



ADVICE SPACE BACKGROUND INFORMATION 2021

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 1954. 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 modernise 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), although currently remote working during the pandemic, Advice Space aims:

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

VISION, MISSION AND KEY PRINCIPLES

Vision

A society where individuals are not held back by their personal circumstances and are able to play a part in their communities; and, where policy makers target and provide for the most vulnerable in an efficient, effective and client focused manner.

Mission

Our mission is:

- Through service excellence, we exist to create positive impacts for individuals and communities, by providing clarity and focusing on solutions to the issues affecting them.

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, has any right to 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.
- **Impartial:** The service is impartial. It is open to everybody, irrespective of disability, age, gender, gender identity, race, religion or philosophical 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. Appropriate action will be taken on behalf of the client regardless of how unpopular or unpalatable it may be with the community or the bureau itself.
- **Accountable:** Advice Space provide a service which is accountable to users and others who work with the advice centre
- **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 of its clients and the community which it serves and are able to show its effectiveness through demonstrable and measurable outcomes

1.1 STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Advice Space operates with 31 staff and over 20 volunteers.

RANGE OF SERVICES

Advice Space helps people resolve their debt, benefits, housing, legal, discrimination, employment, immigration, consumer and other problems.

Under our Membership Agreement with Advice NI we must

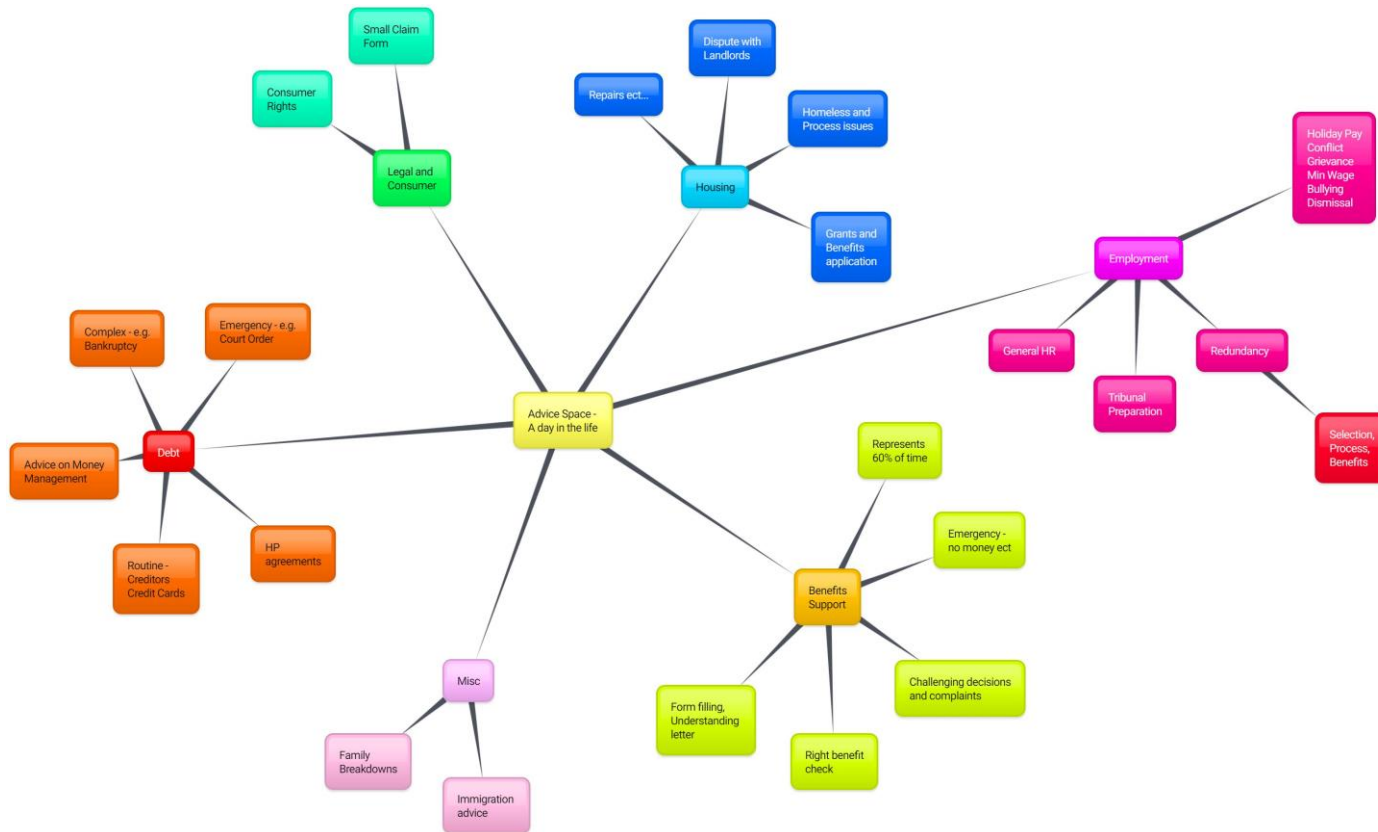
- provide assisted information services in all advice subjects where the client requests this or where the client is capable of taking the issue forward on their own behalf;

- provide generalist advice to clients in welfare benefits, money advice, housing, employment, consumer, immigration and nationality, family and personal matters, taxes, health and education;
- provide generalist advice to clients on discrimination across all subjects.

We also aim to ensure that clients in need of casework in money advice and welfare benefits are able to get this and where it is appropriate provide self-help information services as long as it is clear to clients that they have access to an advisor during specified hours whether by phone or face to face via remote technology.

A typical “day in the life” of Advice Space is outlined below:

Figure 1.1 “A day in the Life”



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

Advisors do not tell clients what to do but explain their options and the possible outcomes of different courses of action. Clients are 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 to 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;
- Sometimes represent clients at tribunals; and
- Refer clients to specialist caseworkers for complex problems or to other agencies when appropriate.

LOCATION OF SERVICES

Advice Space has six advice offices in Belfast, located in the following areas:

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

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 moved all its offices onto a single number for the provision of advice: 0300 1 233 233.

Prior to the pandemic we had expanded our operating channels and whilst retaining face to face services, we were able to offer telephone and email advice. During the pandemic remote working has been implemented.

Figure 1.3 Tailored model of intervention to meet client need and advice type

