London’s advice sector boosted to help tackle cost of living crisis

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London Citizens Advice and the London Legal Support Trust have teamed up with the Mayor of London to increase the capacity of London’s advice services in response to the cost of living crisis.

Today, London’s Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, visited South West London Law Centre in Croydon to see the important work the organisation is undertaking to help more Londoners can access support within their communities.

Across London demand for financial hardship advice outstrips supply, as the cost-of-living crisis continues to bite, thousands of Londoners are turning to their trusted local advice agencies to get their issues resolved. Many are facing serious issues and are in desperate need of support at all levels, from one-off information and advice to specialist-free legal advice. Debt, homelessness, unemployment and domestic violence are all contributing to the hardship faced by many in our community. They need advice, casework and representation from advice agencies help them to overcome these issues.

The scale of the crisis and its impact on low-income Londoners has exposed by recent data that show London at the epicentre of the cost of living crisis.

- According to the Money Advice and Pension Service, London has seen the highest rise in need for debt advice at 30% (compared to an 18% national average).
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s comprehensive report into UK poverty shows that a quarter of Londoners are living in poverty, with almost 2.3m people going without basics like food and toiletries.
- The GLA’s Survey of Londoners shows that the crisis is now especially acute for those on low incomes, and for young, single parents, disabled and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Londoners, and that over a quarter of private renters are affected by housing insecurity.

Through the partnership, the Mayor of London is providing £2.3m of funding to increase advice provision in the city. The additional resources are critical for advice agencies to maintain their life-changing work. The partnership has enabled London Citizens Advice to increase the number of advisers across its 28 London citizens advice charities and expand support to community organisations helping those in need, and London Legal Support Trust (LLST) to increase capacity across its network of 21 Centres of Excellence and other specialist and community based partners by recruiting and training more specialist advisers in areas of high demand.

The funding is part the Mayor’s Robust Safety net mission focussed on helping Londoners access welfare advice where and when they need it. Other initiatives supported by the Mayor include free school meals for primary school children, the Cost of Living Hub to help Londoners access a wide range of information and advice including how to claim benefits that they are entitled to, help dealing with debt, financial management and mental health support, and alongside the Debt Free London bus bringing a mobile debt advice unit to London’s communities.

Recently at an event at City Hall with the Mayor and Martin Lewis, the importance of Londoners being able to access advice on support for housing costs, energy bills, utilities, and taking up unclaimed financial rights and benefits such as pension credit, was stressed to help relieve financial hardship. Also, recent report commissioned by the GLA from UCL’s Institute of Health Equity shows that the crisis is harming Londoners health, and that the providing accessible welfare and debt advice is key to every layer of response.

Yet funding for advice organisations is in short supply, local authorities and other public and private bodies that fund advice are facing new financial pressures, and advice organisations are struggling to recruit and train staff they need to help support demand.

Deputy Mayor for Communities and Social Justice, Dr Debbie Weekes-Bernard, said: *“At a time when so many people are facing rising bills, economic uncertainty and struggling to make ends meet, it’s never been more important to have properly funded advice services in place for those who need them most.*

“That’s why I’m really pleased that City Hall has teamed up with Citizens Advice and London Legal

Support Trust and invested £2.3m to ensure more Londoners can access the expert advice and services they need right across the capital.

"I was honoured to visit the South West Law Centre today to see our partnership in action to support Londoners of all backgrounds to access a wide range of services. Financial difficulties can have a devastating impact on mental health and wellbeing but by providing more Londoners with the support they need to navigate the challenges presented by the cost of living crisis and funding more specialist advisers in areas of high demand, we can help build a better, fairer London for everyone."

London Citizens Advice Development Manager, James Sandbach, said: *"Demand for advice on cost of living issues has soared across all our services over the past year, and the poorest Londoners are the worst hit by the cost-of-living crisis. Our services are here to provide support for people when they need it and this partnership is helping to extend our reach into communities to support more Londoners. Accessing information and advice can prevent problems from becoming crises."*

CEO of London Legal Support Trust, Nezahat Cihan, said: *"Our Centres of Excellence advice agencies work tirelessly to support their communities affected by the cost of living crisis. There is more demand more than ever for their services. This funding has allowed them to increase their capacity to provide more vital specialist advice that is transformational to those suffering in the cost of living crisis."*

Notes to Editors

1. London Citizens Advice is a network of 28 local advice charities, 19 of which receive funding through the partnership, whilst London Legal Support Trust (LLST) is supporting 21 delivery organisations. The funding consists £1.2m to London Citizens Advice and £1.1m to LLST and together is supporting addition frontline staff capacity (equivalent to approximately 44 full time adviser roles), and partnership working including training community groups and organisations to support their users and refer into advice services (Advice First Aid).
2. For contact details

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1. For sources referred to in the press release see

· Money Advice and Pension Service

· Joseph Rowntree Foundation https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2023

· GLA Survey of Londoners https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/survey-of-londoners-2021-22

· Institute of Health Equity

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