

SERVICE SPECIFICATION

COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SUMMONS SERVICE

1. Service Description

- 1.2 This contract relates to the provision of social welfare advice in the areas of debt advice to people receiving summonses for their council tax, that are in receipt of council tax support before the summons is issued and help the resident engage in a managed repayment plan. There will be an expectation on the provider to attempt creative engagement methods to achieve outcomes.
- 1.3 This service specification for the provision of the Council Tax Support Summons Service describes key features of the service and the outcomes required, along with key indicators against which service performance will be measured.
- 1.4 The council tax support summons service will run between 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2021. The Council may choose to change aspects of this specification during the lifetime of the contract. However, this will be carried out after discussion with the provider about proposed changes and how they will be implemented. The views of the provider and service users will be taken into account in any review of the service.

2. Contract Value

- 2.1 The contract is for one year with an option to extend for a further 12 months at council's discretion and subject to good performance. The total fixed value of this contract is £30,000 per annum (which should include all associated costs and travel). The contract will start on 1 August 2020 and end on 31 July 2021. Payment of the contract sum will be made quarterly in advance on receipt of an invoice as per contract terms and conditions.

3. Lambeth's Vision and Strategic Aims

- 3.1 Lambeth Council Corporate Income and Debt Recovery Policy 2019/2020 key outcomes will ensure that the council is doing all that it can in relation to managing income collection and recovering debt, to support residents to improve their financial security and reduce indebtedness and the associated problems. The strategy is also linked to the council's Financial Resilience Strategy understanding and preventing problematic debt so residents can plan and manage their finances. The financial issues for residents in 2020-21 will no doubtedly worsen due to the COVID19 pandemic.

3.2 The Council Tax Support Summons Service will help us achieve the following outcomes in the State of the Borough 2016, Lambeth Council Corporate Income and Debt Recovery Policy 2019/2020 and the Financial Resilience Strategy.

- People achieve financial security
- Vulnerable customers identified and supported
- Educate non-payers to a payment culture

4. Outcomes

4.1 The Provider should ensure these outcomes are achieved from the Council Tax Support Summons service:

- The Provider should utilise innovative and successful engagement methods to ensure high take up of the service.
- The Provider should provide debt advice to people receiving summonses for their council tax, that are in receipt of council tax support before the summons is issued thereby negating court costs for customers. The service is targeted at residents in receipt of council tax support.
- The advice service should encourage people to set up direct debit payments or a payment plan to ensure that the resident will not fall behind on payments in the future. Most customers are on a 10 monthly payment plan, it is possible for the council to offer customers a 12 month payment plan, for those who this would be more suitable this will also be promoted.
- Wherever possible help people with other problematic debt/benefit and welfare advice. Where this is identified to be required the Provider and Lambeth will refer people to their Lambeth outreach or other outreaches or drop in service as appropriate.
- Through good monitoring, the Provider should develop a strong understanding of demographics, needs and development of users and a clear debtor profile.

5. How the service should be delivered

5.1 The provider will be required to engage with council tax, housing benefit officers, rent officers and other parties as required offering a full and comprehensive support service. Clear communication lines will be developed to support this (email/phone contact):

- The provider should provide two drop in sessions per month (1st Wednesday and the 3rd Wednesday of the month) - excluding Bank Holidays and weekends offering holistic debt advice and support to residents who have council tax arrears and are in receipt of Council Tax Support at the Customer Centre at the Civic Centre, 6 Brixton Hill, London, SW2 1EG from 10.00am until 4.00pm

providing a mix of appointments (pre-booked and on the day including assessments) and on the day liaison with Council Tax and Benefit Officers.

- Two Advisers should be in attendance on the days of the session at the Customer Centre (use of the Customer Centre is free of charge for the two days). On the days when there is a holiday/sick leave/training or other absence then one Adviser and another member of Provider should be present. Lambeth and the Advice Supervisor are available via phone/email with any on the day supervision queries.
- A dedicated service email address will be available for Lambeth staff and clients to use.
- The Provider should also provide outreach services and follow ups at their own offices by either telephone Skype, email or face to face support/appointments.

5.2 Sessions will need to run between summons dates and the reminder cycle; and these dates will be shared with the provider in advance to plan for session dates. Summons dates can be subject to change by the courts and the provider will need to accommodate for this.

5.3 The Provider will need to develop and update a flyer (an example of the flyer will be provided to the provider) advertising their drop in sessions. This flyer will be sent by Capita with council tax bills and at various stages of the reminder cycle. The reminder cycle is:

	Council Tax Reminder Cycle	Action needed by provider
1.	Bill	None.
2.	Text	None.
3.	Soft reminder (with drop in leaflet)	The first flyer will be sent with soft reminder notice, advertising sessions that run on 1st Wednesday and 3rd Wednesday of the month to allow residents time to consider attending. Provider must design and update flyer to be sent to Capita before soft reminder is sent. The Provider should then work with debtors at drop in sessions to encourage uptake of repayment plans, budgeting, and broader wellbeing support.
4.	Text	None.

5.	Final notice (drop in leaflet)	A more urgent flyer will be sent with the final notice, advertising sessions that run on 1st Wednesday and 3 rd Wednesday of the month. The Provider should then work with debtors at drop in sessions to encourage uptake of repayment plans, budgeting, and broader wellbeing support.
6.	Summons	The summons stands due to the interventions taken prior to the summons being issued. Unless there are mitigating circumstances e.g. vulnerability.

5.4 If the Provider can show income and expenditure form from resident (financial statement) and arrears from current year, Capita will agree a repayment plan. Capita will also accept this information verbally over the telephone.

5.5 The Provider will maximise choice and flexibility for our residents, and develop unique engagement models, by ensuring a range of service access points including Drop-In sessions and pre-booked appointments (including face to face, telephone and Skype dependent on client's preference). Equally devising new methods of engagement if the drop in sessions prove unpopular.

6. Service Requirements

6.1 The provider will be required to use experienced debt advisors and project co-ordinators who will have a range of responsibilities in relation to the service. The provider will be responsible for managing their on-going training and development needs, dealing with performance and conduct issues etc.

- The Provider should develop and update an engaging flyer to advertise their drop in sessions and provide this to Capita in time to be sent with reminders.
- The Provider will be responsible for: organising venues in Lambeth, setting up and managing staff rotas etc.
- The Provider should need to develop a broad and robust monitoring process that includes user demographics, needs, solutions so that we can develop a strong profile of our debtors.
- The Provider needs to develop a holistic referral pathway for residents to consider wider implications of debt such as employment, health, child care.
- The Provider will also be required to feedback to Lambeth about any issues identified with uptake of offer and make suggestions for improvement.
- The Provider will also be required to look and apply for funding streams and grants to support the development of the service (after checking suitability with the commissioner).

- The provider will provide their own signage at each session and remove after each session.
- 6.2 The provider's debt advisors will be required to have experience of working with vulnerable adults (DBS checked). Most importantly you will need to have a passion for helping our residents resolve their debt issues.
- 6.3 The provider will be required to promote through appropriate communication (their website and other suitable channels) the flyer and the service widely within Lambeth to those receiving Council Tax notices to ensure high take up where possible.
- 6.4 The provider will be required to work pro-actively with a wide range of local agencies to ensure that a broad and holistic debt advice service can be offered. This will involve building knowledge of community resources and ensuring that effective links and joint working arrangements are in place. The provider will also be required to work closely with Lambeth council to ensure that suitable locations are available for delivering support to debtors.
- 6.5 Where the session is quiet and less than 15 users requiring assistance the provider will go through the multiple debtor report and make contact with residents listed in the report.

7. COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS

7.1 General

The provider will be required to maintain regular contact with the Lambeth commissioner to report any issues relating to safeguarding of vulnerable adults and/or serious health and safety concerns.

7.2 Service review progress

The provider should attend regular monitoring meetings with the Lambeth commissioner to discuss progress towards service objectives and targets and any on-going issues. This will include providing written information where requested. We envisage that monitoring meetings will take place bi-monthly and include a Revenues Contract Manager and the Capita Council Tax Manager.

- 7.3 The provider must maintain appropriate daily data recording systems with suitable audit trails for the provision of agreed service information for the Council, to enable cost effectiveness to be measured.

7.4 The provider must send their quarterly monitoring data to the nominated Council officer on the 28th day of the month following the end of the quarterly monitoring period.

7.5 **Performance Indicators**

These will include but not limited to the following:

Quantitative indicators

- Number of residents who have been supported (including full monitoring of demographics of user, needs and support given).
- Number of residents who have engaged with a repayment plan for their council tax arrears (had summons process stopped).
- Number of residents who have maintained repayment plans, reduced broader debt, over a longer term – follow up monitoring after 3, 6, 12 months.
- Number of residents who feel more confident managing their finances (through annual survey).

Qualitative indicators

- Broader information on debtor journeys and the wider impacts of engaging with debt advice. As well as an understanding of why residents have got into debt.

7.6 **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is a key feature of this service provision. The provider will ensure confidentiality in the following ways:

- Discreet interviewing facilities must be available at all outreach provided by the provider and private interview arrangements provided on request.
- Access to personal case records to be carefully managed by the provider.
- GDPR - general data protection and data sharing protocols in place and explained to users.
- Putting in place a confidentiality statement. This should be explained to users and Provider's staff will be required to comply with the statement.

Notwithstanding this, the council's monitoring function allows relevant officers access to case files for the purposes of monitoring as long as no personal details are noted by those officers and where the client has given Provider their permission.

7.7 **Case Management and Supervision**

- Casework must only be undertaken by appropriately qualified staff.

- The provider should have a designated Casework Supervisor. This person is to be responsible for casework management, casework quality and casework staff supervision.
- The Casework Supervisor must be appropriately qualified.
- It is the responsibility of the Casework Supervisor to ensure that they, and the staff they supervise, deal only with cases which fall within their range of competence and refer on as appropriate.
- The provider should ensure that procedures are documented and operate effectively to supervise the conduct and quality of advice casework, taking into account the knowledge and experience of the person being supervised and the limits of the organisation itself.
- The provider should have written procedures for a periodic review (at least quarterly) of a suitable number of cases at all stages from initial advice and notes through to referral or representation. Records must be kept of such reviews throughout the contracted period and made available to commissioners on request.
- The provider should have an administrative system that is capable of supporting the delivery and management of casework.

The provider should have written procedures to ensure that:

- It is able to identify and trace all documents, correspondence and other items relating to a matter
- It is able to identify any potential conflict of interest
- It is able to maintain a back-up record of key dates in matters
- It records proper authorisation and monitoring of undertakings given
- Files are reviewed if inactive for more than 6 weeks. At this point a decision should be taken to either close the case or clearly note further actions still to be taken
- All relevant matters can be identified when acting for a client in a number of matters
- The status of a matter and action taken can be easily checked by someone other than the caseworker
- Documents are organised in a secure and orderly way
- Key information is easy to find
- Clients are aware of and are allowed access to their own case files.

7.8 **Staff and Safeguarding**

All staff and volunteers who provide advice to vulnerable adults must have a current enhanced DBS check in place. The provider must ensure that they maintain records of these and can confirm that these requirements are met. DBS checks should be renewed every 3 years.

Staff and volunteers engaged in the delivery of this advice service must be appropriately knowledgeable/experienced, trained and properly supervised and supported.

7.9 **Partnership Working**

The provider and Council will work in partnership to understand the issues being faced by Lambeth residents, how current local and national policies and processes are affecting residents, and how these policies and processes could be improved. Constructive working relationships will be encouraged between the provider and relevant Council departments (e.g. benefit administration, Council Tax collection, housing options and advice) so that the provider is able to raise issues in a timely manner, avoiding the need for legal processes where possible. The Council commits to listening to feedback from the provider on how Council policies and processes can be continuously improved for the benefit of Lambeth residents. The provider and Council may also identify issues on which to jointly lobby regional or national Government.