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DRAFT

Background to the contracts

The current Southwark Community Legal Advice contracts started in August 2013, to provide free and independent advice to Southwark residents with the strategic aims of:

- Providing a safety net to vulnerable residents
- Improve resilience, and reduce and prevent the effects of social, financial and digital exclusion
- Enabling access to justice

The contracts were as follows:

Service area	Provider
Generalist Advice – West of borough	Advising Communities
Advice in Community Languages – Borough wide	Advising Communities
Generalist Advice – East of borough & Leaseholder advice	Citizens Advice Southwark
Specialist level legal advice services – borough wide	Southwark Law Centre, subcontracting with Cambridge House Law Centre and Migrant Legal Action

In the first year of the contracts their value was £1,295,137. In 2019-20 the value is £1,100,980. A 15% budget reduction was applied in 2016.

The initial contract period was for 3 years. The contracts and they are now due to end in March 2020. The rationale for the extensions has been to allow for other strategic developments including welfare reform, the early roll out of Universal Credit from 2016 in Southwark, and

the increasing move to online services.

Advising Communities closed in May 2019 as a result of insolvency. The services they provided were transferred to Citizens Advice Southwark for the remainder of the contract period.

The Citizens Advice Southwark contract includes the provision of a specific advice service for council leaseholders across the whole borough. From 2016 the Southwark Homeowners Council provided an additional £40,000 per annum to increase the capacity of the service. In 2019-20 this was increased to £60,000 per annum.

Service quality

Citizens Advice Southwark are audited by national Citizens Advice's via their performance & quality framework and by the Advice Quality Standard framework: advice with casework. They also hold Office for the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC) accreditation.

Southwark Law Centre are audited by Lexcel & also accredited with OISC – level 3.

As part of contract monitoring, council commissioners monitor the organisations' governance and financial health. Commissioners carry out an annual monitoring visit and request copies of governance and financial documents including board and AGM minutes, annual audited financial accounts and organisational policies which include equalities & diversity and safeguarding policies.

Generalist advice: Advising Communities to May 2019; Citizen Advice Southwark	Specialist legal advice: Southwark Law Centre – subcontracting with Cambridge House Law Centre and Migrant Legal Action
Triage and first stage general level legal advice, help and casework, referral to specialist level	Specialist level triage, information and advice and legal casework, advocacy and representation services and support to community organisations.
Welfare benefits and tax credits	Welfare benefits and tax credits
Debt & money advice	Not applicable
Housing & homelessness, including independent leaseholder advice service	Housing and homelessness – including disrepair, rent arrears, possession proceedings, evictions
Employment rights	Employment – including rights at work, discrimination, dismissal & redundancy
Utilities & communications	Immigration & asylum – including asylum claims and appeals, family reunion & citizenship.
Consumer goods and services	Other area of law not covered in other categories.
Other areas e.g. family & relationship rights	Second-tier advice to community organisations & support in diagnosing & taking forward complex casework up to and including representation

Strategic aims and outcomes

At the time the current contracts were commissioned in 2013 the council took a partnership approach to commissioning. The providers are required to provide access to services that are:

- Free, independent and non-judgmental
- Provide information, advice and casework services according to need, quickly and easily
- Quality standards assured
- Preventative and able to tackle complex, multiple problems at an early stage to avoid escalation and reduce litigation
- Available online and support digital inclusion
- Joined up with effective referrals between providers
- Empowering informed choice, self-help and facilitate access to appropriate support
- Providing assistance and support relating to welfare reform impacts

The 3 providers were required to take a collaborative approach through [Southwark Legal Advice Network](#) (SLAN). The network is convened by Citizens Advice Southwark, and includes Southwark Law Centre, other local advice providers and the council. The SLAN strategy, last updated for 2017-20, sets out overarching objectives for the advice sector in Southwark, including meeting client needs, improving access, sustaining a diversity of services, strengthening communities and addressing emerging needs.

To provide a seamless service, the two generalist providers were required to provide open access face to face services covering the west and eastern sides of the borough respectively. Email advice was provided by Advising Communities and advice by telephone – via a single dedicated telephone number - was provided by Citizens Advice Southwark. Citizens Advice Southwark established the [SLAN website](#) which sets out the 4 access channels on the home page: face to face, email and telephone advice and the option to search online resources.

Voluntary sector strategy 2016-22

In 2016 [Common Purpose Common Cause](#) voluntary and community sector (VCS) strategy for the borough was published. This is a tripartite strategy agreed by the council, Southwark Clinical Commissioning Group and the local VCS.

The strategy sets out a vision of a sustainable, confident and resourceful VCS that can work alongside the public and private sector to deliver the best outcomes for Southwark residents.

The strategy sets out a key priority of improving commissioning to focus on outcomes for Southwark

residents. In line with these principles of outcome-based commissioning, the council agreed a new [Common Outcomes Framework](#) to be used by all council commissioning departments. The framework sets out a broad set of outcomes that the council want to achieve for residents and how they will be measured.

The outcome themes are in line with the aims of the [Council Plan 2018-22](#) and commitment to a [Fairer Future](#) for all residents. These are:

- Safer communities
- Healthier communities
- Engaged communities
- Greener communities
- Vibrant communities

The Community Legal Advice Services align with the following outcomes from the Framework:

- Safer communities: Residents have an improved understanding of their rights and responsibilities
- Safer communities: Residents feel more able to access services at an early point and in times of crisis
- Healthier communities: Residents are supported to resolve their problems to improve their independence, health and wellbeing
- Engaged communities: Residents have increased opportunities and support to volunteer
- Engaged communities: Residents have the skills and confidence to increase their use of online services and there is less digital exclusion
- Engaged communities: Residents are supported to maximise their income and manage their money better.

These services support the council to meet its [equalities obligations](#) under the Public Sector Equalities Duty by commissioning independent, resident-responsive services that help clarify eligibility and entitlement. Service monitoring data shows that residents who are covered by a number of the Equalities Act protected characteristics are accessing these services more. The services are contributing to the VCS strategy objective of sustaining and building strong, cohesive communities where no one group or community is left behind.

Added value of the contracts

Beyond the core services funded by the council, the contract funding enables providers to bring additional investment into Southwark that delivers outcomes for local communities.

Added value through partnership working

- Southwark Advice Forum – convened by Citizens Advice Southwark, this is open to all front line advice workers in the borough to receive training and share information and learning on legislation which may be changing frequently in areas such as housing, Universal Credit and other welfare reforms, and immigration.
- Advice & information roadshows – quarterly events organised by Citizens Advice Southwark with the council in outreach venues across the borough, aimed at residents having problems with benefits. As well as advisors from the two main providers, other agencies attend including the council’s Council Tax, Rental Income, Local Support and Housing Options teams, and smaller VCS groups working to alleviate poverty including food and fuel poverty. Invitations are issued by the council to all residents in the venue area identified as being in need and around 40 attend on average.
- Universal Credit Network: set up by Southwark Law Centre and Community Southwark – the council for voluntary services for the borough, it provides support and information to front line workers of smaller VCS organisations.
- Universal Credit strategic forum oversaw the United St Saviour’s-funded research into the impacts of the transition to Universal Credit on vulnerable residents and meets to share information on national and local policy developments, develop links between community organisations and statutory agencies working on Universal Credit and make recommendations on future initiatives.
- DWP liaison meetings - promote partnership working between the DWP and advice agencies with a focus on Universal Credit and welfare reform more broadly.
- Exchequer Services liaison meetings – partnership between the council’s Revenue & Benefits and the external advice providers.

Added value through additional funding

The long term nature of the contracts has given the advice providers a platform from which to lever in additional funding.

As well as legal aid contracts in areas such as housing, employment and immigration, funding has been secured from charitable trusts and foundations such as Trust for London and City Bridge Trust.

Southwark contract amounts as a proportion of total income			
	2012-13	2017-18	Next biggest sources of funding 2017-18
Advising Communities	37%	30%	Money Advice Service / Toynbee Hall 20% Big Lottery 12%
Citizens Advice Southwark	39%	22%	Money Advice Service / Toynbee Hall 15% Big Lottery 13%
Southwark Law Centre	31%	22%	Legal aid contracts 41% Big Lottery 7%

This additional funding enables the providers to provide specific additional services, for example:

- Citizens Advice Southwark’s hospital-based advice for people with cancer.
- Citizens Advice Southwark’s advice on saving energy and help with switching energy providers.
- Southwark Law Centre’s support to very vulnerable child migrants

Added value: volunteering

Citizens Advice Southwark have approximately 80 volunteers working with them who are supervised by paid staff. They estimate that in 2017-18 volunteers provided 37,000 hours of unpaid work with an estimated value of £636,000. Volunteers undertake 6 month’s training after which they can work as Gateway Assessors, ‘triaging’ a client’s problem and working out how Citizens Advice can help.

Southwark Law Centre also has a volunteering scheme which provides volunteers with a wide range of transferable skills, through helping with centre administration.

Other advice services in the borough

The community legal advice services are part of a wider landscape of information, advice, and guidance services provided by internal council teams and other voluntary sector providers.

Internal council advice services

As well as externally commissioned services the council provides income maximisation and financial inclusion services to Southwark residents. These are provided by the following teams:

- Local Support Team – whose aim is to ensure that residents receive maximum benefit entitlement. They receive referrals from external agencies
- Financial Inclusion Team – which manage discretionary housing payments as well as the rent arrears fund
- [Sustain team](#) – which assists tenants who are identified as vulnerable and need additional help to sustain their tenancy. They also help them obtain necessary 'white goods'. They take referrals from external agencies.

These services are closely linked to collection of council charges – rent, council tax and leaseholder charges.

In 2018 an externally commissioned mapping and review of these services was carried out with a view to streamlining the services, avoiding duplication and achieving better outcomes for customers. The review concluded that closer links between rent income, client affairs, Sustain, Local Support and Financial Inclusion teams to share knowledge/skills could reduce referrals and duplication and deliver better outcomes.

The Housing Options Service commissions a homelessness prevention service with the charity Shelter. The service is based in council offices and can be accessed via drop in, appointments, a dedicated telephone line and email. The service helps clients to understand their housing options and supports them with obtaining permanent accommodation; making homelessness applications and applications for emergency accommodation and dealing with rent arrears.

Older people's & disabilities hubs

In 2019 the council's Children's & Adults Services departments are procuring two new 'hubs' which will go live in May 2020. One hub will provide older people's services and the other, services for people with disabilities. Voluntary sector organisations have been invited to tender. This Hub model will equip the council to

manage its "front door" by assisting these vulnerable populations to access information, advice, navigation and facilitation support that will link with preventative community opportunities to support independence and wellbeing.

Common Purpose grants programme

In 2019-20 thirty local voluntary sector organisations are in receipt of grant funding via the council's Common Purpose programme. This programme is focussed on core funding for organisations that provide hub / anchor or community engagement roles with specific communities across the borough. One of the criteria is that organisations provide advice, information and signposting to appropriate services. Examples of organisations that provide advice include:

- Blackfriars Settlement who host a legal advice clinic with volunteers from City Law School
- Latin American Disabled Peoples' Project
- Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers provide advice and advocacy services
- Southwark Pensioners Centre who provide an advice service for people aged 50+.

These groups are part of SLAN and they and others also refer and signpost clients to the community legal advice services. There are many examples of partnerships with the community legal advice services, including Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers and Southwark Law Centre.

There are other groups in the borough not currently funded by the council who provide an advice service, such as Big Local Works.

London South Bank University provides a [drop in legal advice clinic](#) staffed by law students under the supervision of practising solicitors. It provides generalist advice in any social welfare law matter and specialist advice in family and housing law.

Evaluation aims and methods

Aims

The aims of this evaluation are to:

- Assess whether the collaborative approach to providing these services that was initiated in 2013 has been successful
- Identify whether the services are meeting the needs of service users and whether there are any unmet needs
- Assess the accessibility of these services to clients, who count among the most vulnerable residents of the borough
- Assess whether the services are contributing to the achievement of fairer future commitments

Methods

Data to inform this evaluation has been collected using the following methods:

- Review of data provided via quarterly contract monitoring reports on
 - Outcomes for clients
 - Client needs, issues and demographics
- Stakeholder survey (online) July to August 2019
- Client survey (paper and online) August to September 2019.

Internal discussions with council departments who provide information advice and guidance services and / or who refer clients to the advices services including

- Client Services
- Customer Experience
- Housing Solutions
- Older People's Services
- No Recourse to Public Funds
- Local Economy

Findings: monitoring data and case studies

Please note these figures on client profile and outcomes below relate to the Southwark Council contracts only.

The total number of unique clients seen by all the 3 providers in 2018-19 was **15,089**. The total client figure from the monitoring reports for the first complete financial year of the current contracts is **26,746**. However, at the time there was an issue with double-counting of some clients who attended more than once. Data collection systems have since been amended to ensure only unique clients are counted. It is more accurate to say that **26,746** instances of advice were provided in 2014-15. In 2018-19 **28,865** instances of advice were provided.

Client profile

Gender: there is a long term pattern of more female clients than male clients, although the gap appears to be reducing. In 2018-19 56% of clients were female and 44% were male.

Disability: In 2018-19 37% of clients had a disability (self defined). Numbers of clients declaring a disability has increased significantly in recent years and includes those with mental health conditions. Services report that clients are increasingly willing to state that they have a mental health condition.

Age of clients: in 2018-19

- 11% of clients were aged 17-25
- 42% of clients were aged 26-49
- 36% of clients were aged 50-64
- 11% of clients were aged over 65

The majority of clients are working age. Other, specific advice services are available in the borough for older people, including Southwark Pensioners Centre, Age UK Lewisham & Southwark and Local Support Team.

Chart 1 opposite shows the ethnicities of clients as a proportion of total clients in 2018-19.

Black African clients consistently represent the highest proportion of clients in terms of ethnicity and are increasing as a proportion of all clients. White Other clients include the significant and growing number of Latin American people resident in the borough.

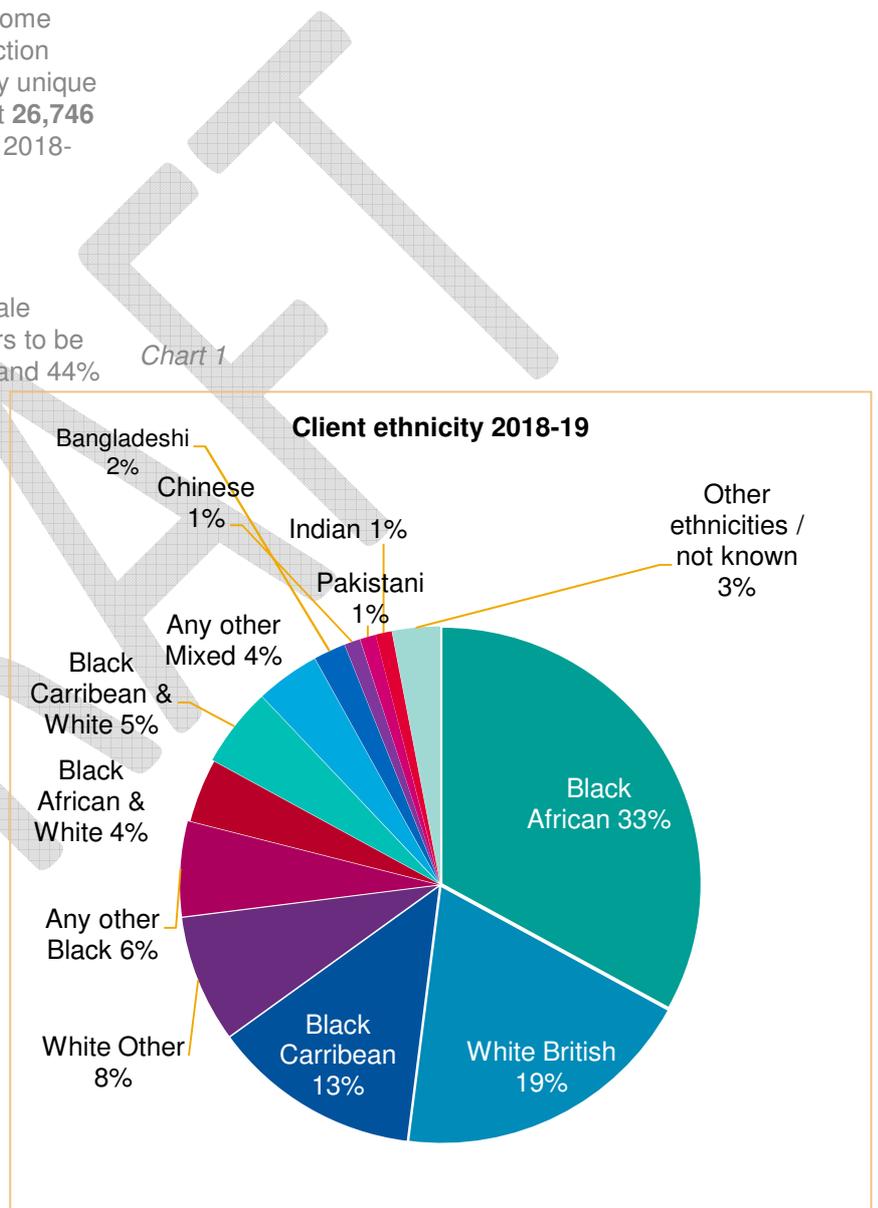


Chart 2 below shows proportions of clients by housing tenure. Over recent years the proportion of social tenants has been increasing and the proportions of private sector tenants has been falling.

Chart 2

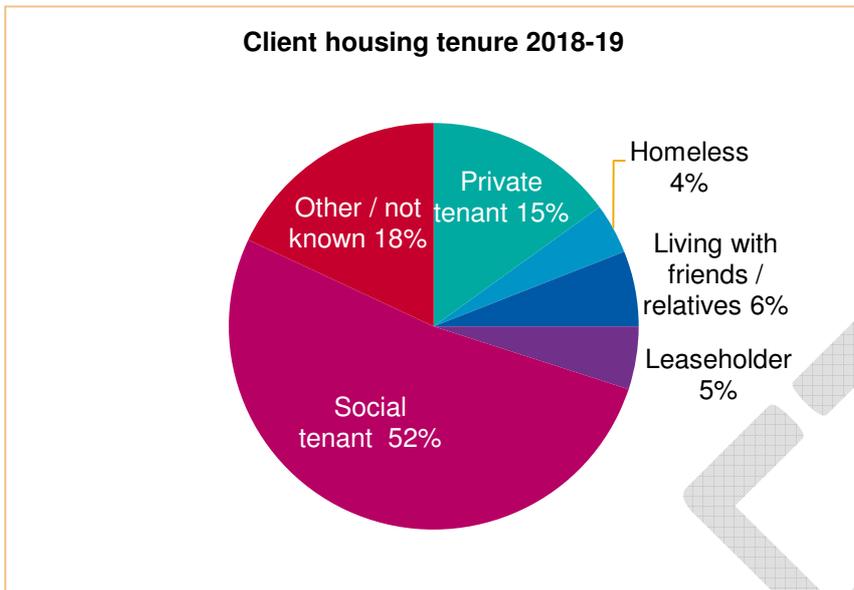
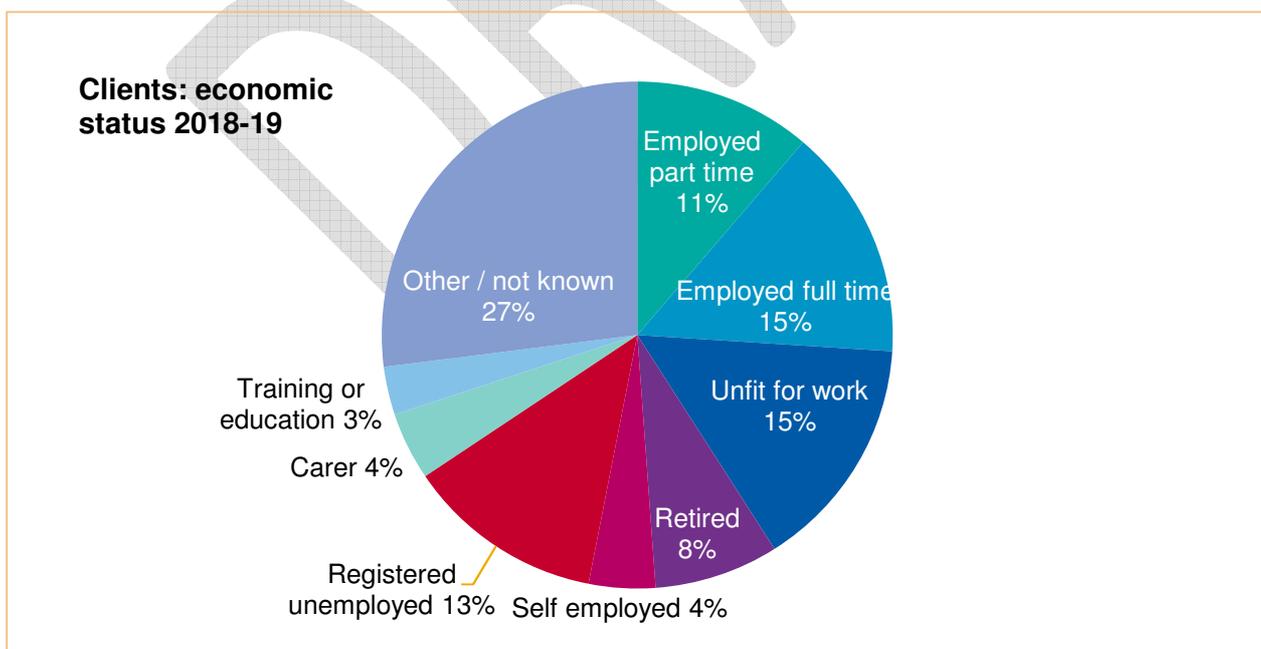


Chart 3 shows the economic status of clients as a proportion of all clients. In recent years there have been falls in the proportion of those unemployed and an increase in those unfit for work.

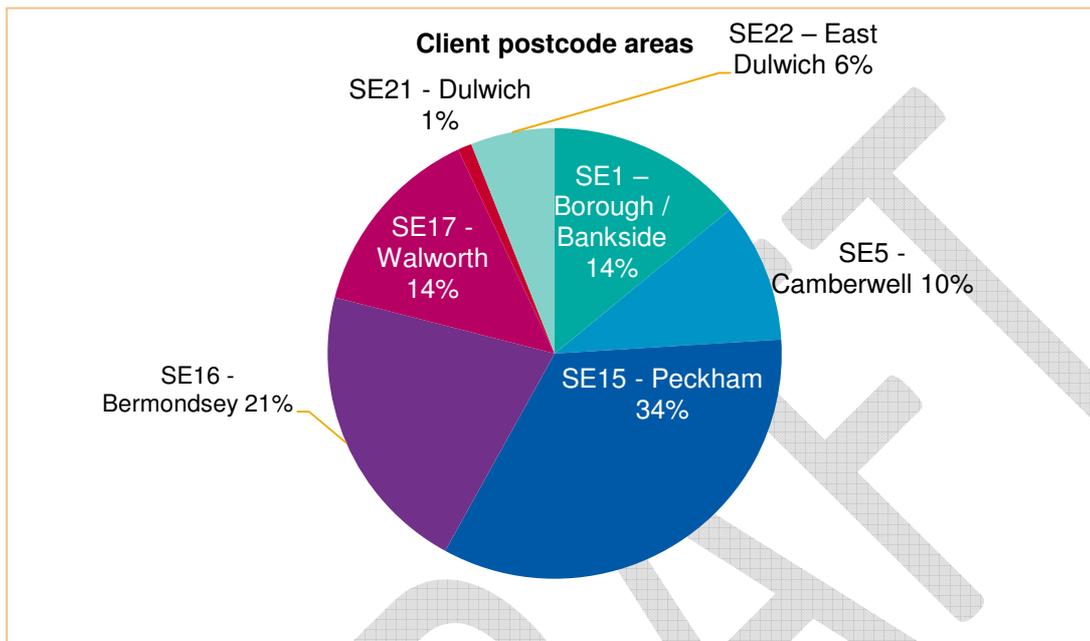
Chart 3



indicates that the advice services clients may include some of the most vulnerable residents of the borough.

Chart 4 shows the pattern of postcodes where clients live. This clearly follows the pattern of areas of higher and lower deprivation in the borough, with the highest proportion of clients from Peckham which has some of the highest levels of deprivation and smallest proportion of clients from Dulwich, which has the lowest levels of deprivation.

Chart 4



Language needs

The table below sets out the top 10 languages spoken by clients of the Advice in Community Languages service, where an interpreter or translator was needed:

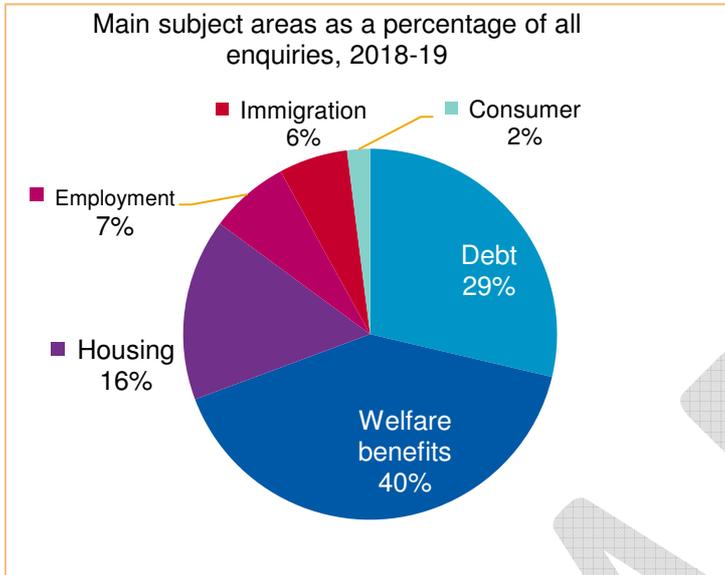
Language	Number of clients 2018-19
Spanish	261
Turkish	39
Somali	19
Portuguese	11
Tigrigna	10
Arabic	8
Farsi	4
Polish	3

The demographic data shows that high proportions of advice services clients fall into several of the Equality Act protected characteristics. Together with the data on housing tenure, economic status and postcode data, this

Client needs

Chart 5 shows each main subject area of enquiry as a percentage of all enquiries – showing that welfare benefits are significantly the highest area:

Chart 5



Changing advice needs

Welfare benefits is consistently the biggest subject area of enquiry across the 3 providers. The rollout of Universal Credit continues to have a significant negative impact on residents. The Safe as Houses research commissioned by Exchequer Services in 2017 revealed an immediate negative impact on 60% of claimants, who have fallen into rent arrears. Some claimants are able to improve their situation after approximately 3 months but many continue to accumulate arrears and may be at increased risk of eviction and homelessness. As at August 2018 Council Tenants transitioning to Universal Credit has resulted in an additional £2.4 Million in rent arrears. Many struggle to cope with claiming on line and then managing their claim. There is often confusion about the housing element of the claims. The services are helping residents understand the changes and providing advice and support including help with claiming on-line, and help with challenging negative decisions.

The move to Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is also having a significant impact often on very vulnerable people with a high number of decisions being overturned on appeal. The advice providers are supporting claimants to challenge negative decisions which they would not have the capacity to do without support. 69% of appeals made to the DWP are successful which tells us that nearly 7 out of 10 claims are incorrect. In 2019, for around 40% of claimants nationally, the main disabling condition is a mental health condition. As at November

2018, 8,000 Southwark residents were yet to be migrated to PIPs. Residents also continue to be affected by other welfare reforms including the benefit cap and the 'Bedroom Tax.'

Debt

The 5 week delay before receiving the first Universal Credit payment (which may take as long as 13 weeks) is causing significant numbers of claimants to go into rent arrears. Debt may also arise as a result of precarious or fluctuating income including zero hours contracts, council tax changes; difficulties with managing Universal Credit as a monthly rather than weekly payment, and fuel poverty, and many clients end up resorting to doorstep lenders. This is leading to severe hardship and an increase in foodbank use. The Mayor's Survey of Londoners 2019 found that one quarter of Londoners who owe money find it to be a heavy burden and this is strongly linked to deprivation.

Housing

Rates of homelessness in the borough are high and growing. Average private sector rents have increased significantly while the Local Housing Allowance has been frozen. The numbers of families in temporary accommodation increased by two thirds from 2010 to 2016 (Review of Homelessness in Southwark, 2017). As people struggle to pay market rents in the private sector many are living in overcrowded conditions or properties that are in a state of disrepair. The providers provide support and representation in cases involving homelessness, possession, eviction and disrepair. Homelessness acceptances currently cost the council around £8,000 per case; the cost of preventing homelessness is around £1,000 per case.

Immigration

Providers report that demand for high quality advice in this area is high and has been exacerbated by the Windrush Scandal and uncertainty around Brexit. There are continuing issues with long delays with Home Office decisions and documents; these delays prevent integration and improved quality of life.

Other / multiple needs

- The providers consistently report that clients typically attend the services for advice about one issue but it soon becomes apparent they are experiencing a number of interconnected problems. The providers therefore aim to help clients address their problems in an holistic way, including support with digital access.
- Providers are also consistently reporting high levels of stress and anxiety among clients and have noted an increased willingness to report mental health problems, and the impact of people in receipt of

Disability Living Allowance being reassessed for PIP.

- Providers have reported increasing levels of vulnerability among clients, particularly men over 50 who have worked in manual trades and lack digital skills.

Client outcomes

Client outcome data is provided via the quarterly monitoring reports and can be summarised in the 4 following key performance indicators:

- Financial gain: benefits income and compensation raised
- Financial gain: debt rescheduled
- Housing possession avoided
- Immigration outcomes

Headline KPI data from 2018-19 is set out in the table below:

Indicator	2018-19
Financial gain: benefits income and compensation raised	£2,371,388
Financial gain: debt rescheduled	£1,971,368
Housing possession avoided (number of cases)	252
Immigration outcomes (number of cases)	498

The KPI data is broken down further in the tables below:

Financial gain: welfare benefits	2018-19 Amount
Universal Credit / housing & council tax benefit	£472,084
Disability & incapacity for work	£1,154,101
Child benefit / tax credits	£220,989
Other means tested benefits	£43,386
Other welfare benefits	£93,396
TOTAL	£1,983,158

Council tax outcomes	Number of cases
Council tax enforcement avoided	25

Financial gain: compensation raised	2018-19 amount	No. of clients
Compensation for disrepair or illegal eviction	£165,992	23
Employment tribunals – compensation	£106,800	8
Employment compensation - negotiated settlements	£108,539	8
Consumer compensation	£5,997	Not known
TOTAL	£387,329	39

Financial gain: debt rescheduled	2018-19	No. of clients
Benefit Overpayment	£234,459	64
Rent arrears	£406,535	145
Mortgage Arrears	£4,706	4
Council Tax	£302,116	316
Utilities	£49,861	81
Other Priority Debts	£75,049	16
Credit/unsecured	£248,542	84
Other Non Priority Debts	£127,992	33
Other debts managed	£465,413	93
Debt written off	£55,836	20
TOTAL	£1,970,512	856

Housing outcomes	2018-19 no. of cases
Supported with accessing housing	518
Possession prevented: council tenants	238
Possession prevented: Homeowners/leaseholders	1
Possession prevented: private tenants	10
Possession prevented: Other	3
Possession order suspended	3
Eviction Suspended	13
Disrepair Challenged / housing repairs carried out	48
Tenancy succession	1
Homelessness decision challenged successfully	40
Homelessness prevented	12
Secured accommodation	41
Asylum support - migrant housing	9
TOTAL	962

Immigration outcomes	2018-19 number of cases
Application made	14
British Nationality granted	68
British passport/travel document issued	1
Indefinite leave to remain granted	61
Limited leave to remain granted	146
Family reunion	3
EU right to reside confirmed	18
Right to enter / entry clearance	36
Immigration status improved	12
Information only	47
Case concluded successfully	3
Access to public funds obtained / NRPF restrictions lifted	33
Other immigration outcomes	56
Total	498

hence the number of instances of advice is higher than the total number of clients for the year which is 15,089.

Access channel	Number of instances of advice
Face to face	23,443
Telephone advice – Citizens Advice Southwark	5,252
Email advice – Advising Communities	170
TOTAL	28,865

Face to face includes the following:

- Drop in advice – the generalist providers are required to provide a minimum of 10 hours' open access drop in a week
- Scheduled appointments – the generalist providers are required to provide a minimum of 12 hours a week appointment hours. This must include a weekly session from 5-7pm.
- Supported online access.

The figures show that the majority of clients prefer a face to face appointment. This has been a consistent pattern over many years. Email advice is most appropriate for the most simple and straightforward queries.

SLAN website

One of the key routes into the service is the SLAN website www.southwarkadvice.org.uk

On the home page 4 access channels are set out:

- Email advice – with a link to a generic email form
- Telephone advice – with a single dedicated phone number & details of opening hours
- Online advice – with links to searchable online resources provided by Citizens Advice nationally
- Face to face – with links to details of SLAN partners, the areas of advice they provide and contact details

Leaseholder outcomes

Financial outcomes from the specific leaseholders' advice service, provided by Citizens Advice Southwark, are set out in the table below.

Number of clients 2018-19 Leaseholders advice service	390
Financial gain for leaseholders 2018-19	£354,009
Average financial gain per client 2018-19	£908

Financial gains for leaseholders include:

- Service charges written off or reduced
- Award of benefits
- Grants

The figure above is a sub-total of the overall financial gains for 2018-19 set out earlier.

Digital inclusion

In 2018-19 the services helped 355 clients to register with My Southwark.

Client access to services

The table below sets out the numbers of instances of advice provided by the 2 generalist providers via the 3 different access channels of face to face, telephone and email in 2018-19. These include many repeat clients



Citizens Advice Southwark – client satisfaction survey

Citizens Advice Southwark carried out a satisfaction survey with 133 clients in June 2019, to inform business planning and future development. The target set out in the organisational business plan is 90% satisfaction or above.

Citizens Advice Southwark achieved 90%+ satisfaction in the following areas:

- Clear explanation of the advice process
- Warm welcome
- Safe and comfortable waiting room
- Whether the assessor made them feel that their problem was important to them
- Whether their issues were properly understood and dealt with by the assessor
- Whether the client was clear on how to proceed with dealing with the problem
- Whether the process of needing further help was properly explained

However they did not achieve the 90% target in these areas:

- Whether the client was kept updated on waiting times
- Length of time the client waited to be seen.

Southwark Law Centre client feedback questionnaires

Southwark Law Centre ask their clients to complete a feedback questionnaire when their cases is completed. Collated surveys from 2018-19 show that only about 3% of clients completed the questionnaires. Among those that did, the majority were happy with the service and the outcome, found staff approachable, felt they had been treated fairly and expressed increased confidence in managing their situation. The comments about individual staff were very favourable but there was a comment that the reception needs to be more approachable and a comment that the centre offers only limited support.

In 2018-19 the site had a total of 9,907 unique visitors. These showed a clear preference for face to face advice as shown by the table below:

Access channel selected on SLAN website	Proportion of visitors to site 2018-19
Face to face	46%
Telephone advice	31%
Online advice	20%
Email advice	3%

Incoming referrals

In 2018-19 the 2 generalist providers received a small number of clients via referrals from other agencies (100+). These include the council's own information, advice & guidance services; smaller voluntary sector organisations and private sector solicitors.

Southwark Law Centre is a referral only organisation. In 2018-19 approximately one third of referrals to the Law Centre were from other SLAN members and another third from voluntary and community sector organisations / charities. Other referrals came from statutory agencies; court; elected member and MPs and private solicitors.

It is noted that other law centres in London provide open access services, albeit the open access is often limited. These include Hackney Community Law Centre; Islington Law Centre; Camden Law Centre, Mary Ward Legal Centre and North Kensington Law Centre. Access is managed in different ways including: limited drop in hours eg 2 hours a week; clients being required to complete the government's legal aid eligibility calculator before contacting the service; initial contact by telephone or email form only.

Case studies

The advice providers are required to provide case studies with their quarterly contract monitoring reports. A selection of case studies that set out different subject areas of advice are set out below.

Case study 1: welfare benefits, Citizens Advice Southwark

Our client was a tenant in private accommodation who was working part-time and claiming Universal Credit for herself and her two children, aged 8 and 10. Her ex-partner's whereabouts were unknown and he had ceased contributing any maintenance payments some years before. The issue that caused her to seek our help was her fluctuating Universal Credit payments. She had had to accept a shift pattern at work that still entailed extra hours and required her to be flexible. This affected her childcare arrangements and when they became payable. This in turn meant that Universal Credit were counting her as having double costs in some months and none in others. This had a catastrophic effect on her UC on which she relies to make her rental payments and provide for her family. We were able to assist in negotiating with her childcare providers to invoice on a monthly basis to at least regularise that part of her income. This was ultimately successful and we were able to bring some stability to this person's circumstances, even though there is still a significant fluctuation due to her hours worked. The situation has caused some rent arrears and we were able to negotiate with the landlord to set up a repayment programme. However, the landlord was very close to issuing a section 21 Notice to Quit which would have made the client homeless. It was evident that explaining the arcane rules around the timing of Universal Credit payments would have been beyond our client's abilities so it would have been unlikely she would have been able to rectify the issue unaided.

This case shows the inflexibility of the Universal Credit system when applied to modern working practices. It cannot cope with a fluid situation and this has made budgeting an impossibility for this client who simply cannot know what her income will be from one month to the next. This has led her into a spiral of debt and housing insecurity through no fault of her own.

Case study 2: Housing: Cambridge House Law Centre

Ms C was very distressed and tearful when she first instructed CHLC. She explained that her partner had left her, and she was now a single parent with 2 young children.

In addition, the Council had started eviction proceedings for rent arrears.

Ms M explained that she had no monies except for Child Benefit to support her 2 children. Ms M had difficulties with literacy.

CHLC assisted Ms C in making a new claim for Universal Credit (UC) which was eventually awarded for her and her two children. She was awarded a monthly amount of UC totalling £1767 which includes an amount to cover her housing costs.

We assisted client with making a new claim for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP), which to help with reducing her rent arrears. She was awarded a total amount of DHP totalling £1655.02 to cover the shortfall in her rent totalling £208.56 monthly not paid by UC due to the Benefit Cap.

Client and her children have been able to remain in their home.

Case study 3: Immigration: Migrant Legal action

Mr M was extremely anxious when he approached MLA. His employer had terminated his contract because he could not produce any evidence that he had indefinite leave to remain in the UK. Mr M had lived in the UK continuously since he came to join his father in 1959. He was 15 years old when he left Jamaica. He had lost the British colonial passport on which he had entered the UK.

MLA advised that we would be able to make an application on his behalf for British citizenship rather than indefinite leave to remain in the UK under the Windrush Scheme. We completed the prescribed form and made an appointment for him to see a case worker in the Home Office.

Within 11 weeks he received an invitation letter from the Home Office asking him to go for the oath ceremony where he will be given a certificate of naturalisation as a British citizen.

The client did not have to pay the Home Office fee of £1330 for the application.

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Findings: client survey

A survey of advice service clients was carried out over 3 weeks in August to September 2019. While waiting to be seen by their advisor, clients were asked to complete a brief one page paper survey with the option to complete it online if they preferred. The following organisations participated in the survey:

- Citizens Advice Southwark
- Cambridge House Law Centre
- Southwark Law Centre
- Blackfriars Settlement
- Latin American Disabled People's Project
- Southwark Day Centre for Asylum Seekers
- Southwark Pensioners' Centre

These represented a range of the large advice contract holders and smaller voluntary sector groups who provide advice services to specific, often vulnerable groups - all located in areas of high need around the borough.

A total of 377 completed surveys have been received.

For Southwark Law Centre, the question was changed to reflect the fact that the Law Centre is a referral-only organisation.

The questions were focussed around how clients had found out about the services and how they had accessed them. The findings reflect the unmediated voices of clients at various advice locations around the borough.

Survey questions

1. Before coming, did you try to get advice anywhere else? (Southwark Law Centre: which organisation referred your case to Southwark Law Centre? What else have you tried doing to get advice?)
2. Have you used this service before?
3. What kind of issue have you come to talk about?
4. How easy was it for you to travel to the advice service today?
5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about using this advice service today?

Survey findings

Client survey August – September 2019: overriding messages

- Most common method of finding out about services was word of mouth (37%) followed by online (19%)
- Other organisations who signposted clients included national charities; local VCS groups; the court; church; council housing officers; jobcentres. A few found out from friends or family.
- Most people who found out about services online didn't state which website.
- Roughly split as to whether people had tried to get advice elsewhere first.
- Of those who did try to get advice elsewhere first, most popular method was to ask friends or family followed by internet search and trying another organisation.
- Approximately half of clients are repeat clients.
- Biggest area of enquiry: welfare benefits (40%), then housing (34%), immigration (17%), debt (9%), and employment (8%). 4% needed help understanding official letters.
- 24% of clients had more than 1 problem or a problem covering more than 1 area of law – most commonly, benefits plus another issue
- Other topics clients sought advice about included: guardianship; care arrangements; council tax; fire; flood; buying a faulty van; utilities; scams / fraud and speeding tickets.

Comments from clients

"Keep doing what you are doing good by supporting communities in dire needs and where all else fails."

"You make my concerns and anxiety reduced."

"Feel very happy, someone has listened to me."

"The service you provide is very effective and makes me feel confident."

"The answer phone service is an obstacle course and very expensive because of time wasted."

Local Support team client survey

At the same time as the advice agency survey, the council's Local Support team carried out a survey of its own clients with broadly the same questions as the advice agency survey but tailored to their own service. 44 responses were received. The survey found that:

- Most common method of finding out about the service was from Southwark staff (43%) followed by word of mouth (18%), DWP / Jobcentre staff (16%), Southwark Council website (7%) and SLAN website (5%)
- Again it was a fairly even split as to whether clients had tried to get advice anywhere else first, but for those who had the most common method was another organisation (27%) followed by friends or family (11%) and then online (7%).
- 56% of clients had never used the service before; 43% once or twice before; none had used it more than twice before.
- The biggest issue clients needed help with was obtaining white goods (38%) followed by food and fuel (28%) then benefits (30%), help with applying to the scheme, help with filling in other forms, and debt (all 3 11%). Housing was 5%.
- 82% had found it easy or very easy to contact the service – the rest were neutral.
- 80% of clients rated the service as excellent, 16% good and 4% as expected – none had been unhappy with the service.

Findings: online stakeholder survey

An online survey of advice services stakeholders was carried out over 6 weeks in July to August 2019. The survey link was circulated to:

- VCS organisations in the borough who make referrals to / receive training from the current providers
- Tenants and Residents Associations
- Council departments including the Local Support, Sustain and Financial inclusion teams; Adult Social Care; Housing Options; Public Health
- Elected members and MPs
- SLAN members

34 responses were received. The overriding messages are summarised below:

Online consultation summer 2019: overriding messages:

- The services being provided are what's needed – there's just not enough provision to meet huge demand
- Digital exclusion is a massive problem and online services are hard to access even for the skilled and confident
- Groups who are most in need find it hardest to access advice
- The long term impact of not having these services is not just negative for the individual but would entail higher costs to public services, from health services to the police
- People need help at the right time: at early stages before the problem escalates; support with medical assessments and help with appeals
- Multiple access channels are needed; face to face continues to be vitally important and there is need for home visits.
- Continued need for advice in other languages, interpretation and translation.

Responses were received as follows

- Common Purpose grant funded: 12
- Other VCS organisation: 2
- Tenant and Resident Associations (TRAs): 7
- Council officer: 6

- Other funder: 1
- Resident: 2
- Current advice provider: 3
- Not known: 1

Survey findings

1. Areas of unmet need

- Immigration advice – current provision insufficient to meet huge demand. Particular need in areas no longer covered by legal aid: human rights and nationality. Need for more good quality immigration advisers and link to housing & employment services.
- Advice that is accessible for people with physical disabilities - need for home visits
- Advice in other languages - current provision insufficient to meet demand
- More capacity for help with Mandatory Reconsideration Requests & appeals and quality representation at tribunals
- Support for completing benefit applications – Universal Credit and disability benefits
- Advice re education – especially for children and young people with personal budgets
- Better & more consistent connections / signposting - especially from schools (holiday hunger) and immigration, GPs, housing associations.

2. Groups affected by these issues

- People living in poverty
- People with physical disabilities and / or mental health issues
- Lone parents
- Women in abusive relationships
- People who are vulnerably housed
- People who don't have English as a first language
- People who are recently bereaved
- Young fathers / BME fathers / non resident fathers
- Refugees and asylum seekers with untreated post traumatic stress.

3. Outcomes – respondents were asked if they agreed that the current contracts outcomes are the right ones

Outcome 1: Residents have an improved understanding of their rights and responsibilities

Yes 19 No 14

Comments: issues identified around: a complicated and confusing benefits system; law often changing; under-resourced advice services; multiple issues faced by refugees and asylum seekers which prevent them from improving their situation – including lack of knowledge of day to day norms and illiteracy in their own language.

Outcome 2: Residents feel more able to access services at an early point and in times of crisis

Yes 17 No 16

Comments: strong message that people need help at the right time: at an early stage before problem escalates and then at different points eg when making benefit appeals. Support to complete benefit applications properly will lead to fewer mandatory reconsiderations. Comment 'Holistic services are lacking and providing a seamless service as an early action safety net for the most vulnerable is poor and much required.'

Outcome 3: Residents are able to access services that are appropriate to their need

Yes 14 No 18

Comments: Clearly expressed wish for multiple access channels and stress on the vital importance of face to face services. Comment that culturally appropriate services seem most affected by cuts.

Outcome 4: Residents are supported to maximise their income and manage their money better.

Yes 19 No 13

Comments: Need for more support with money management, looking at whole picture of why people struggle to manage or problems will recur. Asylum seekers are unable to work hence unable to improve situation by increasing income.

Outcome 5: Residents are supported to resolve their problems to improve their independence, health and wellbeing

Yes 23 No 9

Comments: point made that the services should be empowering and not increase dependency. Needs identified for more awareness, advice & support for wellbeing and reducing isolation and loneliness as well as digital inclusion.

Outcome 6: Residents have the skills and confidence to increase online services and there is less digital exclusion

Yes 13 No 17

Comments: point made that online services are so complicated, confused and difficult to access that everyone is digitally excluded to an extent. There are not enough IT hubs in the borough.

Outcome 7: Residents who are experiencing discrimination are supported to have access to justice

Yes 17 No 14

Comments: several comments about need for justice for immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers. Comment that refugees and asylum seekers – particularly LGBTQ+- are likely to suffer in silence and not complain for fear of repercussions. Also lack of legal aid for housing & debt issues.

4. Should there be any others?

No other specific outcomes were clearly identified but a strong wish for more resources and more joined up working between agencies.

5. Do you think there are any particular groups or communities in Southwark who find it difficult to get the advice they need?

Yes 31 No 1

Very similar to groups of people were identified to with unmet needs listed above, and also: LGBTQ+ people; people with literacy issues; tenants with disrepair issues.

6. If people can more easily get the advice they need, what effect do you think this will have on their lives?

Strong message that people will suffer less stress and isolation and ill-health; and will be able to avoid getting into similar difficulties in future. Also better life chances for children and young people

7. If people cannot get the advice they need, what do you think will be the impact on their lives?

Strong message about increased costs to public services and increased crime. People will increasingly suffer mental ill health and become isolated and excluded. More family conflict and relationship breakdown. Greater risk of destitution and exploitation.

8. Any other comments?

Re-iteration of messages above- in particular a strongly expressed wish for more resources. Comment that these services should be publicly commissioned and not provided by private sector.

Common themes from different groups of respondents

- Southwark Council officers were generally the most positive about the current provision. Specific comments about Universal Credit and disability benefits. Fewer comments on specific needs of specific groups than other respondents. Council officers more likely to state 'yes' to the outcomes than other respondents.
- Other VCS groups were clearly most aware of specific needs of their client groups. For example, clearly expressed wishes for home visits from an older people's group; specific needs of young BME men expressed by a group working with marginalised young men. Groups working with BME communities strongly aware of language barriers.
- TRAs – stressed lack of awareness of services; general confusion – eg about benefits; digital exclusion and also awareness of specific needs of different vulnerable groups. Some comments that services are designed around needs of council not clients.
- Current providers did not identify as many areas of unmet need as other groups, but expressed a wish for more resources.
- Comments that providers may prioritise cases where there is legal aid funding available. Legal aid cases taken against the council are an example of this.

Separate comments from No Recourse to Public Funds team manager

There is a need for adults and families with NRPF to be given legal advice around:

- Applying to the UK Government to have their NRPF restriction lifted (if they have leave to remain in the UK but are facing destitution because of the NRPF restriction)
- Attempting to regularise their stay in the UK (if they currently don't have permission to be in the UK and don't have an outstanding application)
- Giving consideration to taking up support from the UK Government's Voluntary Returns Service (if the adults/families currently don't have permission to be in the UK and have been refused previous applications and appeals on previous refusals).
- Making representations to the UK Government for leave to be granted on compassionate grounds (for example for adults in residential care placements who lack capacity to make an application and there is little likelihood (nor should there be) around them administratively removed from the UK).

Separate comments from the council's Equalities and Inclusion Lead Officer

- On the question of access to justice: 'Also those experiencing discrimination and harassment in their work places, in housing, on the street, as well as from institutions etc. There is a need for help, information and advice, especially for those in work places where there is no union support and/or where union support is weak. Young people (and their parents) from BAME backgrounds who are at risk and need for advice and support in the youth justice system. There is a great need for advice and support in dealing with experiences of discrimination and harassment and barriers to accessing services etc especially in the context of a reduction in specialist advice and support services e.g for people from BAME backgrounds and disabled people in the borough.'
- If people cannot get the advice they need 'Vulnerable groups will be impacted, especially those who do not know where to begin to get help and advice. Greater risk of those currently excluded from mainstream organisations feeling more alienated and more at risk of exploitation.'

Benchmarking with other boroughs

In summer 2019 a benchmarking exercise was carried out, looking at other inner London boroughs and the advice services they fund via grant or contract, and how much funding is provided. in any given borough.

Southwark Council contracts for comparison:

Provider	Annual amount 2019-20
Citizens Advice Southwark	£406,200 original contract including extra leaseholders £235,035 - AC generalist £54,000 - AC languages TOTAL £695,235
Southwark Law Centre	£369,600
TOTAL	£1,064,835

Caveat: we do not know who all the advice providers are

Borough	Provider	Annual contract amount 2017-18
Camden	Camden Citizens Advice	£500,000
Camden	Camden Community Law Centre	£211,294 grant
Camden	Mary Ward Legal Centre	£161,100 – specialist advice £83,590 – disability project
		TOTAL £955,988
From 2019-20 Camden are funding advice services via grants totalling £1m a year over 7 years.		
Hackney	Hackney Community Law Centre	£115,000 grant
Hackney	East End Citizens Advice Bureaux	£1,003,021
		TOTAL £1,118,021
Islington	Islington Law Centre	£460,000
Islington	Islington Peoples Rights Centre	£230,000 grant
Islington	Royal Courts of Justice + Islington Citizens Advice Bureau	£470,000
		TOTAL £1,160,000
Kensington & Chelsea	Kensington & Chelsea Citizens Advice Bureau	£697,135 general grant £157,974 Income max £59,649 Mental Health project £107,925 Grenfell project £25,154 Health & Welfare HIV project
Kensington & Chelsea	North Kensington Law Centre	£75,097 grant
Kensington & Chelsea	World's End Neighbourhood Advice Centre	£150,450 grant
		TOTAL: £1,047,837

Borough	Provider	Annual amount
Lambeth	Brixton Advice Centre	£84,146 grant
Lambeth	Centre 70	£92,287 grant
Lambeth	Citizens Advice Lambeth and Merton	£236,000
Lambeth	Lambeth Law Centre [closed summer 2019]	£91,522
		TOTAL: £503,955
Lewisham	Citizens Advice Lewisham	£424,488
Lewisham	Lewisham Multi Lingual Advice Service	£24,743 grant
Lewisham	Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network	£74,503 grant
		TOTAL: £523,734
Tower Hamlets	Island Advice Centre	£112,087.91
Tower Hamlets	Legal Advice Centre	£84,328.76
Tower Hamlets	East End Citizens Advice Bureaux	£369,732
		TOTAL: £566,147
Westminster	Westminster Citizens Advice Bureau Service	£830,000 – generalist contract
		TOTAL: £830,000

Conclusions

How far have the original commissioning aims from 2013 been achieved?

Note that an independent evaluation has not been carried out.

Strategic aim	Summary findings
Free, independent and non-judgemental	Contracts are held by external VCS providers independent from the council and independently regulated and accredited.
Provide information, advice and casework services according to need, quickly and easily	[Question of whether people get advice at the right time – not accessing services until they reach crisis point.. Issue of waiting times].
High quality	The services are externally regulated, audited and accredited. They meet the required standards as set out in the service specification.
Offer a seamless approach and tackle complex, multiple problems at an early stage to avoid escalation and reduce litigation	Monitoring data on numbers of clients / numbers of cases under different areas of law, survey findings and case studies, indicates that clients are being helped to deal with multiple and complex problems. The issue of tracking early resolution of legal problems where the council is the provider could be addressed better through tracking these cases. As these cases are not funded via the council, the services are not currently reporting on them to the council. [Good examples of joint working eg advice & information roadshows at which multiple services are present].
Provide online access, support and digital inclusion	Online access was provided by Advising Communities via an online self help centre. Citizens Advice Southwark have provided this using additional funding & working with TRAs. These issues are complex and connected to literacy and inclusion. Libraries also provide a resource for communities.
Make effective referrals between providers	The effectiveness of referral systems is linked to capacity.
Empower informed choice and self-help and facilitate access to appropriate support	The SLAN website facilitates access to national Citizens Advice's online resources. The advice providers are well networked with voluntary sector organisations and statutory agencies who provide support to specific vulnerable groups.
Prevent the need for more intensive and costly support	The cost of homelessness acceptances is 8 times that of preventing homelessness. The services may also prevent costs to other services including health services and the police.
Provide assistance and support relating to welfare reform impacts	The advice providers actively work in partnership to maintain a strategic overview of welfare reforms and their impacts and gaps in support; as well as to inform and train smaller organisations in changing legislation – for example; the Universal Credit Strategic Forum; training of frontline workers via Southwark Advice Forum. The data shows that Welfare Benefits is the biggest area of client need. [Survey findings indicate there is still unmet need around Universal Credit support.]

Are the seven outcomes being achieved?

Outcome	Summary findings
1. Residents have an improved understanding of their rights and responsibilities	Welfare Reform appears to have led to much increased confusion about benefit entitlements. This includes the housing element of Universal Credit and also the need to make a separate claim for Council Tax reduction. A key aim of the services is to assist clients to navigate this.
2. Residents feel more able to access services at an early point and in times of crisis	Monitoring data shows that clients are accessing the services in times of crisis. Survey findings indicate that more prevention work may be needed to prevent problems escalating. There is a gap in our knowledge of those residents who are in need but are either unaware of the services or have tried to access services but have not been able to.
3. Residents are able to access services that are appropriate to their needs	There is a clear need and strong demand for the services that are provided. Some of the most vulnerable clients may have difficulty accessing services particularly those who are housebound.[the new older people's hubs are due to go live in May 2020 and other specific services are available for older people and people with disabilities.
4. Residents are supported to maximise their income and manage their money better	The move to Universal Credit has led to increased challenges for many residents in this area, including increases in rent arrears and other debts. There is a need for more budgeting advice and support.
5. Residents are supported to resolve their problems to improve their independence, health and wellbeing	There is a clear link between the support provided by the advice agencies to achieve positive outcomes for the clients, and reduced levels of stress and anxiety for clients. The agencies also help clients to improve their housing situations which is again linked to improved health and wellbeing.
6. Residents have the skills and confidence to increase their use of online services and there is less digital exclusion	This is an outcome that can be achieved most effectively via partnership and collaboration, with organisations working together to provide venues, IT services and staff support [more].
7. Residents who are experiencing discrimination are supported to have access to justice	<p>These contracts support the council's general duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation</p> <p>There is a gap in our knowledge of people in very vulnerable situations who may be unaware or who are unable to access the services.</p> <p>Justice for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants is an area highlighted by the stakeholder survey..</p>

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