

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Anti-Poverty and Inequality
DATE	25 March 2025
EXEMPT	No
CONFIDENTIAL	No
REPORT TITLE	Accessing Money Advice and Advisory Services
REPORT NUMBER	CORS/25/052
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	Andy MacDonald
CHIEF OFFICER	Isla Newcombe
REPORT AUTHOR	Angela Kazmierczak, Financial Inclusion Team Leader
TERMS OF REFERENCE	1.12

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report presents a response to the recommendations set out in the [Accessing Advice Services July 2024 report](#). It outlines the key actions taken to date to address the challenges identified in accessing financial, welfare, and legal aid services across Aberdeen, alongside proposed further steps to improve service provision. This report aims to support strategic efforts in improving financial resilience and ensuring equitable access to essential advice services across Aberdeen.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee: -

- 2.1 Approve the proposed improvement actions; and
- 2.2 Instruct the Chief Officer – People and Citizen Service to report back on progress within 12 months.

3. FEEDBACK FROM QUESTIONNAIRE

- 3.1 This presents an analysis of the feedback gathered from the Accessing Money Advice and Advisory Services questionnaire, which received 560 responses. The survey was conducted from 09 August 2024 to 05 September 2024, assessing the awareness, accessibility of financial, welfare, civil legal aid, and fuel advice services in Aberdeen.

3.2 Awareness of Services

Service Awareness	Percentage Unaware
Debt/Money Advice	64%
Welfare Benefits Advice	69%
Fuel Advice	76%
Civil Legal Aid	71%

3.3 Challenges in Accessing Services

The most reported barriers included:

- Lack of clear information on available services.
- Limited accessibility due to location and opening hours.
- Long waiting times for appointments, with some respondents reporting delays of over a month.
- Low visibility of fuel advice and legal aid services, leading to individuals struggling with legal and financial issues without proper support.
- Digital exclusion, particularly among older adults and those without reliable internet access.
- Complexity of legal processes, with respondents highlighting difficulties in navigating legal aid applications and obtaining timely legal assistance.

3.4 Preferred Methods of Support

- Face-to-face support was the most preferred method, but services often relied on phone or online interactions, which were seen as impersonal.
- Walk-in advice centres for immediate support were identified as a major gap.
- Mobile outreach services were suggested as a way to reach underserved areas.

3.5 Recommendations from Respondents

- Expand financial literacy workshops to improve budgeting and money management skills.
- Enhance service coordination between advice providers, housing associations, and health services.
- Improve targeted outreach efforts to raise awareness of available services.
- Increase funding and capacity for advice services to reduce waiting times and improve accessibility.

3.6 Bank Accounts

All respondents were asked about whether they have access to a bank account and if they didn't the reasons for this. The majority of respondents (551 respondents) indicated that they have access to a bank account, while a smaller proportion (5) respondents reported not having one. Among those without a bank account, they were asked for reasons for this and was allowed to select more than one key barrier.

- Lack of necessary documentation (3 respondents)
- No fixed address (1 respondents)
- Poor credit history (1 respondents)
- Lack of trust in banks (1 respondents)
- High fees (1 respondents)

- 3.7 Additionally, seven responses provided further explanations under "Other" reasons for not having a bank account. These responses suggest that personal experiences, such as past issues with banks or a preference for alternative financial management methods, also play a role.
- 3.8 The Accessing Money Advice and Advisory Services questionnaire feedback validates the key findings of the initial Accessing Money Advice and Advisory Services report, providing clear evidence of the challenges faced by Aberdeen residents in accessing financial, welfare, and legal advice. The survey confirms that awareness remains a major barrier, with over two-thirds of respondents unaware of available services. It also highlights key access issues, including long waiting times, digital exclusion, and a lack of walk-in advice centres, reinforcing the need for improved outreach and service accessibility.
- 3.9 While the initial report of the 28 August 2024 outlined general concerns, the survey findings provide quantifiable data and specific user experiences, strengthening the case for targeted interventions. The results highlight the need for greater service availability, stronger collaboration between providers, and more accessible financial education. This evidence supports the improvement actions outlined in the initial report, ensuring that future efforts are data-driven and responsive to community needs.

3.10 **Civil Legal Assistance**

In a news article from the 6 Nov 2024 "[SLAB Report confirm that legal aid remains in crisis](#)", the Law Society of Scotland reviewed the latest findings from the Scottish Legal Aid Board (SLAB) and concluded that Scotland's legal aid system remains in a state of crisis, with insufficient fees and a worrying decline in the number of practitioners prepared to undertake legal aid work. According to the Law Society's assessment, this has given rise to "advice deserts" in various parts of the country, where individuals—particularly those in rural communities—struggle to secure the legal support, they need. Rising overhead costs and a complex administrative framework are further disincentivising new and existing solicitors from staying in the legal aid sector.

The Law Society of Scotland emphasises the urgent need for immediate government action to reverse these trends. It calls on policymakers to comprehensively review and increase legal aid fees, streamline the application process, and develop strategies to recruit and retain solicitors. Without such measures, the Law Society warns, people facing family, housing, or social welfare disputes will increasingly find themselves with no access to representation, ultimately compromising the fundamental principle of access to justice.

4. RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS TAKEN

4.1 Awareness of Services

SMUH Radio – Financial Support & Advice

- A series of shows have been arranged in February, March and April to raise awareness of benefits, debt support and financial advice. These shows aim to reach individuals who may not actively seek help, using real stories and expert insights to reduce stigma and encourage engagement with available support services.

Targeted Benefit Take-Up using the Low-Income Family Tracker (LIFT)

- The Financial Inclusion Team have been proactively identifying households that are missing out on benefits and financial support such as the Rent Assistance Fund through the Low-Income Family Tracker. This is a data analysis tool that helps Local Authorities identify low-income households, track vulnerabilities and target support effectively.

Targeted Email Campaign

Emails have been developed and tailored to different mailing lists to ensure key groups—Council tenants, families, and those identified through the Low-Income Family Tracker as at risk of financial hardship—receive direct and accessible information about available financial support. These emails are scheduled to go out on a regular basis to ensure ongoing support and engagement.

4.2 Accessibility Improvements

A new data project is being developed for Aberdeen City to connect individuals and families with essential support based on their needs. Inspired by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the tool will simplify access to financial, social, and civil legal assistance, ensuring people can easily find the right resources. By improving financial stability, the project aims to enhance overall well-being and help both the public and professionals navigate available services more effectively.

4.3 Addressing Barriers to Support

- Work is being undertaken through a Local Improvement Group project to simplify information, ensuring leaflets are easy to read and available in multiple languages.
- Key advice partners are exploring the feasibility of a single-point referral system to ensure individuals receive timely and appropriate support.

4.4 **Enhancing Collaboration Across Services**

- The Council has agreed (Communities, Housing and Public Protection Committee 5th September and 21st November 2024) a programme of work, supported through the Scottish Government funded “Fairer Futures Pathfinder”, to design and implement a model of service and support centred around communities and families. This programme incorporates the future libraries and family support models.
- The Fairer Futures Pathfinder is underpinned by the goal of reducing inequalities in health and wellbeing and tackling this through the social determinants of health. Poverty and financial exclusion are a major driver of health and wellbeing inequalities. Collaboration between Council services and partner organisations to improve access to money advice, therefore, will be amongst the priorities of the Pathfinder.

4.5 **Increasing Financial Literacy**

- Financial Inclusion Team have embedded a team member within ABZ Works to ensure employability participants receive direct support in understanding budgeting and accessing entitlements.
- Financial education is being provided through [MyBnk](#) to deliver expert-led financial education to employability participants of all ages with financial education sessions throughout the City.
- Adult Learning, ABZWorks, and Financial Inclusion are working together to create and introduce short videos on financial education topics to enhance and complement existing financial literacy support.
- Using Multiply funding, which runs until 31 March this year, ABZWorks have commissioned a range of financial literacy and numeracy skills training packages for groups identified by the Local Employability Partnership as being key target groups, including people in recovery from substance use, people with criminal convictions, people with experience of homelessness and people from minority ethnic backgrounds, disabled people, and parents.

5. **NEXT STEPS**

- Continue monitoring the impact of awareness campaigns and through tracking engagement metrics and feedback questionnaires to adjust messaging based on feedback along with partners in the Anti-Poverty Group.
- Expand the mobile outreach service, incorporating additional locations identified as high-need areas to be identified through our data sets.
- Report back to the Committee within 12 months and recommendations for further improvements.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

7. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

9. RISK

Category	Risks	Primary Controls/Control Actions to achieve Target Risk Level	*Target Risk Level (L, M or H) *taking into account controls/control actions	*Does Target Risk Level Match Appetite Set?
Strategic Risk	Failure to improve advice access may exacerbate financial hardship.	Implementing targeted interventions and ongoing monitoring.	L	Yes
Compliance	n/a	n/a	n/a	Yes
Operational	Increased demand may strain existing services.	Ongoing resource assessment and additional funding applications.	L	Yes
Financial	Additional funding requirements for service expansions.	Identifying external funding streams to support sustainability.	L	Yes
Reputational	Insufficient improvements could undermine public confidence.	Regular reporting on progress and impact assessment.	L	Yes
Environment / Climate	No environmental risks identified	N/A	N/A	N/A

10. OUTCOMES

Council Delivery Plan 2024	
Impact of Report	
Aberdeen City Council Policy Statement Working in Partnership for Aberdeen	The proposals within this report contribute to the delivery of the following aspects of the policy statement:- Investigate how Aberdeen City Council could support the provision of fair and affordable banking, insurance and financial services, and the expansion of credit unions and advice services.

<u>Local Outcome Improvement Plan</u>	
Prosperous Economy Stretch Outcomes	Stretch outcome 1: 20% reduction in the percentage of people who report they have been worried they would not have enough food to eat and/ or not be able to heat their home by 2026.
Prosperous People Stretch Outcomes	Stretch outcome 12: Reduce homelessness by 10% and youth homelessness by 6% by 2026, ensuring it is rare, brief, and non-recurring with a longer-term ambition to end homelessness in Aberdeen City.

11. IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Assessment	Outcome
Integrated Impact Assessment	Currently be prepared
Data Protection Impact Assessment	Not required.
Other	N/A

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1 [Accessing Money Advice and Advisory Services Aug 2024](#)

13. APPENDICES

13.1 Appendix 1 - Full response to questionnaire along with the demographics

14. REPORT AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS

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