

Equality Impact Assessment: Services

Title of service being assessed:	Welfare Rights Unit: Cessation of the separate service.
Department and Section:	Adult Social Services: Performance and Supply Management
Names and roles of office completing this assessment.	Andrew Hannon: Project Manager Ian Cushway: Financial Assessment Team Manager
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Defining the service
<p>1. What are the aims, objectives or purpose of the service? Are these reflected in the relevant service plan?</p> <p>This Equality Impact Assessment is being carried out on a proposal to cease the separate Welfare Rights Unit and for this to be offset by the continued financial support by the council for other agencies who provide benefits advice.</p> <p>The main aim and purpose behind this proposal in terms of the Equality Impact Assessment is to ensure that the services currently being provided by the Welfare Rights Unit are available to people from other sources.</p> <p>The service currently operates as a service to provide general welfare benefits advice that is not specific to disability related benefits. The majority of referrals are made through various other council services together with referrals from the voluntary sector.</p> <p>The referral sources from within the council are Older Adults, Physical and Sensory Impairment, Mental Health and Learning Disabilities Social Work Teams, other Adult Social Services teams (including day care residences), Asylum Seekers, Barnet Resources department, Housing and from Members. External referrals come from voluntary organisations, health agencies and other agencies. There are also a number of self-referrals directly from clients in need. The service provided may be through home visits or appointments at the office in Barnet House. There is also an 'advice line' service for general benefit enquiries. Several other agencies which are funded by the council provide very similar services, as identified in the table at Annex 1.</p> <p>As this issue deals with the proposed cessation of the Welfare Rights Unit, there is no specific service plan to consider. Rather, the proposal intends that service will be offset through the council's continued funding of the services delivered by the independent and third sector organisations.</p> <p>The purpose of this redelivery of service is to ensure there is no duplication and to ensure best value for the council. This proposal will save £180,000 in a full year.</p>

2. What outcomes does the service want to achieve and for whom? How have these been determined? Please also list any relevant performance indicators.

The service has been commissioned to provide welfare rights and advice for people living in Barnet, with a specific focus on supporting Adult Social Services customers. The service operates Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm providing home visits, office appointments and a telephone helpline service.

No specific performance indicators have been formally commissioned for this service. However, a review of current activity shows that the unit receives in one year:

- Approximately 250 new adult clients each year, about half of which are referred from other council services.
- 569 separate calls to the helpline resulting in 1258 enquiries. Of the 569 calls, 148 were in respect of clients known to Adult Social Services.
- Work to support 100 pre-appeal reviews of which 40 resulted in full appeal hearings.
- Approximately 10 training sessions/presentations per year organised by the adult posts (based on current year and last year figures).

(The figures above, unless specified as relating to the adult posts, include data relating to both the children's posts and the adults' posts. As a result of how the information is recorded, distinctions cannot be made between the two types.)

If adopted the proposal would mean that this activity is directed to the existing voluntary organisations.

Assuming that the service is operational for 48 weeks per year, this would mean that in any one week, 12 calls to the helpline of which 3 are for Adult Social Services clients and 5 referrals per week for welfare rights advice which could involve pre-appeal review support.

The service in respect of adults consists of one manager, one senior advisor, three advisors and one administrator. Currently the Manager post and an Advisor post are vacant. Agency staff have been used to cover the vacant advisor post. In addition there are two advisors for Children who are not included in this proposal.

The intended outcome is the continued provision of welfare advice through the funding of voluntary organisations.

3. Who is responsible for delivering the service? Are any other organisations involved? If other organisations are involved are they fully compliant with the council's Equality Policy?

The Welfare Rights Unit is a dedicated council service. The council also provides a Benefit Advice Team in relation to Housing and council Tax benefits. There are several other bodies, (Citizens Advice Bureaux, Barnet Law Service, East Finchley Advice Service, MIND in Barnet, Barnet Carers Centre, and Disability Action in Borough of Barnet) that are funded through the council to provide similar services. All services funded by Barnet and additional non-funded services are shown in the table at Annex 1.

The contracts for these services with these organisations stipulate a requirement to adhere to adopt and pursue an equal opportunities policy. For example:

Barnet Carers Centre - shall put in place an Equal Opportunities Policy and set up mechanisms to monitor its implementation to ensure that the service is available to all sections of Barnet's diverse communities.

Disability Action in Borough of Barnet - To adopt and pursue an equal opportunities policy with regard to the engagement of staff and management committee members.

Barnet Citizen's Advice Bureau – 'We are committed to equal opportunities.'

Barnet Law Service – In April 2008, the London Councils Grants Committee announced recommended funding for Barnet Law Service. All of the recommended organisations had provided policies that demonstrated that equal opportunities practices, relating to staffing, management, governance, service users and the wider community, were implemented. As a condition of funding all organisations had to demonstrate that their service includes users in the delivery of services, and must also show that they are monitoring the impact of their services.

All services also demonstrated the ability to comply with relevant equalities legislation in delivering services. Through the development of funding agreements with the organisations and through monitoring their progress, officers will ensure that the projects deliver their services in a way that is fully accessible, compliant with equality and diversity practice and that targets the communities that are traditionally identified as hardest to reach.

4. Consider the answers given in questions 1, 2 and 3 and assess whether your service results, or could result in adverse impact on or discrimination against different groups of people. If you consider that there is adverse impact or discrimination, or the potential for either, please outline below and state whether it is justifiable or legitimate and give your reasons for this. (See examples in Section 6)

The intention is that the provision of welfare rights advice will continue to support the existing client groups and hence will not have any adverse impact upon any client groups. The full breakdown of the range of services within the different agencies is shown in the table at Annex 1. The mapping exercise shows that the services provided by the Welfare Rights Unit are also provided by a range of different agencies.

The services which are funded by Barnet Council in relation to the provision of welfare rights related services already demonstrate an explicit commitment to equal opportunities, as demonstrated in section 3 of this Equality Impact Assessment. These policies are in place to ensure that service users are not discriminated against because of their race, gender, sexual preference or because of their disabilities.

Adherence to equalities legislation is a stipulation for the other welfare rights related organisations to receive council funding. The council can continue to allocate funding with this principle in mind, therefore helping to ensure that race, gender, sexuality and disability equality is maintained.

Although a disability related query was raised regarding the proposal to cease the Welfare Rights Unit, no communication with regards to race, gender or sexuality has been received.

5. (a) If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is illegal you are required to take action to remedy this immediately.
- b) If you have identified adverse impact or discrimination that is justifiable or legitimate, you will need to consider what actions can be taken to mitigate its effect on those groups of people. This arises out of the duty to promote good relations between people of different groups and is in keeping with the council's approach to social cohesion. (An example of this could be Positive Action measures which target specific members of staff).

There is no legal requirement to provide an in-house Welfare Rights service. (The proposal is not dissimilar to the approaches adopted by other local authorities.)

From the monitoring information available, it has not been possible to demonstrate the % of customers who have required a specific home visiting service in order to access welfare rights.

Nor is it apparent from the monitoring information that service users required specific expertise in disability related welfare rights advice as evidenced through the breakdown of enquiries to the helpline (see below).

Disability Specific (30%)

- AA/DLA Care - 157
- DLA Mobility - 98
- Incapacity Benefit - 70
- Carers Allowance - 59

General Benefits (70%)

- Income Support 159
- Pension Credit - 73
- Housing Benefit - 123
- council Tax - 109
- Working Tax Credit - 42
- Child Tax Credit - 64
- Maternity Child Benefits - 43
- Social Fund - 41
- JSA (means tested) - 30
- JSA (contributory) - 2
- Retirement Pensions - 19
- Other benefits - 24
- Problems with benefits in general - 57
- Debts - 12
- Other - 76

Identifying and Removing Barriers to Equal Access

6. (a) Identify the ways people can find out about and use the services you provide. Consider any processes they need to go through or criteria that we apply to determine eligibility for receiving the service. List your answers in box (a) below.
- (b) Review those processes and criteria and consider whether any of them are essential (i.e. are they a legal requirement?) and mark accordingly in box (b). You are aiming to maintain only those processes or criteria that are critical to delivering the service.
- (c) Review those processes and criterion that you have decided are critical against the access needs that various equality groups of people have. Are there any groups of people who would not be able to find out about or use the service? What are the barriers that are preventing them? List your answers in box (c)

Consider issues such as:

- How can people who are deaf/disabled or visually impaired find out about your service?
- What about people whose first language is not English. Is information readily available in a variety of formats e.g. other languages, large print, audio tape, easy read for people with learning difficulties?
- If people need to come to council offices, are these fully accessible?
- How easy is it for a person to make their communication needs understood?
- Is there good and accessible transport links to the offices?
- Is there parking for disabled people?
- How do you ensure that an individual's preferred method of communication is known about and adhered to?
- Is there a quiet area for interviewing people who are deaf/disabled? Is sufficient time allocated?
- Are the needs of young children accompanying a service user accommodated?
- Can an officer attend a user's home if, for example, a person finds it difficult or impossible to come to the offices?
- Have staff received sufficient and appropriate customer care and equalities awareness training to be able to deal confidently with a variety of potential access needs?

(a) List Process and Criteria	(b) Essential? Yes/No	(c) Barriers identified and groups affected
The Welfare Rights Unit is currently not publicised. Individuals are referred to it by other voluntary organisations or by self-referral.	No	No specific client equalities group is affected.

<p>The wide range of agencies which are providing the same services are well-publicised and between them deal with all areas of welfare benefit activity currently addressed by the Welfare Rights Unit. The table at Annex 1 demonstrates that there would be no gaps in service if the Welfare Rights Unit was to be abolished.</p>	<p>Yes – this is set out in the Essential Guide for Disabled People and Help Yourself Guide.</p>	
<p>A signposting policy will be required through various media (internet, literature, and other council outlets taking into account visually impaired, deaf, and language barriers).</p>	<p>Yes</p>	
<p>Close monitoring of the number of Adult Social Services clients requiring welfare rights support who are housebound and need a home visiting service.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>There is no monitoring information on this from the Welfare Rights Unit. Annex 1 demonstrates that existing commissioned services in the voluntary sector can meet the needs of this group of clients.</p>

6. (d)Based on your answers for (a),(b) and (c) consider what barriers you can remove, what reasonable adjustment may be necessary to ensure the service is accessible (this could include providing the service elsewhere). Consider what actions you will need to take to address any unmet needs that you have identified. For disabled people, as defined under the Disability Discrimination Act, this could mean treating them more favourably to ensure that there is equality of outcome.

When you are deciding priorities for action you will need to consider whether the barriers result in an adverse impact or discrimination that is illegal. These will constitute your top priority. The other priorities will be dependent on such issues as whether a group is particularly excluded or connected to the core business of the service, whether there are adjustments that would mean several groups benefit.

A mapping exercise is planned for the year ahead to identify the total coverage of all grant-funded organisations with a view to ensuring this delivers best use of resources. During the first quarter after the implementation of the proposal, monitoring will be done to identify any new Adult Social Services customers not supported by other identified agencies and ensure that any adverse impact is mitigated. For existing customers of Welfare Rights, the intention is that all cases will be managed through to conclusion. However, the table at Annex 1 appears to indicate that all services provided by the Welfare Rights Unit are delivered by other agencies.

This proposal will not impact on any specific equalities group as it is merely a re-provision of the existing service. A legal opinion has nevertheless been sought and provided with specific consideration to Barnet's obligation in this matter under the relevant disability rights legislation.

Ensure that the actions you identify are put into the attached equality improvement plan. If you do not have the authority to take the action required, you will need to alert the relevant service manager of your findings.

Ensuring Continuous Equality Improvement

7 The council is committed to mainstreaming equality, ensuring that it is integrated into our performance management frameworks and subject to continuous improvement through performance monitoring. Essentially, if you are not monitoring, you do not know what impact your service is having or whether you are meeting people's needs. The table below shows examples of several types and sources of performance information that we collect as a council, some is collected corporately and some will be collected within individual services. Review what data you have and consider the following questions:

- (a) What does analysis of the data tell you about how well your service is meeting the needs of the various equality groups? Are there any unmet needs or concerns that need to be addressed? How up to date is the information?**
- (b) Which groups of people are you hearing from? Are there groups of people that you are not hearing from? What can you do to ensure that people are able to provide feedback on the service? Is there information on service user needs held by other services that would be appropriate for your services? Note your answers to these questions in the 3rd and 4th column below.**

Data Type	Source(s)	Analysis of the data and/or gaps in information	When last gathered
Compliments, complaints and comments	Complaints System Correspondence Members' Enquiries	Comment received relating to disability concerns	January 2009
Service take-up	Locally held	Data has been provided demonstrating that the alternative agencies to the Welfare Rights Unit are well used.	January 2009

Data Type	Source(s)	Analysis of the data and/or gaps in information	When last gathered
Benchmarking	With other councils/other authorities/partners	<p>Research into the services being provided by council-funded agencies in comparison with the Welfare Rights Unit does not indicate any gaps in the provision of service.</p> <p>Further research has also been conducted relating to how other local authorities make provisions for this service. The proposal to not have an internal Welfare Rights Unit would not make Barnet's approach unique or unusual.</p>	January 2009
Results of any local consultation and/or satisfaction surveys	Locally held information gathered through budget consultation and Barnet UNISON	Capacity constraints identified by existing providers. Will monitor carefully in quarter 1 of 2009/10 in conjunction with FAIB (Forum for Advice and Information Agencies in Barnet). London Borough of Barnet to review contracts for information and advice agencies in 2009/10 to re-profile activity targets to areas of greatest need especially in light of changing economic conditions.	January 2009
Team discussions around service provision	Locally held	Discussions between staff affected, union officials, HR and line management.	

Opportunities for Social Cohesion or Promoting Good Relations between Different Groups of People

8. Social cohesion is a priority for councils. Progress made towards building more cohesive, empowered and active communities is now being measured through national Performance Indicators. Essentially social cohesion is about promoting a sense of connection, trust and belonging both within and across communities and groups. Review all the actions and targets that you have identified as a result of this equality impact assessment to what social cohesion issues could arise, for example: these should include:

- (a) Are there ways in which your service could bring different groups of people together, for example to develop future provision?**
- (b) Are there ways in which existing groups could interact with the service, for example, as part of ongoing monitoring of service provision?**
- (c) Could the way you provide the service bring different groups of people together to use the service?**
- (d) Does the way in which your service is provided have the potential to lead to resentment between different groups of people? How can you compensate for perceptions of preferential or differential treatment?**
- (e) If the improvement plan identifies addressing a gap in the service for a particular group of people, has this also addressed the potential for perceptions of preferential treatment for the group? (For example, if you give priority treatment to disabled people, how will you manage the negative attitudes that non-disabled people may develop as a result.)**
- (f) How can your service explicitly demonstrate the council's commitment to promote equality across race, gender, disability, age, religion/belief and the LGBT communities?**

List your answers below. Ensure that the actions you identify are put into the attached equality improvement plan.

Removal of the Welfare Rights Unit would not lead to a reduction in social cohesion. The services provided will be delivered by agencies that are an integral part of the community rather than through a council specific-service. The council will work with the FAIB (Forum for Advice and Information Agencies in Barnet), the Joint Visiting Team and Barnet Voluntary Services council during 2009/10 to look at reducing duplication and ensuring effective information and advice is available for all Barnet residents as part of the council's approach to promoting health and well-being.

9. Equality Improvement Plan

Please list all the equality objectives, actions and targets that result from the Equality Impact Assessment (continue on separate sheets as necessary). These now need to be included in the relevant service plan for mainstreaming and performance management purposes.

Equality Objective	Action	Officer responsible	By when
To ensure Adult Social Services customers are aware of where to access welfare benefits advice and support.	To ensure appropriate publicity to access support is available.	Financial Assessment Manager	To be agreed.
To ensure that existing clients have their continuing needs addressed.	Identify all existing incomplete cases at point of service change: and ensure that there are arrangements in place to ensure these are concluded.	Financial Assessment Manger	To be agreed.
Ensure that commissioned services are available to respond to the needs of Adult Social Services customers who cannot leave their homes.	Review of voluntary sector funded services	3 rd Sector Commissioning Manager	March 2009 – June 2009

Equality Objective	Action	Officer responsible	By when
Ensure that commissioned services are available to respond to the needs of Adult Social Services customers who cannot leave their homes	Develop agreed proposal for utilisation of targeted resourcing of residual funding for welfare rights	Assistant Director – Performance and Supply Management	March 2009
Ensure that Adult Social Services teams are clear on the range of welfare rights services in Barnet and up to date with welfare benefits	Develop training and communications plan	Assistant Director- Performance and Supply Management in partnership with Department of Works and Pensions	March 09
Ensure that advice and information services are able to respond to service demands from Adult Social Services for welfare rights.	During the first quarter of implementation of the proposal, undertake monitoring to identify any clients not supported by other identified agencies.	Head of Strategic Commissioning	June 2009

1st Authorised signature (EIA Lead) ...Andrew Hannon..... Date: ...11 February 2009.....

2nd Authorised signature (Member of SMT) ...Mathew Kendall..... Date: ...11 February 2009.....