Sandwell Advice Providers Network
SUMMARY OF SERVICE STANDARDS
Revised March 2020

Introduction

The purpose of these service standards is to ensure that clients receive a high quality service and that there is consistency across different providers so that, regardless of where they get advice, clients receive a similar service. These standards have been developed and adopted by the Sandwell Advice Providers Network. Only those providers meeting the standards will be able to display the Sandwell Advice Providers Network logo. Sandwell council funds a number of advice providers and compliance with these service standards is a condition of funding.
The expectation will be that the interpretation of standards will be proportionate depending on the level of funding and / or the level of service provided (signposting, referral, advice/ advice and assistance, casework)

Accessibility

- The service should be appropriate to the needs of the local / target community
- Awareness of the service – it should be well marketed and promoted
- Equality of access – issues for clients are understood and addressed
- The provider has target maximum waiting times for walk in appointments
- The provider has target maximum waiting times for appointments
- The provider has clearly documented times and procedures for follow up (review/ action/ chase up etc) during casework or follow up work
- Use of the “Sandwell Advice Provider” brand will be dependent upon full compliance with service standards

Seamless Service

- Where a provider cannot provide the service needed by the client, they must inform the client and direct them to an alternative service provider, where available
- Clients should receive a timely service from an appropriate source either as a result of referral or supported/handholding referral. If it is not possible to make a referral then clear information should be provided to signpost the client to the right service.

Well Managed Organisation

- A clear management structure that identifies the roles and responsibilities of individuals in the delivery of the service.
- Providers ensure availability of resources to provide the service when and where it is needed – making best use of available resources at all times
- Effective financial control
- Sufficient levels of Professional Indemnity Insurance
- Performance management systems to enable the provider to keep clear records to identify (i) the demand and need for its service (ii) the types of enquiries it receives (iii) the level of service provided i.e referral, advice/advice and assistance, casework and the outcomes delivered

Well Managed People

- Staff (paid or volunteers) possess the skills and knowledge required to meet the clients' needs and are able to develop these.
- Commitment to equal opportunities
- Appropriate access to basic and specialist advice training and continuous development are provided for paid staff and volunteers.
- Appropriate access to customer care training and development are provided for paid staff and volunteers
- Appropriate qualified and experienced support and specialist supervision in advice work is provided to all paid staff and volunteers

Quality Service and Quality Assurance

- A clear commitment to high quality services and regular review of performance.
- Processes and procedures to ensure clients get advice from the most appropriate source taking account of the knowledge and skills of staff – so that the client feels confident in and gets the appropriate level of advice
- In the case of welfare rights advice, the welfare rights team will assess capability and at least one advice worker assessed as good or excellent will be available at each location
- Training - each year all advice workers must attend a minimum of:
    - 1 welfare rights course (benefit calculation refresher or new adviser training),
    - 1 council tax reduction scheme (benefit calculation refresher or new adviser training),
    - and at least 2 topic based network sessions
    - plus appropriate on-line training.

  Training records will form part of the audit process.
- Processes and procedures in place to underpin, monitor and review the delivery of quality services for the client.
- Quality is maintained where part of the service is delivered by someone else.
- There is a clear, transparent customer satisfaction, complaints & compliments process
- Client's feedback is encouraged and there is opportunity to participate in the development of the advice services provided.

Well Managed Service

- Processes and procedures that ensure an effective and efficient service to their clients
- Client information and case files are well organised
- Records are held on an appropriate case recording software system
- Independent audit/review of quality of work and appropriate follow-up.
- Feedback process for service and performance reviews for staff and volunteers
- Agreement to independent audit by Sandwell Council as the funding body

Meeting Client Needs

- Clients receive timely and accurate advice and information
- Clients receive advice and information relevant to their needs
- Service is confidential – the provider has a clear confidentiality policy with all exceptions made clear.
- Advice is independent and impartial – conflict of interest policies and procedures are in place
- Client records documenting the needs, advice given and the actions to be taken next and by whom are kept and made available to the client
- Clients are informed where advice given includes action that the organisation may not be able to undertake and the reason.
- Advice is provided at **no cost/ free of charge**

- Clients are informed of any potential costs such as those arising from referrals to other agencies that may charge.
- Clients are kept fully informed about the progress of a case, including changes, actions, actions required by them, outcomes achieved and closure of case
- Clients will receive clear accurate and timely written records of any advice and services
- Clients are entitled to confidentiality, privacy and fair treatment

Client Consent and Client Records

- Ensure that client consent forms include a privacy notice compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018
- Obtain clients specific consent to act on their behalf/as an 'advocate' – signed & dated at time of contact
- Obtain clients consent to pass information to other organisations
- Up to date accurate records kept for all client interventions
- A documented process for how client records are stored and maintained including letters and third party correspondence
- Keeping client records for the appropriate period of time after the case is closed

Engagement in and Commitment to Sandwell Advice Providers Network

- Commitment to attending & supporting
- Commitment to seeking additional funding
- Sharing training and development opportunities
- Sharing learning from practice
- Continuous improvement - joined up improvement plans

Quality Standardisation Across Service Providers

- Opening hours/contact details of other services available across the network
- The same service from all providers advertised through logos
- Common terminology that describes the different levels of service provided

Signposting
This is when a client attends an advice outlet with an enquiry or issue that can be best dealt with by another agency and is given information, for example a leaflet, about that service. The client is not helped in any other way to access the agency

Referrals.
This is when a client attends an advice outlet with an enquiry that could be best dealt with by another organisation, for example, a client comes in with a housing enquiry and is referred to Shelter.
The adviser actively helps the client to access Shelter by phoning or emailing the clients details to Shelter and in some cases by arranging the appointment for the client.

Advice/ Advice and Assistance.
This is where a client is given advice regarding their enquiry, for example, the client wishes to know if they are receiving the correct amount of benefit. This is checked and if correct the client leaves or, if it is discovered that they are entitled to an increase in their benefit entitlement, the adviser assists the client to complete the form for claiming.

Casework.
This is where the adviser takes over the client's case, the client signs a consent form, (not to be confused with the data protection consent form) making the advice agency their agent to act on their behalf. All letters are sent out on letter headed paper with responses being sent back to the advice agency who will keep the client informed of the progress of the case.