

ADVICE SPACE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

MAY 2024

INTRODUCTION

Advice Space is an organisation that works within the membership framework of the Advice NI charity. Prior to this change Advice Space was formally known as Citizens Advice Belfast and had operated in Belfast from 1964. Following the withdrawal of the Citizens Advice brand in December 2018, Citizens Advice Belfast formally adopted the organisational name: Advice Space. This has presented an opportunity to modernize the delivering of our services and to broaden the relevancy of advice services to a younger audience both in advice giving and volunteering opportunities.

Operating from six sites in Belfast (plus additional sites located in hospitals), Advice Space welcomes tens of thousands of clients annually (*29,613 clients in 2022/23 assisted with 94,177 problems that resulted in clawing back and claiming an additional £7m in unclaimed benefits*). The service aims:

- to provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Advice Space has just developed a new 5-year Strategic Plan for the period 2024-29 to drive forward and develop our services.

OUR VISION, MISSION, VALUES & KEY PRINCIPLES

Vision

All people in Northern Ireland can exercise their rights and obtain fair treatment under the law.

Mission

Providing high quality, free, independent advice enabling people to move towards positive life solutions.

Values

**Collaboration; Independence; Innovation; Professionalism;
Equality & Respect.**

1.0 KEY PRINCIPLES FOR ADVICE SERVICES

These include:

- **Free at the point of use:** Advice Space services are provided free to clients at the point of delivery.
- **Independent:** The service provided by Advice Space is completely independent. We are able to offer impartial advice to all clients and to take up any issue with the appropriate authority on behalf of clients. The policies and practices of the Advice Space service are decided through the Advice Space Trustee Board. No individual or agency, even on giving financial support or other aid to the organisation, can determine or influence these policies or practices. Independence does not inhibit the development of healthy working relationships and partnerships, since it is part of the job of Advice Space to help individuals to make the best use of all available services.
- **Confidential:** Advice Space offer confidentiality to all enquirers and meet all data protection legislative requirements. Nothing learned from enquirers, including the fact of their visits, will be passed on to anyone outside the service without their express permission or due to safeguarding issues unless the law requires this.
- **Impartial:** The service is impartial. It is open to everybody, irrespective of ability, age, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and social or economic status. Advice and help are given on any appropriate subject without any preconceived attitude on the part of the centre regardless of how unpopular it may be.
- **Accountable:** Advice Space provide a service which is accountable for example to the Charities Commission, Companies House, our Trustee Board, clients, partners, key stakeholders and funding bodies.
- **Accessible:** Advice Space provide an and accessible service to all members of the community which it serves.
- **Effective:** Advice Space provide an effective service to all its clients and the community which it serves and strives to show its impact through effective Business Plan reporting.

2.0 STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Advice Space currently has around 34 positions across all services. As a community and volunteer sector organisation we also support our services using volunteers in various roles to help us build capacity. Historically we would work with 20-30 volunteers, however post pandemic we are now working hard to rebuild our volunteer base and have around 8 active volunteers at present.

3.0 RANGE OF SERVICES

Advice Space helps people resolve their debt, benefits, housing, legal, discrimination, employment, immigration, consumer and other problems and is available to everyone regardless of age, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and social or economic status.

We have developed multiple partnerships over time and deliver specialist bespoke services to trusted partners such as:

Macmillan Cancer Support;

Belfast Heath & Social Care Trust (e.g. Sensory Impairment; Young People);

Chest, Heart & Stroke

Positive Life (People impacted by HIV)

Cystic Fibrosis Trust

Cedar Foundation (Learning disability)

Belfast City Council & DfC (Generalist advice; Welfare Reform & Debt)

We provide assisted information services in all advice subjects where the client requests this or where the client is incapable of taking the issue forward on their own behalf.

We provide generalist advice to clients, for example in welfare benefits, money advice, housing, employment, consumer, immigration and nationality, family and personal matters, taxes, health and education.

We also aim to ensure that clients in need of casework in money advice and welfare benefits can get this and where it is appropriate provide self-help information services if it is clear to clients that they have access to an advisor during specified hours whether by phone, digitally or face to face.

There are a number of ways in which Advice Space advisors can help people to resolve a problem:

Advisors endeavour to explain options and the possible outcomes of different courses of action. Clients are then encouraged to make their own decisions and act on their own behalf. This enables clients to manage their own problems by focusing on their needs as individuals.

Advice Space Advisors (both paid and volunteer), all of whom are trained to a certified level by Law Centre NI (known as the Certificate in Generalist Advice), can:

- Interview clients to find out their problems.
- Access reliable information sources for up to the minute information.
- Help clients to negotiate with companies or service providers such as creditors or to appeal against decisions, for example, social security benefit claims.
- Write letters or phone companies and service providers on behalf of clients.
- Help clients to prioritise their problems, for example, to sort out benefit issues and creditors.

- Help clients with form filling, for example, to claim social security benefits.
- Represent clients at tribunals; and
- Refer clients to specialist caseworkers for complex problems or to other agencies when appropriate.

4.0 LOCATION OF SERVICES

Although some of our bespoke services are operated for people across NI Advice Space does have six advice offices located in Belfast in the following areas:

- North Belfast – Duncairn Gardens.
- East Belfast – Holywood Arches Medical Centre.
- West Belfast (3) – Springfield Road, Suffolk and Andersonstown and Shankill Road; and
- Central Belfast – Merrion Centre, Howard Street.

Additionally, we provide bespoke services for the Trust and Macmillan Cancer Support from sites in the RVH Belfast and Belfast City Hospital respectively.

5.0 OPERATING MODEL

The current operating model is one which involves the primacy of phone advice. This has had a marked impact on the ability of offices to manage high levels of advice demand. Advice Space has moved all its offices onto a single number for the provision of advice - 0300 1 233 233.

We have expanded our operating channels and whilst retaining face to face services, we offer email advice and a webchat facility.

This operating model enables Advice Space to respond better to demand, provide clients with a range of ways in which they can access advice services and deliver a more consistent level of service. It also ensures that the needs of clients match the method of advice they are given, as outlined below:

Figure 1. Tailored model of intervention to meet client need and advice type

