

Welfare Rights Service

Consultation report – 2019

www.lancashire.gov.uk

Lancashire

County
Council





**Mick Edwardson, Mike Walker, Melissa Sherliker,
Catherine Richards and Stephanie Windross**

June 2019

For further information on the work of Business Intelligence please contact us at
Business Intelligence
Lancashire County Council
County Hall
Preston
PR1 8XJ
Tel: 0808 1443536
www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight

Contents

1.	Executive summary	3
	1.1 Key findings – service users and general public.....	3
	1.2 Key findings – organisations.....	4
	1.3 Key findings – workshops.....	5
	1.4 Other responses	6
2.	Introduction.....	8
3.	Methodology	10
	3.1 Limitations	12
4.	Main findings – service users and general public	13
	4.1 Using the Welfare Rights Service	13
	4.2 The proposal for Welfare Rights Services	18
5.	Main findings – organisations	22
6.	Main findings – stakeholder workshops.....	27
	6.1 Knowledge and expertise	27
	6.2 Challenging environment.....	27
	6.3 Impact on services.....	28
	6.4 Lack of funding for core services	29
	6.5 Welfare reform.....	29
	6.6 Accessing the service	30
	6.7 Protected characteristics	30
	6.8 Early intervention	30
7.	Other comments	31
	Appendix 1 – service users and general public demographics	36

1. Executive summary

This report summarises the response to Lancashire County Council's consultation on the Welfare Rights Service.

The fieldwork ran for eight-weeks between 15 April 2019 and 9 June 2019. In total, 419 service user/general public consultation questionnaires were completed (9 paper copies and 410 online copies). In total, 64 organisation consultation questionnaires were also completed.

Consultation workshops with service providers and partner organisations were held between 18 March and 5 June 2019. In total, 93 people attended the workshops (30 internal stakeholders and 63 service providers/partner organisations).

We also received nine email/letter responses to the proposals during the consultation period.

1.1 Key findings – service users and general public

1.1.1 Using the Welfare Rights Service

- Over half of respondents (53%) said that they had used the Welfare Rights Service.
- Of those respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service, about three-fifths (59%) said that they had used general benefit advice by telephone for people under the pension age and about two-fifths (42%) said that they had used help with an appeal/mandatory reconsideration.
- Of those respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service, over four-fifths (84%) said that the advice they received was very helpful.
- Of those respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service, about two-fifths (38%) said that they were referred to the service.
- Those respondents who were referred to the Welfare Rights Service most commonly said that they were referred by the Citizens Advice Bureau (20%), GP or other medical professional (15%) and a charity or voluntary organisation (14%).
- About a quarter of respondents (27%) said that they had sought help from other organisations and about three-quarters (73%) said that they hadn't sought help from other organisations.
- Of those respondents who sought help with their benefits from any other organisation, about three-fifths of these respondents (58%) said that they sought help from the Citizens Advice Bureau. About one in six of respondents who sought help from other organisations (17%) said that the help they received was not good.
- About two-fifths of respondents (42%) said 'no' they haven't and wouldn't consider using an online service to access benefit advice and guidance.

- When asked why they would or wouldn't consider using an online service to access benefit advice and guidance, respondents were most likely to say that they prefer to talk to someone in person (51%), not everyone has access/ability to use the internet (25%) and information/wording online can be difficult to understand (22%).

1.1.2 The proposal for the Welfare Rights Service

- Over four-fifths of respondents (83%) said that they strongly disagree with our proposal to reduce access to the provision of welfare benefit advice and guidance services.
- The most common reason given for agreeing or disagreeing with the proposal was that it's a vital service used by vulnerable people (62%).
- Respondents were most likely to say that if the proposal happens they are concerned that support won't be available anywhere (28%) and they although they don't need the service at the moment they may do in future (23%).
- When asked if there is anything else that they think we need to consider or that we could do differently, respondents were most likely to comment that the service should be kept as it is (33%) and that the proposal will directly affect vulnerable people (19%).

1.2 Key findings – organisations

- 60 out of 64 respondents said that they disagree with the proposal (48 strongly disagree and 11 tend to disagree).
- The most common reasons given for agreeing or disagreeing with the proposal were that vulnerable people use and need the support (39 respondents) and it will increase the strain on other service and/or people won't access the support they need (35 respondents).
- When asked how it would affect their service and the people they support if the proposal happened, respondents were most likely to say that it will lead people into severe hardship and/or crisis (31 respondents), people will have difficulty/won't be able to appeal/challenge decisions (18 respondents) and it will increase strain on services (18 respondents).
- When asked if there is anything else that they think we need to consider or that we could do differently, respondents were most likely to say that we need to consider the wider and/or long-term implications on vulnerable people and/or communities (23 respondents) and don't make any cuts to the service (19 respondents).
- When asked how they think they or their clients would get the support needed in future if they were unable to access the Welfare Rights Service, the most common response to this question was that they won't get support (34 respondents).
- 37 respondents said that they do provide benefit advice.

- Respondents were most likely to say that they provide advice about AA, PIP Universal Credit (UC), EA sanctions etc (15 respondents) and help with form filling (11 respondents).

1.3 Key findings – workshops

- No other service that offers the level of expertise provided by Welfare Rights.
- Stakeholders favoured retaining the service, with the majority stating that the service is vital to their own ability to support service users across a wide range of needs.
- Overwhelmingly, workshop participants informed the consultation that Welfare Rights is a well-established service with a reputation for independent, consistent and accurate benefit advice. It was clear that this respect extended to the fact that it was the only organisation which gave complex case advice and supported complex appeals at court across Lancashire.
- Feedback identified that previous financial savings across this sector generally have led to a number of system changes taking place already. Most of the voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) services consequently operate a "low level" benefits advice offer, escalating to Welfare Rights only when the need is complex or at appeal case level. Whilst the consultation did identify that some organisations did offer some appeal support, for example housing associations, it was only in a specific locality or for a specific client base, such as those people requiring housing with those associations, therefore other people were excluded from that support.
- The workshops identified the significant demand pressures on the services supporting the welfare system. Most of the organisational stakeholders attending reported that they were struggling, "imploding", or not coping with meeting the demand from people needing benefits advice at low and complex levels. They all reported increasing demand, growing waiting lists and a concern that the quality of their services were being undermined by the pressure of demand.
- Attendees expressed concern that this proposal, if agreed, would impact on the most vulnerable in our communities, especially to those with disabilities, including mental health, age and gender, in respect of women. They used terminology such as "it's discrimination" and "disadvantaged".
- A £340,000 reduction in Welfare Rights budget will have a detrimental effect on all stakeholders. Taking into account the feedback received from stakeholders across Lancashire, together with the implementation of other service challenge proposals from LCC to reduce other front line services such as the Lancashire Wellbeing Service, there will be an increase in the number of vulnerable people in crisis. This will have a direct impact on the other services both internal and external to LCC.

- Attendees reported that their ability to recruit to the level required to support complex case work and appeals, either through paid staff or by volunteers, was a real challenge. The expertise and knowledge gained over years of experience in the sector was difficult to find and difficult to maintain and sustain within a financially challenged VCFS organisation or other stakeholders. Recruiting volunteers with expertise that are expected to work for free on complex cases, lasting over twelve months in some cases, is an insurmountable challenge.
- Internal stakeholders confirmed that Welfare Rights advice underpins their service offers and contributes to some of their targets to deliver organisational savings. They acknowledged that Welfare Rights provides accurate and trusted advice to their service users which allowed the services to retain their service users, to support and enable them to secure their maximum income to be able to contribute towards their care needs. These services included the Shared Lives team, which highlighted a concern that the impact of the proposal to its team could be potentially £30k per person. The Care Financial Assessment Team, Financial Safeguarding Team, Care Leavers Team, Exchequer Services Team all expressed concern about the potential impact on their service and service users.
- Workshops identified that whilst most of their organisations and services are providing as much as they can digitally, there are limitations to this. Firstly, feedback confirmed that advice cannot be given online and that it needs to be in person, either face to face or over the phone. Secondly, digital exclusion and poor literacy skills have an impact on the effectiveness of online provision.
- There will be an impact on the revenue that Welfare Rights brings in to the county each year. In 2018/19 that revenue totalled £7,800,000. If the service sees a 50% reduction in budget then this figure will be significantly reduced. The workshop feedback has identified that both external and internal stakeholders alike have recognised the financial value that this places to their services.
- The proposal to reduce Welfare Rights could not have come at a worse time given the ongoing welfare reform agenda and its impact on residents and services which would have a significant impact on already stretched organisations such as VCFS and other service providers. This would have a cumulative impact on the most vulnerable people in Lancashire. It would result in an increased demand for complex advice, and an increase in people in crisis coming in to statutory services.

1.4 Other responses

- We received nine email/letter responses to the proposals during the consultation period. We received six responses from members of the public, one from Chorley Council, one from Charnock Richard and Wroughton parish councils and one from Seema Kennedy MP. These responses all

expressed concern about the potential negative impact of the proposal on vulnerable people. Chorley Council proposed working together to develop solutions and alternative delivery models.

2. Introduction

Lancashire County Council, like many councils across the country, is going through financially challenging times. This is as a result of funding not keeping pace with the increasing demand and cost of services being delivered. We need to continue to look at ways of reducing costs to help balance the books for future years. This means that we have to consider changes to some of the services we currently provide, as we do not have the resources to continue to deliver what we have done in the past. These changes were considered by our county councillors and we are now looking to consult on what impact the proposals may have. We really welcome your views.

The Welfare Rights Service

The service provides advice and assistance to people who live in Lancashire on all welfare benefit issues. We specifically support people with long-term health problems and terminal illness and people in work but on low incomes. We provide training and support to other county council services, local partners and agencies across Lancashire, who also refer customers to us for help. The service prioritises

1. Advising and assisting in legal challenges against benefit decisions, including representation at Appeal Tribunals.
2. Advising and assisting vulnerable customers under pension age, to navigate the benefit system and maximise their income. This includes negotiating with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) on their behalf when there are ongoing problems.
3. Targeted benefit take-up campaigns with older people to maximise their income to help improve or prolong good health and wellbeing and promote independence.
4. Providing urgent advice and support as a result of direct referrals from health professionals, for example, GPs, Macmillan nurses.

The service supports approximately 6,000 people a year with their benefit issues, and last year obtained £7.8 million in benefits for its customers. Of this, approximately £4.5 million came from work involving legal challenges and representing at Appeal Tribunals, approximately £800,000 came from advice to vulnerable people of working age and the remaining £2.5 million was from the advice and take-up work with older people.

The core purpose of the Welfare Rights Service is to provide a high quality, comprehensive and independent personal welfare rights service within the resources they have available, to make Lancashire residents more financially secure. They are specialists in all welfare benefits legislation and are the 'go to' service for anyone who is having problems in accessing their appropriate benefit entitlement. They advise and represent people at first tier Tribunal hearings, and also represent people at Upper Tribunal hearings where they believe the first tier Tribunal decision contains an error of law. They work closely with staff and services across Lancashire who support residents, in particular the most vulnerable residents who are at risk of needing or are already receiving support from statutory services. They also provide informal and

formal training on key benefit topics and act as a consultancy for professionals and services across Lancashire.

In this report respondents' responses to the open questions have been classified against a coding frame to quantify the qualitative data. Coding is the process of combining the issues, themes and ideas in qualitative open responses into a set of codes. The codes are given meaningful names that relate to the issue, so that during close reading of responses it can be seen when similar issues relate to a similar code. As the analysis process continues the coding frame is added to and refined as new issues are raised by respondents. All responses to open questions are then coded against the coding frame, and can be subsequently analysed as quantitative data.

Our proposal

We propose to reduce access to the provision of welfare benefit advice and guidance services. This would mean that the service would focus on advising and assisting in legal challenges against benefit decisions, including representation at Appeal Tribunals within the limited resources available. As a consequence it is unlikely that we would provide support to the other areas of work identified above.

It is anticipated that people with lower level needs will be able to access other existing advice and support services that are based in local communities and online, for example, Citizens Advice Bureau and Gov.uk.

Timescales

3 December 2018 – Cabinet agreed to consult on proposals

15 April -9 June 2019 – consultation with the public, staff, other county council services that use us and partner organisations

8 August 2019 – likely date of reporting the consultation outcomes to Cabinet

31 March 2020 – proposed implementation of the decision

3. Methodology

For this consultation, we asked the public, our employees and partner organisations for their views on our proposal for the Welfare Rights Service.

We promoted the consultation via social media, a press release and on the county council website. It was promoted to our employees on the intranet and to county councillors via C-First (the councillors' portal). An email promoting this and other consultations was also sent from our chief executive to the chief executives of the district and unitary councils, public health, clinical commissioning groups and MPs. County council services were asked to circulate the links to the consultation through appropriate partnerships and fora. Previous and existing Welfare Rights Service users were not contacted directly to take part in this consultation. This decision was taken to protect the wellbeing of vulnerable service users and was done in line with GDPR requirements.

Two electronic versions of the consultation questionnaire were available online at www.lancashire.gov.uk. One questionnaire was made available for service users and the general public and another was made available for organisations. Posters were available for service providers to display and paper copies of questionnaires were available on request.

The fieldwork ran for eight-weeks between 15 April 2019 and 6 June 2019. In total, 419 service user/general public consultation questionnaires were completed (9 paper copies and 410 online copies). In total, 64 organisation consultation questionnaires were also completed.

Consultation workshops with service providers and partner organisations were held between 8 April and 5 June 2019. In total, 93 people attended the workshops (30 internal stakeholders and 63 service providers/partner organisations).

From April to June 2019 the service ran workshops for stakeholders. Workshops for internal stakeholders were held on 18 March, 25 March, 19 April and 15 April 2019. Workshops for external stakeholders 8 May, 9 May, 14 May, 17 May and 4 June 2019. Some internal stakeholders attended the workshops for external stakeholders as they were not available to attend the other dates.

Sessions were recorded by dedicated note-takers, with responses collated and analysed using 'Framework Method'¹ to identify proposal responses and emergent themes.

We received nine email/letter responses to the proposals during the consultation period. We received six responses from members of the public, one from Chorley Council, one from Charnock Richard and Wroughtington parish councils and one from Seema Kennedy MP. The responses are presented in full in section 7 of this report.

¹ Ritchie, J. and Spencer, L. (1994) Qualitative Data Analysis for Applied Policy Research. In: Bryman, A. and Burgess, B., Eds., *Analyzing Qualitative Data*, Routledge, London.

The questionnaire for service users and the general public outlined what the Welfare Rights Service offers and explained our proposal for the Welfare Rights Service. The main section of the questionnaire included thirteen questions. The questions were split into two sections. The first section asked respondents about their use of the Welfare Rights Service, including the type of support they used, if the advice they received was helpful, if they were referred to the service, if they've sought advice from any other organisations and if they would consider using an online service. The second section asked respondents for their views on our proposal. Respondents were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the proposal, why they agree or disagree with the proposal, how the proposal would affect them and if they think there is anything else that we need to consider or that we could do differently.

The remaining questions asked respondents for information about themselves. For example, if they are a deaf person or have a disability. This information is presented in appendix 1.

The questionnaire for service users and the general public outlined what the Welfare Rights Service offers and explained our proposal for the Welfare Rights Service. It then asked respondents how strongly they agree or disagree with the proposal, why they agree or disagree with the proposal, how the proposal would affect them and if they think there is anything else that we need to consider or that we could do differently.

In this report, the responses to the open questions in the service user and general public questionnaire have been classified against a coding frame to quantify the qualitative data. Coding is the process of combining the issues, themes and ideas in qualitative open responses into a set of codes. The codes are given meaningful names that relate to the issue, so that during close reading of responses it can be seen when similar issues relate to a similar code. As the analysis process continues the coding frame is added to and refined as new issues are raised by respondents. All responses to open questions are then coded against the coding frame, and can be subsequently analysed as quantitative or qualitative data.

In the sections of this report that cover the stakeholder workshops the following acronyms are used

3.1 Limitations

The findings presented in this report cannot be assumed to be fully representative of the views of people who use the Welfare Rights Service. Neither can they be assumed to be fully representative of the population of Lancashire. They should only be understood as reflecting the views of people who were made aware of the consultation and who, given the opportunity, felt compelled to respond.

As the number of responses from organisations totalled 64 the figures in section 5 of this report are given as the actual number of responses, not the percentage of responses.

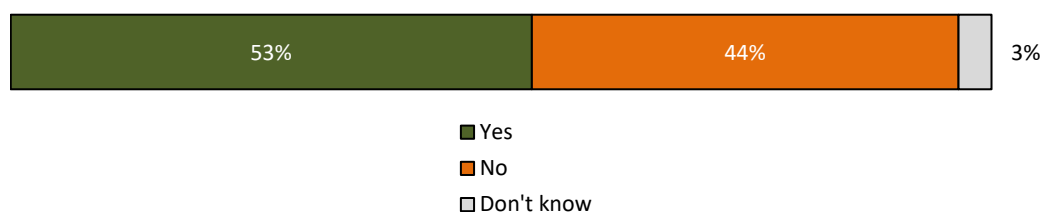
In charts or tables where responses do not add up to 100%, this is due to multiple responses or computer rounding.

4. Main findings – service users and general public

4.1 Using the Welfare Rights Service

Respondents were first asked if they have ever used the Welfare Rights Service. Over half of respondents (53%) said that they had used the Welfare Rights Service.

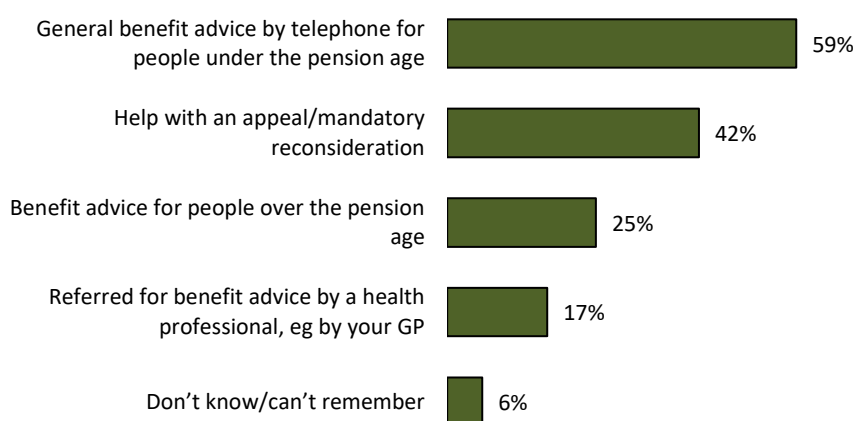
Chart 1 - Have you ever used the Welfare Rights Service?



Base: all respondents (416)

Respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service were then asked which type of support they used. Of these respondents, about three-fifths (59%) said that they had used general benefit advice by telephone for people under the pension age and about two-fifths (42%) said that they had used help with an appeal/mandatory reconsideration.

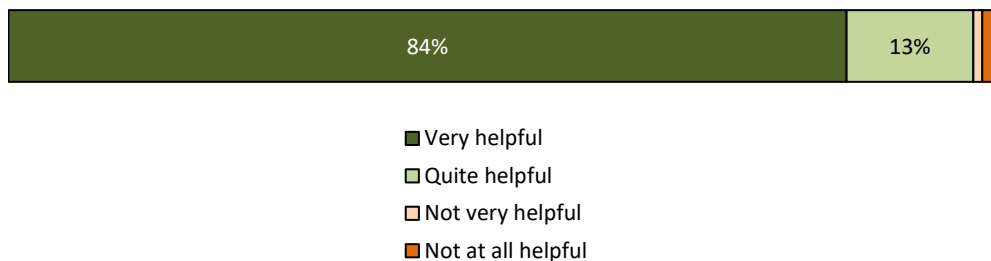
Chart 2 - Which of the following areas of Welfare Rights Service support have you ever used?



Base: respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service (220)

Respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service were then asked how helpful the advice they received was. Of these respondents, over four-fifths (84%) said that the advice they received was very helpful.

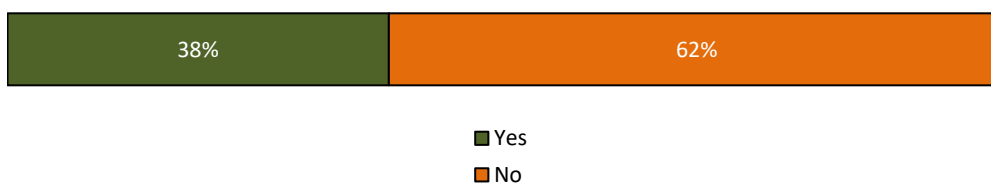
Chart 3 - How helpful was the advice you received?



Base: respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service (219)

Respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service were then asked if they were referred to the service, of these respondents about two-fifths (38%) said that they were referred to the service.

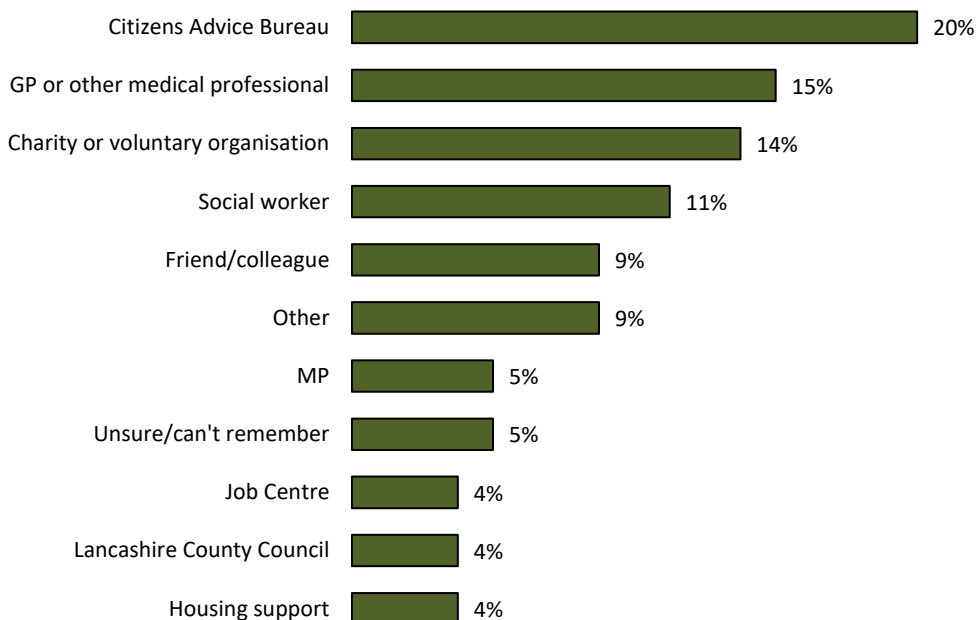
Chart 4 - Were you referred to the Welfare Rights Service?



Base: respondents who have used the Welfare Rights Service (217)

Respondents who were referred to the Welfare Rights Service were asked who referred them. The most common responses to this question were the Citizens Advice Bureau (20%), GP or other medical professional (15%) and a charity or voluntary organisation (14%).

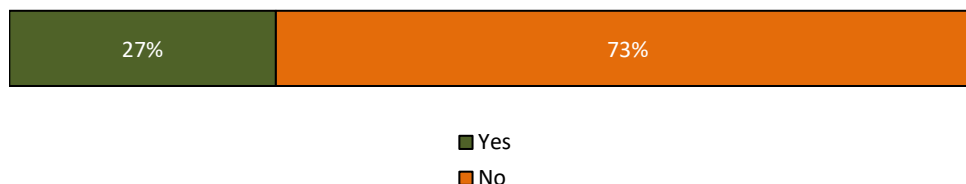
Chart 5 - If yes, who referred you?



Base: respondents who were referred to the Welfare Rights Service (79)

Respondents were then asked if they have sought help with their benefits from any other organisations. About a quarter of respondents (27%) said that they had sought help from other organisations and about three-quarters (73%) said that they hadn't sought help.

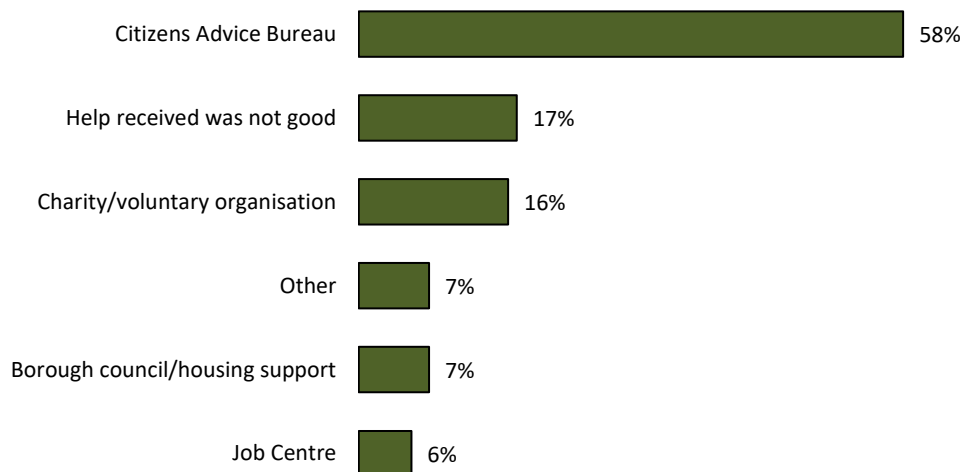
Chart 6 - Have you sought help with your benefits from any other organisations?



Base: all respondents (415)

Respondents who sought help with their benefits from any other organisations were then asked to provide details about the help they sought. About three-fifths of these respondents (58%) said that they sought help from the Citizens Advice Bureau. About one in six of these respondents (17%) said that the help they received was not good.

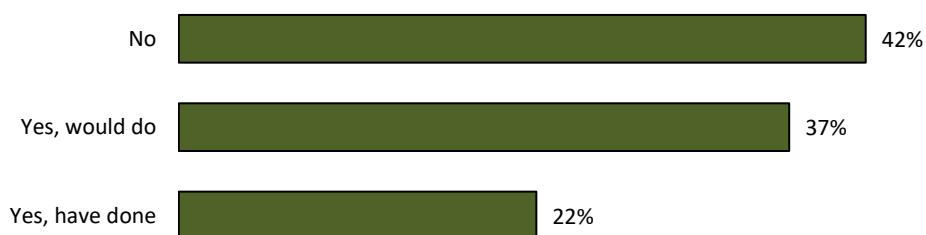
Chart 7 - If yes, please give details below.



Base: respondents who sought help with their benefits from another organisation (107)

Respondents were then asked if they have, or if they would consider, using an online service to access benefit advice and guidance. About two-fifths of respondents (42%) said 'no' they haven't and wouldn't consider using an online service to access benefit advice and guidance.

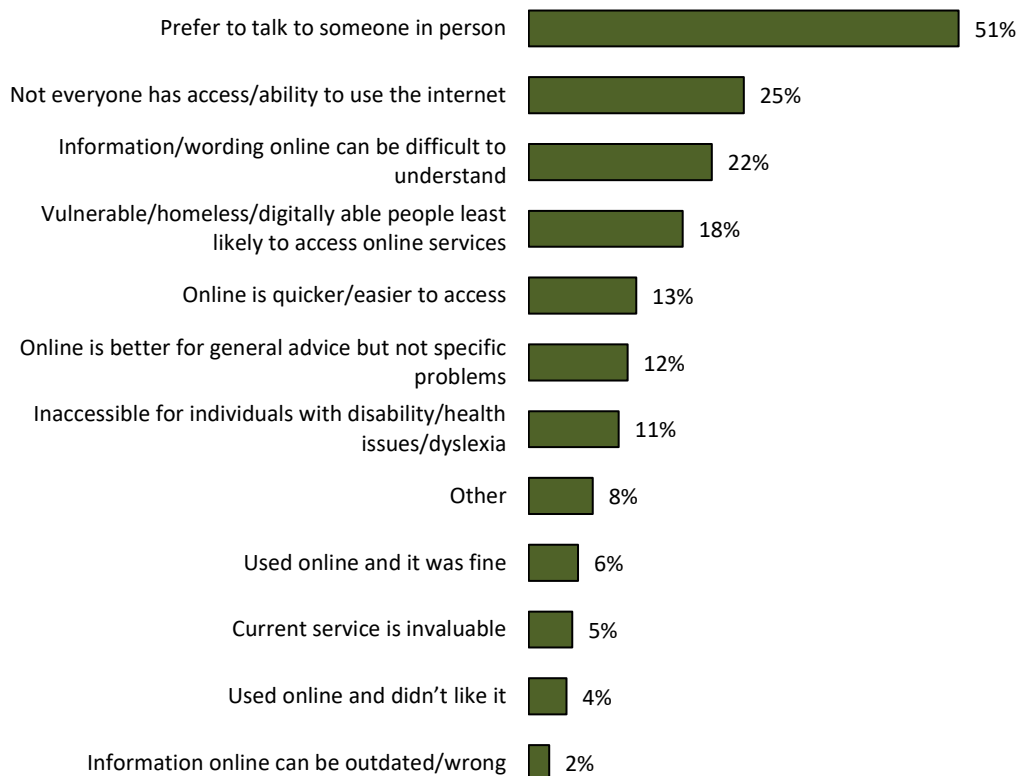
Chart 8 - Have you or would you consider using an online service to access benefit advice and guidance?



Base: all respondents (412)

Respondents were then asked why they would or wouldn't consider using an online service to access benefit advice and guidance. Respondents were most likely to say that they prefer to talk to someone in person (51%), not everyone has access/ability to use the internet (25%) and information/wording online can be difficult to understand (22%).

Chart 9 - And, why do you say this?



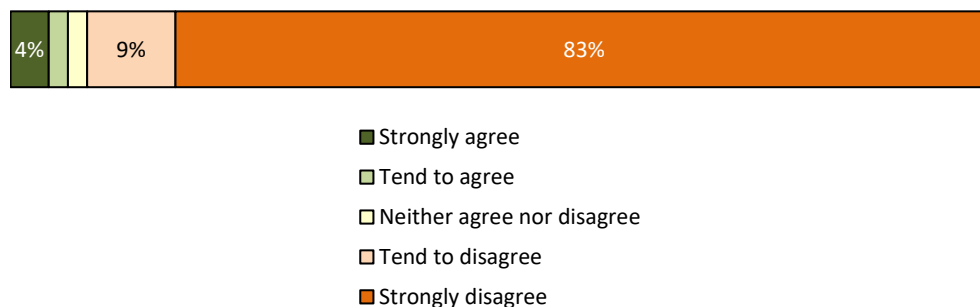
Base: all respondents (293)

4.2 The proposal for Welfare Rights Services

Respondents were then asked how strongly they agree or disagree with our proposal to reduce access to the provision of welfare benefit advice and guidance services.

Over four-fifths of respondents (83%) said that they strongly disagree with this proposal.

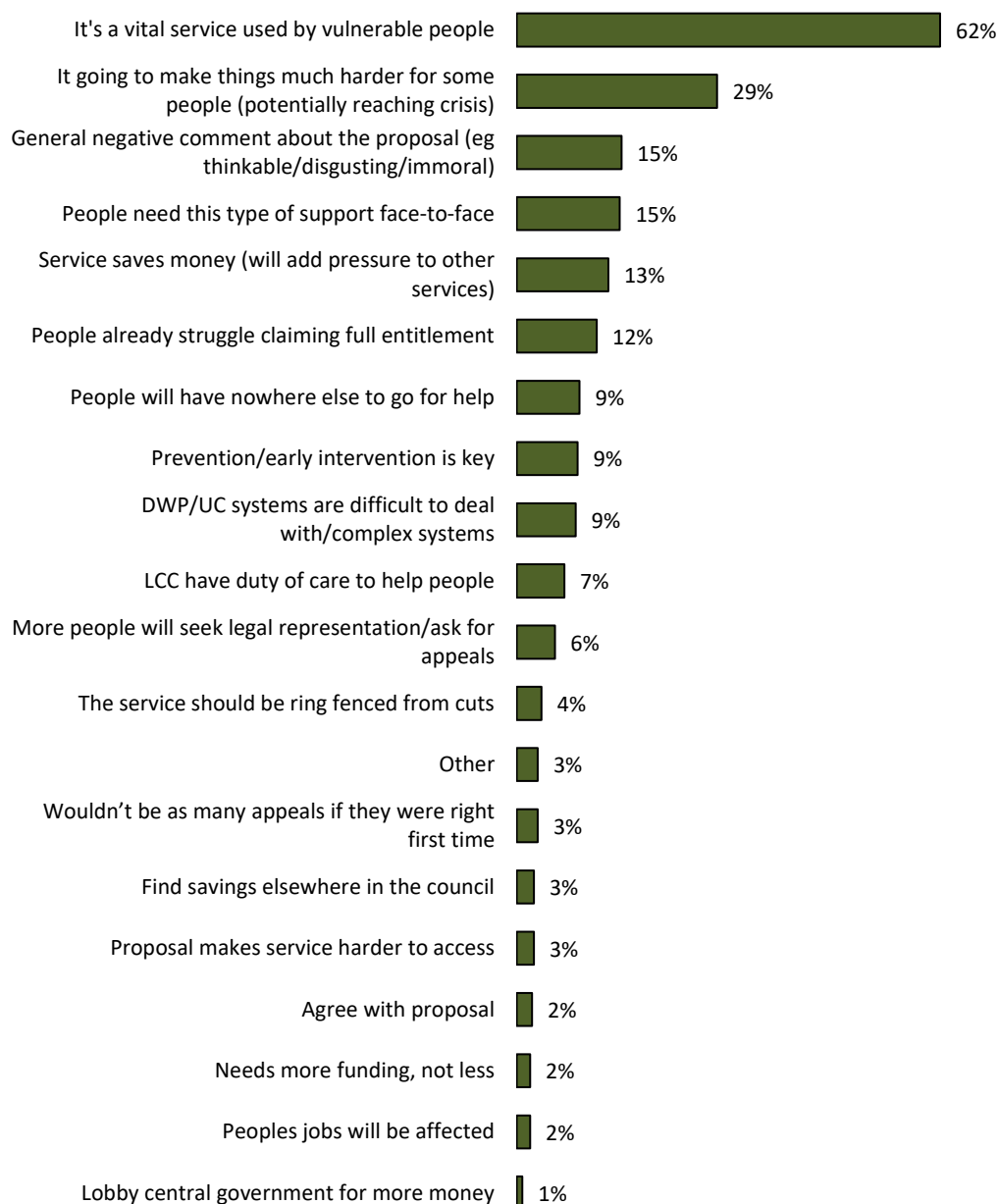
Chart 10 - How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?



Base: all respondents (411)

Respondents were then asked why they agree or disagree with the proposal. The most common reason given for agreeing or disagreeing with the proposal was that it's a vital service used by vulnerable people (62%).

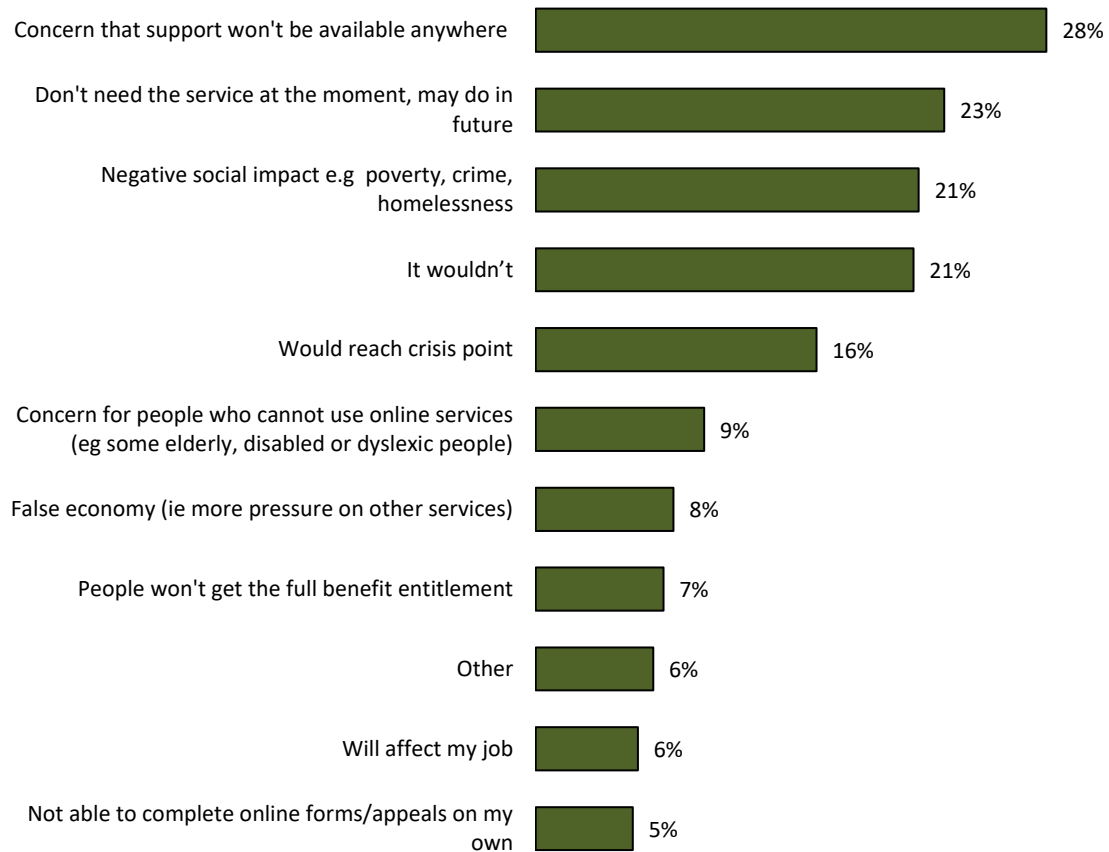
Chart 11 - Why do you say this?



Base: all respondents (356)

Respondents were then asked how it would affect them if the proposal happened. Respondents were most likely to say that if the proposal happens they are concerned that support won't be available anywhere (28%) and they although they don't need the service at the moment they may do in future (23%).

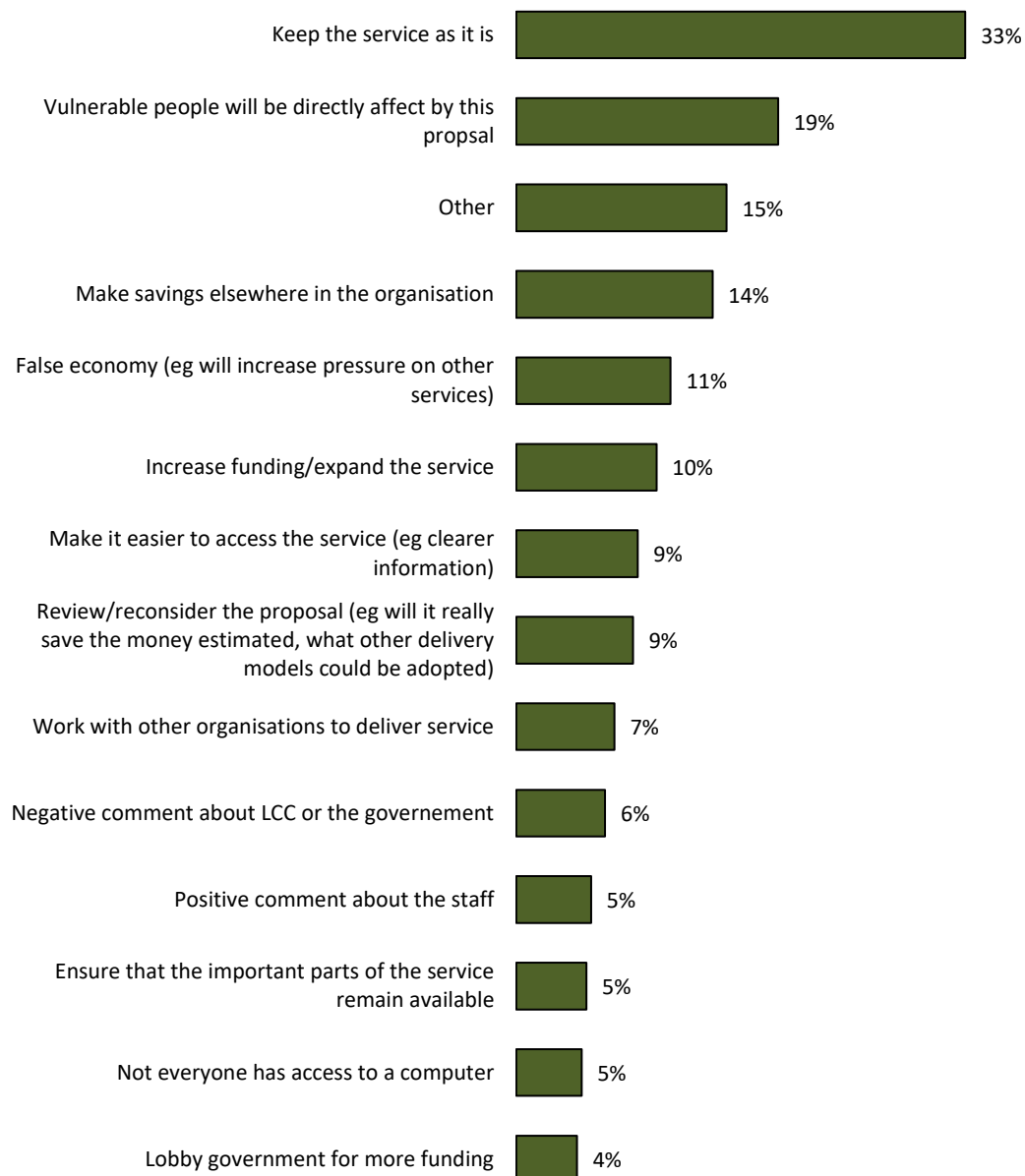
Chart 12 - If this proposal happened, how would it affect you?



Base: all respondents (354)

Respondents were then asked if there is anything else that they think we need to consider or that we could do differently. Respondents were most likely to comment that the service should be kept as it is (33%) and that the proposal will directly affect vulnerable people (19%).

Chart 13 - Thinking about our proposal, is there anything else you think we need to consider or that we could do differently?



Base: all respondents (293)

5. Main findings – organisations

Respondents were then asked how strongly they agree or disagree with our proposal to reduce access to the provision of welfare benefit advice and guidance services.

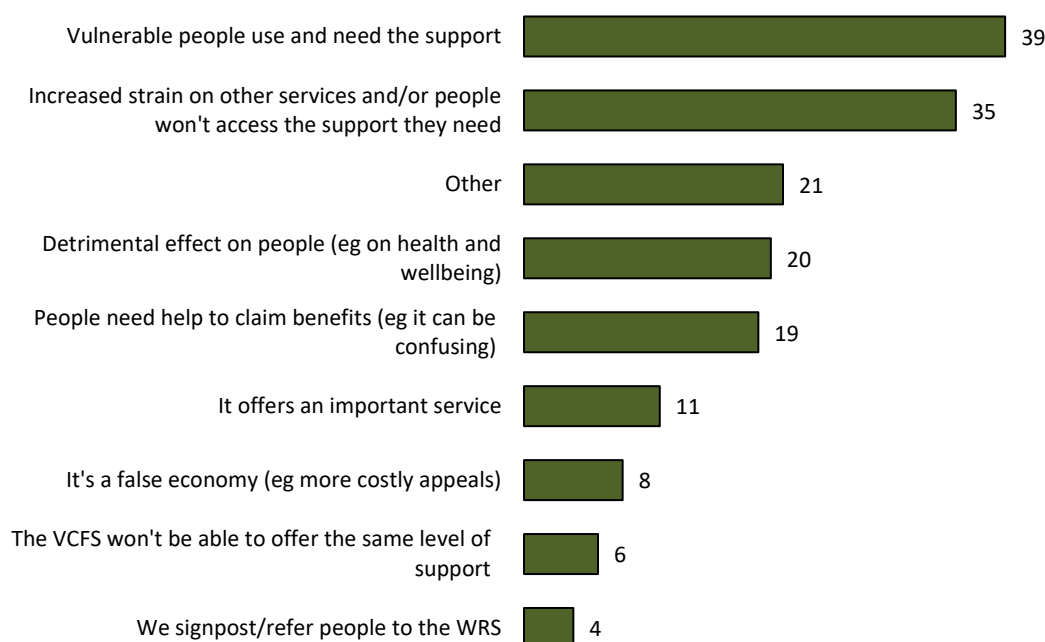
60 out of 64 respondents said that they disagree with the proposal (48 strongly disagree and 11 tend to disagree).

Chart 14 - How strongly do you agree or disagree with this proposal?



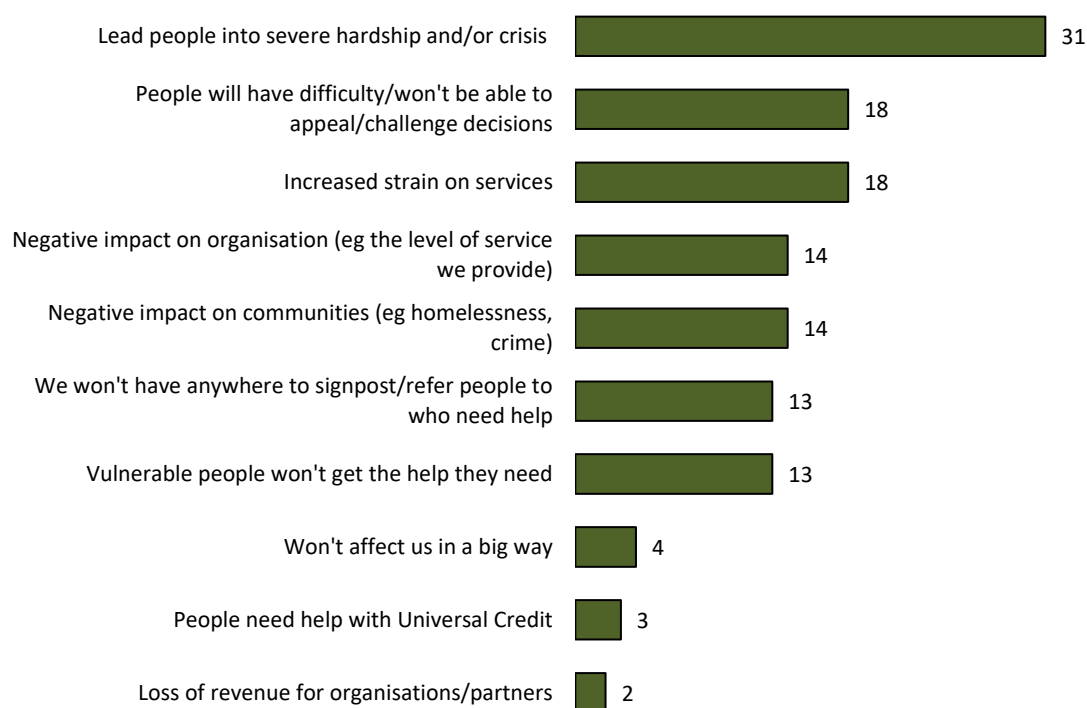
Respondents were then asked why they agree or disagree with the proposal. The most common reasons given for agreeing or disagreeing with the proposal were that vulnerable people use and need the support (39 respondents) and it will increase the strain on other service and/or people won't access the support they need (35 respondents).

Chart 15 - Why do you say this?



Respondents were then asked how it would affect their service and the people they support if the proposal happened. Respondents were most likely to say that it will lead people into severe hardship and/or crisis (31 respondents), people will have difficulty/won't be able to appeal/challenge decisions (18 respondents) and it will increase strain on services (18 respondents).

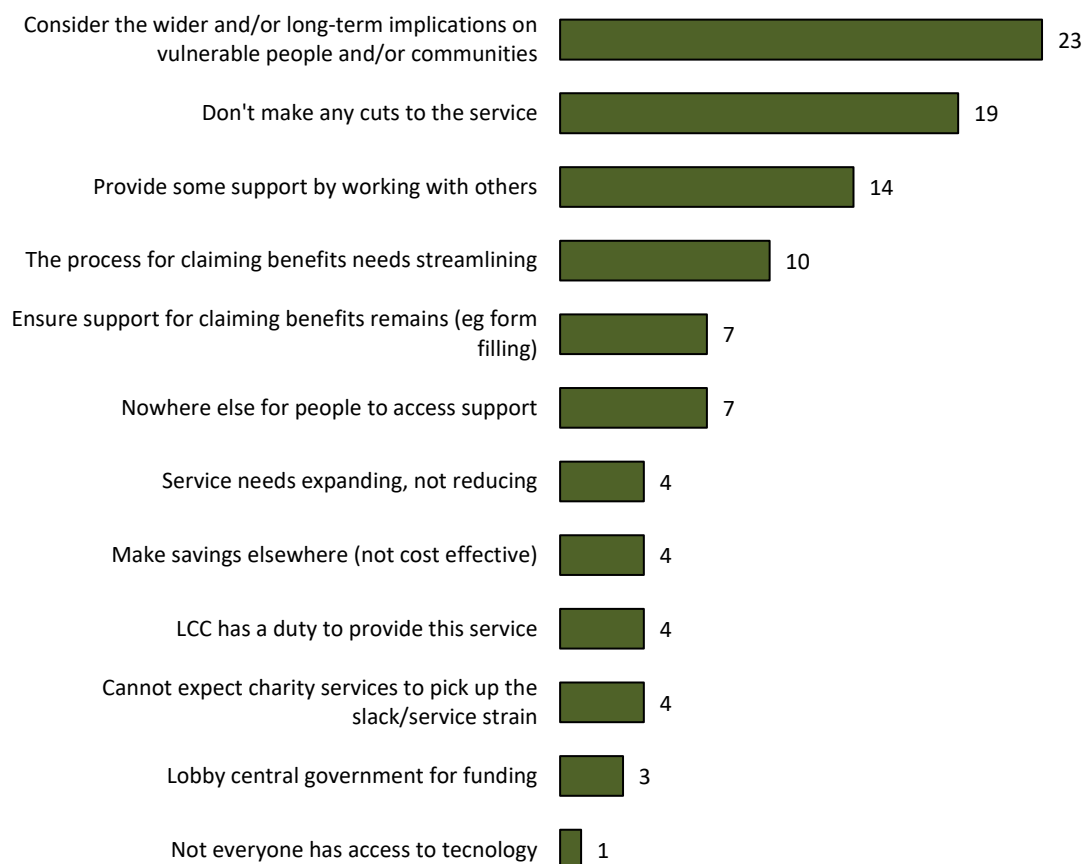
Chart 16 - If this proposal happened, how would it affect your service and the people you support?



Base: all respondents (62)

Respondents were then asked if there is anything else that they think we need to consider or that we could do differently. Respondents were most likely to say that we need to consider the wider and/or long-term implications on vulnerable people and/or communities (23 respondents) and don't make any cuts to the service (19 respondents).

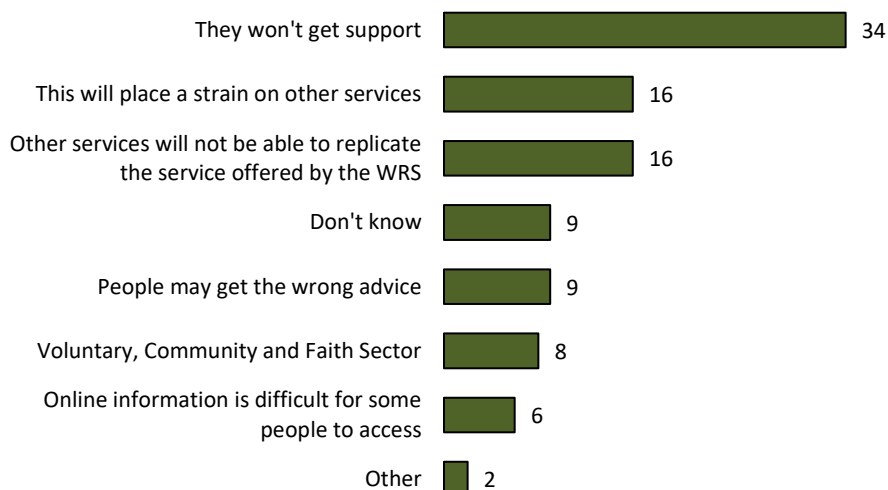
Chart 17 - Thinking about our proposal, is there anything else you think we need to consider or that we could do differently?



Base: all respondents (52)

Respondents were then asked how they think they or their clients would get the support needed in future if they were unable to access the Welfare Rights Service. The most common response to this question was that they won't get support (34 respondents).

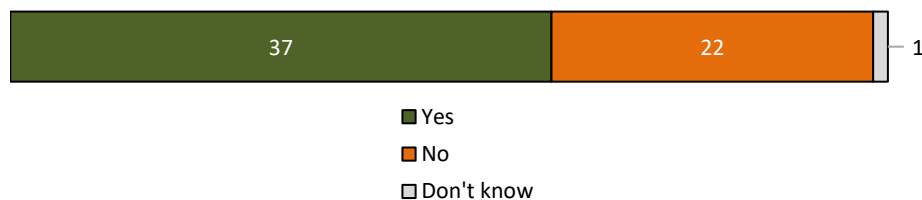
Chart 18 - If you were unable to access the Welfare Rights Service, how do you think you or your clients would get the support they need in the future?



Base: all respondents (64)

Respondents were then asked if their service currently provides any benefit advice. 37 respondents said that they do provide benefit advice.

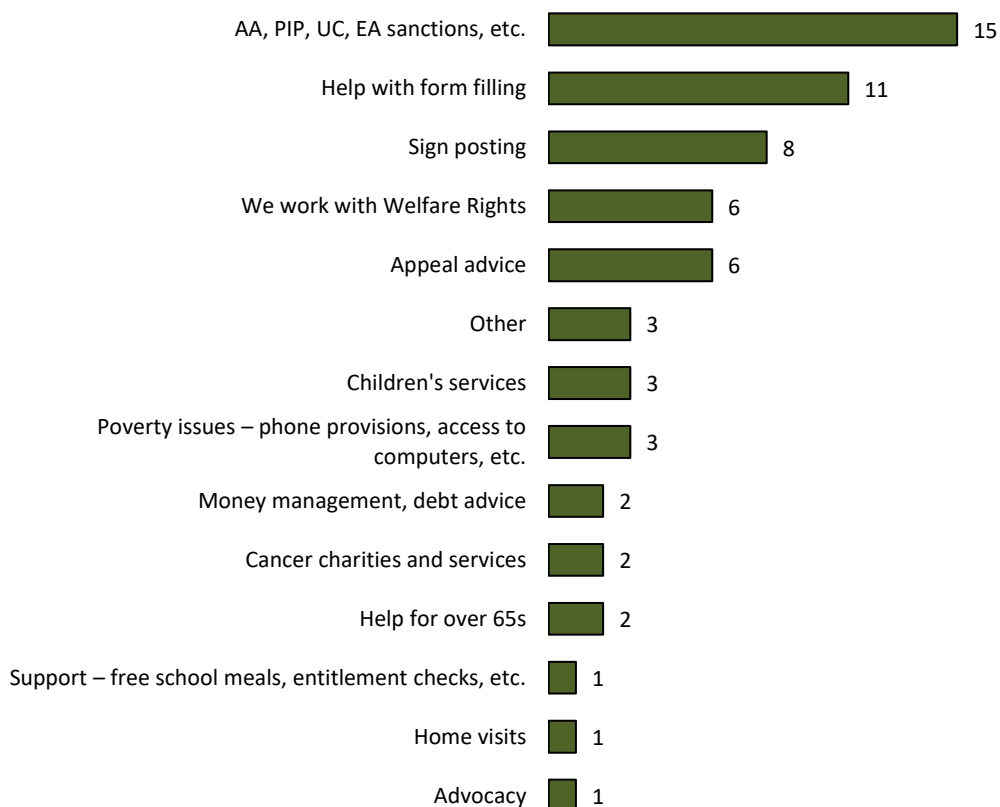
Chart 19 - Does your service currently provide any benefit advice?



Base: all respondents (60)

Respondents who do provide benefit advice were then asked what advice they provide. Respondents were most likely to say that they provide advice about AA, PIP, UC, EA sanctions etc (15 respondents) and help with form filling (11 respondents).

Chart 20 - Please tell us the benefits advice that you provide.



Base: all respondents (52)

6. Main findings – stakeholder workshops

6.1 Knowledge and expertise

Stakeholders would be unable to train and maintain the knowledge and expertise of volunteers and staff.

Lack of provision of consistent and accurate advice was voiced at all workshops as this is fundamental for complex casework and appeals.

Complex cases and appeals can take a long time to resolve, sometimes over twelve months, without the expertise of Welfare Rights, the customer would struggle to understand and support the court process themselves, this having a significant financial and health burden on the individual.

If the decision to reduce the service is upheld, then this will result in valued and respected knowledge and expertise being lost to the wider benefits and welfare system and it will be lost to Lancashire. This will have a detrimental impact on internal and external stakeholders.

There is a clear concern that there was no other service that offered support at court appeal hearings due to the complex nature of the claims.

6.2 Challenging environment

The emphasis of support has changed from maximising the income of residents to people presenting as destitute with no income at all. It is inherent within a system like this that the number of complex cases and appeals has increased. It is also a reason why service providers struggle to recruit employees and volunteers.

Respondents reported that the demand for benefit support and advice is not decreasing, it is increasing. There was concern that the proposal for reduction in service would have a cumulative impact and would result in vulnerable people being isolated and voiceless.

Workshop feedback included the following comment, that on occasion individuals who are in crisis have threatened suicide when they have contacted services for welfare advice

All stakeholders said that they rely on Welfare Rights to assist them.

Consultees reported that they work with service users as early as possible to try to reduce the need for referral to Welfare Rights in the longer term. However, they reported that they are services which are under pressure and had limited capacity themselves and in some instances, no casework volunteers.

6.3 Impact on services

6.3.1 Lancashire County Council services

Losing the current level of support from Welfare Rights, could potentially impact on the Shared Lives service up to a cost of **£30k per person**. The detrimental impact to an "already vulnerable person" is that they could be rendered homeless.

Internal stakeholders highlighted the importance of support from Welfare Rights to their services within Lancashire County Council. They confirmed that the advice from Welfare Rights supported their work and enabled their service users to maximise their income. This provided accuracy and reassurance, which lead to service user satisfaction and retention of service users in some services such as Shared Lives.

The loss of skills and the impact on service users would lead to the displacement of costs across other services within LCC and directly impact on savings reduction targets. For example Care Financial Assessment Team (CFAT) stated they need 'high level' benefits training and regular benefits updates from Welfare Rights, as well as ongoing benefits consultancy support for staff to ensure they can continue to undertake accurate financial assessments and maximise the income to the authority. Exchequer Services (Children's Services) commented that they require accurate benefits information to include in court documents for Special Guardianship Orders / Adoption Hearings and rely on advice from Welfare Rights to those carers which is then used to finalise a means test in Exchequer Services and reduces the financial responsibility of LCC by maximising the financial support available from welfare benefits. LCC Mental Health Teams regularly see service users who are relapsing due to stress caused by benefit problems and commented that without the Welfare Rights support they are going to struggle to respond to a growing 'crisis' caseload.

6.3.2 VCFS and external services

There was also a distinct challenge raised about the ability and desire for volunteers to give up their time to support people with complex cases and the endurance that was required by volunteers to operate at this level for free. There was additional concern about the amount of knowledge and expertise required to ensure correct advice is given, with concern that if you get anything wrong it could lead to suspension or reduction in benefits and the impact of that on individuals is devastating

Challenges around recruiting, training, monitoring and supporting VCFS employees and volunteers for their work and wellbeing was acknowledged as unachievable and difficult. The levels of stress that volunteers and staff are exposed to within the advice environment make it difficult to support and retain them.

Some Citizens Advice (CA) stated they had no benefit casework volunteers and no paid benefits caseworkers due to the difficulties finding people with the knowledge required in this role, but did their best before referring to Welfare Rights and are

concerned about the impact on their work but more importantly the impact on some of the most vulnerable residents who may not be able to access Welfare Rights expertise elsewhere.

Other external service providers shared concerns relating to the potential negative impact of service loss on other services, around capacity, increased demands and costs that would be displaced.

The loss of expertise would also have a displacement cost and cumulative effect on external services across public, private and VCFS organisations in Lancashire.

Welfare Rights works closely with the NHS which refers people as part of its patient support pathways for help with welfare advice and support. NHS respondents taking part in the consultation said that they and their services did not have the capacity, expertise, skills and resources to undertake the kind of work that Welfare Rights has provided. They added that as it is a well-established and respected service. That they have been reliant on this service and it is well-known to patients.

6.4 Lack of funding for core services

Organisations like Citizens Advice (CA) reported that they are under pressure to cope with increasing demand and deal with larger numbers of people with ever more increasing complexity of enquiries. The expectation is that they are capable of being able to do this without adequate funding or increased funding and this is unachievable and not sustainable. CA organisations reported that their funding situations vary across Lancashire. Many confirmed that they were continually having to take the time to apply for core funding which was becoming increasingly difficult. There were short term funding opportunities for bespoke project work but not for core work which is where they struggle to find adequate finances. CA commented that LCC is not looking after all residents having seen the support decrease over the years, but the voluntary sector should not be propping up LCC services.

Preston CA reported that it has had a further reduction in core funding. It was concerned that the benefit system had never been as complex for people to navigate as it was now and at the same time, there was less support available.

Age Concern located at Burnley, Clitheroe, Nelson and Accrington said that complex cases aren't being undertaken at these offices due to the fact that experienced staff have left and have not been replaced.

6.5 Welfare reform

Attendees of the workshops talked about the impact that welfare reform was having on their service users. They gave accounts of their service users falling into crisis situations, poverty and mental and physical ill-health as a result and they had witnessed this as they tried to provide support to them over time. Stakeholders said that this was having an impact on social care and health services as people then had to seek support

All attendees expressed concern about existing demand pressures and this is prior to the anticipated managed migration from existing legacy benefits to Universal Credit which all felt would have a significant impact on already stretched organisations whether VCFS, other external organisations or LCC services. LCC staff felt the savings made by cutting Welfare Rights would prove to be more costly having seen the impact of welfare reform on people using their services. For example, social workers supporting care leavers felt there would be an increasing demand on section 17 budgets, and LCC Mental Health services believe there has already been an escalation of people's conditions due to benefit problems and they expect this to continue to increase as welfare reform continues.

6.6 Accessing the service

Respondents reported that there are a host of people across Lancashire who are 'digitally excluded' for a variety of reasons, including rurality, age, lack of facilities like libraries not being open at accessible hours and VCFS organisations only operating for a couple of days per week.

Low levels of literacy can impact on individuals' ability to get online support. It is not possible to access the libraries all over Lancashire as they are not all open at times which are accessible. Some people need to access the help available at libraries as they don't have the basic skill set to support themselves. However libraries expressed concern that if Welfare Rights is cut, they may struggle to cope with people coming in to them for support.

You can't measure how desperate someone is via a form. Speaking to someone is more powerful than online

"There are no alternatives to Welfare Rights. The jobs that would go as a result of financial savings makes it seem as though vulnerable people are less important."

6.7 Protected characteristics

It was recognised that, as people are living longer but not necessarily healthy lives and managing the impact of, sometimes, multiple long term conditions, that this in itself contributed to the demand pressure on Welfare Rights, Social Care and stakeholders.

Stakeholders were concerned that reductions in service, on top of other service challenge impacts, would be detrimental to specific groups of people.

6.8 Early intervention

The importance of early intervention and prevention is a theme that all stakeholders discussed, as being vital to ensure that costs to Lancashire County Council are limited.

Providing people, especially the most vulnerable, with timely and accurate advice and support will result in reduced costs overall to the Authority. The bulk of the

costs are where 'crisis management' needs to take place and this is because people couldn't access the correct support, earlier.

7. Other comments

7.1 Executive Leader – Chorley Council

I'm writing on behalf of Chorley Council regarding the Lancashire County Council budget position and savings proposals presented to the Executive Cabinet in December 2018.

I wholly acknowledge the scale of the financial challenge and understand that difficult decisions have to be made, however I am very concerned that the proposed cuts to services will have a critical and detrimental impact for Chorley and its residents both now and into the future.

Our communities have already suffered many cuts to essential provision including libraries, bus routes and children's services, which in most cases we have stepped up to protect and maintain. The current proposals will hit residents even harder, for example, the proposed changes to school transport and the difficulties that this will create for families living in rural areas, with children increasingly travelling out of the borough. This will further isolate members of our population, particularly young people, from their local community and inhibit access to key local services.

Of most concern are cuts to services that support vulnerable and high risk members of our community such as reductions to the Welfare Rights Service, cessation of the Lancashire Wellbeing Service and the integrated home improvement service contracts. These services are essential support mechanisms for people who would otherwise struggle to cope and be most likely to end up in a revolving door of costly interactions with statutory provision.

Overall, the proposals represent a withdrawal from services that promote and support vital early intervention and prevention. This approach is likely to have a significant impact on service demand for the council and its partners (particularly the voluntary, community and faith sector) in the short to medium term, and more catastrophic consequences for population health over the longer term including unmanageable pressure on health and primary care provision.

I feel that the approach to achieving savings must take a wider and longer term view that will ensure sustainable services for the future, rather than a piecemeal approach to implementing quick wins. In Chorley we have committed to a model of early intervention and prevention that aims to achieve a healthier population by working differently with our partners and community to provide early help, avoiding the need for more expensive crisis care. We have established an Integrated Community Wellbeing Service that is working proactively in the community to reform key pathways and enable easier access to support. We've also developed multi agency teams, bringing together key players from across the system to coordinate provision and reduce duplication of effort.

Therefore, rather than constantly dealing with the fallout from service cuts, I am proposing that we take this opportunity to work together to develop solutions and alternative delivery models that will avoid the most negative consequences for our residents. To do this, we need to be engaged early in the process so that we can work collaboratively to proactively shape our plans and resources. This will help to reduce the impact for our residents and it may even lead to positive outcomes if we work constructively with our communities.

I would urge you to consider this offer, which I know is supported by district colleagues, and will gladly meet to progress this conversation further.

7.2 Member of the public 1

Though I do not live in the area you cover, I was interested in your proposal to cut benefits advice services. Having gone through the process recently in Edinburgh regarding my PIP I was lucky enough to have help regarding this. I understand from a conversation with a nice lady at your council offices, that the cuts seem to be about the filling in of forms. This I would suggest is one of the areas that cause the most distress, especially when the forms are onerous.

Though I do not live in your area, I thought I would share my concerns about your proposal.

7.3 Member of the public 2

To whom it may concern, regarding the proposed cuts to the Welfare Rights Service.

I have briefly read the proposal to cut The welfare rights service by 50%.

Personally, I think this is a disgraceful proposal and should be torn up. It is my understanding from what I have read on the website that £800,000 of income is generated by general benefit advice two people of working age and thereabout. If the purposes of these cost cuts is to save money then in the interest of saving money I would like you to consider the following,

1. If the income I have mentioned is generated from giving general benefits advice, then surely that is an extra £800,000 of income for the council so by potentially dropping the £800,000 of generated income how is the council saving money by making itself lose money?

2. The benefits system is a minefield for an applicant at the best of times and it is important that Welfare Rights continue to give benefit advice. I myself have been to them for advice recently and have found them far more helpful than the CAB. Because I recently went to them for some advice on a different issue and was told "you know more about it than I do" by one of their specialist advisors, I am sure the CAB have been good for other people but not in my experiences with them over the last few years. Returning to the matters of the proposed cuts I would like to make my third point.

3. When you cut services, you also risk people's jobs which means more people needing advice and then they can't get it because you will have taken it from them.

4. It is my understanding that you intend for Welfare Rights to focus on legal proceedings. Would it not make more sense to keep the general advice and have less people needing to go down the legal path and save money through reduction of legal representation costs?

5. Reduction of services should never be at the cost of the health, be it mental or physical of the public that you serve because not only is it wrong, but you end up placing more strain on the system which is going to cost you more money in the long run.

In closing I would like you to consider my final point. I am a former member of the St. John Ambulance brigade and our motto is "In service of humanity" this disgusting proposal is not even slightly a public service. I have never been a doctor but the hypocratic oath is well known "do no harm" How is this proposal anything but harmful to the public? I wish the people who make the cut proposals would take that oath.

Thank you for your Time and attention.

7.4 Member of the public 3

This is a staggeringly myopic proposal.

It ignores the effect on the local economy of the millions of pounds brought into the county by the Welfare Rights Service. If you cut the service you will generate less money. As the vast majority of the people helped by the Welfare Rights Service are on a very low/zero income, it is accurate to say that additional income generated is spent in the local economy. Consider the marginal propensity to spend of the poor and the multiplier effect. Preston City Council are aware of this, are you?

For the money spent you get a huge return.

Have you considered the amount of money that the Welfare Rights Service saves the county council?

You will lose staff able to advise your own staff on specific issues that may result in additional county council expenditure. Look at shared lives & special guardianship to name a couple.

Have you considered the implications of the roll out of Universal Credit and the consequences this WILL have on the people of Lancashire? Universal Credit can and does make people ILL! The virtual workhouse has arrived. You will not be able to answer questions or address problems faced by service users which again may result in additional county council expenditure. Are you sufficiently prepared for the problems to come and capable of dealing with them?

You should not look to the DWP for a solution. They, unfortunately, are the problem. That is why the Welfare Rights Service have to assist so many people with disputes over DWP decisions which are not resolved despite a mandatory reconsideration process and have to go as far as an appeal Tribunal. Look at the success the Welfare Rights Service has at assisting people to appeal against DWP decisions.

You have dedicated staff who know what is happening on the ground, who know how people are affected and exactly how to help them. DO NOT LOSE THEM!

7.5 Member of public 4

Many times I have turned to welfare rights and found this service extremely helpful, along with lots of other people who will use this service.

The help and service also lets you know your entitlements, which the dwp is not as helpful..

This service would be greatly missed and should look to the government to fund for this.. Too many local services are been run down through lack of funding and is disgusting really..

I am going to write to my local MP to complain, such a shame to lose it..

7.6 Member of public 5

Sadly moving to the last stages of a process seems to work against the interest of all parties.

There appears to be a lack of thought and indeed care to possibly the most vulnerable in our community's

For most people that first move for help is the most difficult. You are taking that away.

The first approach has to be the most important for both parties.

The council, well versed in administrative affairs against members of the community desperate for some honest help with little knowledge of their entitlements is dishonourable.

You are playing into the hands of people who know all the angles including yourselves of course.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice my feelings.

7.7 Member of public 6

First of all my wife is using your service to help with her tribunal pip appeal She suffers from psychosis and schizophrenia and without your service she and myself would be lost, she has already had her benefit cut in half With a 6 months wait for a tribunal hearing , there is so many people affected by bad social decisions in all aspects of local and national government that you would hardly think we were the 6th richest country on earth, what with the way the mentally ill and disabled people are treated as an easy target or cuts , you will not get much agro from them they are too Sick and bewildered to put up a fight for their rights, so we have to hope for others to do so on their behalf instead, like welfare rights at LCC If you pare down this service it will be life changing for the most vulnerable persons in our society, but it's ok

thinking illogically other services can pick up the slack ! after all they are all twiddling their thumbs waiting for customers NOT.

7.8 Charnock Richard and Wrightington Parish Councils

Further to the information received in regard to the Welfare Rights Public Consultation, both my Parish Councils feel that the proposals and cuts once again target the most vulnerable people in the County.

7.9 Seema Kennedy MP

My constituent, [REDACTED] has recently contacted me regarding Lancashire County Council's (LCC) Welfare Rights Service. I have enclosed [REDACTED] correspondence for your information.

[REDACTED] has raised concerns regarding LCC's proposal to change the way the Welfare Rights Service operates. [REDACTED] is of the opinion that the Welfare Rights Service plays a vital role for the residents of South Ribble and [REDACTED] believes that LCC should re-think its decision on this matter because it will have a negative effect on other services that LCC provides. [REDACTED] seeks clarity as to why this decision has been made.

I would welcome your comments on this matter on behalf of my constituent and I would appreciate a response that I may forward to [REDACTED] in due course.

Message: I am contacting you in relation to a decision by Lancashire County Council who have deemed it necessary to drastically reduce the vital work that LCC Welfare Rights service provides. This is a disgraceful decision as without the help and support they provide many residents of Lancashire/South Ribble will suffer because of it. I don't understand the logic of this decision as there would be a knock on effect to budgets of other services who provide support to the vulnerable within the county. It is false economy. If people do not get the right help at early stages the consequences can be very serious to health, wellbeing, and our NHS resources. This type of service enabling and empowering individuals to seek the help and guidance they need is crucial to residents of Lancashire and maybe it should be a statutory provision for councils in the UK. Please use your position to put pressure on those making this decision to look again and prioritise this valuable service

Appendix 1 – service users and general public demographics

Table 1 - Are you...?

	%
A Lancashire resident	91%
An employee of Lancashire County Council	8%
An elected member of Lancashire County Council	<1%
An elected member of a Lancashire district council	3%
An elected member of a parish or town council in Lancashire	4%
A member of a voluntary or community organisation	21%
Other	6%

Base: all respondents (413)

Table 2 - Are you...?

	%
Male	26%
Female	68%
Other	0%
Prefer not to say	6%

Base: all respondents (412)

Table 3 - What was your age last birthday?

	%
Under 16	<1%
16-19	1%
20-34	9%
35-49	29%
50-64	39%
65-74	13%
75+	3%
Prefer not to say	6%

Base: all respondents (410)

Table 4 - Are you a deaf person or do you have a disability?

	%
Yes, learning disability	3%
Yes, physical disability	15%
Yes, Deaf/hearing impairment	5%
Yes, visual impairment	1%
Yes, mental health disability	14%
Yes, other disability	8%
No	58%
Prefer not to say	10%

Base: all respondents (410)

Table 5 - Are there any children or young people in your household aged under 20?

	%
No, but expecting	3%
Yes, aged under 5	5%
Yes, aged 5-11	15%
Yes, aged 12-16	14%
Yes, aged 17-19	9%
No children aged under 20	56%
Prefer not to say	10%

Base: all respondents (411)

Table 6 - Are there any disabled young people aged under 25 in your household?

	%
Yes	10%
No	82%
Prefer not to say	8%

Base: all respondents (409)

Table 7 - Which best describes your ethnic background?

	%
White	86%
Asian or Asian British	1%
Black or black British	0%
Mixed	1%
Other	1%
Prefer not to say	11%

Base: all respondents (407)

Table 8 - What is your religion or belief?

	%
No religion	35%
Christian	46%
Buddhist	<1%
Hindu	<1%
Jewish	<1%
Muslim	1%
Sikh	0%
Any other religion	4%
Prefer not to say	14%

Base: all respondents (414)

Table 9 - What is your sexual orientation?

	%
Straight	75%
Bisexual	2%
Gay man	2%
Lesbian/gay woman	1%
Other	<1
Prefer not to say	19%

Base: all respondents (403)

Table 10 - Does your household have access to the internet?

	%
Yes	88%
No	3%
Don't know	0%
Prefer not to say	9%

Base: all respondents (407)