Outreach Advice for Debt Problems: Research and evaluation of outreach services for financially excluded people

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for Financially Excluded People

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Policy Background

This report presents results from a multi-phased evaluation of debt outreach advice in England and Wales. The broad policy background of the ‘Money Advice Outreach Pilots’ was to tackle financial and social exclusion, while meeting the specific needs of disadvantaged groups of people who would not normally seek help from mainstream advice services. Outreach advice was provided in locations such as prisons, family centres, housing offices, community finance organisations and other community-based venues, as well as through home visits and video-link facilities. The findings should be of interest to those concerned with commissioning, shaping and delivering outreach advice, in particular for debt problems. The research addresses the paucity of research on legal outreach advice.

Methodology

The evaluation encompassed multiple perspectives, using a variety of research methods to examine the impact of the outreach debt advice and processes involved. This report draws upon a face-to-face survey of target groups, results from extensive interviewing with providers, outreach delivery partners and clients, and a cost and effectiveness analysis.

Results

The outreach services were very successful in reaching socially and financially excluded people who had not sought advice before, building new partnerships, and delivering advice at new locations. Overall, less than 10 per cent of clients reported having previously sought advice in relation to a debt problem. The advice led to a range of positive outcomes for clients, including payment plans, crisis avoidance, averting the loss of a home or utilities disconnection and gaining nearly £1.9 million as income for clients in a one-year period. The advice also achieved ‘softer’ outcomes such as reduced stress and, importantly, changed attitudes to advice-seeking. Most clients said they were optimistic about avoiding future debts, although this was often thought to be challenging to achieve given their difficult life circumstances.
The research highlighted how outreach needs to be moulded to specific challenges ‘on the ground’: different types of outreach locations serve different users and a range of different barriers need to be overcome to achieve effective outreach advice in a given location. For example, there are significant logistical and cultural challenges to delivering advice to prisoners, a highly financially excluded group.

Important lessons for outreach partnership development were identified, including the benefits of training partners to act as ‘problem noticers’, the importance of early partner engagement and ongoing relationship management.

Outreach cases tended to take less time and therefore cost less than mainstream advice work. However, when costs were considered in terms of total project funding, the data suggested that outreach advice costs more than standard advice services. This reflects an unavoidable overhead or fixed cost associated with outreach services. Some of these costs arise because of the need to establish and maintain relationships with partners, others because of the challenges of working in specific settings and still others because of travel to outreach venues and non-attendance at appointments.
1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents results from a multi-phased evaluation of debt outreach advice in England and Wales. It draws together key results and implications to highlight the successes and challenges, and the potential, of outreach advice. The findings should help others to shape services that: reach people who have not sought debt advice but are financially and socially excluded; maximise the effectiveness of partnerships; enhance advice delivery; improve outcomes for clients; and provide outreach advice in different settings. The report draws on four research and evaluation phases that took place from early 2006 to 2008.

The broad policy background of the ‘money advice outreach pilots’ was to tackle financial and social exclusion, while meeting the specific needs of disadvantaged groups of people who would not normally seek help from mainstream advice services. Outreach advice was given in locations such as prisons, family centres, housing offices, community finance organisations and other community-based venues, as well as through home visits and video-link facilities.

The evaluation encompassed multiple perspectives, using a variety of research methods to examine both the impact of outreach debt advice and processes involved. The report draws upon a face-to-face survey of target groups, results from extensive interviewing with providers, outreach delivery partners and clients, and a cost and effectiveness analysis.

Chapter 2 of the report deals with the policy background to the debt outreach services. The broad methodology for the research and evaluation is set out in Chapter 3, followed by key results from the four different research phases in Chapter 4. The concluding Chapter 5 highlights implications arising out of the research findings. Appendix A provides in-depth information on the methodology, with Appendix B detailing references.

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1 Four separate, in-depth reports have been published on each of these research phases: Buck, Tam and Fisher, (2007); Day, Collard, Davies, (2008); Day, Collard and Hay, (2008); Smith and Patel, (2008). All downloadable from www.lsrc.org.uk/publications. See also Buck (2009).
Debt, Financial Exclusion and Social Exclusion

Since the late 1990s, policy concerns about personal finance have received increased attention, in particular the extent of over-indebtedness among UK households\(^2\). The term over-indebtedness is used to describe debt that has become a major burden for the borrower. Over-indebtedness can be caused by, and contributes to, social exclusion, financial exclusion and poverty.

Social exclusion and financial exclusion have also been key government concerns for over a decade\(^3\). Social exclusion is a (contentious) concept encompassing a combination of linked problems and caused not just by poverty, but also by discrimination, chronic ill-health and geographical or cultural isolation\(^4\). Whilst there are a number of definitions for financial exclusion, it broadly refers to limited or no access to mainstream financial services such as bank or building society accounts.

Financial exclusion has significant consequences for individuals and their families. Maintaining a household budget without mainstream financial services is often expensive and difficult. Regardless of how well low-income families manage their finances, their efforts can be thwarted by a lack of access to affordable credit and debt advice. As financially excluded people are unable to access mainstream loan and credit services, they may turn to less regulated, costly and sometimes illegal sources of credit.

In recognition of the problems faced by those experiencing financial exclusion, HM Treasury announced a Financial Inclusion Fund of £120 million over three years in 2004\(^5\). A Financial Inclusion Taskforce was also established to oversee and monitor government progress against targets. The Fund, now extended until 2011\(^6\), supports a range of initiatives to tackle financial exclusion, including free face-to-face debt advice.

Initially, £45 million was allocated to increase such provision in England and Wales, in a project led by the then Department of Trade and Industry (now Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)); £6 million was allocated to the Legal Services Commission to pilot outreach advice services, this report focusing on the evaluation of this outreach initiative\(^7\). In December 2007\(^8\), HM Treasury announced that the Financial Inclusion Fund would provide £76 million to continue funding free face-to-face money advice to financially excluded people as part of the BIS money advice initiative. HM Treasury also announced that

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\(^2\) From 2004 to 2007, the government published annual reports on indebtedness and policy responses to address it (e.g. Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (2007)).


\(^4\) Burkhardt et al. (2002); Hills et al. (2002); Social Exclusion Unit (2001)

\(^5\) HM Treasury (2004)

\(^6\) HM Treasury (2007)

\(^7\) For the evaluation of the £45 million initiative, see Opinion Leader (2007).

\(^8\) HM Treasury (2007)
there would be no further money from the Financial Inclusion Fund to mainstream the outreach pilots. However, a new £5 million initiative to develop debt outreach for people in prisons and their families, jointly funded by HM Treasury and the Ministry of Justice, and run in partnership with the Legal Services Commission and the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), was announced at the same time.
2. THE MONEY ADVICE OUTREACH PILOTS

The Legal Services Commission (LSC), responsible for running the legal aid scheme in England and Wales, received £6 million from HM Treasury’s Financial Inclusion Fund to pilot money advice outreach services. The pilot programme was funded for a three-year period, from 2005 to 2008.

The pilots were aimed at areas or groups facing high levels of deprivation and financial exclusion. The objective was to take legal and advice services to locations already frequented by potential clients but where money advice services could not ordinarily be accessed. Through this delivery method it was hoped that the pilots would reach those who would not normally seek help from mainstream advice services, whether face-to-face or by telephone. Further objectives of the money advice outreach pilots were to provide advice by new methods and through new partners. The advice funded as part of the pilot should also meet standard value-for-money requirements.

In early 2006, the LSC awarded contracts to 22 organisations to establish the pilots. The amount of funding ranged from around £60,000 to almost £1 million (depending on the number of advisers and the length of the contract) to fund project activity over a three-year period, with actual debt advice delivered over approximately a two-year period. In aggregate more than 40 full-time equivalent posts were created for advisors delivering money advice through outreach. The majority of contractors were voluntary sector organisations, including Citizens Advice Bureaux, independent advice agencies and other information and advice services. Two contracts were awarded to commercial providers. The money advice outreach pilots started service delivery on a rolling basis between January and July 2006. Service delivery ended in March 2008.

The outreach projects varied in terms of the types of partner organisations with whom they worked and the venues through which their services were delivered. The pilots ran in both urban and rural areas, with debt advice being delivered from over 150 different outreach locations. While some projects focused on service provision in specific venue types, the majority of projects offered services across a range of different locations. The partner organisations and venue types with which the pilots were working fall into five broad categories:
• Family support services, including Sure Start children’s centres\(^9\) and other family resource centres.
• Housing support services, including housing offices, hostels and refuges.
• Organisations in the justice system, including prisons, young offender institutions, the probation service, magistrates and county courts.
• Community finance organisations such as credit unions,\(^10\) credit union collection points and other Community Development Finance Initiatives.
• Other community-based organisations, including community centres, Jobcentres, local authority customer service centres and one-stop shops, mental health units and libraries.

**Outreach Advice**

‘Outreach’ is a concept that requires explanation. Its’ meaning tends to be taken for granted\(^11\), despite lacking a clear definition. Outreach often refers to services that are made available in locations where they would not usually be accessible. These locations are mostly community-based, meaning that they have the benefit of geographical proximity to the target group – i.e. those who would not normally use a service in its institutional setting. Community-based outreach locations may also represent a non-threatening environment.

Dewson et al. (2006) suggest four different outreach delivery models: outreach delivered in a specific, separate site such as a high street shop (the satellite model); or using another organisation’s premises such as a room in a community centre (the peripatetic model); the detached outreach model involving outreach staff going out into the community and engaging with customers outside any organisational setting, for example, in shopping centres or mosques; or a variant on this, the domiciliary model, in which outreach staff visit people in their own homes. Outreach delivery can also involve the use of new technologies, such as video-link facilities situated in libraries or supermarkets.

A key component of outreach is client engagement. The terms vulnerability, disadvantage and in particular ‘hard-to-reach’ are often used in this context, to indicate groups of people who do not use mainstream services and need to be ‘engaged’ to take up (outreach) provision. The expectation is that outreach is a more accessible and effective way of reaching out to and

\(^9\) Sure Start is a UK Government initiative, instigated by HM Treasury in 1998. The aim is to promote early childhood development with efforts to improve childcare, early education, health and family support, through outreach and community development.

\(^10\) Credit unions are non-profit cooperatives with the aim of offering ethical financial services such as insurance, loans and savings accounts to local people. They are owned and democratically controlled by their members. All profits from the credit unions are either re-invested back into the cooperative or shared between union members.

\(^11\) See McGivney (2000) for a discussion on this.
helping disadvantaged and ‘hard-to-reach’ individuals than mainstream provision. ‘Hard-to-reach’ is deliberately put in apostrophes in this report, as it is in most literature, to highlight the assumptions that may sometimes inform its use\(^\text{12}\).

Another key characteristic of outreach services is that they typically draw on partnerships and networks with other service providers. Relationship building, with partners as well as users and potential users, is therefore important for successful outreach delivery. Potential benefits reaped from partnership working include co-location of services, cross-referrals and effective targeting.

Outreach has been used in different policy fields, ranging from health to education to welfare-to-work services. The provision of legal outreach advice is not new. For example, doctors’ surgeries have been used in England and Wales as a setting for the delivery of welfare benefits advice\(^\text{13}\). Community justice outreach workers with knowledge of the community, and who speak Inuktitut as well as English, have worked with Nunavut Inuit communities in Canada\(^\text{14}\). In Australia, examples of legal outreach advice provision include outreach as part of the Homeless Persons Legal Clinics\(^\text{15}\) and outreach to Aboriginal Legal Services Offices\(^\text{16}\).

However, given the relatively widespread use of outreach legal advice, its aims and potential benefits, surprisingly little rigorous research and evaluation has been conducted. This report attempts to go some way to address this gap. Most recently, the New South Wales Law and Justice Foundation has published a systematic review of the literature on outreach legal services to disadvantaged people with complex needs\(^\text{17}\). The review also identified the paucity of research on outreach legal services, and described the research and evaluation conducted for this report as extensive, well-funded and belonging to the best research evidence available.

Based on Dewson et al.’s\(^\text{18}\) definition of outreach delivery models (see box above), most of the pilot projects constituted peripatetic outreach, i.e. working with partners to

\(^{12}\) See for example, Brackertz (2007) and Freimuth and Mettger (1990). In Freimuth and Mettger’s words (1990: 323), “hard-to-reach audiences have been called obstinate, recalcitrant, chronically uninformed, disadvantaged, have-not, illiterate, malfunctional and information poor”.

\(^{13}\) E.g. Sherr et al. (2002); Whitnell (2004); Citizens Advice (2006).

\(^{14}\) Anderson and Stratton (2008).

\(^{15}\) Queensland Public Interests Law Clearing House Inc (2003).

\(^{16}\) Dimos (2008).

\(^{17}\) Forell and Gray (2009).

\(^{18}\) Dewson et al. (2006)
deliver an advice service at outreach venues such as community centres, housing offices or credit unions, where debt advice had not previously been available. However, some pilot projects also delivered detached outreach, outside an organisational setting. A small number of projects used office-based outreach services, including one that delivered advice remotely from its office to clients via video link. A limited number of home visits were used to deliver services.
3. METHODOLOGY

The Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC), the independent research division of the LSC, was given responsibility for the evaluation of the pilot programme. The different research phases were carried out in-house by the LSRC, and by expert researchers from ECOTEC and the Personal Finance Research Centre based at the University of Bristol. Table 1 summarises the different research phases, with further information on research methodologies available in Appendix A.
Table 1: Researching Outreach Advice

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<td>Face-to-face survey in 25 different outreach locations: 563 survey respondents</td>
<td>Survey fieldwork in 2006</td>
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<td>• In-depth case study research at 8 pilot projects (interviews with 27 project staff, debt advisers and project managers), and 28 representatives from partner organisations</td>
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<td>• Exchange and dissemination event for pilot projects</td>
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<td><strong>Phase 3</strong> a) Impact of debt outreach advice on clients, including reasons for using outreach advice</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Data for one year reference period (September 2006 to August 2007); analysis conducted in 2008.</td>
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4. RESULTS

The first section of this chapter details key results from the survey of target groups. This is followed by a section on the extensive process and effectiveness evaluation, which focussed on the perspectives of advice providers and outreach delivery partners. Section three of this chapter highlights main findings from the qualitative interviews with clients. The final section of this chapter focuses on results from the monitoring and closed case client data.

4.1 Survey of Target Groups

4.1.1 Who Used the Outreach Locations?

The face-to-face survey of target groups demonstrated that a considerably higher proportion of people with demographics indicative of social and financial exclusion compared to the population in general were found in the 25 outreach locations surveyed. Seventy-five per cent of respondents lived in the top 20 per cent of the most deprived areas in England, and 47 per cent lived in the top 10 per cent of the most deprived areas. In all five outreach location types surveyed (community centres, credit unions, prisons, housing offices and family centres), a higher percentage of lone parents, people who lived in social housing, unemployed people and those with a long-standing illness or disability were found compared to national averages. In addition, a significant percentage of outreach location users had limited access to mainstream banking services. Among the outreach locations covered in the survey, the highest proportions of financially excluded respondents\(^\text{19}\) were found in prisons and credit unions – 73 per cent out of 133 and 51 per cent out of 106 respondents respectively in these locations.

Many survey respondents could also be described as ‘hard-to-reach’:

- Almost a third (31 per cent) of the 150 non-prison respondents who had either experienced real financial difficulties since the start of 2003, or were having financial problems at the time of the interview in 2006, reported not receiving any advice at all.

\(^{19}\) Defined as: respondents who did not have a current account or had one but did not use it for day-to-day money management.
• An overwhelming number (90 per cent) of the 41 prison respondents reporting real financial difficulties had received no advice.

• Nearly a third of non-prison respondents with money problems who did receive help, received it from creditors, or family and friends, rather than from a money adviser.

• Many respondents were unaware that a Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) or a solicitor was within two miles of their home. Of those with at least one solicitor’s office within two miles, 51 per cent of respondents who were questioned in non-prison outreach locations were unable to identify any. Similarly, 55 per cent of respondents with a CAB within two miles were not aware of this.

4.1.2 Variations Between Outreach Locations

Despite many similarities, there were important variations between the five outreach location types. For example, the survey showed that prisons and credit unions had the highest proportions of respondents with the lowest household incomes, the least educational qualifications and the highest unemployment rates.20

Users came to different outreach locations for different reasons. The reasons behind visiting a community centre were the most wide-ranging, and included adult leisure or skills classes, using resources, looking for employment, social reasons, as well as activities for children. Respondents in family and children centres typically came to the centres to pick up or drop off children, attend joint activities or deal with a child’s health matter (which could be of a sensitive nature). On many occasions, the ‘flow’ of people using family and children centres was sporadic.

Prisons stood out as a particular setting for (debt) outreach advice, as the box below illustrates.

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20 For prison respondents, this described their situation before going to prison.
21 Ibid.
Providing Outreach Advice in Prisons: A Special Case

Drawing together findings from different research phases highlights how prisons differ from other outreach locations in a number of ways. The findings from the target group survey demonstrated the significant disadvantage prisoners experience. For example, 40 per cent of the 133 prisoners interviewed reported no educational qualifications at all; 40 per cent also reported being unemployed before prison; and 24 per cent reported long-term illness or disability (a relatively high percentage for a young population group). The survey findings from prisons further showed that financial exclusion might play a role in, and be reinforced by, custodial sentences. At 60 per cent, the majority of those in prison for the first time were financially excluded; this percentage rose to 80 per cent for prison respondents who had been to prison before.

Of the 21 respondents who had serious financial problems (relating specifically to falling behind with bills and credit commitments) before going to prison, 8 (38 per cent) reported that their debt problems had got worse since the start of their sentence. Mounting interest and the inability to contact their lenders from prison were common problems. Of 112 respondents who did not report having debt problems before going to prison, 12 per cent (13 respondents) reported falling into debt since being in prison. Reasons for this debt included the inability to stop interest and cancel direct debits and mobile phone contracts, as well as issues related to housing. Lastly, six (30 per cent) of the 21 prison respondents with financial problems said their debts were causing problems for their family.

Given the high incidence of financial exclusion and money problems, it is surprising that a high 90 per cent of the 41 prison respondents who reported real financial difficulties over the previous three years had not received any advice for their problems. Only six per cent of all prison respondents (133) reported receiving advice at the time of the survey interview on how to manage their money on a day-to-day basis.

These findings provide convincing evidence that debt outreach advice in prisons is important. However, the qualitative interviews with advisers and project managers, and with prisoners themselves, highlighted specific challenges to providing debt outreach advice in a prison setting, including:

- Negotiating access and obtaining security clearance for advisers;
- Dealing with limitations on the types of items allowed into prison (e.g. mobile phones, laptops)

This research confirms previous findings both in the UK (Social Exclusion Unit (2002); Singleton et al. (1998)) and abroad (Grunseit et al. (2008)), showing that prisoners are a particularly excluded group with health, civil and family law issues as well as criminal law issues. The negative impact of imprisonment and debt problems on prisoners’ families has also been highlighted by previous research (Smith et al (2007); Codd (1998)).
• Providing continuity of advice when faced with ‘lockdowns’ and sometimes remote prison locations;
• Advising prisoners who did not always have access to their paperwork;
• Arranging debt repayment plans when options were restricted by prisoners’ lack of income;
• Recruiting debt advisers who felt comfortable advising in a prison environment.

The findings showed that these challenges, in particular the ones related to practical access and booking appointments, were surmountable through improved communication between adviser and prison. Prison interviewees also consistently perceived the advice to be effective in preventing their debts from escalating whilst in prison and relieving pressure on family members.

Further key factors (though not an exhaustive list) to consider when planning, funding and delivering debt outreach advice in prisons include the following:

• Several projects aspired to work with the families of prisoners; this proved difficult either because of constraints on adviser capacity or because of difficulty generating referrals within the confines of penal institutions. Whilst advice for family members is clearly necessary, the best delivery route needs thoughtful consideration.
• Given the findings about prisoners’ financial problems and their limited advice seeking, there is a need to raise awareness of debt advice, and the specific benefits of advice. The timing of debt advice (especially important for short-stay prisoners) is also crucial here. For example, prisoners might not be particularly receptive to the offer of debt advice when first entering prison. However, the target group interviews in prisons suggested that a number of respondents would prefer advice at the beginning of their sentence (38 per cent). Others said that they would like to receive advice on debt problems throughout their time spent in prison (14 per cent), shortly before leaving prison (12 per cent), and in the middle of their prison sentence (9 per cent).

• Consideration needs to be given to how debt advice links up with other advice, provided both in prison and upon resettlement. Changing financial circumstances (e.g. employment or benefit receipt) may, for example, trigger action by creditors once prisoners are out of prison.23

23 The Prison Reform Trust and the National Association of Reformed Offenders are currently exploring the impact of a criminal conviction and prison sentence on access to financial services for offenders, reformed offenders, and their families. The project aims to gather evidence to raise awareness of the links between financial exclusion, social exclusion and reoffending.
4.1.3 Benefits of Outreach Advice

Eighty-six per cent of respondents to the target group survey felt that the outreach location they were interviewed in was a good place to receive money advice. In sum, respondents:

- Talked about the non-prison outreach locations being local, accessible and easy to get to, and therefore not involving any expensive transport costs;
- Visited locations frequently and consistently, making them further suited for outreach advice;
- Welcomed the familiarity and friendliness they associated with locations;
- Mentioned the benefit of multiple advice services in one location; and
- Said money advice outreach in the interview location was a good idea because they felt at ease and had received good professional advice for other issues.

The Benefits of Outreach Advice from the Perspective of Target Groups

'Because it is a professional establishment, people would know what they are talking about and people would trust the advice they gave.' (Respondent in a Housing Office)

'Because it is a community centre, and all kinds of people are coming in, it would be better to walk in here than walk into a debt advice centre. You would not stand out as much.' (Respondent in a Community Centre)

'People like myself have no money to shell out for transport.' (Respondent in a Children and Family Centre)

'The location is central. It's easy to find. They have done good market research.' (Respondent in a Credit Union)

'It would take a burden off people here. And be a chance for people to say 'I can sort things out'. A chance to speak to independent people to help sort out their problems, not the officers.' (Respondent in a Prison)
4.1.4 The Importance of Trust

Prior positive experiences meant survey respondents trusted the outreach location and its staff. There is considerable potential for trust transfer from the host venue to the outreach service. Advice in trusted locations is likely to result in people feeling more at ease, confident and better equipped to articulate their money problems and advice needs in a ‘safe’ environment.

However, trust transfer alone is not enough. Survey results highlighted that a private space is important to target groups. Privacy and confidentiality is particularly vital for outreach venues, in which people from the same local community are likely to meet. Whilst initial trust in an outreach venue is important, this trust needs to be further augmented through providing good, timely and relevant advice and continuity of process.

4.2 Process and Effectiveness – Advice Provider and Outreach Delivery

Partner Perspectives

4.2.1 Partnership Working

Partnership working was a key component in the delivery of the money advice outreach pilots. The outreach projects aimed to increase access to debt and associated welfare benefits advice by developing partnerships to target financially excluded people. Almost all the projects were able to develop working arrangements with new delivery partners that they had not worked with before, to reach financially excluded people; a few projects appeared to rely on existing joint working arrangements. Some projects experienced difficulties engaging certain types of partners, such as the probation service and extended schools.

Developing and sustaining delivery partnerships over the course of the outreach programme required considerable time and effort on the part of the outreach projects. A number of success factors were highlighted by the outreach projects, which are shown in the box below.
Partnership Working to Deliver Outreach Advice:
Lessons for Effective Practice

- Early engagement of partners at a strategic level is essential.
- Sufficient time is also required to develop partnerships at an operational level.
- Logistical issues, such as referral mechanisms and access to interview rooms, have to be identified and addressed early on with outreach venues.
- Clear channels of communication between the advice agency and the partner organisation and ongoing relationship management are needed, to ensure sufficient throughput and quality of referrals and to address any issues as they arise.
- Relationships between advice projects and partner organisations may have to be re-established if key members of staff on either side leave.

From the delivery partners’ perspective, the main advantage of joint working was the ability to provide their service users with relatively quick and easy access to specialist advice. Continuity of service provision (‘a familiar face’) was also important for vulnerable service users. The main drawback was that demand for debt advice often outstripped the outreach projects’ capacity to deliver it.

4.2.2 Service Delivery

As previously stated, the most common method of service delivery among the outreach projects was for advisers to run advice sessions in geographical locations where debt and welfare benefits advice was not usually available. A small number of projects operated office-based services, including one which largely delivered advice through an existing network of video-link portals.

Estimates indicate that the outreach projects delivered debt advice at around 170 to 180 outreach venues (including video-link portals and venues where advice was available on demand). Debt advice had not been available at around seven in ten of these venues before the pilot projects were set up. This figure rose to nine in ten if video-link portals and venues where advice was available on demand were excluded.

Advice was largely delivered face-to-face, mainly on an appointment basis, and usually at an outreach venue. For practical and cost reasons, most projects did not offer appointments in clients’ homes unless absolutely necessary, e.g. if the client had physical or mental health problems. Non-attendance at appointments was highlighted as a problem by several projects. It could be mitigated by tactics such as...
telephoning clients or sending them a text message on the day of their appointment, but some level of non-attendance was felt to be unavoidable when working with vulnerable and excluded people.

4.2.3 Engaging Target Groups

Referrals from delivery partners were the main way in which potential clients were identified and engaged in the advice process. Delivery partners tended to generate referrals by acting as problem noticers. A small number of partner organisations (notably prisons and young offender institutions) identified debt problems during the course of a routine process or standard procedure (e.g. the induction process). Some of the success factors for generating and maintaining referrals identified by the outreach projects are outlined in the box below:

**Referrals from Delivery Partners: Lessons for Effective Practice**

- Screening for debt problems requires sufficient throughput of potential clients and a clear line of responsibility within the delivery partner organisation.
- Some types of delivery partners (e.g. housing providers and civil courts) are better-placed to act as problem noticers than others.
- Training delivery partners to act as problem noticers may help increase the volume and quality of referrals (e.g. who to refer, when to refer, how to refer)
- Time for partnership management is important to develop and maintain levels of referral. This might include advisers regularly attending team meetings at delivery partner organisations, to keep awareness of the outreach service high and to promote the value of debt advice to their service users.
- Regular progress updates or feedback to delivery partners can help to evidence the value of the service to their service users.

As well as referrals from delivery partners, potential clients were also identified through cross-referrals between different projects run by the same organisation, and self-referrals which were generated by promotion and marketing activities as well as word-of-mouth recommendations.

4.2.4 Working with Different Target Groups and Delivery Partners

The types of people targeted by the outreach projects were largely determined by the types of delivery partners they chose to work with. In some cases, the target groups
were clearly defined (e.g. offenders, social housing tenants with rent arrears), in others they tended to be more diverse.

Each of the outreach projects generally worked with a number of delivery partners across a range of settings. Partnership working with housing services mainly involved the delivery of debt advice to social housing tenants who had rent arrears. Housing officers or rent recovery officers were felt to be well-placed to act as problem noticers. Moreover, since 2005 referrals for independent advice have been integral to good practice in managing rent arrears and the avoidance of eviction. Potential conflicts of interest could arise in this type of partnership, however, for example, once formal proceedings had been instituted by a housing provider. These needed to be identified and taken into account early on.

Outreach projects that partnered with providers of family support services mainly worked with Sure Start Children’s Centres. Several projects reported low levels of take-up at Children’s Centres, supporting results from the target group survey. One reason for this seemed to be that, at the time of the evaluation, Children’s Centres had yet to become established within some communities as places to access support and advice. It might also take time for support workers operating within Children’s Centres to get to know their service users and to act as effective problem noticers.

Outreach projects working within the justice system mostly provided advice to prisoners, young offenders and people on probation. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) seemed to provide a useful framework for the delivery of debt advice to offenders. Prisons and young offender institutions also had systems in place that allowed for the routine screening of inmates to identify debt problems and make referrals. There were, however, significant logistical and cultural challenges to delivering advice within the prison environment. A small number of projects reported successful joint working relationships with the Probation Service. Others had been unable to get partnerships with the Probation Service off the ground, possibly because of the individuals involved or because of organisational restructuring within the Service.

Partnership working with community finance organisations mainly involved working with credit unions, and referrals tended to be made by credit union staff who acted as problem noticers. Despite the apparent synergy between credit unions and the outreach projects, the projects had a mixed experience of joint working. Some
reported a steady flow of referrals while others had seen a low throughput of clients. Poor take-up could be exacerbated by a mismatch in the expectations of community finance partners and the service delivered by the outreach project. For example if a debt advice client owed money to a community finance organisation, this would generally be regarded as a non-priority creditor – a view which might not be shared by the community finance organisation.

Outreach projects worked with **other community-based partners** as well, mainly either employment-related services such as Jobcentre Plus; health-related services; or community centres. Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers generally acted as sign-posters or problem noticers. They did not, however, have regular contact with all benefit claimants and at least one outreach project had developed partnerships with voluntary and community organisations to engage with a broader range of benefit claimants.

The apparently high incidence of health problems among the outreach programme’s target groups heightened the relevance of health-related partnerships, which included services for people with mental health problems, drug and alcohol teams and community health projects. Home visits were a valuable aspect of service delivery in this context.

The community centres with which outreach projects worked generally offered a range of services for their communities. This could provide the advantage of anonymity for people seeking debt advice, as they might feasibly be using the community centre for a number of reasons. At some community centres staff acted as problem noticers, while at others the outreach projects were not promoted much beyond the display of leaflets or posters.

### 4.3 Qualitative Interviews with Clients and Target Groups

#### 4.3.1 The Nature of Clients’ Money Problems

Money advice outreach clients sought advice from pilot projects for a range of problems, most but not all of them debt-related. The most common problems were consumer credit debt and difficulties paying household bills. The small number of target group interviewees, who had not sought advice despite having financial
problems and using outreach locations, reported similar types of debt problems to clients.

Among clients who were not in prison, debt problems tended to be attributed to loss of income and / or a build-up of consumer credit debt over time. Regardless of the factors involved, clients generally only recognised they were in difficulty at a relatively late stage – when they were unable to pay all their creditors and had fallen behind with payments.

The picture was rather different for clients in prison. It was not uncommon to enter prison with debts; however, in other cases, the problems were a direct result of incarceration and loss of earned income. As with other clients, debt problems were generally afforded a high priority to resolve.

4.3.2 Seeking Debt Advice

For the most part, the approaches used by clients to try and cope with their debt problems prior to contacting a pilot outreach project offered a temporary stop-gap. Most clients had tried to negotiate with at least some of their creditors to reduce repayments or to arrange to make up missed payments. Few had reached any agreement with their creditors themselves. The main reasons given by clients for not contacting their creditors included:

- Not knowing how to approach creditors or lacking the confidence to do so;
- Not having the means to repay what they owed; and
- Being fearful of the response they might get from creditors.

4.3.3 Awareness and Experience of Other Advice Services

General awareness of the existence of free-to-client advice services (other than the money advice outreach service) was fairly high among the client and target group interviewees. Awareness was rather lower among prison clients than it was among those interviewees who were not in prison.

Where clients were aware of other free advice services, however, this usually amounted to no more than a general awareness that advice was available from organisations like the CAB service, and did not extend to knowing the types of advice and help that might be offered.
The reasons why some clients had not sought advice, even though they were aware of advice services, included lack of knowledge about what help or advice these services might offer, and closure of local services. Some had simply not considered seeking advice. Prison clients in particular mentioned the embarrassment of seeking advice and the fact that, for a few of them, debt problems were a low priority.

4.3.4 Accessing Debt Outreach Advice

Awareness of the Money Advice Outreach Projects

Most of the clients who were interviewed had first become aware of the money advice outreach service through contact with one of the projects’ partner organisations. Partner organisations mainly acted as problem noticers, whereby partner staff identified a need for advice during discussion with clients, or undertook more general awareness-raising. Only a small number of clients had been proactively seeking advice at the point when they were signposted to the project.

Regardless of how they became aware of the outreach service, clients generally seemed to have little idea of what they could expect from the service, beyond knowing that it provided help to people with debt problems. A handful of clients reported having had negative expectations.

Most clients were already in a grave financial situation by the time they made contact with an outreach project. By far the most common trigger that led clients into contact with a pilot project was simply being made aware of it; this was true of all the clients in prison. The second main trigger was where partner organisations contacted a project on behalf of a client. These partner organisations went beyond just making people aware of the money advice outreach service to ensuring that a referral was made - what might be termed a ‘warm referral’.

Regardless of the process by which they were referred to an outreach project, clients generally got an appointment to see a money advice caseworker fairly quickly. Most non-prison clients got an appointment within a week, which was viewed very positively. For prison clients, the process generally seemed to take about two weeks.
4.3.5 Effectiveness of Debt Outreach Advice

A Profile of the Money Advice Outreach Pilots

Money advice outreach always involved face-to-face advice in the first instance. Three interviewees received this initial session by video-link, all from the same project that used this method routinely to access a very rural area. Home visits were less commonly used, and it appears that they were offered by some projects for less mobile clients, but not by others.

Clients very rarely resolved their case at the initial session. A few were referred onwards for other more specialist (such as immigration law) advice. For most, some kind of follow-up and initial contact was needed. This took the following formats:

- Additional sessions; averaging two and up to a maximum of six. This was nearly always supplemented by some mix of postal, telephone, or drop-in contact, or;
- Instances where the remainder of the case was conducted entirely by post, telephone or drop-in, after the initial advice session.

The duration of individual cases was often difficult to establish from the interviews. Clients themselves rarely placed the main emphasis on case ‘closure’, but rather described their case in terms of one or more episodes of advice-seeking. This aside, it appears that a period of several months was typical, up to a maximum of six months. For a minority of clients, the initial case was closed and subsequently re-opened within the project period, due to the debt having been ‘sold-on’ to another company.

Venue and Location

In the main, familiarity with the venue for advice was considered less important than the timeliness and relevance of the advice itself. This was particularly so where the referral was made at a ‘crisis point’, such as bailiffs calling or a court summons, at which point clients were often anxious to receive advice as soon as possible.

Confirming findings from the target group survey, clients often identified barriers to travelling far to receive advice. These included caring responsibilities and low levels of personal confidence. The ability to 'drop in' to see the adviser during the case
sometimes helped to reassure clients. For a minority of clients with chronic health problems or disabilities, a nearby location was said to be essential.

**Case Study: Advice by Videolink**

One of the pilot projects offered outreach advice using a video booth, as a method of accessing more remote rural locations. The clients who used this facility all reported that the location provided the main draw. In one instance, the client described how the alternative would be a 30 or 40 mile drive to the nearest provider agency. Use of the technology was facilitated by staff at the Citizenlink portal, and all of the clients felt generally comfortable with the technology as a means of accessing face-to-face advice. This was considered far preferable to telephone-based support.

None of the clients described chronic levels of social exclusion of the type that were recounted by some clients who accessed advice at other pilot projects. A potential issue to explore further, therefore, is whether the videolink mode of delivery also meets the needs of the most vulnerable clients. If so, this appears to be a very cost effective way of serving some of the remotest rural areas with money advice.

Clients routinely commented on the importance of a 'private' space for the advice. For some clients, the process of seeking advice took some courage and they were keen, as previously discussed, to avoid others from their local community from finding out about their situation.

**Provision**

Clients often described money advice outreach as an in-depth casework service. There was considerable diversity in the models of outreach provided, and it is apparent that the pilot projects and advisers devised their own ways of prioritising and apportioning time between clients. The aspects of the provision that were commonly rated highly by clients included:

- The timeliness of the advice;
- Trust in the adviser; and,
- Continuity in the process.

The interviews show that the clients usually valued in their adviser a combination of good interpersonal skills, and a breadth of knowledge regarding money and welfare rights issues. Advisers needed to quite rapidly gain an understanding of the other services that the client was already accessing, such as those relating to health or
housing. Some clients identified that the adviser had taken a *holistic* approach to address their financial and personal issues together. These qualities compared favourably with most clients' previous experiences of advice provision.

In the main, few major differences were found between service settings and venues, regarding clients' satisfaction with the provision. Prison settings were an exception to this, where the heightened security, often remote locations, and unforeseen factors such as lockdowns disrupted the advice process. These barriers were thought to be surmountable through improved communication between adviser and prison.

### Qualities of Debt Outreach Advice Considered Important by Clients

- **Timeliness of the advice** - clients commonly identified that fast access to advice was an important aspect of the service. Many clients described being at a crisis point by the time advice was sought. The ability to schedule an appointment flexibly – within days or a limited number of weeks, was often said to have enabled the adviser to take rapid action to stop creditors.

- **Appropriateness of the location for advice** - an accessible and private space was considered important by clients who received money advice outreach. Not having to travel far considerably eased the process for clients with caring responsibilities, whilst a minority of housebound clients thought home visiting essential due to physical or mental health issues, caring responsibilities, or an acute lack of personal confidence.

- **Thoroughness of the initial advice session** - the detailed approach taken by the adviser to assess clients’ financial situations emerged as a key theme from the interviews. This approach was often said to have reassured clients of the adviser’s knowledge, and made them more receptive to attending further sessions - especially where clients had previous negative experiences of advice-seeking. Clients routinely described how the adviser took “on the spot” action to contact creditors in front of them, and they took reassurance from this.

- **Holistic approach to the advice** - clients regularly described how the advisers took the approach of addressing the ‘whole case’, taking into account both their financial and personal circumstances. This usually compared favourably with other forms of advice. For example, some clients who had contacted debt help-lines described how this type of service was more narrowly focussed on money matters and did not always offer a person-centred service.

- **Continuity of service** - clients usually placed an emphasis on being able to track the progress of their case to completion. Continuity in the advice process and adviser were thought to be important factors in this respect. Most clients reported being able to see the same adviser throughout, except in situations of staff turnover. This was usually thought to have benefited their case, because the adviser had a detailed knowledge of their
Clients’ Levels of Engagement in the Advice Process

The interviews show that very few clients consciously disengaged from the advice process, although these findings must be treated with caution given that disengaged clients would also be unlikely to take part in the research interviews.

With regard to the ongoing type and level of engagement, the key findings were that:

- Most clients described the advisers’ role as one of expert and advocate, and were more than happy to comply with any actions that were recommended to them. In a smaller number of cases, the clients took a more selective view of the advice, or even admitted taking contrary action.

- Clients had mixed feelings about taking responsibility for managing aspects of their own case. In the main, support from the adviser gave clients confidence to fill-out forms and to budget. Clients with poor literacy or English language skills and those considered particularly vulnerable were sometimes less able to take responsibility.

Clients routinely described some kind of handover process from the adviser, as part of the case closure. Some clients thought that responsibility for their finances was transferred back to them too quickly, because the adviser was keen to close the case. A minority of the most vulnerable clients who reported an acute lack of self confidence and difficult personal circumstances had an expectation for longer-term support.

4.3.6 Outcomes from Debt Outreach Advice

Levels of Personal Finance

Clients routinely said that their general levels of personal finance had improved as a result of the outreach money advice, with regard to overall levels of income – net of outgoing payments (including debt repayment). Of those clients who received advice in non-custodial settings, the considerable majority reported noticeable
improvements, whilst some were unsure. Only a handful said that the advice had made little or no difference.

In most cases, clients’ outcomes were said to have been achieved through a combination of actions by the adviser to consolidate their debts and maximise their income. Where cases involved court representation, some clients also thought the support from the adviser helped to achieve a better outcome, although not always so.

Clients routinely described a number of qualities of the adviser and the advice process that were thought to have influenced the outcome of their case. These were said to include:

- The advisers' negotiation skills;
- Their ability to provide the client with options as part of their case; and,
- The provision of debt and benefits expertise under one roof.

For the smaller number of clients who reported no financial benefits from the advice, this was sometimes because their case had stalled, meaning that their financial situation was essentially unchanged. This situation most commonly related to cases that involved customer rights or specialist (non-financial) expertise. A few clients were also unhappy with the level of repayments that had been negotiated on their behalf, because they felt them to be unmanageable.

Whilst the service setting did not appear to affect the type and level of outcomes for most clients, prisons were a notable exception to this (see also box in section 4.1). The key issues included that:

- The available options for money advice were restricted by prisoners’ lack of income because this meant that the adviser was unable to arrange a debt repayment plan; and,
- Factors relating to the category of prison and sentencing status may have affected clients’ outcomes from the advice. For example, one resettlement prison allowed prisoners to access paid employment.

Money Management Skills

Of those clients who received advice in non-prison settings, some said they felt better able to budget and prioritise, others were unsure, and a few reported no change. These findings appear slightly muted compared with previous research, but this may
largely be explained by the fact that increasing money management skills and providing financial capability training were not within the specific remit of the outreach projects.

Clients’ Financial Circumstances Following Outreach Advice

Whilst most clients reported some improvements to their finances as a result of the advice, their circumstances often remained difficult in absolute terms. This is to be expected, given their often chaotic lives, multiple personal problems and limited options for income generation. Of those clients who received advice in non-prison settings, the considerable majority were managing all of their bill and debt payments, although many said they were struggling. A minority had actually fallen behind with their repayments.

The main reason given by clients for struggling with their commitments was a combination of low income and other circumstances in their lives (such as those relating to housing, family or employment) that presented financial uncertainty. Nevertheless, it was rare for clients to report having fallen behind with debt repayments that were negotiated through the project. Having been supported by the adviser to achieve a successful outcome, clients were usually determined not to “go back”.

Wider Benefits of Debt Outreach Advice

Clients who accessed the project for a variety of different money problems invariably reported some level of reduced personal stress as a result of the advice received. Clients commonly described how the adviser eased the stress or pressure they were under, by taking rapid action to halt threatening letters or calls from their creditors. Where clients reported having long-term health problems, they sometimes expressed relief at the money advice outreach. In a smaller number of cases, the advice was said to have directly averted clients losing their home.

Future Advice-Seeking and Debt Avoidance

Almost all of the clients from non-prison settings reported an improved awareness of what advice could do for them, and said they would seek advice at an earlier stage in the future. Most of the clients said the money advice outreach project would be their
first point of call, if their debt problems resurfaced. This was usually due to their satisfaction with the advice process, and because the adviser was now thought to be familiar with their case.

Most clients who were interviewed said they were optimistic about avoiding future debts, although this was often thought to be challenging to achieve. The main risk factors were thought to be the struggle to meet essential costs; especially where clients had caring responsibilities, and sometimes the pressure from doorstep lenders.

The small number of target group interviewees who had not sought advice were less optimistic in their views towards future debts; perhaps because they had not received any advice for their current debt problems. They showed a correspondingly low level of awareness of the potential future benefits of seeking money advice.

4.4 Cost and Effectiveness Analysis

4.4.1 Who did the Projects Reach?

The cost and effectiveness analysis confirmed that projects were highly successful in delivering services to clients who were financially excluded. The monitoring data showed that just over 90 per cent of clients met at least one of the five indicators used by the projects to determine financial exclusion. Just over four in ten clients owed priority debts (such as those relating to mortgages, rent, taxes, court fines, maintenance, utilities, and hire purchases), though, as with other financial exclusion indicators, this proportion varied widely among the outreach projects. The proportion of clients with priority debts was highest among clients from justice-based venues with more than nine in ten of them owing priority debts. It was lowest among clients accessing services at community-based organisations with 19 per cent of these clients having priority debts.

Analysis of closed case client data highlighted that the projects were successful at delivering advice to people who had not sought advice before. Overall, less than 10 per cent of clients reported having previously sought advice in relation to a debt

24 Having no bank account, holding no savings, using high interest credit, owing priority debts, or having an annual income less than £14,500.
problem. However, this ranged from a low of 3 per cent of clients in prisons/probation settings, to a high of 46 per cent for clients in community based venues.

Comparing client demographics between outreach pilots and mainstream legal aid services demonstrated that the pilots were particularly successful in delivering services to younger, male and non-white population groups. Looking at pilot organisations, which also held mainstream LSC contracts, likewise showed that they were able to engage with client groups that differed from those funded by their mainstream contracts.

4.4.2 What Kind of Problems Did Clients Have?

The number and types of debts that clients presented with at the outreach venues was explored using the closed case data. A majority of 57 per cent of pilot clients presented with one type of debt, 20 per cent had two types, 12 per cent had three, and 6 per cent had four. The remaining 5 per cent reported 5 or more debt problems.

Debts arising from unsecured credit products were experienced by 46 per cent of clients making them the most frequently reported type of debt. Experience of priority debts was also high among outreach clients. Rent arrears affected 27 per cent of clients and a further 6 per cent had mortgage arrears; 22 per cent had Council Tax arrears and a similar 23 per cent had utilities arrears. Fourteen per cent of clients had fallen into arrears with court fines.

Interestingly, analysis also highlighted differences among demographic groups and the types of debt they experience. Male clients, for example, were more likely to have reported court fine arrears than females. In contrast, a higher proportion of women had council tax arrears, rent arrears, utilities arrears and arrears in unsecured credit. Rent arrears were more common among clients living in shared ownership schemes and among social housing tenants. A higher proportion of couples with children had unsecured credit arrears than other family types.
4.4.3 How Long Did Cases Take?

Using the closed case data it was possible to determine the average case duration and advice time where this data was available. Overall, the average duration for outreach cases was 101 days. The average total advice time for a case was 217 minutes. However, as is clear from Table 2, both duration and advice time varied significantly by venue types. The data showed particularly shorter case durations for clients accessing services in prisons/probation services and justice-based venues (51 and 53 days respectively). The highest average case duration, 149 days, was among clients seen in employment-related venues.

Total advice times for a case ranged from an average of 113 minutes for clients seen in justice-based venues to 296 minutes for clients seen in CAB/CAB satellite offices (this refers to services provided in such offices and not to services provided by CAB per se). While prisons/probation services and justice-based venues shared a similar average case duration, the same was not observed with regards to average advice time with clients seen in prisons/probation settings receiving on average 203 minutes of advice. It is notable that prison/probation venues had a much higher share of clients offered advice at the general help level while a greater share of cases in justice-based venues involved advisors representing clients.

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25 There were apparent differences in time recordings between pilot organisations, which may have influenced some of the time variance.
Table 2: Average Case Duration and Advice Time by Venue Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venue Type</th>
<th>Duration (number of days)</th>
<th>Average advice time (minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family support service</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing support service</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisations in Justice</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based organisations</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAB/CAB satellite office*</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment-related</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health-related</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisons/Probation services</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Union/Money advice supplier</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visit</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closed Case Average</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Services provided in such offices, not necessarily provided by CAB

Differences were observed in duration and advice time when comparing outreach services to mainstream LSC services, controlling for area and organisation, with the latter taking longer to close cases and requiring more time to provide advice. This leads to the perhaps surprising finding that outreach cases, when costed at an hourly rate, seem to cost less than ‘mainstream’ legal aid funded work. However, as set out below, this cost figure needs to be seen within the broader cost context of delivering outreach services.

In trying to understand factors that determine advice times for outreach pilot cases, a number of statistical models were fitted to the closed case data. The models indicated that financial exclusion status of clients had little impact on the amount of time spent on a case. Determinants that were significant predictors of case time included gender, ethnicity, housing tenure, family status, employment status and number of debts.
4.4.4 What Benefits Did Outreach Advice Provide to Clients?

Monitoring data from the pilot projects captured a range of tangible outcomes for clients. The range of outcomes for clients can be seen in Table 3, which shows the number of cases for which particular outcomes were achieved. Outcomes included having debt written off, receiving an increase in monthly income, avoiding the loss of a client’s home or disconnection from utilities. The most common outcome for clients was to receive a payment plan.

Table 3: Outcomes Achieved for Clients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of closed cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Payment plan</td>
<td>2047</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt Written off</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client represented in Court</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in monthly income</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to other advice/support</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client opted to use IVA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client becomes bankrupt</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of threatened loss of home</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Securing lump sum (including back payment)</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of threatened utilities disconnection</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values were recorded for outcomes that could be financially measured, namely, an increase in annual income, securing a lump sum (including back payments), and debt written off. The values for the outreach project as a whole are given in Table 4. Nearly £6 million of debt was written off for clients in the 5863 cases closed during the one-year reference period. This equals an average of more than £1000 per case overall and £11,517 for cases that reported having a debt written off. It is around 7.6 per cent of the recorded debt for these cases (£45 million). In addition to this, the advice given led to an increase in annual income totalling more than £1.5 million plus a further £353,000 in lump sum payments.
Table 4: Financial Value of Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Aggregate Value for cases closed in reference period (£)</th>
<th>Average of all closed cases (£)</th>
<th>Average for cases where outcome recorded (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase in annual income</td>
<td>1,521,833</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>3374.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secured lump sum</td>
<td>352,834</td>
<td>60.2</td>
<td>1362.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debt written off</td>
<td>5,977,210</td>
<td>1019.5</td>
<td>11516.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.5 Meeting Performance Targets

The evaluation found that projects experienced difficulties in meeting the performance targets set out in their contracts, particularly those relating to the number of cases dealt with. Most projects reported having under-performed against their targets for new cases. In fact, only one project was meeting the case opening target of 275 cases per full-time equivalent worker per year. Some of the reasons for under-performance against the new cases target were attributed, to greater or lesser extent, to staff capacity, lack of footfall turnover in some venues, inappropriate referrals, and client heterogeneity (meaning not all clients being picked up in the outreach services met the project eligibility criteria).

In contrast, the projects collectively over-performed in terms of number of hours being delivered, with 53,561 hours reported against a target of 48,345 hours. Overall, 70 per cent of hours delivered were directed towards casework. However, the share of hours spent on casework and non-casework activities varied markedly between projects. For example, while two organisations reported that 100 per cent of hours provided were casework, three projects attributed less than 50 per cent of their total hours to casework. Some of these variations undoubtedly arise from differences among organisations in methods of time recording and definitions, but others are due to the very different challenges faced by working with clients in the different settings. Indeed, non-casework hours included time spent on engaging with partners and training problem noticers in partner organisations, publicity and promotion, and travel to venues. It also included time wasted on client non-attendance and the logistical challenges of specific settings e.g. security clearance in prison venues.
The difference between casework and non-casework hours is highly significant when looking at project performance and in particular, at the cost of delivering outreach advice. If costs are considered in terms of total project funding, the cost and effectiveness analysis suggested that outreach advice costs ‘more’ than standard advice services. The data indicate that the difference can be attributed to the lower than projected number of cases being conducted by organisations and by the number of hours spent by advisors on non-casework activities. This suggests that there is an unavoidable overhead or fixed cost associated with outreach services. Funding of outreach services must take account of these fixed costs of service provision.
5. RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This report has presented key findings from a multi-phased and in-depth evaluation of outreach debt advice. Aside from evaluating a specific policy, the findings should be of broad interest to those concerned with commissioning, shaping and delivering outreach advice, in particular for debt problems. This chapter draws on the extensive findings to set out main research implications and lessons for development.

5.1 Successes of the Money Advice Outreach Pilots

The evaluation results showed that the pilots were very successful in reaching socially and financial excluded people who had not sought advice before, building new partnerships and delivering advice at new venues. The monitoring data, for example, showed that over ninety per cent of clients met at least one of the five indicators used by the projects to determine financial exclusion. The closed case data demonstrated that overall less than 10 per cent of clients reported having previously sought advice in relation to a debt problem (this ranged from a low of 3 per cent of clients in prisons/probation settings, to a high of 46 per cent for clients in community based venues). The process and effectiveness evaluation highlighted that almost all the projects developed working arrangements with new delivery partners they had not worked with before. In addition, debt advice had not been available at seven in ten of the venues before the pilots projects were set up (nine in ten if video-link portals and venues where advice was available on demand were excluded). Key objectives of the pilot initiative were therefore met. More generally, the successes of the money advice outreach pilots demonstrate the potential of legal outreach advice.

For clients, the advice saw some real successes in terms of crisis avoidance, gaining income, averting the loss of a home or utilities disconnection, and the setting up of payment plans. Clients also reported ‘softer’ outcomes, such as reduced levels of personal stress. Only a handful of interviewees said that the advice had made little or no difference. Most clients said they were optimistic about avoiding future debts, although this was often thought to be challenging to achieve given their difficult life

26 These outcomes confirm previous findings from the LSRC (Pleasence et al. (2007)), which indicated that people’s levels of anxiety, general health, relationships and housing stability benefit from debt advice. This was in addition to the research showing how advice can improve people’s financial circumstances and their understanding of their personal finances, and helps them to target ‘priority’ debt more effectively.
circumstances. This confirms recent findings from a qualitative longitudinal study of the impact of debt advice on low income households\(^{27}\): a neat-linear pattern of ‘indebtedness – advice – debt free’ was found to be unusual, for most people the situation is far more complex.

The projects went some way to evidence the demand for outreach money advice among financially excluded clients, and to develop viable models for servicing a range of different locations (see also below). From the perspective of outreach advice project staff and delivery partners, successes included:

- Raised awareness of debt advice with wholly new delivery partners;
- Widened access to new clients and locations where debt advice was not previously available, or available only at a very limited level;
- Improved quality of advice provision available to clients on an outreach basis, and reduced risk of poor or partial advice; and
- Enabled advisers to gain experience of a wider range of target groups and settings and to deliver money advice alongside other types of services.

Whilst key objectives of the money advice outreach pilots were met, a number of challenges were also encountered. These are discussed in some of the sections below.

### 5.2 Resourcing Outreach Advice

In terms of resourcing, the evaluation provided a perhaps surprising finding, namely that outreach cases tended to take less time and therefore cost less, than ‘standard’ legal aid funded work. However, when costs were considered in terms of total project funding, the data suggested that outreach advice costs more than standard advice services. This reflects an unavoidable overhead or fixed cost associated with outreach services. Some of these overhead costs arise because of the need to establish and maintain relationships with partners, others because of travel to outreach venues and still others because of the logistical challenges of working in specific settings. Not surprisingly given these findings, the evaluation also found that projects experienced difficulties in meeting the performance targets set out in their contracts, particularly those relating to the number of cases opened. The balance

\(^{27}\) Orton (2009)
between overhead and variable costs in outreach provision needs to be considered when funding and delivering outreach advice.

In terms of staff, the qualitative interviews demonstrated that clients valued their advisers to have a good combination of interpersonal skills, and a breath of knowledge regarding money and welfare rights issues. They also appreciated the timeliness of advice, seen as particularly important given the late stage many clients sought advice at, and continuity of process. Also rated highly was trust in the adviser, dealt with in greater detail below. Clearly, outreach advisers require a range of skills, many of which are also required when delivering ‘mainstream’ advice; however, outreach advisers also need to be comfortable providing advice in unfamiliar and challenging locations such as prisons. Moreover, outreach project co-ordinators and advisers also need to be adept at building and maintaining partnerships with delivery partners, at both strategic and operational level.

5.3 Trust, Attitudes, Capability and the Potential for Behaviour Change

The evaluation demonstrated a need for education initiatives to target ‘hard-to-reach’ groups with debt problems to highlight the specific benefits of advice. The findings show that, whilst some may have an awareness of advice services in general, there is a lack of knowledge of the impact of advice. It is not surprising, then, that the motivation for seeking advice is sometimes small if it is unclear how this may benefit an individual in tangible and practical ways.

The evaluation also indicated that the most vulnerable people had expectations for longer-term support, experienced multiple problems and had limited options for income generation. In that sense, whilst outreach debt advice is clearly beneficial, it can only reach ‘so far’. In policy and delivery terms, this implies that outreach advice ideally needs to be supplemented with other help and support for those with reduced levels of capability and difficult life circumstances. This may include persistent relationships with one adviser to help with a range of legal and non-legal problems. This type of intense support is expensive and would require coordinated funding and policy direction from a range of government and non-governmental bodies and agencies.

Findings from both the target group survey and from the qualitative interviews with clients highlighted the importance of trust transfer. Having trusted intermediaries
introduce disadvantaged and ‘hard-to-reach’ clients to an advice service can in turn confer trust onto that advice service. However, trust is not a static sentiment or attitude; outreach advice per se does not always build trust and there is the potential for trust depletion.

One important finding arising out of the qualitative interviews with clients was that almost all of them said they would seek advice at an earlier stage in the future. This attitude, together with trust building and better awareness of the benefits of advice, may lead to behaviour change, a ‘holy grail’ for many policy initiatives.

5.4 Models of Outreach Delivery

Results from all four research and evaluation phases highlighted the variation between different outreach location types. For example, the target group survey demonstrated that outreach services need to be responsive to how people use a location. This includes considering the purpose of visits, volumes and flows of people, whether people go to outreach locations with children, as well as being aware that not all locations are suitable for outreach. The inclination to label groups of individuals under a homogeneous ‘hard-to-reach’ banner, fails to permit sufficient reference to demographic, cultural, behavioural and attitudinal differences. This is why tailoring outreach to distinct outreach location types and distinct groups remains important in accounting for the heterogeneity within and between groups.

The qualitative interviews with outreach project staff, delivery partners and clients also evidenced how variable outreach locations can be, and the way in which different outreach locations present different challenges. For example, in housing offices and in community finance organizations potential conflicts of interest in the partnership between the debt outreach advice and delivery services need to be identified and taken into account early on. So too, the significant logistical and cultural challenges of delivering advice in a prison environment, including lock-downs and the potential impermissibility of phones and laptops, which necessitates a tailored rather than a ‘ready made’ approach to outreach delivery.

The analysis of closed case client data further highlighted the differences between outreach location types. For example, average duration for outreach cases and total advice time varied significantly by venue type. However, this finding may also have been influenced by differences in how time was recorded between pilot
organisations. Funders and projects should ensure that the same information is collected across projects as much as possible.

As already mentioned, the research and evaluation findings reinforce that outreach advice stands to benefit from being more closely integrated with other forms of support for the client groups. If adequately resourced, this type of model has the potential to address some of the perceived shortcomings of debt outreach advice as a ‘stand alone’ service. The specific benefits might include stronger networks of support and resources for outreach advisers; and more capacity to provide aftercare for the most vulnerable clients, through lighter touch advice and financial capability work.

Integrating outreach advice with other legal (and non-legal) advice delivery models may also contribute to sustainable outreach services: integrated advice models have the potential benefit of providing the economies of scale that are needed for sustaining debt advice outreach, alongside a range of other services. The LSC’s current strategy of establishing Community Legal Advice Centres and Networks aims to provide integrated social welfare and family law services, including through outreach delivery.\(^{28}\)

5.5 The Need for Further Research

This was a comprehensive research and evaluation project, which has filled key knowledge gaps in regard to providing debt outreach advice to financially and socially excluded and ‘hard-to-reach’ groups. The research has also pinpointed the need for further research in a number of areas. More research is required to establish the exact costs of the ‘non-advice’ element of outreach advice services. Research is required on the relative merits of investing limited public funds into education initiatives vis-à-vis (outreach) advice.\(^{29}\) More fine-grained insights into trust-building and trust-depletion processes in advice-seeking of ‘hard-to-reach’ and disadvantaged groups would also be useful. Lastly, further research is also needed to establish the benefits of integrating outreach advice within other advice delivery models.

\(^{28}\) Legal Services Commission (2006).
\(^{29}\) Buck et al. (2008), Buck et al. (2007)
Phase 1: Face-to-face Survey in Five Different Outreach Location Types

The first phase of evaluation focused on the target population of the money advice outreach pilots. The objective was to assess the suitability of five different outreach location types for delivering money advice to target groups. Interview fieldwork was conducted by BMRB Social Research.

Interviews lasting around 20 minutes were undertaken in prisons, family and children centres, credit unions, housing offices and community centres. In all, 563 interviews were achieved across 25 different sites. The pilots were either just up-and-running or due to start soon, in all the locations surveyed.

Survey questions were designed to ascertain to what extent users of these five most frequent pilot outreach location types were within the target group of the pilots. The survey therefore explored the characteristics, views and experiences of all users of the locations selected for the survey (rather than just those who experienced money-related problems and/or financial exclusion).

Survey questions covered financial exclusion, use of financial services and money management among respondents, as well as the experience and extent of debt related problems. In order to ascertain the extent to which outreach location users were familiar with mainstream advice services, survey questions explored awareness, usage and attitudes vis-à-vis existing advice services. One survey section dealt specifically with attitudes to money outreach services to gauge preferences and potential usage patterns. Demographic questions were also included in the survey. The questionnaire consisted mainly of closed questions, with a small number of open-ended questions.
Phase 2: Process and Effectiveness – Provider and Partner Perspectives

The second phase of the evaluation was a process evaluation, focusing on the provider perspective. A process evaluation involves identifying and exploring issues relating to the delivery and implementation of interventions, services or programmes. The aim of the process evaluation was to provide an in-depth understanding of the processes that pilot organisations encountered in setting up the money advice outreach pilots, and during the lifetime of the projects. The research was extensive and took place over an 18-month period.

Phase 3: Outcome Evaluations

Outcome evaluations provide information about the range of effects or impacts of interventions, programmes or services. They tend to focus on participants or service users, but can also include non-users and service providers. Two separate outcome research exercises were conducted for the evaluation of the money advice outreach pilots.

Measuring the outcomes of outreach services is not straightforward. Outreach provision is frequently patchy. The very nature of outreach means that provision also has to be flexible, sometimes informal, and adapted to local needs. In addition, as Dewson et al. (2006) have noted, outcomes from outreach often take longer to achieve as clients are ‘harder-to-reach’ and, by definition, usually ‘harder-to-help’. Furthermore, outreach outcomes need to distinguish between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ outcomes, such as increased confidence, motivation or awareness. All these factors make reliable and generalisable overall success measures difficult to calculate. Correspondingly, both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were chosen to explore the outcomes of debt outreach advice for clients.

(a) Qualitative Interviews with Clients and Target Groups

Forty-nine in-depth qualitative interviews with clients and target groups were carried out. Of the 49 interviews, 41 were conducted with clients of the pilot projects. The clients interviewed had received advice in a range of outreach settings, including

30 Molloy, Woodfield and Bacon (2002)
prisons, credit unions, Sure Start Children’s Centres and housing offices. A small number (3) of interviewed clients had received advice remotely via video link.

The main aim of the client interviews was to focus on the impact of money advice outreach on clients, including the reasons for using outreach advice (e.g. lack of awareness of mainstream advice providers), clients’ views and experiences of accessing advice from the pilot projects, the type of help and advice they received and the outcomes of receiving advice (financial and otherwise).

The remaining eight qualitative interviews were conducted with target groups. These explored the reasons why people had not sought advice from a money advice outreach project even though they used an outreach venue and had financial difficulties.

All interviews were conducted using a topic guide, recorded with the interviewees’ permission and fully transcribed.

(b) Cost and Effectiveness Analysis

A cost and effectiveness analysis was carried out using quantitative data gathered during a one year reference period starting 1 September 2006. By the start of this period, the majority of outreach projects had been operational for at least six months and client numbers had built up as the projects and venues had become established. The analysis used three discreet datasets:

- Monitoring data: Monthly quantitative monitoring data provided by all organisations funded under the pilot projects;
- Closed case data comprising nearly 5,000 client records from 17 of the 22 organisations involved in the outreach projects (83 per cent of all closed cases over the one-year reference period);
- LSC administrative records for 90,560 clients who were provided advice under mainstream LSC debt contracts in the same period.

The monitoring data and closed case data enabled detailed analysis of outreach pilot performance, client profiles and case types (including outcomes). A comparative analysis was also carried out between the closed case data and mainstream LSC
data. A number of pilot organisations also held mainstream LSC debt contracts enabling comparison controlling for area and organisation.
APPENDIX B: REFERENCES


Provider and Partner Perspectives. London: Legal Services Research Centre.


This report presents key findings from a multi-phased evaluation of debt outreach advice. The broad policy background of the ‘money advice outreach pilots’ was to tackle financial and social exclusion, while meeting the specific needs of disadvantaged groups of people who would not normally seek help from mainstream advice services. Outreach advice was provided in locations such as prisons, family centres, housing offices, community finance organisations and other community-based venues, as well as through home visits and video-link facilities. The findings should be of interest to those concerned with commissioning, shaping and delivering outreach advice, in particular for debt problems. The extensive research addresses the paucity of research on legal outreach advice.