

Community advice toolkit

A guide to setting up your own service

2nd Edition

About the Centre for Justice Innovation

The Centre for Justice Innovation seeks to build a justice system which all of its citizens believe is fair and effective. We champion practice innovation and evidence-led policy reform in the UK's justice systems. We are a registered UK charity.

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SECTION 1

Introduction

The majority of people in contact with the criminal justice system are those who commit low-level offences: two thirds of people sentenced receive lower level disposals such as fines,¹ and even more are resolved with out of court disposals such as cautions or community diversions, without further supervision from the Probation Service. However, these individuals often also present with social welfare needs which underpin their offending behaviour. These needs can include homelessness, mental health issues, debt, difficulties accessing benefits support or substance misuse. The criminal justice system addresses serious and prolific offending, but is not geared towards effectively addressing the social welfare needs of these individuals before their offending behaviour worsens or begins in the first place.

Providing court users with advice and guidance for navigating the court process, as well as help to access support services, improves their experience of the court system and the criminal justice system more widely. It helps defendants, victims, witnesses and their families to understand proceedings and meaningfully contribute during hearings.² When people understand the court process, and feel fairly treated, they are more likely to accept and comply with the court's decision and have a positive view of the court and the justice system more widely, and obey the law in the future.³ This is often referred to as procedural fairness. For victims and witnesses, attending court can be a re-traumatising experience. Trauma can also impact on an individual's ability to understand the court process. Offering assistance with understanding the court process and providing signposting and referral routes for further support can help to reduce court users' anxieties and the risk of re-traumatisation.⁴

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What are community advice services?

Community advice services are independent advice, support and information services, providing emotional and practical support to people passing through the courts. There are currently three active services: Community Advice and Support Service (CASS+), established in 2005 in Devon and Cornwall, Highbury Community Advice, established in 2014 in Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court, and Youth Court Solutions, launched in 2021 in Northamptonshire Youth Court.

Six principles of effective advice and support

Through our work, we have identified six principles of effective advice and support practice which are:

1. Ease of access:

Services must be accessible in-person and contactable via phone or email.

2. Consistency:

The service should provide a single point of contact for each client who has responsibility for managing that client's case and keeps them informed.

3. Sensitivity:

The service should be discrete and non-judgmental and understanding of people's differences and individual circumstances.

4. Criminal justice awareness:

The service should address criminal justice needs, as well as social welfare needs, such as helping to understand jargon and processes within the criminal justice system.

5. Whole-person approach:

Services should seek to support clients to address all of their needs.

6. Effective transition between agencies:

Services should help clients access the specialist services to which they have referred them and continue to offer support in the interim.¹²

The evidence that community advice services work

An evaluation of CASS+, which included interviews with 27 clients, a client profile analysis, and a cost-benefit analysis, was conducted by CREST and published in 2022. It identified a range of short- and long-term outcomes.⁵

Short term outcomes:

- 1. Improved client needs:** The majority of clients reported that their needs had improved during their contact with CASS+ and that the service had improved their situation.
- 2. Improved ability to navigate the court system:** 18 out of 27 clients stated that they had a better understanding of what to expect in court and what happens after.
- 3. Higher referral rates to other services and client follow-through:** In 2021 the CASS+ service made 1,865 referrals, roughly 7 referrals per client. 24 out of 27 interviewed clients stated they had needs with which they were not being supported before coming into contact with CASS+. These two data points, coupled with stakeholder perceptions that the physical presence of staff increases the probability of client engagement with services to which they are referred, suggest that CASS+ is successful in increasing referrals.
- 4. Sustained engagement with services:** Interviewed clients pointed to the positive impact of regular check-ins and follow-up calls on their engagement with services.
- 5. CASS+ is highly effective at providing emotional support** to clients during and after court.

Long term outcomes:

1. **Improved client wellbeing:** 21 out of 27 clients interviewed said that CASS+ had supported their general wellbeing, mental health and ability to deal with problems.
2. **Accessible, ongoing support:** 21 of the 27 clients interviewed believed they would have access to support from CASS+ in the future. Some clients recontacted CASS+ with a different issue after a break in contact.
3. **Reduced demand on some criminal justice system partners:** Court-based stakeholders stated that CASS+ helped reduce demand on their services and provided support that they were not able to offer.

Data collected by Highbury Community Advice shows that clients reported 9% of issues as resolved after two weeks, rising to 38% of issues over six months. 91% of clients reported that Highbury Community Advice had helped to resolve the issues they had presented with.⁶

What we don't know

Whilst there is evidence to suggest addressing criminogenic needs can reduce reoffending, the pandemic delayed the Ministry of Justice Data Lab analysis, which would have enabled the CREST evaluation to establish a direct link between CASS+ activities and reoffending. Further, the evaluation was unable to obtain evidence for the impact of CASS+ on compliance with sentences and court orders.

Further, the impact of advice services on client engagement with the services to which they are referred is unclear. The CREST evaluation found evidence that CASS+ was making follow-up calls to clients to check-in on their progress and that they were sometimes effective. However, it was unable to establish the real impact of this on service engagement.

Case Studies**HIGHBURY COMMUNITY ADVICE**

Highbury
Community
Advice

 Highbury Community Advice

The Highbury Community Advice service is a free and confidential support service at Highbury Corner Magistrates' Court. It offers practical and emotional support for individuals attending court (defendants, victims, witnesses) and their family members.

Highbury Community Advice is overseen and run by a full time manager and coordinator, with the help of volunteers. In its first five years in operation the service supported around 2500 people, an average of 441 people per year. It is independent of the court and any criminal justice proceedings. The aim of the programme is "to reduce the risk of (re) offending, and to connect people to their local community and the support that they need."

Routes to support

Staff and volunteers at the service aim to be "a friendly face at court". They begin the day by walking around the court building greeting those appearing in court and their families, offering directions and explaining court processes. They hand out leaflets explaining what the service offers and encourage people to come by the office to speak to us when they feel ready. Court users may be too stressed or agitated to seek support on the day of their court appearance, but often make contact with the service in the weeks that follow. The team also visit the cells at court to see if anyone on remand would like some support. Depending on the client's needs, the team may be able to provide support on the spot or signpost the individual to an appropriate service within the local community.

Assessment and tailored support

Anyone who approaches Highbury Community Advice for support completes an assessment where they can talk freely about their support

needs. The assessment form details the issues with which the service can offer advice and guidance and individuals can request support with as many issues as they like including debt, benefits, housing, employment, education and training, domestic abuse, drugs and alcohol and health. The most common need that people present with is housing, followed by benefits needs or debt. The service is person centred and focuses on what the client states they need support with. If someone comes to the service in need of emotional support or advice about benefits, the team can help clients to complete the relevant application forms and access the support they need.

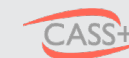
Highbury Community Advice refers clients to over 30 local support organisations. The team have an excellent knowledge of local community services in general, and have built relationships all over London with other service providers.

Follow up

Whilst Highbury Community Advice is predominantly an advice service, signposting and referring clients who require more in-depth specialist support onwards to other services, it does offer some casework support to individuals who require ongoing assistance. It also conducts follow up calls to everyone who has been assessed. These calls are made two weeks, two months and then six months after a person first accesses the service. The purpose of these calls is to check in with individuals and encourage them to approach services if they have not yet done so. If the individual has sought support from the agencies to which they were signposted, the follow up call seeks to ascertain whether these referrals were helpful, and provides an opportunity to discuss any new support needs that may have arisen.

“ They gave me a lot of options. They said anything you need help with, if we can, we’ll help you. They were competent and a really good team.
[Highbury Community Advice client]

CASS+



cassplus.org

CASS+ is a community advice service in Devon and Cornwall which offers practical advice, personal support and help for court users to access services with the aim CASS+ offers a wide range of services for their clients: practical support with issues like fines or benefits, information on the workings of the criminal justice system or help to access support services to address the issues which bring people to court. They work with the courts, police and probation service to ensure that court orders are obeyed in order to reduce the risk of reoffending and create long-term savings for the justice system.

CASS+ has been widely recognised as an outstanding example of early intervention in the justice system and in 2017 received the Queen’s Award for voluntary service.

The work of CASS+

Operating in four magistrates’ courts in Devon and Cornwall, CASS+ provides on-the-spot advice, direct support with practical problems and referrals into long-term support for chronic issues like debt, addiction or mental health. The service is open to any court user who needs it: whether they are a defendant, a witness or the family member of someone appearing in court. CASS+ services are delivered by paid co-ordinators who oversee a team of volunteers who receive training and support in identifying and responding to a range of issues that clients are facing, including mental illness and dual diagnosis.

CASS+ has been operating in Devon and Cornwall magistrates’ courts for almost 20 years, with its first service opening in Bodmin Magistrates’ Court in 2005. The service was initially run by Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) before moving to Rethink Mental Illness and then eventually becoming an independent charity in 2015.

“ They made me feel like a human being again. I honestly think I would be dead if it wasn’t for CASS+ coming to see me down in the cell and starting to help me. I would have gone back to prison and I would have died in there. They made me feel useful and I’ve turned a negative into

a positive. I have been dry for two years now. I help to run a local AA meeting. I'm involved in pantomimes at the local theatre. I volunteer on the soup run.

[CASS+ client]

CASS+ clients

CASS+ clients often face a range of complex needs underpinned by poverty. The interim report of a recent independent evaluation of the CASS+ service showed that the average number of needs per client was 3.4, demonstrating that clients benefit from a service that can help them to address a range of needs in one place.

29% of CASS+ clients had a debt issue, 36% were on at least one benefit, 17% were homeless or of no fixed abode. 61% of clients had a mental health issue, while 19% reported a drugs issue and 21% with an alcohol need.⁷

Evaluation

An evaluation of the service was completed in 2022, which made a number positive of short and long term findings and overall found the CASS+ model to be affordable and effective. Read the full report [here](#).

YOUTH COURT SOLUTIONS

Youth Court Solutions

YOUTH
COURT
SOLUTIONS

Youth Court Solutions (YCS) is an independent, at-youth court general and specialist support service, based in Wellingborough Magistrates Court. The service is available for anyone who attends the court: defendants, victims, witnesses, family and friends.

YCS is designed according to the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) model and underpinned by the understanding that any young person's contact with the criminal justice system constitutes an ACE. Youth Court Solutions addresses these issues and aims to resolve them as early as possible, when a young person comes into contact with the courts.

The interventions are provided by Service Six, an East Midlands regional charity, and Northamptonshire Youth Offending Service (YOS). Other partners include Crisalys Foundation which coordinates the service, and the Centre for Justice Innovation which supported the initial development of the service. YCS enjoys the support of The Lieutenancy, The Shrievalty, the Magistracy and Senior Judiciary, the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, the Police and HMCTS.

The service

YCS offers its services across seven categories: generic and needs-led information and support, brief solution-focussed therapy, cross-sector community referrals, education services, substance misuse advice, housing and debt advice and mental health support. The main characteristics of the model are that it is independent and participation is voluntary, as well as the unique scope and immediacy of interventions that are provided.

A Service Six Youth Specialist is based in the magistrates' court and provides clients with information about and signposting to available support and services provided by Service Six and other local organisations. The specialist is also trained to assist with any emergency and immediate needs. The service offers check-ins after two and four weeks and six months.

The Northamptonshire YOS provides information, advice and support in areas including housing, law, benefits, education (to facilitate a return to school) and substance misuse information. Health information is provided by staff from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

The pilot

The pilot ran from October 2021 to September 2022. During the course of the pilot (19 court days), the service reached 118 clients, of which 79 were young people and 39 were adults. The target was 70.

Of those seeking advice, 20 sought help with substance misuse, 33 with education, 6 with both substance misuse and housing and 10 with housing. 55 sought general support and advice. During this period, YCS reported 100% beneficiary satisfaction.

SECTION 2

How to set up your own Community Advice service

Here we outline the seven steps required to set up an advice and support service. They are designed to take you through the whole process from the initial idea, to evaluating the impact the service is having. Template documents can be provided that you may use and adapt as appropriate.

1. Get support

For a service to be possible, support will be required from the judiciary, especially lay magistrates, and HMCTS as a minimum. This support will be needed in three key areas:

- **Permissions:** To give authorisation for the service to be based in and operate from the court.
- **Governance:** To develop the role of the service and act as an overseer of its delivery.
- **Operational:** To ensure the service can be delivered effectively alongside the court processes.

The first step will be to secure permission for the service or at least for the idea of developing one. This will mean discussing the idea with your Regional Head of Legal Operations, via your local HMCTS Operations Manager and Senior Legal Manager, chair of your magistrates' bench and a senior judge.

Below, we include some examples of feedback from professionals who have experience of working alongside a community advice service:

“Over the weekend I was called by a desperate client who needed advice on housing and his benefits [...] I immediately provided him with your contact details knowing that he would obtain all the advice and support he needed.”

[Solicitor]

“Thank you for your continued hard work – you all make a real difference to people’s lives and during the pandemic your support would have meant even more to everyone you have helped.”

[Cluster Manager, HMCTS]

“You are such an invaluable asset to our courts, and the defendants we work with in Devon and Cornwall. The time, support and practical help you provide them with is amazing.”

[Probation Officer]

From here, you should decide who will take responsibility for overseeing the development of the service. This might fit within existing structures in the court such as the Judicial Leadership Group, or a dedicated working party can be formed that then reports back. A working party may include the same people who have given permissions, but is more likely to be delegated. The working party will continue to need representatives from HMCTS and the judiciary and/or magistracy. Its role is to do the following:

- Provide oversight of the design and delivery of the service
- Monitor progress
- Identify and take action to prevent and tackle upcoming operational issues
- Enable key partners to share learning
- Support development of the service as appropriate
- Identify strategic opportunities for embedding the service
- Review the management of the working protocol between the court service and the provider

A working party will need to agree terms of reference: who its members are, their roles, how meetings will work (e.g. how often and the format) and other relevant practical considerations.

In addition to the above, it can also be beneficial to involve other court professionals at various stages of the development process. This includes list callers, solicitors, probation, the witness service and other services operating from the court such as liaison and diversion. This is particularly important to raise awareness of what the service offers so you can avoid any duplication of services and to guard against repeatedly assessing clients.

It is also advantageous to speak to current court users. The advantages of involving the various people and the appropriate timing is described below.

2. Define who the service will work with

The fact that the existing community advice services are open to all users of the court has been identified as a critical success factor supporting perceptions of the approachability of the service. Essentially, in order to attract the most at-risk clients, the service must cast its net wide.⁸ Advice and support services add to the range of means through which the justice system can address the problems of those who come into contact with it. Therefore, we advise that your service should be open to anyone appearing at court, from defendants, victims to witnesses, as well as those attending court in a supportive role, including friends, families and carers. The service should avoid an exclusion criteria relating to a client's geographical location as individuals could be required to attend any court, not necessarily the court building local to them.

While these services are open to all, it is likely that clients will be predominantly those who are appearing at court as a defendant. In particular, those whose sentence, such as fines and discharges, does not include ongoing support from probation. As mentioned earlier, this is reflected in data from the Highbury Community Advice service, where in the period from 2015 to 2020, 71% of those who accessed the service were in court as defendants.⁹

When determining the right eligibility criteria for your service, we suggest that it is important to allow all relevant stakeholders to have their say on this and to work with them to come to a clear agreement from which you can go on to design the service.

Once the eligibility criteria are clear, it will be useful to understand more about the specified client group so that the service can be designed accordingly. Specifically, you need to have a rough idea of:

- i) How many people you might expect to use the service;
- ii) The characteristics (age, gender etc.) of these people;
- iii) What kind of needs they are likely to present with.

The first two of these can be estimated through looking at data on who has attended court over the last year. The service will be voluntary and many clients will not require it or may choose not to access it, so start with a low estimate for take up from clients using the court, especially in the first year of operations. The third data set is less readily available other than for those who have undergone a probation assessment. However, we know from existing advice and support services that the needs with which people most commonly present at those services are housing, benefits, debt and mental health. This is a sensible basis on which to proceed where you are unable to identify more specific local information.

3. Define the model

Expanding on the principles of effective advice and support practice which we have outlined earlier, we have identified ten key components of the Community Advice model at court. These are:

- ✔ **Visible in the court** – It is important that the service is easily accessible and where possible situated in a prominent place in the court building. This allows clients to approach the service themselves and/or staff to approach court users. Having a service based at the court provides a great opportunity to intervene: clients are likely to have to wait around for their hearing; some may have travelled a considerable distance (this is especially true in more rural areas) and; for some, appearing at court can be ‘a wakeup call’, resulting in a motivation to change.

✔ **A friendly face in a scary place** – For some, appearing at court can be a traumatic and bewildering experience. Community advice services should be discrete and non-judgmental and understanding of people’s differences and individual circumstances. Staff are on hand to provide emotional support to court users. This can include: sitting with a client who is distressed, providing guidance on the court process (where to go, how to sign in, etc.) and finding a solicitor.

✔ **Independent** - Key to engagement is that the service is not affiliated with a statutory body – engagement is entirely voluntary and clients can withdraw at any time. No legal advice is provided.

✔ **Ease of access** – Support can be immediate and on the day and can include; benefit applications, fine repayments, printing forms, applying for a passport, etc. Strict eligibility criteria and complicated referral processes can act as a barrier to those seeking support. By keeping any eligibility criteria to a minimum, the service is open to a variety of individuals supporting them with what they need, when they need it. Anyone can access the service including defendants, victims, witnesses and those providing support, e.g. friends and family.

✔ **Criminal justice awareness** – Staff are on hand to support court users with criminal justice needs, as well as social welfare needs, such as helping to understand jargon and processes within the criminal justice system. This can help defendants, victims and witnesses navigate the system, as well as their supporters at court, including family and friends.

✔ **Flexible timescales** – Community advice services work closely with other agencies who have their own deadlines and timescales. Flexible timescales are also important for being able to work at a pace that the client is happy and comfortable with.

✔ **A person-centred approach** – Community advice services offer a holistic approach, supporting clients with any needs that they are seeking support with and signposting and referring onwards to specialist services where necessary.

✔ **Consistency and proportionality** – We know that justice-involved individuals can sometimes receive support from a number of agencies and keyworkers, and be subject to multiple assessments. This can be intrusive, repetitive and traumatising. Community Advice only requires the client to provide the information needed to make a referral and no more.

✔ **Partnerships with local agencies** - A key function is to act as a signposting and referral service, putting people in touch with organisations and agencies that can provide them with specialist support. It is crucial for staff to develop expert knowledge of local services and foster working relationships with third sector agencies covering a variety of needs. Individuals may not be confident to seek support, or may not understand the processes or know where to go. Staff can help them to take the first step. Referral forms are completed on site and where possible appointments are made with a named person.

✔ **Follow up** – Conduct regular follow up calls with everyone who has been assessed. The purpose of these calls is to support individuals and encourage them to approach services if they have not yet done so. If the individual has sought support from the agencies to whom they were signposted, the follow up call seeks to ascertain whether these referrals were helpful (holding agencies to account), and provides an opportunity to discuss any new support needs that may have arisen.

4. Design the service

When preparing to design your service, it’s important to consider both the key characteristics of the community advice model as well as the local context in which the service will be delivered. Here we outline the major considerations in service design, specifically who to involve and how, clarifying the aims and structure of the service, how the service interacts with the court, how staff work with clients, and the importance of identifying and collaborating with partner agencies both within and outside the court building.

Who to involve

The working party should first of all consider who else may be able to offer insight into how the service could be delivered. This includes list callers, solicitors, probation and other services operating in the court such as liaison and diversion and victim and witness services. This is not just about raising awareness of the service with them; they may also have thoughts and suggestions on how the service could operate, how it might benefit them, and how it fits with their roles. This information is useful to include in the service design to ensure that the service fits in well with the other court services. Similarly, where possible, it is advantageous to speak to current court users to understand what they feel would help them, any barriers they might have in accessing such a service and how these might be overcome. The more involvement that can be secured at the outset, the more chance you have of designing a service that will meet the need it is trying to meet.

Agreeing your aims

As described above, the aim of community advice services is to help address the needs of those who come into contact with the justice system. We have outlined the key aims of Community Advice as follows:

- Improvement in underlying needs of those using the service;
- Improved access to community support services;
- Increased compliance with court orders;
- Increased understanding of and trust in the justice system;
- Reduction in rates of client reoffending.

A good service will have an evaluation framework in place to determine what might indicate whether it is making progress towards this goal and how this will be demonstrated. You should consider working towards specific outcomes, both short-term and longer-term. Here, we detail a number of short-term and long-term outcomes which have been taken from the 2022 evaluation of the CASS+ service:¹⁰

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES	LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
✔ Reduced criminogenic and other needs	✔ Reduced risk of (re)offending
✔ Increased sense of procedural fairness	✔ Greater compliance with sentences and court orders
✔ Better-informed sentencing	✔ Improved client health and wellbeing
✔ Clients better able to navigate the court system	✔ Clients have access to ongoing support in case of future crisis
✔ Increased number and uptake of referrals	✔ Decreased burden on criminal justice system by filling gaps in provision
✔ More sustained engagement with other services	
	✔ Greater emotional support for clients

Having monitoring and evaluation in mind from the beginning of the service design process is highly recommended. If possible, at this stage the working party should develop and agree to a plan that is both feasible and likely to yield useful information. Developing an evaluation plan early can help to clarify the service’s objectives, and to promote shared understanding of these goals. Evaluations can describe how a service is operating, whether it is working as planned, determine if it is achieving its objectives, and identify areas for improvement. While case studies detailing how service users have benefitted from the service are extremely useful in demonstrating the impact that receiving this support can have on an individual, funders will understandably expect to see broader evidence supporting the approach to justify their investment.

Defining what the service will look like

Determining the service's processes will help to clarify what the service will look like. Members of the working party should work with their wider partners to answer the following questions:

- i) How will the service be structured?
- ii) How will the service interact with the court?
- iii) What will the service actually do?

Each of these questions is discussed in detail below. As part of this discussion, we describe much of what happens in existing advice and support services as a guide. Community advice services should be responsive to and relevant for its local context. Therefore, it's important to tweak the model and implement any changes that you feel will work more effectively in your area. It will be important to measure impact as you go to identify whether the service is delivering and achieving what you intend it to.

i. How will the service be structured?

As outlined in section one above, the community advice model has a number of core components that we feel contribute to its simplicity and effectiveness. Community advice services tend to have a small number of paid staff, comprising an advice manager and / or coordinators, that are responsible for delivering the service. They are usually supported by a team of volunteers, with much of the assessment and triage process delivered by trained volunteers under the supervision of a staff member. Volunteers (including student placements and those with lived experience) bring a wide range of skills, experience and knowledge to any organisation and they are often part of the communities you work in, which can help build trust with service users.

Under the supervision of a staff member, volunteers can offer advice and support on a range of issues and can signpost or refer court users to community services based on their needs. Existing community advice services in London and Devon and Cornwall rely on volunteers to deliver their services. Being volunteer-driven is an important component of the model which also helps to keep the service affordable. By providing opportunities and experience to volunteers, you can inspire them to become your greatest

advocates. When volunteers move on to other roles, often in the voluntary and public sectors, this increases awareness of Community Advice among local services and helps with developing working relationships with a range of support agencies.

Colleges and universities can also be an excellent source of volunteer recruitment. Community advice services can offer placements to students on courses such as social work, law, criminology, psychology etc. Students are given the opportunity to gain experience working with court users who are often dealing with a range of issues, and community advice services gain motivated volunteers who, depending on their placement requirements, can often commit to volunteering a number of days per week for the length of their placement period. This helps to accelerate the training and induction of volunteers and provides some consistency for clients.

Taking into account time to assess people's needs, carry out actions, monitor progress and administer the service, one full time staff member and two volunteers per day can usually manage around 15 cases per week. However, this will depend on the busyness of the local court and whether the service is open full-time. Furthermore, this figure may be a little lower in the first few months as the service becomes established.

Recruiting and retaining high quality staff and volunteers is key to delivering a good service. All staff and volunteers should be DBS checked to ensure their suitability for working with the client group. The type of DBS required will depend on whether the service is for children and young people, or adults. The number of volunteers you will need will depend on your likely demand as well as the space you have available in the court building.

Staff and volunteers will require good induction, training and ongoing support from the coordinator to enable them to find satisfaction in the work and fulfil their roles effectively. Induction should cover the following:

- The role and function of the service;
- An overview of the criminal justice system;
- An introduction to magistrates' courts;

- Training in skills needed to work effectively with all court users, including defendants, victims and witnesses, as well as the families and friends of court users (handling difficult situations, communication, maintaining professional boundaries);
- Guidance on safe working;
- Policies and procedures of the service - safeguarding, health and safety.

It is recommended that as part of induction, volunteers are allowed to spend some time observing court proceedings and familiarising themselves with the court services before they begin working directly with individuals.

ii. How will the service interact with the court?

The extent of interaction with the court will need to be determined locally, but advice and support services are designed to be independent from the judicial process and it is important to be clear about this. There are several points at which the service could interact with the court and you should consider the approach you will take to each:

- **Legal advice:** Community advice services do not give legal advice. Where people ask for this, staff and volunteers should refer them to their legal representatives or the duty solicitor.
- **Mitigation and advocacy in court:** This is not the role of an advice and support service. Lawyers and the probation service may choose to use information provided by the service, but the staff and volunteers should only ever give factual information on support that may be available for people, and even then only if requested to do so by the court.
- **Working with defendants:** It's important to ensure that any engagement with the service prior to a defendant's hearing does not interfere with the judicial process. The time while defendants are waiting for their hearing is a key opportunity to engage them and many will want to leave immediately afterwards. However, staff should exercise caution when working with defendants, ensuring that the service remains impartial to the court process. It should be made clear from the start that the service does not provide legal advice.

- **Referrals from the bench:** Although advice and support services are voluntary, it can be beneficial for judges and magistrates to mention the service at or after sentencing so that those who might benefit but are not aware of the service have an opportunity to engage with it.
- **Referrals from cells:** where people are in custody, you will need to decide how referrals to the service can be made. You may wish to do this only upon release, or to allow a worker to visit people in cells following a risk assessment by security staff.

iii. What will the service actually do?

The activities of advice and support services fall into two main areas of focus, working with clients and working with partners, both in and outside of the court.

Working with clients

Engaging: Community advice and support services are voluntary and completely independent from the judicial process. A core component of the model, as outlined above, is the lack of stringent eligibility criteria. Anyone who attends court, including friends and family of court users can avail of the service. However, staff and volunteers must be proactive in engaging people, both themselves and through encouraging referrals from judges, magistrates, lawyers, probation, witness service and others. The majority of referrals at existing community advice services come via "self-referral", which often means they have been approached by staff from the service who have explained what they do and begun to build a relationship with them. At initial contact, people can often be reluctant to engage or too concerned about their impending hearing, but very often this introduction establishes the relationship and people approach the service a little later. Although not strictly part of its remit, advising people who are in waiting areas on where they need to go or how to find certain facilities or information can also be useful in beginning to build trust with potential clients. A barrier to engaging that has been identified by existing services is when staff are mistaken for representatives of the court. Wearing badges clearly marked "volunteer" and displaying prominent independent logos for the service have been found to go some way towards removing this barrier.

Assessing: Staff and volunteers speak with potential clients and in doing so will undertake an assessment of their circumstances and needs. This should cover basic details of the person as well as information on where they feel they need or want support. As part of the assessment, every person should have it explained what information is being recorded and what information may be shared, and must give consent for this to ensure General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) compliance.

Responding: Depending on the circumstances of each individual, responses tend to be a combination of advice, practical help with issues such as benefit claims, and signposting or referrals into longer-term and more specialised community services. Workers often also do some work to help people understand the court process – though as mentioned above this should not lead to interference with it. Responses should be recorded.

Monitoring: After help has been given or referrals made and the person leaves the court, staff should ensure that, where permission is given, they follow up with individuals. This is partly to assess the impact of the interventions but also to encourage people to attend referrals if they have not already done so and to identify any more support that might be necessary. It is good practice to undertake follow ups after 2 weeks, 2 months and 6 months. For ease of reporting, you will also need to develop some means of collating the information the service is collecting. When developing a new service, staff should explore what database options would be most appropriate for their service. It's likely that you will be collecting data on client demographics, client needs, actions taken by staff, and details of any referrals made. Given the sensitive nature of the information collected, we advise that services explore secure online database options.

To give an idea of how these services work with clients in practice, we provide a couple of case studies below, outlining the support provided to them by their community advice service.

A client's journey:

Below we follow the journey of two clients, from initial introduction to final check in to give an idea of the advice and support activities that staff and volunteers undertake for each service user.

LEON

● Leon* is a 29-year-old male who is currently in receipt of Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) for his mental health condition. He is an existing client who had received help previously to make an application for his local authority housing register. He came back to the service for support as, due to a breakdown in relationship, he had been asked to leave his mother's home and had been left homeless, sofa surfing and some nights sleeping rough. Leon has 2 children from a previous relationship that he has child arrangement for 2 days a week.

Losing his home had a significant impact on his mental wellbeing and his child arrangement with his children. He shared that he had made a homeless application with his local authority over 30 days ago and had still not heard anything from this. He said he had sent all the relevant information that the housing advisor had requested but had only had contact with her once since. Leon shared how he felt extremely anxious as no one would answer his calls or tell him what was happening.

Action taken

A staff member from the Community Advice service immediately emailed the housing officer, requesting an update into the progress of his application as he had proved his eligibility, homelessness, intention, local connection and priority need. They explained how the lack of contact was having a deep effect on Leon's wellbeing and expressed concerns for Leon's safety and health condition as he was now sleeping rough on some occasions. Community Advice also asked the housing office to pay due regard to the Equality Act 2010, in particular the duty to consider disability, when investigating a client's application for homelessness.

The Community Advice service also logged on and updated the client's housing application with the council to reflect his change of circumstances. As he was now homeless, the council could consider a duty to award more points for homelessness based on the client's needs assessment.

Outcome

Two week follow up:

Leon was given relief duty by the local authority and his personal housing plan and paperwork was emailed directly to Community Advice from the housing officer. He was immediately offered interim accommodation in the next borough. Leon was happy with this and collected the keys immediately. He then attended his community advice service and went through his personal housing plan with a staff member; all documentation requested was signed and scanned over to the local authority.

Two month follow up:

Leon has now settled into his temporary accommodation which means he can start having his children over again. He has also completed the Good Tenant training as laid out by his local authority. He is awaiting his housing points for the housing register to be updated with the new homelessness points to reflect his change of circumstance. This will allow Leon to bid more reasonably for a council studio flat.

Leon sent a text to Community Advice, reflecting his experience with the service and expressing his appreciation:

" Morning, hope all is well. I just wanted to say a big thank you for actually helping with housing and helping me sort myself out. I don't think you understand how much it means to me. Other than my mum, you are the only one that actually takes the time to go through stuff with me and gets the job done!! This is an appreciation message...god bless you in every way I've had a lot going on, but I need to come see you soon. Hope you have a great day."

LAWRENCE

Lawrence* is a 61-year-old male who was referred from the witness service. Lawrence was unsure of his benefit entitlement and wanted to know whether there were any more benefits he could claim. He had no knowledge of Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and had previously been rejected from Universal Credit Limited Capacity to Work (UC LCW). He was receiving basic UC and was required to regularly meet with his work coach to job search. He said he was in no position to work due to his health conditions and his doctor was now able to provide evidence that he has a long-term health issue. Lawrence is not confident using a computer and was unsure how to complete the online process to make his job coach aware of his change in circumstances and apply again for UC LCW.

Action taken

Staff at the Community Advice service encouraged Lawrence to ask his work coach at his next meeting whether he could reapply for UC LCW due to the new information from his doctor. They also offered to help him to complete the forms when re-applying.

Outcome

2 week follow up:

Lawrence had enquired about UC LCW at the job centre and they said they would send out an application form to his home address. He asked for an appointment at Community Advice, but unfortunately did not attend.

Two month follow up:

Lawrence failed to attend five appointments over a two-month period, but he did manage to keep telephone contact. After two months he disclosed that he was alcohol dependent and he struggled to maintain appointments because of this. He said he still wanted support from Community Advice. He agreed to continue trying to attend appointments and staff arranged another appointment at a time that suited him. He also consented to be referred to his local alcohol support service.

*Names have been changed to protect client identities.

Ongoing support:
Lawrence has since attended 3 separate appointments. Across these visits, staff helped him to complete a UC LCW assessment form, PIP assessment form, UC phone call assessment, council tax rebate and updated UC regarding rent payment. From this he has received his council tax rebate and altered his UC according to his rent. He also received confirmation that he is going to receive UC LCW payments. Lawrence was noticeably more relaxed by the third meeting and was continuously thankful for the support from Community Advice.

Working with partners

A key element of the service is the requirement for staff and volunteers to form relationships and work closely with other staff in the court and with a range of local community services. This ensures that clients’ needs are assessed accurately and they receive the specialist wrap-around support that they require.

Working with staff in court

A key task for staff and volunteers is building relationships and raising awareness about the service with people working in the court building. You will need to explain the role of the service, its interaction with the court, who the service can help, and how to make referrals. Below, we outline who you should approach and the possible methods by which you might engage them.

The service will quickly identify those staff who are most frequently in court. There can, however, regularly be new people attending so it will be necessary to make efforts to engage continually with those who may be unaware of or less familiar with the work.

WHO TO APPROACH	METHODS
Judiciary and magistracy	✔ Bench newsletters
	✔ Breakfast and lunch meetings
	✔ Via the Judicial Leadership Group
Lawyers	✔ Visiting the advocates’ office regularly
	✔ Speaking to lawyers in waiting areas
Legal advisors and list callers	✔ Through HMCTS communication channels including through the HMCTS public user engagement team
	✔ Team meetings
	✔ Speaking to list callers in waiting areas
Probation, Witness Service, Liaison and Diversion, and other services	✔ Through team managers
	✔ Team meetings
	✔ Conversations with individuals
	✔ Via the Probation Liaison Group
Security and facilities staff	✔ Conversations with individuals
	✔ Through building champions

Identifying and working with external services

Given that much of the work of advice and support services involves making referrals to longer-term support in the community, it will be necessary to have a good working knowledge of and relationship with those services that can provide this. This external support will need to respond to the needs of people using the community advice service so staff and volunteers should begin by identifying what is available for the needs identified at stage two above. At existing community advice services, the top needs are:

- Housing
- Benefits
- Debt
- Mental health

- Criminal justice involvement
- Education, training and employment
- Drug use
- Alcohol use
- Physical health
- Domestic abuse

Where available, smaller local services are often able to be more flexible and responsive, as well as easier to build a relationship with, but national organisations and helplines can also be useful where there are gaps in local provision. As a first step when setting up an advice service, staff and volunteers should map the local service provision, and keep an up-to-date record of all the services in the area. While basic internet searches are useful as a starting point, personal relationships with services will result in more effective referrals, so staff should devote time to building good partner relationships. Make initial introductions, explaining the service and discuss how the two services could work together. Where possible, ask to shadow the service for a day, and invite them to visit the court in return.

This isn't just about collecting information on what services do, it's also about knowing the best way to contact them, the times they are available, the referral process, and any relevant eligibility criteria. Having named contacts and a deeper understanding of those services can reduce people's fears or doubts about using them and increase the chances of their taking up the referrals. Being able to provide leaflets also helps so that people can read more about the services in their own time once they are away from the court. If staff are able to develop dedicated access routes or service level agreements to facilitate referrals this is hugely advantageous.

As much work should be done on this as possible prior to the community advice service opening but it will, of course, require continuous attention and should not be neglected in favour of other priorities. Of equal importance will be for workers to identify which services are proving most useful. Where staff are unable to use quality assurance criteria for the services to which they are referring, the follow-up process with individuals who have used the advice and support services will be an important mechanism for achieving this.

Once you have agreed who is involved, the aims of the service and its structure, and what staff will be doing you should ensure that you confirm the details in a protocol that is signed by the key partners, including the service provider once you have one in place. This protocol should include information on the process to follow if any party feels the protocol is not being followed or if they have concerns.

5. Secure funding

How much it costs

It is difficult to give a precise cost for a service as this will vary depending on the model agreed locally. Instead, we outline here some key costs you will need to consider:

1. **Paid staff** – We suggest hiring one Community Advice Manager and one Community Advice Coordinator. They can be full time or part time depending on the number of people who will access your service and the number of days the service will be open.
2. **Office costs** - This will include equipment, such as laptops and printers, a database to store client information and any insurance cover you will need. This also covers petty cash and general staff expenses, e.g. travel to events / to meet other services.

3. Staff/volunteer training

Who to approach for funding

As outlined above, the service can be delivered at a minimal cost and therefore you may wish to apply to one funder or to split the cost over several. Having one funder can reduce your workload in terms of applications and reporting, but having several can be a useful way of bringing ownership and involvement more widely as well as being helpful for future sustainability. When you first set up the service it may be easiest to approach a charitable trust or foundation to support with establishing a pilot. Other options include the Police and Crime Commissioner, Community Safety Partnerships and local authority advice commissioners. It is important that you do not limit your applications

to only those funders with a criminal justice focus; due the wide spectrum of needs supported via this model you should also consider those whose aim, for example, is to end homelessness, support those in debt or provide support for those experiencing domestic abuse.

What to include in a proposal to funders

Different funders will have different requirements for proposals, but all will require you to have some basic information. You should develop this around key areas that can then be adapted for individual funders. All the information listed here should have been developed during the stages of this toolkit you have covered so far. This includes:

- The overall aim of the service
- The outcomes you will be working towards
- How you intend to measure your impact
- Who your service will work with and anticipated demand
- The activities the service will deliver
- Your governance arrangements
- How much it will cost.

6. Monitor and adapt

The working party should agree a reporting schedule, including how often and in what format. This should include:

- A summary of progress since the last report;
- Any learning from the period: what has gone well and what has not;
- Any development plans based on the learning;
- Performance data including:
 - Client numbers and referral routes;
 - Client demographic profiles;
 - Client needs profiles;
 - Numbers and types of actions taken;
 - The outcomes of referrals made;
- One or two case studies of people using the service: their needs, action taken and the results.

Your working party will continue to fulfil its role of overseeing progress, but it should also serve as a means to identify any potential problems early and take action to mitigate against these. It should also be discussing what the service is learning through its delivery and considering how it could be developed or whether there are opportunities to use the learning with other services.

7. Evaluate

Having a plan for evaluation is important, and having this plan in place from the beginning of the service is ideal. The plan should describe the service itself, how it will be evaluated, and how evaluation results will feed into service improvements and inform decision making. It can be updated as circumstances warrant, but should be written as early as possible and include consideration of the following:

- The target group the service is working with and the needs it is addressing;
- The service's theory of change/logic model - a visual representation of how the service is expected to bring about change;
- The key research questions the evaluation will answer;
- The types of data the evaluation will require;
- Indicators and potential data sources;
- Timescales, budgets, and potential evaluation partners.

There are several types of evaluation, serving different purposes at different stages of a service's development. A few common types are outlined in the following table.¹¹

Even with careful planning prior to implementation you are unlikely to anticipate every aspect of the service's operation in practice. Some data may prove difficult or impossible to collect, and some outcomes may turn out to be unrealistic. An evaluation plan should be flexible in response to learning and change.

EVALUATION TYPE	WHAT IT SHOWS	WHEN TO USE	PURPOSE
Formative	Is the service well developed?	During planning stages or at the beginning of implementation	To allow for early modification of the service plan
Process	How is the service operating? Has it been implemented as planned?	In the early stages of implementation	To ensure that service plans and activities are working
Impact / outcome	Does the service achieve its outcomes? What impact has it had on service users? What change can be attributed to the service?	When the service is fully developed, stable, and unlikely to fundamentally change	To determine whether the service is effectively meeting its objectives
Economic (Cost-benefit / value for money etc.)	What resources are being used (and their costs), compared to outcomes generated through the service	During service operation (building on an impact / outcome evaluation)	To provide stakeholders and funders with a method to assess cost relative to effects

However, our experience with existing advice and support services operating in magistrates' courts suggests that there are likely to be a number of outcomes of interest in common between these services. Members of the working party should discuss and develop their own outcomes and indicators, but an example is provided here to help start this conversation.

OUTCOME	INDICATORS	DATA SOURCE
Improvement of underlying needs of those using the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Take up of external services ✔ Usefulness of referrals and actions ✔ Progress on issues 	Community advice service data
Increased compliance with court orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Fine repayment ✔ Reduced return to court 	Court compliance team information
Reduced reoffending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Frequency of reoffending ✔ Severity of reoffending 	Justice Data Lab
Increased understanding of and trust in the justice system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✔ Perceptions of legitimacy and fairness ✔ Understanding of the process 	Questionnaires with people using the service

The information above is purely introductory - these concepts, and many more not mentioned, are described by a voluminous research literature. Evaluation is not always easy. The working party might explore the possibility of partnering with an experienced research organisation or university to help develop and carry out an evaluation plan.

SECTION 3

Conclusion and offer of support

Providing advice and support to those attending magistrates' courts can add to the range of problem-solving approaches that aim to tackle the underlying problems that lead people to commit crime. Setting up services to deliver this support requires some thought and work but we hope that by giving advice on the steps to be taken, sharing examples of what existing schemes do, and providing template tools that can be used where appropriate locally, this toolkit can make this process simpler.

If you are interested in establishing such a service or would like any more advice or support please contact us at info@justiceinnovation.org.

You can find more details on existing advice and support services below:

For further information about CASS+ please see cassplus.org

You can learn more about Highbury Community Advice on the Centre for Justice Innovation website, <https://justiceinnovation.org/areas-of-focus/community-advice>

Information about Youth Court Solutions is available on the Crisalys Foundation website, crisalys.org/youth-court-solutions

SECTION 4

Templates

To help you get started these templates and draft documents are available on request:

- Working protocol
- Terms of reference for working party
- Working party agenda
- Service policies and risk assessments
- Job descriptions and person specifications
- Shortlisting grid and interview questions
- Assessment form
- Consent and personal information forms
- Follow up form

Please contact us at info@justiceinnovation.org

Endnotes

- 1 Figures are for April 2021-March 2022 and taken from Ministry of Justice Criminal Justice Statistics Quarterly, January-March 2022
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- 7 Crest Advisory (2021). *Process evaluation of Community Advice and Support Services + in Devon and Cornwall: Interim report*. Available at: <https://justiceinnovation.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2021/Process%20Evaluation%20-%20Cass%2B%20Interim%20Report.pdf>
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- 11 Adapted from Martin, Alison Brooks, "Plan for Program Evaluation From the Start," *NIJ Journal* 275 (2015): 24-28, available at <http://nij.gov/journals/275/Pages/plan-for-program-evaluation.aspx>.
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