money management skills through to negotiation with creditors.

- 9.3.3 There is also a second tier advice service to support frontline services to assist their clients with specialist welfare benefits and debt advice.

#### **9.4 Delivery of the Community Advice Service**

9.4.1 The Community Advice Service is primarily provided through Barnet Citizens Advice Bureau (BCAB). BCAB has a long history of providing advice in the borough. There are around 70 volunteers along with 28 paid staff, full and part-time, who provide advice on a whole range of subject areas, most commonly welfare benefits, debt, housing and employment advice. There are two bureaux located in the borough, one at New Barnet and the newly refurbished 'hub office' in Hendon.

9.4.2 The focus of the Community Advice Service is to provide preventative advice at an early stage with a diagnosis of a client's problem through the Gateway Assessment. Clients receive an initial triage assessment and are referred as appropriate to other agencies for more specialist advice. The emphasis is, where possible, to empower clients to resolve their own problems through information and self-help. Specialist advice and casework is targeted to those clients who are unable to resolve their own problems or have complex advice queries. There are a number of access routes to obtain a Gateway Assessment, of these, 2539 (43%) access the service by telephone; 3148 (52%) through face-to-face interviews at local bureaux and 283 (5%) through email (from February to September 2013).

#### **9.4.3 Case Study 1<sup>1</sup>**

*The client contacted the Helpline for advice on an employment dispute with her employer regarding a compensation claim for discrimination on the grounds of gender. She was assessed by BCAB Gateway Assessors. An appointment was arranged with an Employment Specialist. The client then called back to inform BCAB that following another meeting with her employer, she had negotiated a one off payment in settlement, but who, unfortunately, retracted on this verbal offer soon after. She wanted to know what her rights were.*

*Due to the complex nature of her query and the impending Employment Tribunal deadline for bringing a claim, she was signposted to specialist employment solicitors to assist her with her dispute. She was also given the contact details for the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS). As a result of BCAB's ability to link the client with the most appropriate source of legal help for her needs the client was able to negotiate a voluntary redundancy payment of £28,000 in lieu of a possible discrimination claim.*

9.4.4 During the first 8 months (from February to September 2013) of year 2 of the contract, there were 5970 Gateway Assessments with 4163 (70%) people resolving their problem at the first point of contact. 30% of clients were

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<sup>1</sup> Source Barnet CAB Annual Report 2011/12

referred for further generalist or specialist advice. This would indicate that the initial triage assessment is effective, without the necessity of further intervention from an adviser. This has ensured that resources are being more effectively targeted at vulnerable clients and people in need. The disruption caused by the refurbishment of the Hendon 'hub' office has affected the volume of queries.

Advice	Year 2 Targets	Achieved up to month 8	% of annual figure achieved
Triage – Gateway Assessment	8500	5970	70%
Referred Generalist (CAB)	3000	1398	47%
Referral Specialist advice	159	141	89%
Referral to other agencies	N/A	268	N/A

9.4.5 Under the umbrella of the contract, second tier specialist advice is delivered through Barnet Law Service (BLS). The Law Service provides more specialist advice and support in the areas of: welfare benefits advice and representation; immigration and nationality advice; employment advice and representation. BCAB sub contract to BLS the provision of second tier advice and support to local voluntary sector organisations and front line services in the public sector. Through the initial Gateway Assessment, there is an initial diagnosis of the client's problem and dependent upon the urgency, complexity and vulnerability of the client, a referral can be made to BLS. For example, a client with mental health problems who has rent and council tax arrears, facing eviction and/or bailiffs would be referred to BLS.

#### 9.4.6 Case Study 2<sup>2</sup>

*The client lives with her husband, two young children and elderly disabled mother in a privately rented 2-bedroomed house. Her husband works full time for a low wage, and she cares for her mother and children. Although in receipt of Tax Credits, Child Benefit and some Housing Benefit, the client was struggling financially, in particular because a non-dependent deduction was made from the Housing Benefit in respect of the client's mother. This meant that the client was not able to save enough money for a deposit on more suitable accommodation. The client was advised that if her mother were in receipt of Pension Credit guarantee, then no non-dependent deduction would be made in respect of her. Furthermore, if her mother qualified for Attendance Allowance, the client could also claim Carer's Allowance. The client made these claims and is now able to begin putting a little money aside each month towards a deposit for more suitable accommodation, which will have a positive impact on the well-being of her family, and her children in particular, in the long term.*

### 9.5. Welfare Benefits Advice

9.5.1 BCAB continues to receive a high volume of enquiries about welfare benefits, currently at 35% of all enquiries (compared with 34% for 2011/12). This

<sup>2</sup> Source Barnet CAB Annual Report 2011/12

reflects, in part, the increased number of people affected by benefit changes introduced by Welfare Reform. The areas of Welfare Reform changes impacting on BCAB includes: changes to medical assessments for employment support allowance; the benefits cap; housing benefit under-occupancy rules and changes in council tax support. The Service advises local residents with 'one off' welfare benefit queries and provides more in-depth advice and support to safeguard more vulnerable residents affected by Welfare Reform.

## **9.6 Money and Housing Advice**

9.6.1 The second highest level of queries relates to money advice at 16% of the total. BCAB has reported an increase in the number of queries relating to Council Tax arrears following the introduction of the Local Council Tax Support scheme in January 2013. BCAB have a specialist Money Advice Project that provides debt advice. The Project is funded by Capitalise, which is in turn funded by the Money Advice Service. The Project seeks to provide debt advice whilst empowering clients to resolve problems themselves. BCAB also provides personal budgeting workshops to residents, with the emphasis on people being enabled and empowered to resolve their own financial problems. To safeguard more vulnerable residents, pro-active advice and assistance is provided to protect those who need more help or those faced with imminent legal action.

9.6.2 The third highest volume of queries, at 12%, relates to the provision of housing advice. The provision of housing advice by the Community Advice Service is not specifically included within the terms of the contract, however housing advice is provided as part of an holistic assessment of needs. Housing advice is also provided by Barnet Homes and Broadway.

## **9.7. Macmillan Welfare Benefits Project**

9.7.1 In addition to the core services delivered through the Community Advice Service contract, BCAB has secured four year funding from Macmillan Cancer Support to provide welfare benefits advice to people affected by cancer. The Macmillan Welfare Benefits Project provides advice across three London boroughs: Enfield, Haringey and Barnet. During 2012/13, the Macmillan Welfare Benefits Project provided advice and support to 566 new clients.

### **9.7.2 Case Study 3<sup>3</sup>**

*A homeless man was admitted to hospital suffering from cancer. He had no clothes and was finding it very difficult to stay in hospital, having lived on the streets for the last 7 years. He had lost his Post Office card which was the only way of accessing cash and was having to spend all his time dressed in hospital clothing.*

*A Macmillan welfare benefits adviser contacted the Post Office on his behalf and arranged for a new card to be issued to him which provided him with some cash. An application for a Macmillan grant to help buy some clothing was made. We also suggested that we obtain a grant for a small portable radio which would help him manage his hospital stay; he was very happy with this*

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<sup>3</sup> Source Barnet CAB, Macmillan Welfare Benefits Project Annual Report 2012/13

*suggestion and Macmillan provided a grant for the radio which was a real boost for him.*

## **9.8. Welfare Reform**

9.8.1 BCAB is a member of Barnet Council's Welfare Reform Steering Board. This is the partnership board responsible for making every appropriate effort to ensure welfare reforms are implemented effectively in the borough – including seeking to ensure that benefit reductions are accurate and timely and that those affected understand the changes affecting them and their options to respond; and are supported to act on these where appropriate. The Board provide strategic direction and oversight on policy development and action to maximise positive outcomes for those impacted, thereby minimising the numbers unable to sustain their tenancies and thereby risk homelessness.

9.8.2 As a board member, BCAB are collectively accountable for delivering the welfare reform project and supporting policies and programmes in the borough. In practical terms, BCAB have fed back their local experience of trends in queries and issues, as well as information they gather from national CAB activities. This includes learning from pilots and horizon scanning on disability benefit reforms where the local authority does not have local intelligence.

## **9.9. Healthwatch Barnet**

9.9.1 BCAB is part of the consortium, led by Community Barnet, to deliver Healthwatch. BCAB, through its access routes, provides advice and information about social and health care services.

## **9.10 Community Advice Service Safeguarding policies**

9.10.1 BCAB has an Adult and Child Protection Policy with clear reporting processes where there are incidents of adult or child abuse. These policies have been reviewed under the terms of the Community Advice Service contract.

9.10.2 When commissioning services, safeguarding issues are regularly reviewed through the Community Advice Service contract monitoring arrangements. Under the monitoring arrangements, a risk assessment is undertaken every 6 months by the Chief Executive of BCAB. The purpose of the risk assessment is to ensure that BCAB has robust processes and policies in place to safeguard vulnerable adults and children.

## **9.11 Community Advice Service Quality Assurance**

9.12 BCAB is externally audited every three years by its parent organisation, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureau. It can be reported that BCAB provides a high quality service. In its last Quality of Advice Audit, it scored 82%, ensuring that it ranked within the top 15% of CABX in England and Wales. The audit of advice provided by the Gateway Assessment scored 85%. In addition to external audits, there are quarterly contract monitoring meetings between Barnet Council, BCAB and BLS. The contract is monitored on: performance against targets; identified safeguarding issues and risk management issues.



- 9.13 In addition to external audits, quality assurance is provided through client satisfaction surveys. BCAB reports high satisfaction levels, which would indicate that it is meeting the needs of those who obtain advice:

Client satisfaction levels<sup>4</sup>:

Question	Happy or Very Happy %	Unhappy or Very Unhappy %	No Answer %
Satisfaction with overall service	98	2	0
Better understanding after advice	97	2	1
Location of bureaux	97	3	0
Openings hrs	97	3	0
Waiting time	99	0	1
Time with adviser	100	0	0

## 10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

*Barnet CAB Annual Report 2011/12*

[www.barnetcab.org.uk/images/banners/BCABAnnualReport2011\\_12.pdf](http://www.barnetcab.org.uk/images/banners/BCABAnnualReport2011_12.pdf)

*Macmillan Welfare Benefits Project Annual Report 2012/13*

<b>Cleared by Finance (Officer's initials)</b>	JH
<b>Cleared by Legal (Officer's initials)</b>	LC

<sup>4</sup> Source Barnet CAB Annual Report 2011/12