



# LATAN Demand for Advice & Capacity Survey 2023

September 2023



Liverpool  
Access to Advice  
Network

## Contents

<b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....	3
<b>2. Purpose and Context</b> .....	5
<b>3. Increases in Demand for Advice and Support</b> .....	7
<b>4. Why has Demand Increased?</b> .....	8
<b>5. How is Demand Affecting Service Availability for Residents?</b> .....	9
<b>6. The Experience of Clients</b> .....	10
<b>7. How are Staff Affected?</b> .....	11
<b>8. Funding Capacity and Sustainability</b> .....	12
<b>9. Community Resources Unit Funding</b> .....	14
<b>Appendix 1 – Overview of Methodology and Participants</b> .....	15
<b>Appendix 2 – About LATAN</b> .....	18

## 1. Executive Summary

Liverpool has a diverse, complex and fragile ecosystem of advice providers and gateways supporting residents with widely differing advice journeys and needs. Advice provision might typically relate to areas such as housing, income, benefits / discretionary assistance, debt, immigration, employment, social care and educational needs.

LATAN's primary purpose is to help to protect access to quality, free independent advice, by operating as a community of practice, and providing a collective voice.

In June and July of 2023 LATAN invited members of the network to participate in an online survey about their current situation including the extent and nature of demand, pressures on services and the experience of clients and staff. The survey also asked for information on funding and sustainability.

Discussions amongst the Network had already painted a picture of a level of demand which was unprecedented in its scale, complexity and urgency. The results from the survey provide a stark picture of the reality of demand for advice that organisations are facing, and the impact on clients as well as the organisations.

The results from the survey include:

- 95% of organisations who responded have seen an increase in demand for advice, with most reporting an increase of 20% or more;
- Cost of living increases were identified as the main reason for the increase in demand, but housing issues, and the need for debt advice were also key drivers;
- 70% of organisations reported that clients are now facing even greater delays in accessing the advice they need;
- Almost half of organisations reported that they weren't able to meet the demand they face;
- The effect on clients is delays to accessing advice, and an increase in stress and anxiety.

As one organisation described **“As clients become more desperate they increasingly turn to other methods to try to manage their debt, that may include gambling or illegal money lenders. Of course this exacerbates their financial situation.”**

The survey also asked respondents to consider their level of funding, and the future – both short term, and where they see themselves in 5 years time.

- 90% reported that their funding is not sufficient to meet the level of demand for their services;
- Over 50% had already had to limit or withdraw their services.

When looking to the future, many respondents were not feeling confident about their ability to continue delivering services at current levels:

**“Not very - we have a balanced budget (for this year at least) provided costs don't increase, but we are unable to meet the increased demand”**

**“As with many charities currently, we are concerned about our ongoing ability to deliver services with restricted funding.”**

When asked to complete the statement ‘**In the next 5 years our organisation will be....**’ organisations mostly provided statements that paint a stark picture of the challenges that the advice sector in Liverpool faces:

**“Stretched to the limit, as more and more people are accessing our welfare benefit advice service, debt advisory service and community pantry”**

**“Closed!”**

We urge you to read this report in full; whilst the survey clearly evidences the determination of members to provide the advice and support which clients need, unfortunately it also shows that there are severe risks to the sector.

LATAN believes that the findings of the survey show that the advice sector is at a critical juncture in terms of capacity and sustainability. This provides an opportunity for development of a long term provision and funding strategy that can help to maintain high quality independent advice in the face of extraordinary needs. This in turn will help to protect our citizens and public services from spiralling personal, social and economic costs.

## 2. Purpose and Context

LATAN is a network of advice provider, gateway and other support organisations linked to the journey to accessing free legal advice in Liverpool. The sector in Liverpool is a diverse, complex and fragile ecosystem of advice providers and gateways supporting residents with widely differing advice journeys and needs. Advice provision might typically relate to areas such as housing, income, benefits/ discretionary assistance, debt, immigration, employment, social care or educational needs.

Research undertaken by the University of Liverpool on behalf of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, published in 2018, highlighted some of the difficulties people faced in accessing advice in Liverpool at that time:

**“Although participants valued the support they received, advice centres cannot meet demand and they can only provide a limited service. This can mean long waiting times or being unable to obtain advice at all.”** (Organ et al, 2018)

Since the publication of the research a range of factors have exacerbated the situation, including the Covid-19 pandemic, major increases in the cost of essentials such as food, fuel and rent, an emerging housing crisis, as well as the continuing impact of ‘welfare reform’. At the same time funding reductions have impacted advice providers and gateways. Early access to quality independent advice is essential to protecting the health and wellbeing of residents and to helping Liverpool to be a fairer city, yet delays in accessing advice is increasing. Furthermore, the demographic of those seeking and in need of advice is widening and growing.

Members of the Liverpool Access to Advice Network (LATAN) frequently mention increased scale, complexity and urgency of demand. In order to better understand the nature of this demand and the pressures faced by the sector and the residents it serves, LATAN has undertaken a survey of its members. The survey was undertaken during June and July 2023, and focused on the following key areas:

- Changes to level of demand, the extent of any increase in demand for advice, and the key reasons for any increase in demand.
- The advice areas under most pressure and the changing nature of clients’ needs.
- How any pressures on capacity may have affected the ability to support clients.
- Changes to the client experience (for example the impact of delays or changes to needs).
- How staff working within advice providers and gateways have been affected by increases in demand.
- Funding, capacity and sustainability.
- The likely impact of scheduled cuts to Liverpool City Council Community Resources Grant funding during 2024/2025; and
- Looking forward, asking organisations where they see themselves in 5 years’ time.

Survey results, including comments and insights offered by participants are described in detail below.

Appendix 1 details provides an overview of the survey questions, methodology and provides a list and breakdown of participating organisations. 17 organisations responded to the survey, which is 15% of the LATAN membership.

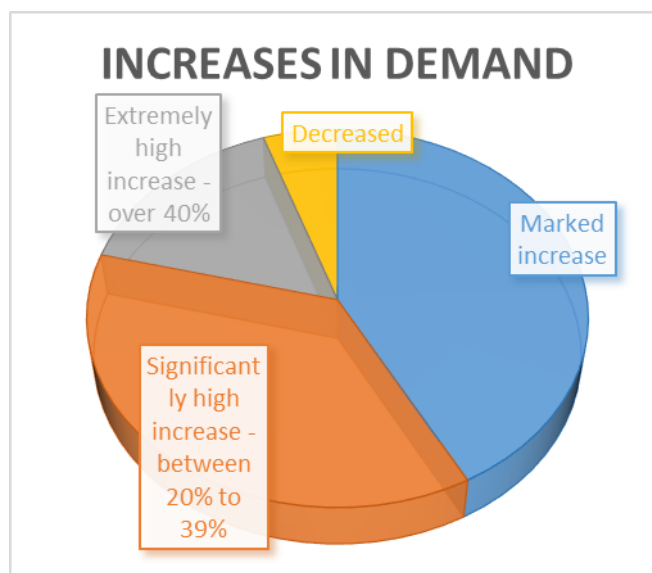
Appendix 2 provides a brief overview of LATAN.

### 3. Increases in Demand for Advice and Support

Survey participants were asked about the extent of any increase in demand for services in the preceding 12 months. 95% of respondents confirmed that they had experienced increased demand; of these 44% had experienced an increase of up to 19% with the remaining 56% identifying an increase of 20% or more.

The increases in demand described are in addition to what is widely reported to be heavy demand in the previous 12 months. The underlying reasons for this demand level and the impact upon clients was further explored in subsequent elements of the survey.

Increases in demand need to be understood in the context of other pressures including case complexity; in other words whilst numbers of clients is a simple measure, casework complexity adds a further dimension.



Pressures upon, and risks to, clients have also increased. Most participants indicated that they had found increasing numbers of clients to be at immediate risk of homelessness and destitution (unable to afford essentials to eat, stay warm and dry and keep clean).

**95%**

identified an increase in their demand over the last 12 months

Most reported an increase in excess of 20%

**84%**

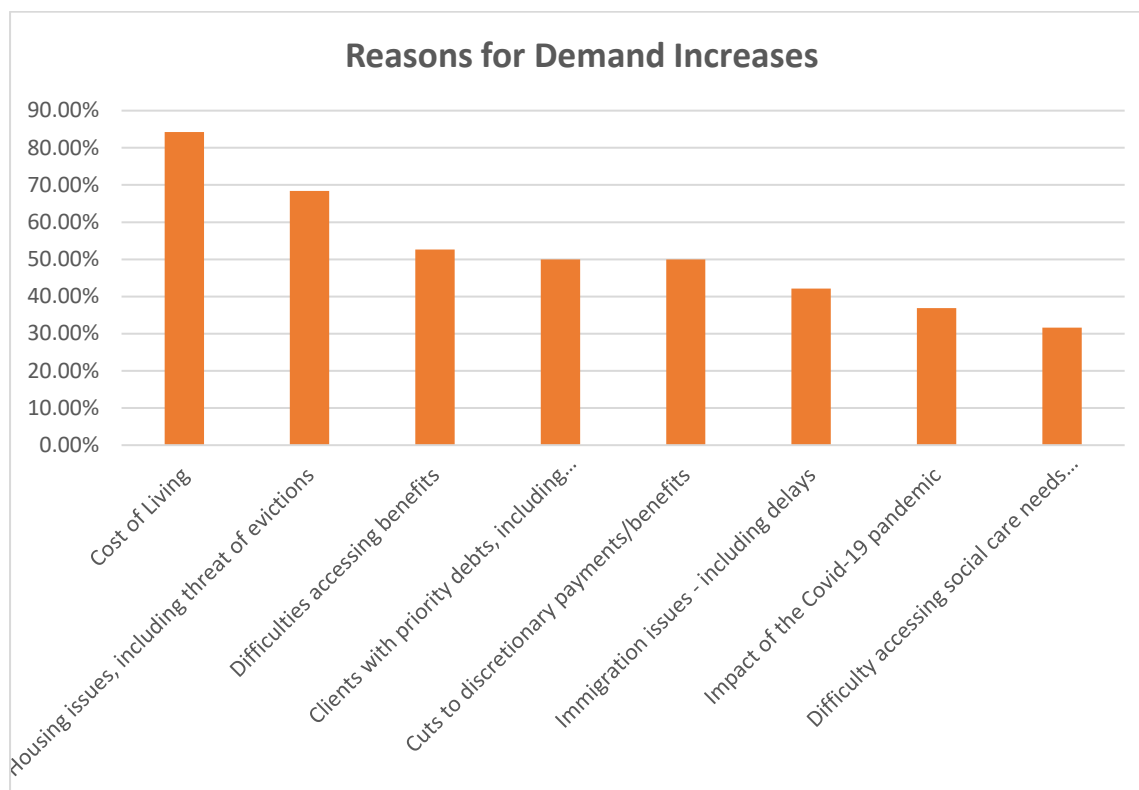
reported an increase in the number of complex cases

**64%**

were encountering more clients at immediate risk of homelessness and / or destitution

## 4. Why has Demand Increased?

Participants were asked to identify the key underlying reasons for any increase in demand. The survey highlighted practitioners' views that the single biggest cause of greater demand was increases in the cost of living (over 80%), the second highest cause was housing issues, including the threats of eviction (68%). Other key causes included difficulties accessing benefits, cuts to benefits and discretionary payments, priority debts (circa 50%) and immigration issues and delays (42%).



Almost 70% of respondents identified that increasing numbers of people were in financial hardship and in need of debt advice. A number of organisations commented upon how clients are often unable to afford essentials and have a 'deficit income'.

We are an organisation that provides Welfare Rights services and debt (Money Advice) services. We have seen a significant rise in demand for these services. However, as people struggle to manage a deficit household budget the effect on the basics - food, fuel, housing, clothing, school related items including uniform, is impacted.

**Raise**

The demands increased in all areas of the social life, such as health, benefits & welfare, housing, debts, energy bills, cost of food etc...

**Liverpool Arabic Centre**



## 5. How is Demand Affecting Service Availability for Residents?

The survey sought to gather information on how providers of advice and gateway organisations have been affected by recent levels of demand. Questions explored issues such as ability to meet the level of demand and any steps that organisations have felt necessary to react to this including waiting lists, additional triage and other steps to prioritise or restrict access.

Key headlines are that:

- Over 70% stated that clients were facing greater delays in obtaining the advice needed.
- 68% stated they did not have enough staff to meet demand.
- 58% reported that their waiting lists had increased, with just over a quarter of respondents indicating that they had been forced to temporarily close waiting lists.
- Over a third indicated that they had been forced to introduce waiting lists.
- Almost a half stated that they simply weren't able to meet the demand which they faced.
- 47% stated that they had introduced additional levels of triage.
- Around 20% stated that had needed to reduce the level of casework to respond to high levels of demand. Separately 20% had restricted the numbers of new cases taken on, in order to cope with demand.

This element of the survey confirms that demand is significantly outstripping capacity and that many organisations have needed to develop a range of responses to cope, including restricting or delaying access and spreading resources more thinly.

Early and easy access to advice is critical to ensuring that clients problems do not become compounded, allowing crisis situations to worsen. The findings suggest that without additional capacity some residents will fail to get advice as quickly as they need, which in turn may lead to damaging effects upon their lives.

Increases in urgent and priority need e.g. fuel, food, benefit sanctions, require an immediate response.

We are overwhelmed by the need for debt advice and the advice options available are limited due to negative budgets.

Citizens Advice Liverpool

We have had to gently control the numbers accessing our service by reducing the overall accessibility and publicity and then by constantly monitoring and prioritising caseload. Repeatedly this year we have heard of services that have closed or reduced their offer from clients who are then adding in to our caseload.

Big Help

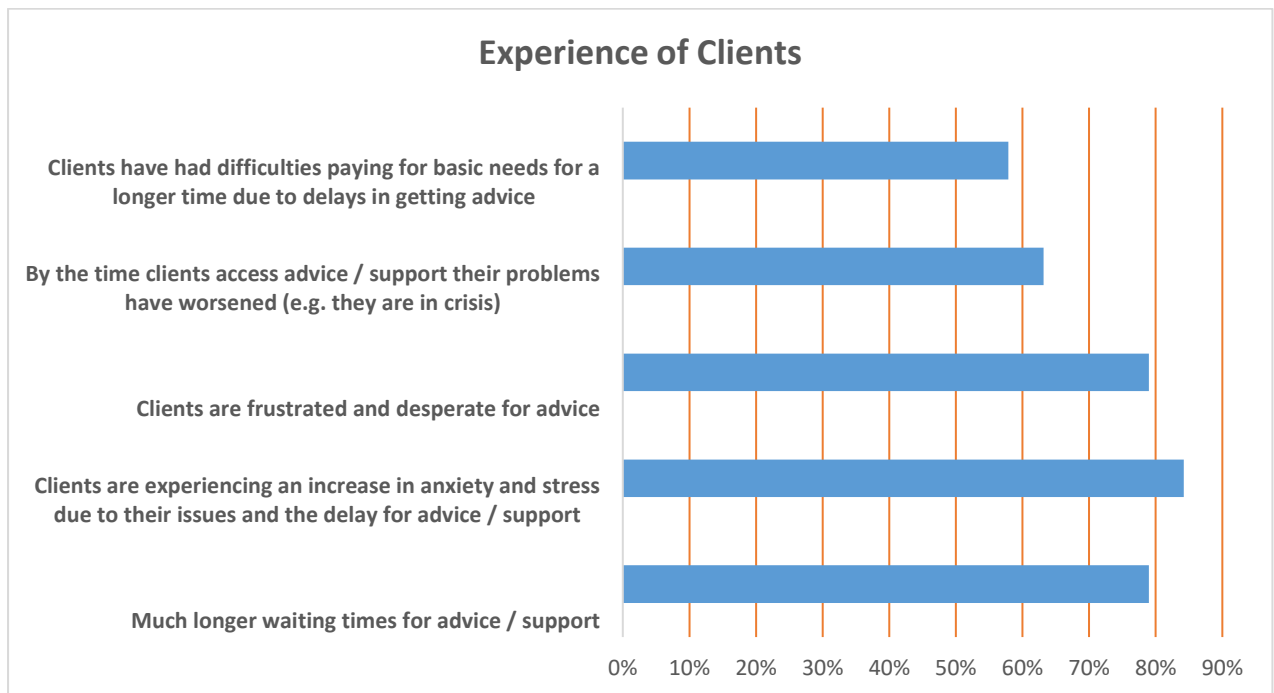
Having to be very focused who we can help and increase in signposting.

Anonymity requested

## 6. The Experience of Clients

The survey sought information on organisations perceptions of the current experience of residents seeking advice, including their personal circumstances. Elsewhere the survey has found a picture of increasingly complex needs amongst clients, high levels of clients at risk of potential destitution and delays in obtaining advice. The impact of this combination of pressures upon the health and well-being of clients is evident in the responses in this area.

Over 60% of respondents believed that clients situations had worsened due to delays in receiving advice and over 80% had seen increasingly levels of stress and anxiety.



As clients become more desperate they increasingly turn to other methods to try to manage their debt, that may include gambling or illegal money lenders. Of course this exacerbates their financial situation. Our services try to support the client to re-engage with their finances and get back on track. But the deeper the financial issues for the client that harder it is for them to see a way through.

**Raise**

Clients mental health is affected the longer they have to wait and this in turn is yet another thing that they have to worry about.

**St Andrews Community Network**

Seeing a lot more at urgent crisis point cases and a lot more safeguarding work involved before advice can be delivered

**Your Housing Group**

## 7. How are Staff Affected?

Organisations that had identified an increase in demand were asked a series of questions about the effects of this upon staff and staffing. This covered matters such as recruitment, retention, training and staff wellbeing and stress.

Just over 40% of survey participants identified problems recruiting staff with the same proportion indicating difficulties with training, due to stretched resources. This is another concerning development for the health of the sector. Almost a third indicated increased difficulties in maintaining cover during holidays and staff sickness, confirming an overall picture of stretched resources.

Turning to staff welfare, it is a deeply concerning that over 70% stated that staff were suffering from increased levels of stress, with 40% of participants indicating that they had encountered issues related to staff burnout.

We are having to re-advertise for specialist legal advisers and get very few if any suitable candidates. We are having to grow our own by developing our staff. This impacts on time and reduces casework capacity.

**Merseyside Law Centre**

Staff are more frequently dealing with upset and angry clients due to the amount of time they have spent trying to access advice services. We are dealing with more people than ever before and yet the perception can be that we aren't responding to need which is negatively impacting our reputation.

**Citizens Advice Liverpool**

It's a difficult job. The Advisors are hugely compassionate and caring and work with the clients to try to tackle entrenched issues within complex, often chaotic personal circumstances. It takes its toll on the staff team. Expert Advisors, with the right interpersonal skills and the resilience to work with clients, who invariably have upsetting stories, are a rare breed. Supporting them, including their wellbeing, and valuing them is vital. They are unsung heroes, literally changing people's lives.

**Raise**

We have had to ruthlessly prioritise training and monitoring staff workload/stress.

It is very difficult to recruit trained and experienced staff in certain skill areas in advice.

Fundamentally - there are insufficient resources to recruit enough staff to meet demand.

**Big Help**

## 8. Funding Capacity and Sustainability

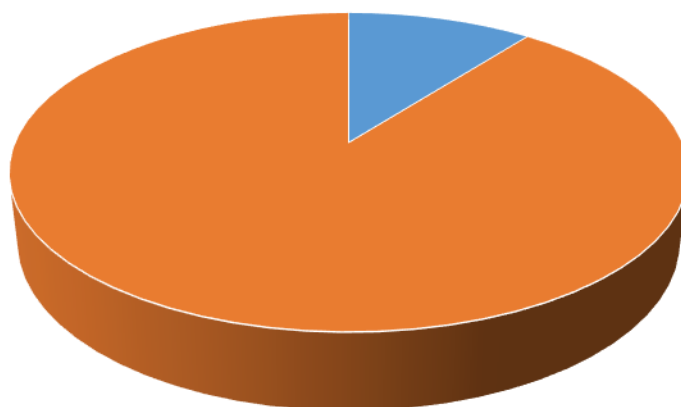
Participants were asked a series of questions connected to funding, service availability and sustainability of their own organisation. Topics addressed included:

- The adequacy of current funding relative to demand.
- Whether an actual or real terms (after inflation) cut in funding has been experienced.
- The potential impact of Liverpool City Council's decision to cut Community Resources Unit funding by 20%.

Organisations were also asked to describe where they envisaged they would be in 5 years. Whilst some indicated confidence a significant number were unsure that they would still be around or envisaged restricting access.

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Is Your Funding Adequate to Meet Demand for Services ?



■ Funding adequate for demand for services

■ Funding not adequate to meet demand for services

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**90%**

of respondents  
did not have  
adequate funding  
to meet demand

**37%**

had suffered an  
actual or real  
terms cut in  
funding

## Withdrawn or Limited Services due to Funding



- Have had to withdraw or limit services in the last 12 months due to funding levels
- Have not had to withdraw or limit services in the last 12 months due to funding levels

Organisations that needed to restrict or withdraw services were asked whether they anticipated further reductions in the next 12 months; the responses suggested a high degree of uncertainty with over half stating that they could not say at this stage. The inability of these organisations to confidently plan services over the next 12 months demonstrates that current provision is in a potentially perilous situation, particularly given the backdrop of high demand.

Organisations that had suffered an actual or real terms funding cut were asked about the impact. Responses indicated that all of those affected had reduced their capacity for advice and support provision. Other impacts which were experienced included unrealistic expectations from funders and increased needs for fundraising activity.

**50% +**

had been forced  
to withdraw or  
limit services

**1 in 4**

felt the funding  
situation left  
their organisation  
in a precarious  
position

## 9. Community Resources Unit Funding

Participants in the survey were also asked about the potential impact of Liverpool City Council's 20% reduction in Community Resource Unit funds. Just over half of participants stated that they would be affected, with one of these saying that were likely to be indirectly affected as they anticipated that they would get further demand if other organisations had reduced capacity.

A selection of comments from those potentially affected by the reduction in funding is provided below.

We do not receive CRU funding but the people who would use those services will possibly seek help from us.

It is unrealistic to believe other funding sources will pick up the 20% shortfall - although this may help those making the cuts feel better it simply isn't the case .....

**Big Help**

We will have to cut drop-in sessions and specialist free legal advice services in areas of high deprivation some of which are already advice deserts.

**Merseyside Law Centre**

We rely on that funding to cover direct advice work, and this may potentially suffer as result of this cut.

**St Andrews Community Network**

The cumulative impact of reduced funding, harder to secure funding on top of increased costs is placing the organisation in a perilous financial position. That's unsustainable and incredibly stressful on all staff and trustees. Supporting the people of the city to manage debt, see a way through, re-engage in their personal finances and, (where appropriate) secure their rightful welfare benefits, is not just good for them, their family, their community but the city in general.

**Raise**

This funding is used as an anchor to support our core services. It already doesn't cover some of our basic advice costs and a further reduction of this could be detrimental to our advice delivery.

**Citizens Advice Liverpool**

## Appendix 1 – Overview of Methodology and Participants

LATAN developed an online survey that included multiple choice questions (most with the opportunity to tick 'other' and provide other information), opportunities to comment on the main question areas, and an opportunity to provide their views on the future. In the survey there were 5 main sections:

- **Organisations experience of demand for services in the last 12 months** – including questions on changes to the level of demand; the reasons why there may be increases in the level of demand; what the impact is of any increase in demand, and; an opportunity to describe where demand had risen the most.
- **Client experience in relation to level of demand** – including multiple choice questions on what the impact of any increase in demand has on clients, and; an opportunity to describe the impact on clients.
- **Staff experience in relation to level of demand** – including multiple choice questions on what the impact of any increase in demand has on staff (including staff retention, levels of stress), and; an opportunity to describe the impact on staff.
- **Capacity and funding** – including questions on whether organisations funding is adequate to meet demand; limitations on services due to funding; whether organisations have had a reduction in funding in the last 12 months, and what the impact of this has been. Under this section organisations were asked to indicate if they receive CRG funding, and if so, what the reduction in funds would mean for them.
- **Type of organisation and (for advice providers) levels of advice delivered** – including an opportunity for organisations to describe whether they are advice provider, gateway or support organisations. For advice provider organisations there were additional questions identifying what area and levels of advice they provide.

The survey was circulated to the LATAN membership through email campaigns, with reminders to complete at Network and other meetings. The survey was circulated between June and July 2023.

There were 19 respondents to the survey from 17 advice and support organisations. This represents 15% of the LATAN membership.

Of the 17 organisations responding, 14 organisations described themselves as advice organisations, providing one or more areas of legal advice on debt, disability, education, employment law, family law, health & social care, housing, immigration, and welfare benefits.

Organisations providing advice not only provide advice on a range of issues but do so at different levels - from advice through to Court and Tribunal representation. Of the organisations that responded:

Area of advice	Level of advice	No. organisations delivering
<b>Debt</b>	Advice	10
	One off casework	8
	Ongoing casework	7
	Court & Tribunal Support	3
	Court & Tribunal Representation	3
<b>Disability</b>	Advice	7
	One off casework	7
	Ongoing casework	7
	Court & Tribunal Support	6
	Court & Tribunal Representation	5
<b>Education</b>	Advice	5
	One off casework	2
	Ongoing casework	2
	Court & Tribunal Support	1
	Court & Tribunal Representation	1
<b>Employment</b>	Advice	3
	One off casework	1
	Ongoing casework	0
	Court & Tribunal Support	0
	Court & Tribunal Representation	0
<b>Family Law</b>	Advice	3
	One off casework	1
	Ongoing casework	1
	Court & Tribunal Support	1
	Court & Tribunal Representation	0
<b>Health &amp; Social Care</b>	Advice	5
	One off casework	3
	Ongoing casework	1
	Court & Tribunal Support	0
	Court & Tribunal Representation	0
<b>Housing</b>	Advice	7
	One off casework	7
	Ongoing casework	7
	Court & Tribunal Support	4
	Court & Tribunal Representation	4
<b>Immigration</b>	Advice	5
	One off casework	3
	Ongoing casework	3
	Court & Tribunal Support	1
	Court & Tribunal Representation	1
<b>Welfare Benefits</b>	Advice	11
	One off casework	11
	Ongoing casework	11
	Court & Tribunal Support	9
	Court & Tribunal Representation	9



Organisations who responded to the survey include 4 organisations who wished to remain anonymous. Other respondents were:

4Wings Northwest CIC

Big Help

Citizens Advice Liverpool

Energy Projects Plus

Fazakerley Community Federation

Liverpool Arabic Centre

Merseyside Law Centre

Raise

Riverside Housing

St Andrews Community Network

United for Ukraine

Vauxhall Community Law and Information Centre

Your Housing

## Appendix 2 – About LATAN

Liverpool Access to Advice Network (LATAN) was formed in 2020 as part of a ground-breaking project funded by Liverpool City Council (LCC), The University of Liverpool and Citizens Advice Liverpool. The network was developed as part of the Access to Justice Project, which was a response to the fact that Liverpool has high levels of deprivation and high levels of demand for free legal advice in social welfare law. Austerity driven policies, Covid-19 and the unprecedented cost of living crisis continue to increase the level of demand. Research undertaken by the University of Liverpool identified that the advice ecosystem in Liverpool is limited, fragile and complex.

“At present there are a diverse number of organisations involved in a person’s journey to getting advice, but there are a very limited number of places to get legal advice.” (Source: Organ, et al. 2020).

The Liverpool Access to Advice Network (LATAN) was developed as a way to work in partnership, develop a community of practice, and to help protect and improve access to quality, independent advice for residents.

### **The Network aims to:**

- Be a thriving community of practice supporting the development of skills, knowledge and infrastructure within the advice sector, aiming to help maximise capacity
- Support residents to secure appropriate independent, quality advice at the earliest possible point, maximising preventative value;
- Promote and demonstrate the social and economic value of free, independent advice;
- Capture and amplify the voice of citizens needing advice;
- Provide an influential collective voice on social policy issues, supported by evidence and data;
- Work collaboratively, offering an equal voice to members to work creatively for sustainable solutions including funding;
- Increase knowledge and understanding of advice provision in the city and increase awareness of the demand on different types of advice.

LATAN is currently governed by a Committee composed of 10 Network members. Meeting monthly, the LATAN Committee share their knowledge, skills and a commitment to working collaboratively, to ensure the Network is effective, and working to the overall aim of improving access to advice.

LATAN is currently funded by the Legal Education Foundation (LEF) for a 3-year period, providing funds for a part-time Network Development Co-ordinator (for 3 years) and a part-time Referral Engagement Lead (for 1 year). LEF funding has been accessed through Citizens Advice Liverpool as the accountable body.

## Network activities in brief:

- LATAN Network Meetings – hybrid meetings focusing on information and knowledge sharing; issues of common interest; development of the network.
- Collective voice – including activities/events to develop the Liverpool Advice Strategy; a network response to LCC Budget proposals for 2023/24; and a series of workshops on best practice in measuring the impact of advice.
- Online Referral System – an inter-agency referral system to enable advice providers and gateway/support organisations to refer residents for appropriate specialist advice (e.g. housing, employment, welfare benefits, debt, education, SEND or family law).

For further information on LATAN visit the website:

[www.liverpoolaccessstoadvicenetwork.org.uk](http://www.liverpoolaccessstoadvicenetwork.org.uk)

To contact LATAN email: [info@liverpoolaccessstoadvicenetwork.org.uk](mailto:info@liverpoolaccessstoadvicenetwork.org.uk)

