

Developing a Community Legal Advice service for Sunderland – Update December 2008

The LSC and Sunderland City Council make important progress to ensure joined-up advice services for local people

Joint commissioning remains the long-term goal of both the LSC and SCC. Both have been working in partnership to develop a new, jointly commissioned Community Legal Advice Service. Sunderland was one of the nine local authorities included in the Law Society's deed of settlement as a potential area where we would jointly commission a Community Legal Advice Centre (CLAC) that would be operational before April 2010.

We now know that neither the LSC nor SCC will be in a position to meet this date for reasons largely relating to the duration of existing contracts. However, recent progress has been extremely positive and will prepare funders and service providers for effective joint commissioning at a later date.

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) and Sunderland City Council (SCC) continue to work in partnership to develop first-class legal and advice services for the city's residents.

Further Information

Following a comprehensive review of local advice services by both SCC and the LSC, both organisations have agreed to work on aligning the timescales for the advice contracts they fund. This will allow them to jointly commission services in the future, pooling budgets and resources so that services are truly integrated and taxpayers' receive value for money.

This commitment represents an important step towards linking general advice services, predominantly funded by the Council, to specialist legal services, funded mainly by the LSC. Connected services will mean that people can receive a broad range of help, from basic help to legal representation all from one place or as a result of effective referrals. This is increasingly important as people's problems are frequently complex and many will require more than just general advice.

As a next step, the council is letting six new advice contracts across the city. This will increase the number of contracts, and ensure that each has a duty to provide advice in a different geographical area of the city. This will mean, that for the first time, advice services will be delivered across the whole city and not just in the areas where suppliers happen to be located. These contracts will run from early 2009 until 2013 bringing them in line with the three-year civil contracts that the LSC will let from 2010.

The LSC will work with its existing legal service providers to ensure that links are forged with these new council-funded services over the coming months.

Both SCC and the LSC view the progress made to date as providing a sound foundation on which to develop new Community Legal Advice services that can truly reflect the legal and advice needs of local people.

The LSC continues to develop jointly commissioned CLA services with local authorities in a number of areas across England and Wales. Where a local authority is unable to jointly commission services with us, we will still look to integrate services – that cover a wide range of civil legal matters - alone when we tender for new contracts from April 2010.