In June and July of 2023 Liverpool Access to Advice Network (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. The findings of the survey show that the advice sector is at a critical juncture in terms of capacity and sustainability.

We received 19 responses to the survey from 17 organisations, with 82% of respondents describing themselves as advice providers, and 18% describing themselves as support organisations.

Demand for advice & support

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

"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

Why has demand increased?

80%+ single biggest cause of greater demand was increases in the cost of living

68% second highest cause was housing issues, including threats of eviction

50% difficulties accessing benefits, cuts to benefits, priority debts - half of respondents reported all of these as reasons for increases in demand

Capacity

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 indicating that they had been forced to temporarily close waiting lists

"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 for clients who are then adding in to our caseload."

Big Help

Impact on clients

80%+ report that clients are experiencing an increase in anxiety and stress due to their issues and delays in accessing advice

"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

60%+ report that by the time clients access advice or support their problems have worsened

"Seeing a lot more at urgent crisis point cases and a lot more safeguarding work involved before advice can be delivered."
Your Housing Group

Funding, capacity & the future

90% of respondents did not have adequate funding to meet demand

37% of respondents had suffered an actual or real terms cut in funding during the last 12 months

50%+ had been forced to withdraw or limit services

1 in 4 felt the funding situation left the organisation in a precarious position

Changes to CRU funding - a 20% reduction in funding from Liverpool City Council

"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

"This funding [CRU] 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

The future - how confident organisations felt about sustainability based on current levels of funding and levels of demand

"Not confident. Our organisation is fully committed to helping all we can but demand is overwhelming."
Big Help

"As with many charities currently, we are concerned about our ongoing ability to deliver services with restricted funding."
Anonymous

"We are not confident"
Vauxhall Community Law & Information Centre

"We are below average in confidence"
St Andrews Community Network