



# **Liverpool Access to Advice Network**

## **Liverpool City Council Budget Proposals for 2023: Response to Consultation**

6th January 2023



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# Liverpool City Council Budget Proposals for 2023: Response to Consultation

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Liverpool Access to Advice Network (LATAN) thanks Liverpool City Council (LCC) for the opportunity to respond to its consultation on Budget Proposals. Our Network brings together advice providers and gateways across the city. In responding to the budget proposals we aim to act as a voice for organisations delivering independent, quality advice to citizens, therefore we have examined the consequences both for advice provision and for the residents that we support.
- 1.2. In drawing together this response we have sought the input of advice providers across the city via an on-line survey, by highlighting proposals at our network meetings and by providing opportunities for further individual comments. The comments and insights below therefore reflect input from a wide range of organisations.
- 1.3. We regret that the City Council consultation window was short and spanned the Christmas period and suspect that, in some cases, this will have affected the ability of some organisations (particularly smaller ones) to respond. We may therefore continue to gather and put forward the views of our network members following the end of the formal consultation on 6th January 2023.
- 1.4. We understand that the Council faces extreme pressures on its budget and will prioritise statutory services. We strongly advise the Council to examine the full consequential impacts of its budget proposals including the cumulative effects. For example, reducing LCC advice provision and gateways (by limiting One Stop Shops and phasing out the Benefits Maximisation Team), cutting funding to the advice sector and withdrawing large amounts of welfare support (via cuts to Council Tax Support, Discretionary Housing Payments and the Citizens Support Scheme) could create a dangerous cocktail of reduced support and increased demand. This in turn may result in many citizens failing to get timely quality advice or support, causing increased destitution, homelessness and extremes of child poverty, all of which is likely to significantly increase pressure on statutory services. For this reason, we have commented both on individual proposals and the combined impacts.

## 2. Our Response

- 2.1. Our response highlights key information from our Network members, detailed below are comments on specific proposals. In conclusion, we respond to the combined effect of the proposals.

### 3. Community Resource Unit (CRU)

3.1. LATAN believes that quality, timely advice is vital to supporting citizens to secure their rights and entitlements and protect their basic needs. The advice sector faces unprecedented challenges. Multiple current issues, including the 'cost of living crisis', the continued impact of welfare reforms, unaffordable housing, delays in immigration decisions, and the after-effects of COVID, leave many citizens struggling to meet basic needs and at risk of destitution and exploitation. Advice needs are increasingly complex and urgent. Empowering citizens to access their rights and entitlements will help our communities to better weather the current storms. Against a background of significant cuts to funding and major reductions in Legal Aid, the sector is already unable to meet demand.

3.2. In response to the proposed reduction of 20% in funding to advice provision Network members comments include the following:

The overall current climate is pushing organisations to the brink, we are already receiving calls and visits from people coming to us who have been unable to get through to other agencies ... on the phone. Further reductions across the sector will have a negative effect on service provision at a time when need is at its greatest. (Vauxhall Community Law & Information Centre)

We currently provide face to face specialist legal advice and casework for over 1200 people per year. A 20% cut would mean we would advise 250 less citizens directly each year, a reduction of around 800 hours of casework time. CRU supports our drop in surgeries, triage and early intervention services. A reduction in funding means we will have less ability to prevent matters escalating into crisis which require more extreme, expensive interventions such as court and tribunal representation. We already have to secure funding from other charities to support our services. This funding is scarce and increasingly hard to access. (Merseyside Law Centre)

CRU funding is the building block underpinning our core functions. Core funding enables Citizens Advice Liverpool to provide a network of support that prevents escalation of local health, care and housing needs: reducing the need for more intensive and costlier crisis support.

The suggested 20% funding cut would restrict our ability to provide the basic, 'safety-net services' that the people of Liverpool so fundamentally need, or deliver additional savings for the local statutory sector. Our services are intrinsically linked with other support services in the City – issuing over 3000 food bank and 2700 fuel vouchers (excluding the HSF2 Vouchers - 6700 inclusive) dealing with the root causes and underlying problems that force people to use food banks, such as debt, housing and welfare benefits, and provide preventative work such as Financial Wellbeing services and Energy Advice...

...There is a tipping point. Due to the depth and quality of our service the demand for our services outweighs the current capacity, and at peak points in the year people are not always able to access our services. ... Most of the advice sector is at this point, as demand is ever increasing, and organisations are expected to do more with less....

Ultimately we estimate we may serve up to 1000 fewer clients after a 20% grant reduction. 20% reduction in our core funding would not only affect direct delivery of service but also affect our ability to lever in additional funding. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)

- 3.3. Network members funded by CRU have identified a range of possible impacts to provision, however all respondents in this category identified increased shortfalls in advice provision, poorer outcomes for citizens and increased pressure on staff. A majority of respondents also felt that reduced advice provision, lower early intervention, reduced staffing and an inability to meet basic operational costs would arise as a result of the proposed 20% reduction in funding.
- 3.4. LATAN would implore the Council to work with the Network to develop and implement the Advice Strategy which we have recently shared with the authority.

## 4. Mayoral Neighbourhood Fund (MNF)

4.1. Network members who responded to the survey and are funded by MNF all identified a reduced ability to support community-based projects as a direct impact of the proposed 20% funding reduction. Individually members identified negative effects on programmes for young people, older people, and educational, environmental, and social support.

4.2. We have included a selection of the individual comments from Network members below:

The MNF funds some of the cost of our warehousing for the foodbanks and pantries, without this provision we will not be able to feed some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. (St Andrews Community Network)

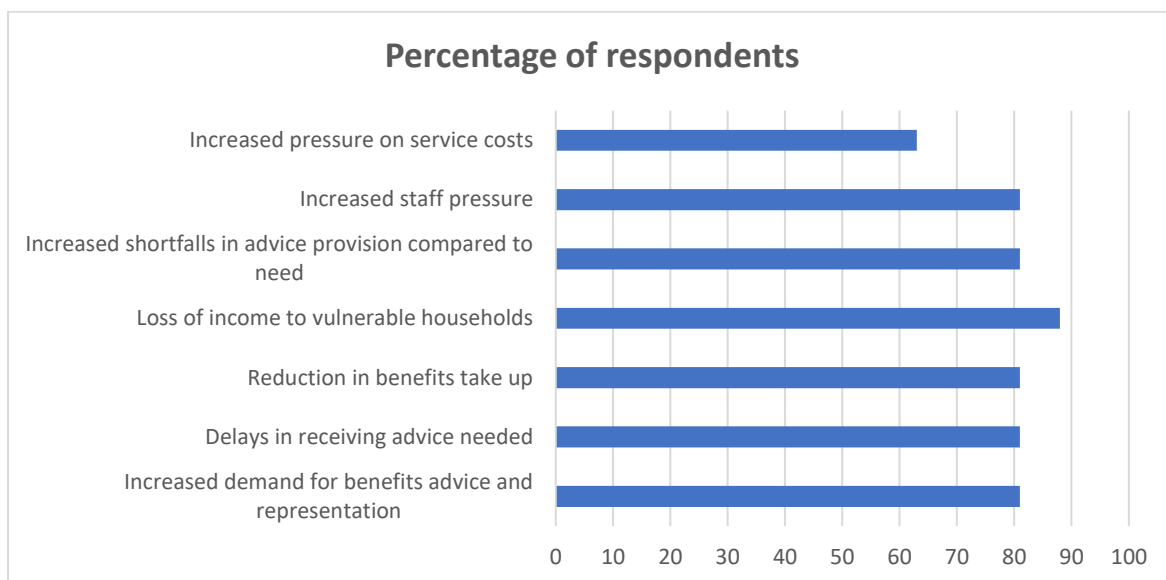
The MNF has previously been invaluable in enabling us to quickly react to immediate needs, the best example being support in delivering food and emergency provisions to those most in need during the Covid lockdowns - this literally saved lives. While we will always aim to support the disabled and vulnerable people in our local community to the best of our ability, reduced funding could reduce this support. (Daisy Inclusive UK)

MNF funds our community based service in one of the most deprived areas in the city, Dovecot. We have recently moved into new premises and face substantial costs to deliver free social welfare legal advice to the community there. Access to justice is essential but will be reduced if this cut is implemented. Consequences include decreased services/risk of closure, inability to meet core costs, increased reliance on funding from other charities, increased reliance on volunteers, inability to pay competitive salaries, inability to recruit, and reduced hours of roles resulting in lack of access to justice for local people. (Merseyside Law Centre)

Mayoral Neighbourhood Fund provides us with funding to target areas of need. Working with elected representatives, we receive funding to deliver advice through outreaches at venues such as grass roots community groups and Liverpool City Council One stop shops and libraries in some of the most deprived wards. Reduction in this funding would impact on the most vulnerable communities and along with the reduction of CRU funding could result in the loss of up to 5 outreach sessions per week providing direct advice to 700 clients per year. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)

## 5. Benefits Maximisation Service (BMS)

5.1. Network members have commented extensively on the effects of the proposal to phase out the Benefits Maximisation Service. The chart below identifies impacts identified. It is notable that the bulk of those responding identified loss of income to vulnerable residents, reductions in benefits take up and increased pressures on other providers.



*Benefits Maximisation Phase Out : LATAN Survey*

5.2. Below we have provided a selection of the many comments which we have received:

The closure of BMS would be a disaster for vulnerable people living with poverty in Liverpool. Their expertise and skills in helping people will cause untold hardship. Unfortunately, this is viewed by many in the community as a means of outsourcing services which will lead to further reductions and eventual abolition of the service. (Vauxhall Community Law & Information Centre)

Increased pressure on family carers and on community care services (disability benefit issues). Increased pressure on housing providers, courts and housing advice (increased rent arrears associated with removal of income maximisation). This is a long established and highly effective service. The staff team have huge and largely irreplaceable experience. (Anonymous 01)

We will be massively impacted by this, and we are very concerned about the effect the closure of BMS will have on vulnerable residents. BMS officers are more like social workers than benefits officers - the work they do is fantastic. While we are concerned about the impact on us being able to provide a quick and efficient service, we are more worried about how this is going to impact vulnerable residents. (St Andrews Community Network)

This important service provides one of the few remaining sources of advice on welfare benefits, which are complex. Removing it will have a significant impact on people's incomes at a very difficult time, and increase pressure on other services as people try to get help needed. It seems like a false economy for the city to cut the service as it brings in more money than it costs." (University of Liverpool)

A valuable resource that our staff are able to refer to. The service, by helping people achieve their entitlements to welfare benefits, increases finances in the local economy. (Mary Seacole House)

This will have an effect on all organisations as we see demand for advice and support increase. The closure will exasperate existing housing and debt issues and target vulnerable households disproportionately. The closure seems short-sighted, as whilst it will provide a short-term saving, it will cost more longer-term due to increases in the number of individuals/families accessing temporary accommodation, due to not being able to afford PRS accommodation. (Shelter)

BMS has an essential role in maximising income for citizens and LCC. Reduction in advice from any sector will impact all services significantly. (Merseyside Law Centre)

Closure of BMS will have a knock on affect to other services, and will increase pressure on surrounding services, this impacts staff morale as well as community issues. (Venus)

The loss of £1 million of funding for advice provision would present a false economy, as it is: disinvesting in crucial preventative services; will increase expenditure on crisis management; and will severely limit capacity to help local vulnerable people at a time when demand for support is at its highest.

The result is increased demand for services who are already overstretched and facing further cuts. Any assumption that the voluntary sector can pick up the work of the BMS service is unrealistic, ill-advised, and will ultimately lead to increased levels of hardship for citizens. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)



## 6. Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)

6.1. Network members have commented extensively on the impact of the proposed withdrawal of £1M in funding. 93% of respondents felt that this would increase the risks of evictions, increase rent arrears and place affected households at risk of being unable to afford basic necessities. Individual respondents also identified risks of stress to families and children, an increased risk of homelessness amongst refugees and citizen anxiety and ill-health.

6.2. A small selection of comments received is provided below:

... Cuts to DHP will mean individuals will get into crisis quicker, increase rent arrears, evictions and demand on homelessness and temporary accommodation services (ultimately costing more longer term). (Shelter)

This cut will effectively remove £1M from people who are amongst the poorest in the city. (Vauxhall Community Law & Information Centre)

An increase in evictions and homelessness. An increase in domestic tensions and abuse. An increase in absolute poverty including hunger and hypothermia. (Anonymous 01)

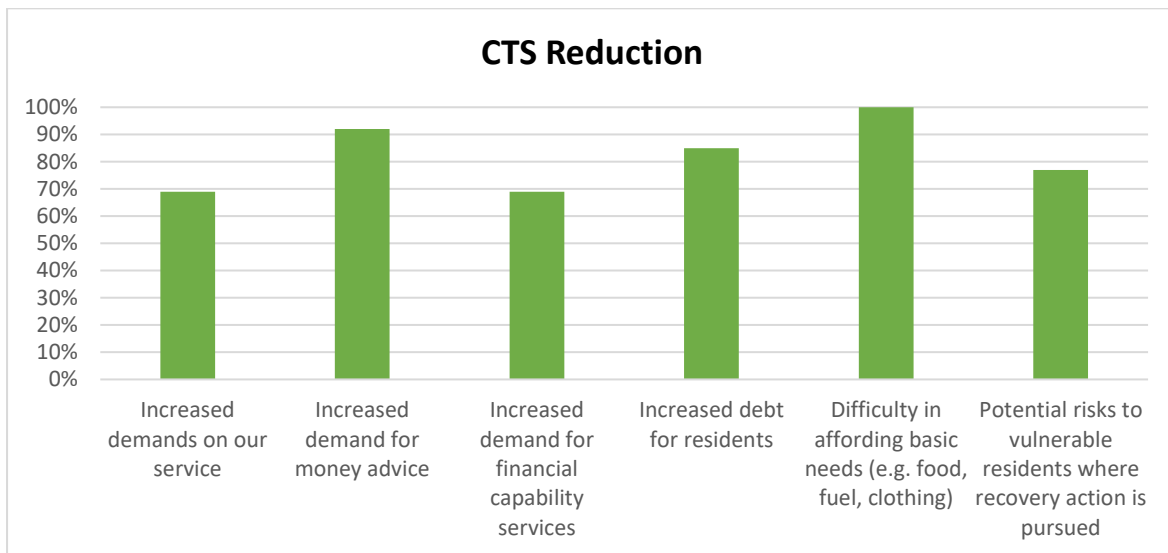
Discretionary Housing Payments is essential for supporting residents to remain in their homes, it is a lifeline to families to avoid eviction and homelessness.... Awards of DHPs reduce Liverpool City Council's enforcement costs and costs associated with homelessness: by assisting clients to remain in their home without fear of homelessness due to rent arrears...Discretionary Housing Payments are often the only way to prevent homelessness. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)

Increased risk of possession matters escalating as unable to agree rent payment arrangements. Increased demand for affordable housing which is already unable to be met. People having to move from lifelong family homes and support networks. (Merseyside Law Centre)

The most important thing is that the DHP is needed by a lot of service users who are vulnerable and who are struggling financially without this being cut. It will be difficult for people to make the difference up in rental costs - ... increasing cases of homelessness. (Torus Foundation)

## 7. Council Tax Support (CTS)

7.1. We have asked Network members to comment upon the Council's 'preferred option' of reducing the maximum amount of Council Tax Support from 91.5% to 80%. Information from those respondents whose organisations deliver advice on Council Tax is detailed in the chart below.



### *Impact of Reducing Maximum Council Tax Support: LATAN Survey*

7.2. Network members responding to this question all indicated that the change would result in households experiencing increased difficulty in meeting basic needs. Almost all respondents also felt that the proposed change would result in higher demand for money advice. There was also concern regarding risks to vulnerable residents where recovery action is pursued.

7.3. Below is a selection of the comments received regarding the proposal:

People will find it increasingly difficult to be able to afford their rent either resulting in rent arrears or driving people further into poverty (Mary Seacole House)

This directly targets the most vulnerable of Liverpool citizens, many of whom who are already experiencing extreme poverty. This is a callous, short sighted measure which will cause hunger and destitution and will inevitably increase demand for local authority services. (Merseyside Law Centre)

The cut in Council Tax Support will disproportionately affect poorer households. With fewer resources to cover rising bills, many are taking on debt just to get by. Due to the impact of Covid, cost of living crisis and welfare reform we have a cohort of people affected by in work poverty. Increasing the Council Tax liability will only add to the intense pressure of families struggling to balance heating their home and feeding families with paying Council Tax and other essential bills.

The numbers of families unable to pay will significantly increase, leading to increased pressure on Liverpool City Council's Council Tax collection services as the rates of enforcement action and costs associated with collection dramatically increase.

Citizens Advice Liverpool work closely with Liverpool City Council Tax department, helping reduce Council-Tax enforcement costs for Liverpool City Council and assisting with agreeing payment plans earlier for 1233 local residents with Council Tax arrears.

(Citizens Advice Liverpool)

This proposed cut will add an extra burden on some of the most vulnerable people in the city who are already struggling with the increase in household costs such as gas/electric and food. (Torus Foundation)

This will be a disproportionate increase in Council tax liability for those on low incomes, a staggered increase over 2-3 years would help reduce the impact of this rise. (Raise Limited)

More debt that is unmanageable for residents - residents who are struggling already are unlikely to pay the increase in the shortfall and therefore will be getting into more and more debt. (St Andrews Community Network)

This removes support from those already on means-tested benefits as an income (CTS) and effectively adds to the burden of inflation and fuel cuts rather than increasing help. (Anonymous 01)

## 8. Citizens Support Scheme (CSS)

8.1. Network members were asked to comment on the proposal to remove furniture grants from social sector tenants. A large number of responses were received, over 90% agreed that the proposed cut would result in:

- Negative impact on physical and mental health
- Potential inability to escape abusive relationships
- Inability to maintain home and tenancy

8.2. Respondents also indicated that those in temporary accommodation and refugees may be amongst the worst affected, as they were unlikely to have savings or any existing furniture.

8.3. Below is a selection of the individual comments received.

People who have moved on from a difficult circumstance – homelessness, abusive relationship, no immigration status - will not get help to set up a home. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)

It will lead to financial instability which will impact other aspects of a client's life. Especially if they have children. (Savera UK)

Removal of furniture grants will make life difficult for those moving into settled accommodation i.e. from temporary accommodation. Lack of essential furniture will make it hard to maintain a tenancy and will increase cases of tenancy abandonment, and homeless presentations. This will have a great effect on people's mental and physical health and will adversely affect families/those with children. (Shelter)

Refugees who have recently gained their status and need to move on into non-Home Office based accommodation, struggle with destitution. Access to furniture packs if they move into RSL accommodation is vital. They do not have the luxury of saving for or collecting furniture in anticipation of moving due to income and no networks. Also the timescales they have to move is very tight. 28 days is not enough time to find a property and most end up being placed in emergency accommodation ... (Anonymous 02)

8.4. Network members were also asked for their views on the proposal to replace cash based Urgent Needs Payments with supermarket vouchers. Several organisations

indicated that this may present problems to households purchasing culturally appropriate foods.

- 8.5. Other comments included that the proposal removed flexibility and choice including, for example, the ability to use a Food Pantry. Respondents were also concerned that citizens may find it difficult to purchase other essentials such as clothing or travel.
- 8.6. Most respondents identified that travel to supermarkets might present an obstacle to households. There was also a widespread view that use of vouchers could reduce personal dignity for those using the scheme.

## 9. Reductions in Support to People with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)

9.1. We have received a wide range of responses regarding the Council's proposal to further restrict support to people with NRPF. It was highlighted that the nature of the restrictions is unclear i.e. whether it would affect people with children or adults. A concern was also expressed that it was unclear how equality duties would be met and if the proposal would disproportionately affect black and other minority ethnic groups.

9.2. A selection of some of the specific comments is provided below:

People with NRPF are amongst the most vulnerable they are already living without access to the welfare safety net and further cuts to services for this group will increase poverty in this group. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)

This is likely to leave some of the most vulnerable people in our communities with no funds whatsoever. This does not appear to be a change that is based on assessed need? (Anonymous 01)

Clients with NRPF already have limitations on what they can access and the support that they receive from our service is their lifeline. If further reductions are made then this will increase the level of support that we would have to provide. (Savera UK)

There is already very little support for people with NRPF - there will be less places for us to refer them to for help, and they will likely find themselves in more and more dire situations. (St Andrews Community Network)

It is already complicated and difficult to provide support to those with NRPF. Increased reduction may lead to destitution and will leave vulnerable people open to exploitation and abuse. (Mary Seacole House)

It will increase problems even further for people in already desperate situations. (University of Liverpool)

We work with clients who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF). Some of these receive support from the local authority on the basis of local authority duties under the Children Act. These include families without leave to remain which are unable to return to their home country; for example a survivor of domestic abuse who has British children. In other instances, the local authority provides support to particularly vulnerable adults under its statutory duties. If this support were to cease the likely impacts would be increased homelessness, including of children and vulnerable adults. This in turn would be likely to lead to pressure on other services (children's care services, education, homelessness and health) as well as exposing the local authority to the risk of litigation.

The local authority, through its 'NRPF' group has recognised that a large number of the NRPF cases which the local authority supports would be resolved if the person or family were able to resolve their immigration status. It has also recognised that free, high quality immigration advice is key to achieving this and would, in many cases, be more cost effective than long term NRPF support. We have achieved OISC accreditation and have started an immigration practice which will, with more resources, be capable of dealing with these types of cases. This service is currently accredited and in the early stages. ...We have successfully made change of conditions applications in several cases in the short time our service has been running. This intervention helps to prevent homelessness and destitution. To do more of these we need to be able to expand. We are unable to expand without more resources. (Merseyside Law Centre)

## 10. One Stop Shops (OSS)

10.1. We consulted members of the network on proposals to reduce OSS services. Those responding believed that the proposals would;

- a) Result in additional difficulties accessing services for those unable to use telephone or on-line channels.
- b) Increased difficulties for vulnerable residents accessing services, who may be particularly reliant on face-to-face services.
- c) Cause greater reliance on community organisations and advice providers to deliver basic help.

10.2. Other comments highlighted that accessibility of services will be reduced for people with particular needs relating to language and disability.

10.3. A small selection of the individual comments received is provided below:

All council services will be far less accessible to residents of Liverpool, covering a range of issues. This will adversely affect those with reduced disposable incomes, less ability to travel around the city to the nearest office/ have sufficient digital technology ie. phone/ access to the internet. Will the Local Authority be providing digital inclusion services, free phone points? (Shelter)

Over the past few years we have received funding to deliver services that work alongside the One Stop Shops in Liverpool. Being co-located has given us first-hand experience of the importance of these community based assets and their social value. Working in the most deprived communities they are essential at a time where most services are accessed through online, email or webchat, and particularly given that Liverpool has a high percentage of vulnerable residents who are digitally excluded from accessing services.

Having a place where people can attend to present documents, discuss queries and make applications is essential in the swift resolution of issues. Working in situ, we have developed a partnership with the client and the One Stop Shop Staff that enables quick resolutions to issues that may not have been acted upon until crisis point, saving Liverpool City Council resources and collection costs. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)

Further difficulties in resolving more complex issues, therefore increasing the vulnerability in victims of abuse. (Savera UK)



Advice agencies should be giving free legal advice in relation to benefits, housing, immigration, employment etc., not having their resources used up providing basic help that should be provided by local authorities. (University of Liverpool)

How the council gets the message out about closure of OSS and what alternative forms of information/advice are available will be really important. ... If OSS have to be cut, we would urge the council to keep all OSS's open to some extent (even if this is with reduced hours) as keeping only Kirkdale and Norris Green open would present serious accessibility issues for people living in other areas which are not in walking distance, some of which are the most deprived areas of the city e.g. Princes Park. Another consideration would be a pop-up OSS service - taking the service wherever it is needed. (Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services)

## 11. Combined Impacts of Proposals

- 11.1. LATAN members have expressed deep concern about the combined impact of the proposed budget reductions. There is a clear belief that the proposed cuts to funding of advice provision, welfare support and One Stop Shops will exacerbate poverty and hardship at a time when households in the city are facing unprecedented pressures due to the 'cost of living crisis'.
- 11.2. A number of organisations have indicated that the consequences of the proposed reductions will include additional demands upon local authority services, particularly when crisis situations can no longer be averted or mitigated.
- 11.3. The combined impact of the proposals is likely to affect the sustainability of advice provision in the city. Cuts to welfare services and support (including CTS, DHP, LCSS and NRPF support) will increase demand for advice. This takes place when advice providers are already unable to meet demand, with the urgency, complexity and scale of demand likely to substantially increase due to the current economic position. Escalating costs of essentials including food, fuel and housing significantly outstrip headline inflation rates and affect an increasingly wide demographic, including large numbers of in-work households that do not qualify for benefits. In this context, the risks of increased destitution, homelessness and family breakdown are likely to result in substantial additional pressure upon public services including adults, children, housing, and health. Advice provision and assistance to secure support are critical to mitigating such risks.
- 11.4. We would respectfully advise the City Council to carefully model the effects of both individual budget proposals and the combined effects upon citizens and communities. We are particularly concerned that the authority sets out the implications for those residents who suffer socio-economic deprivation, this must also include taking account of effects upon households that may be affected by multiple proposals (e.g. many households will be affected by both reduced CTS and DHP - and may then struggle to obtain assistance from LCSS or advice providers).
- 11.5. We understand that the Equality Impact Analysis documents which have been drafted to date are regarded as 'formative' and we hope that full analysis will be made available prior to final decisions on proposals, including in particular the significant and disproportionate effect that cuts to DHP, CTS, LCSS and advice provision will have upon groups with a protected characteristic.
- 11.6. Below are a range of comments received from network members regarding the combined impact of the City Council's budget proposals:

The remaining services are constantly being asked to do more with less resources. This appears unsustainable and policy makers may need to understand this has objectively measurable impacts on the level of absolute poverty and on death and disease within the Liverpool City area. (Anonymous 01)

We would like to stress that all of the proposed cuts will affect the most vulnerable residents of Liverpool, and those most in need. Whilst the LA might see short term savings, they will almost certainly see costs increase, longer-term, due to the increased demand on homelessness and temporary accommodation services. There will also be a knock on affect, increasing demand (and costs) for NHS services/ children's services/ VCS organisations who are supporting those who are already disproportionately disadvantaged in the region. Organisations, who already have stretched capacity, will struggle with increased demand and will have to focus on supporting people in crisis, rather than on prevention work. ... It is important that with the proposed cuts to funding there is also a reduction in outcomes/outputs that organisations are expected to achieve. An open acknowledgement that organisations cannot continue to achieve what they have previously would go a long way. (Shelter)

The number of vulnerable people living in hardship is increasing and the country is facing multiple crises (fuel, housing and food etc). These proposed budget reductions will lead to more people getting into debt, increased health problems and an increase in social care. By investing in these services, rather than reducing them, you are investing in society and saving people from having further issues. (Citizens Advice Liverpool)

The proposed budget reductions will affect those who are most vulnerable and there is a potential that any cost savings will mean increased usage of other service areas. With no increased resources or capacity, this would mean that services become overwhelmed, overspend on budgets and any cost savings are wiped out. (Anonymous 02)

Liverpool City Councils record of assisting poor people has been better than many other authorities. These cuts will cause suffering and ill health, mentally and physically amongst sick, disabled and vulnerable people. (Vauxhall Community Law & Information Centre)

This will increase anxiety for citizens and lead to more ill health.. This will increase the number of families in crisis. This will increase the number of families living in poverty. (Torus Foundation)

Merseyside Law Centre was established following the demise of Merseyside Welfare Rights, which closed in 2017 following substantial cuts to local authority funding and legal aid. We have worked extremely hard to establish and grow our new service and these cuts will undermine the stability of our organisation and the citizens we support - again! The free specialist legal advice sector in Liverpool has suffered severe funding cuts and is overwhelmed with demand already. Cuts to any form of local authority funding puts increased pressure on us and places an over reliance on third sector organisations and charities. It is not acceptable for the burden to fall on these organisations. Governments and local authorities have a duty to support their citizens. This duty cannot and should not be abdicated and passed on to charities. The local authority should put pressure on government to increase funding rather than passing on cuts to charities and the citizens they support. We contributed to and support LATAN's call for an advice strategy for Liverpool. A long-term funding strategy- not cuts-is urgently needed to maintain and increase specialist legal advice provision in Liverpool and access to justice for its citizens. (Merseyside Law Centre)

The proposed reductions are devastating and will have a hugely detrimental effect on the poorest and most vulnerable in our city. (St Andrews Community Network)

The combined effects of the budget reductions will be to increase the number of people in poverty, worsen the situation of those already in poverty, and exacerbate the impact of the cost of living crisis. This is the worst possible time to make these cuts and will have a long-term impact on people's lives. (University of Liverpool)

## 12. Concluding Comments

- 12.1. The comments of LATAN members on the Council's budget proposals demonstrate great unease and worry for the impact on citizens, the advice sector and vital public services. It is clear that in a worsening economic climate, with major increases in the cost of food, fuel and housing, a growing proportion of citizens will be in need of this advice and support. Many of the proposed cuts are likely to exacerbate an already difficult position, pushing some households into crisis and worsening pressures on public services.
- 12.2. LATAN is concerned that the short consultation period over the Christmas period will be an obstacle to, and potentially prevent, meaningful consultation. We also note that the Council has announced consultations on the future of the Benefits Maximisation Service and changes to the Citizens Support Scheme on 23<sup>rd</sup> December with a closure date of 27<sup>th</sup> January. As highlighted in this response, we believe that the Council should examine the combined impact of its proposals; to fragment the consultation with closure dates ranging between 6<sup>th</sup> January and 27<sup>th</sup> January is potentially confusing, inconsistent and ineffective. We would suggest that the authority extends the relevant consultations to have a common closure date of 27<sup>th</sup> January 2023.
- 12.3. In the Council Report to Cabinet of 24/11/22 entitled 'Delivering the Council Plan: Budget Proposals for 2023/24 to 2025/26' it was stated that the authority would undertake '...individual engagement in key areas such as health and the community and voluntary sector.' LATAN is not aware of any initiatives to engage with the voluntary sector in general, or advice providers and gateways in particular, and would welcome such engagement as part of continuing consultation.
- 12.4. We would value the opportunity for a greater dialogue with the City Council and the opportunity to meet, preferably within an extended consultation period. This would improve the quality of consultation and enable discussion of alternatives and mitigation strategies.

## **Annex 1 List of organisations providing comments**

Anonymous – 2 organisations preferred to remain anonymous

Citizens Advice Liverpool

Daisy Inclusive UK

Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services (LCVS)

Mary Seacole House

Merseyside Law Centre

Raise Limited

Savera UK

Shelter

St Andrews Community Network

Torus Foundation

University of Liverpool

Vauxhall Community Law & Information Centre

Venus

## **Liverpool Access to Advice Network**

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