

Access to Justice: Network Development and Visual representation of advice provision in Liverpool

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Development of Legal Advice Network

The strengthening of Liverpool's legal advice network is an important project objective. There are three strands to the development: citywide referral system, establishing an access to advice network structure, and training collaboration.

Referral system – Refernet: The electronic citywide referral system for all organisations providing free legal advice is now operational. 27 services are using Refernet. These include Council services, law firms and organisations from the not for profit sector. 7 more are finalising paperwork to join. 6 more applied. 287 referrals made using Refernet in September and October.

Access to Advice Network: The first network meeting was held on 21 October. 35 organisations attended and high level of positive engagement. Website for the network is due to be launched in November. This will provide a collaboration platform, access to research outputs, a training booking facility, and secure access to Refernet.

Training: The first training sessions in family law have taken place. Employment law sessions are planned. Spare capacity in training sessions being run by participant organisations will be advertised and booked using the network website.

Visual Representation of Liverpool's Legal Advice Ecosystem

The project research has enabled the visual representation of the complex free legal advice network in Liverpool. The maps and figures will be an **interactive tool embedded within the Liverpool access to advice network website**.

Maps and figures show the relative numbers of organisations that provide advice in each area of law. The **areas of social welfare law mapped** according to the physical location of each organisation are housing,

welfare benefits, family, employment, public law, asylum, immigration, discrimination, and community care. The organisations we have been able to map include single and multi-site organisations.

The organisations see clients at different stages in the process and provide different **levels of advice**. We have mapped organisations according to the level of advice they give in each area of law.

Level of advice offered by organisations	
1	Information
2	+ Advice
3	+ One off casework
4	+ Ongoing casework
5	+ Tribunal support
6	+ Tribunal representation

The number of clients helped by the organisations included in the research varies considerably, and the numbers for any given organisation vary as funding streams and advice projects come and go. The number of organisations in a particular area of advice does not necessarily mean a higher number of clients served, or less unmet demand. The project is still working to identify the capacity of each organisation, what their client criteria are and how best to represent this on the interactive tool.

The project has also explored **gaps in provision of free legal advice**. These are shown in figure 6 below. The main take away is that the organisations we spoke to identified a wide range of gaps in services that their clients needed, and that these gaps were in all areas of law. Employment advice was the most commonly identified gap. This fits with the picture of unmet demand to which research participants repeatedly referred.

We have identified **89 organisations** (with 102 physical sites) that offer free legal advice or information in the city. The organisations are from the public, private, and third sectors. The role of an organisation as a means for people to access the advice network or as a provider of the advice itself varies according to the type of organisation and funding availability.

The information we have collated and presented here is based on project research interviews and accessible online information. This is currently under review to test its completeness.

Below we include some sample figures relating to Liverpool’s free legal advice network and the gaps in provision, and some examples of the maps available in the interactive tool.

Figure 4. Percentage of organisations that cover each advice type out of a total 89 organisations identified.

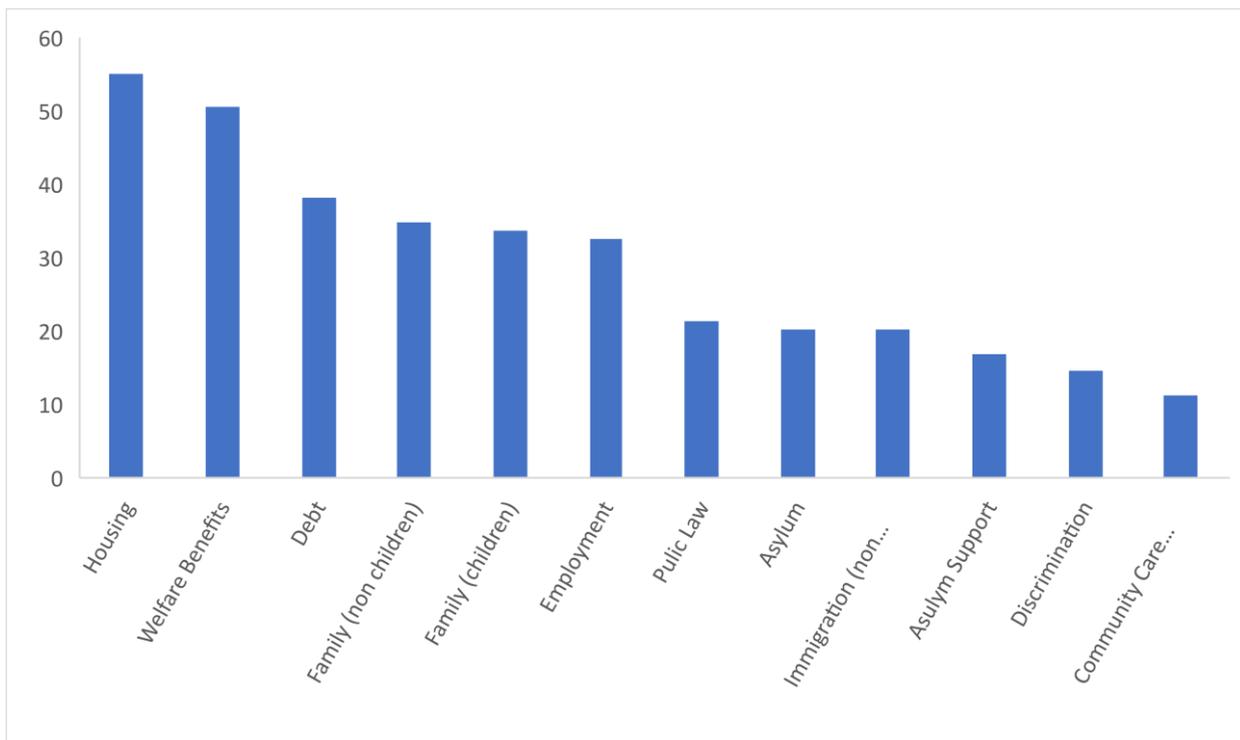


Figure 5. Total number of organisations offering advice in each area of law and the level of support offered. The level of advice they give is cumulative so that those offering tribunal representation, for example, also offer all the preceding levels of advice. This does not indicate the number of people supported.

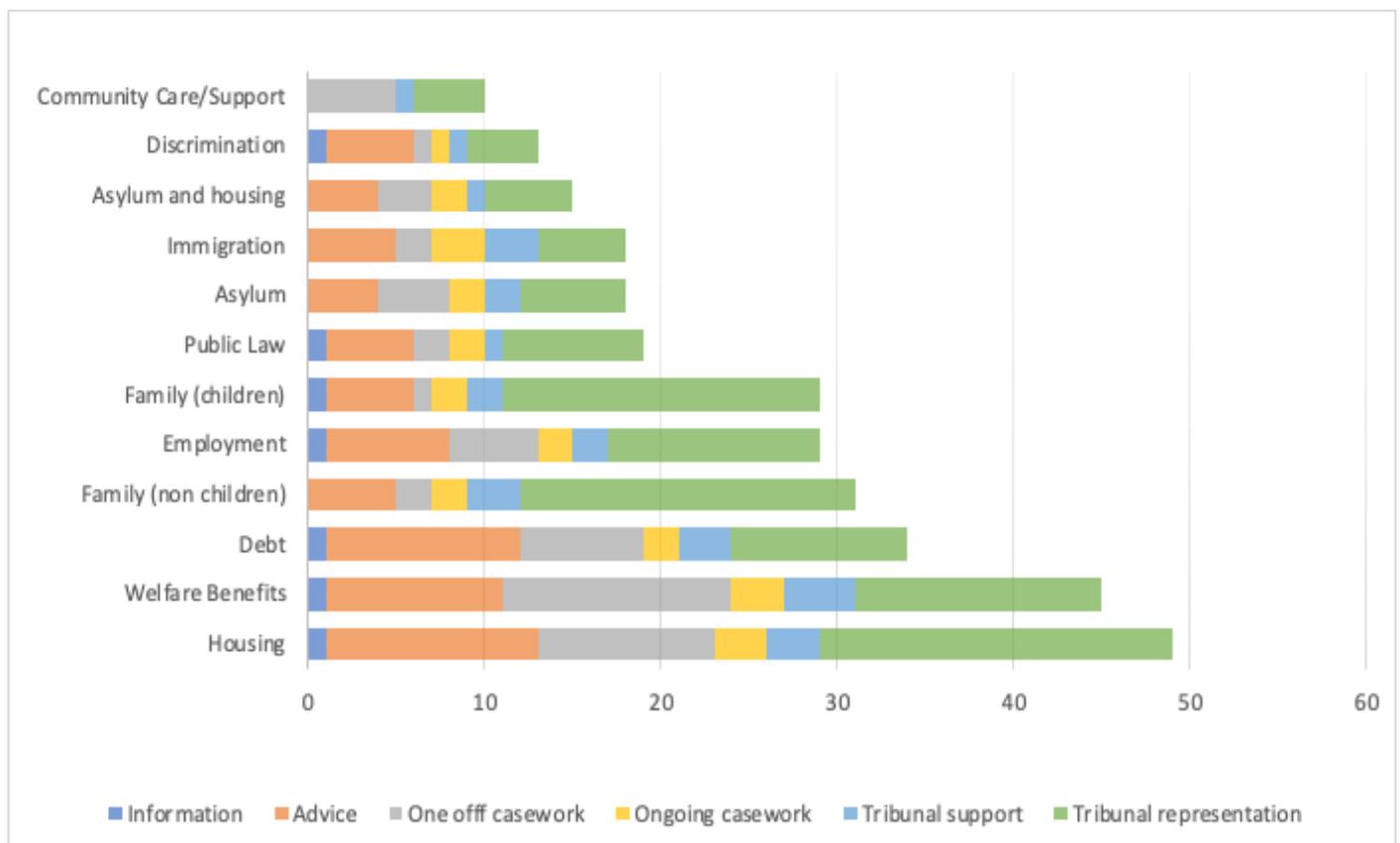
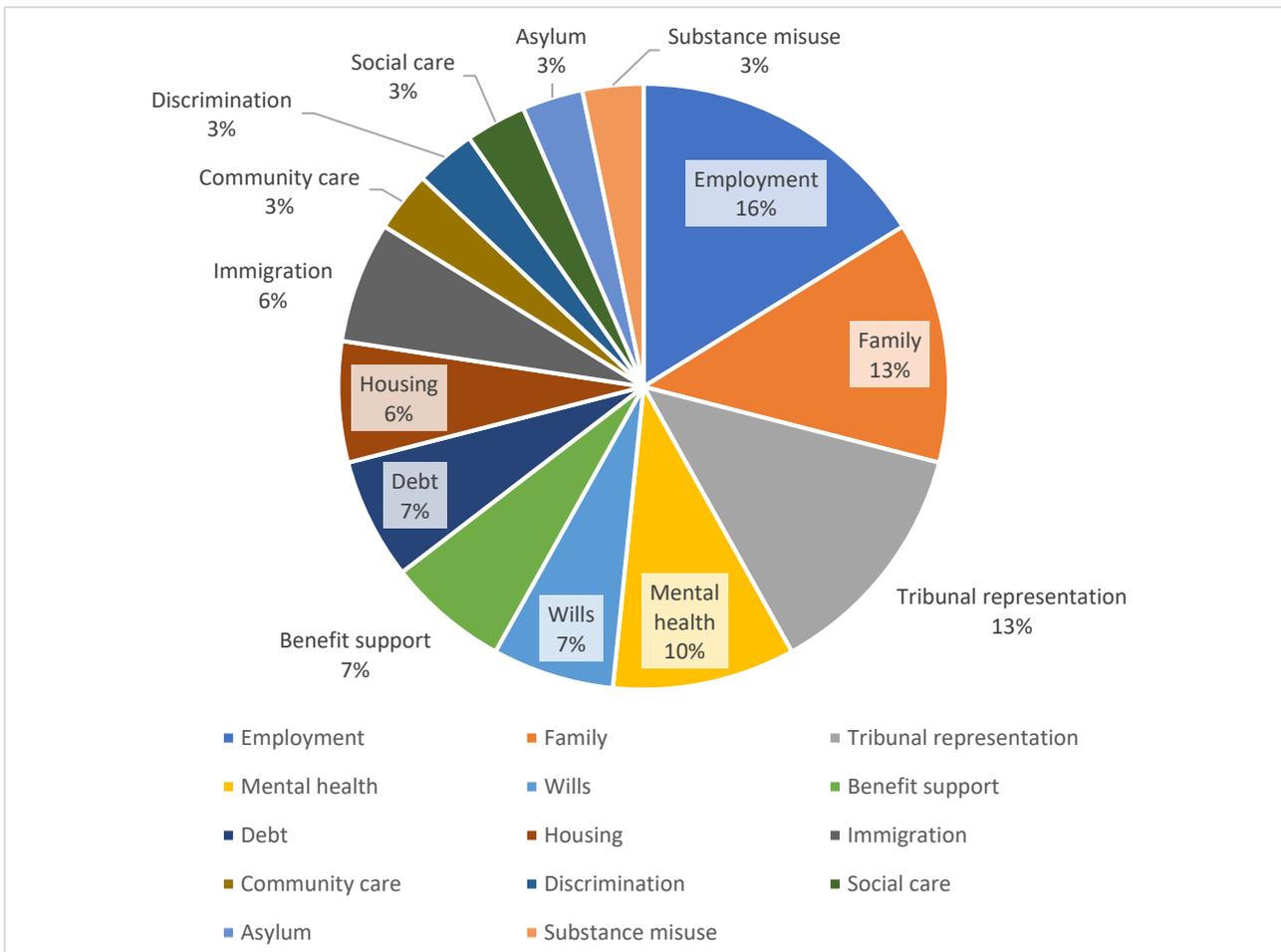
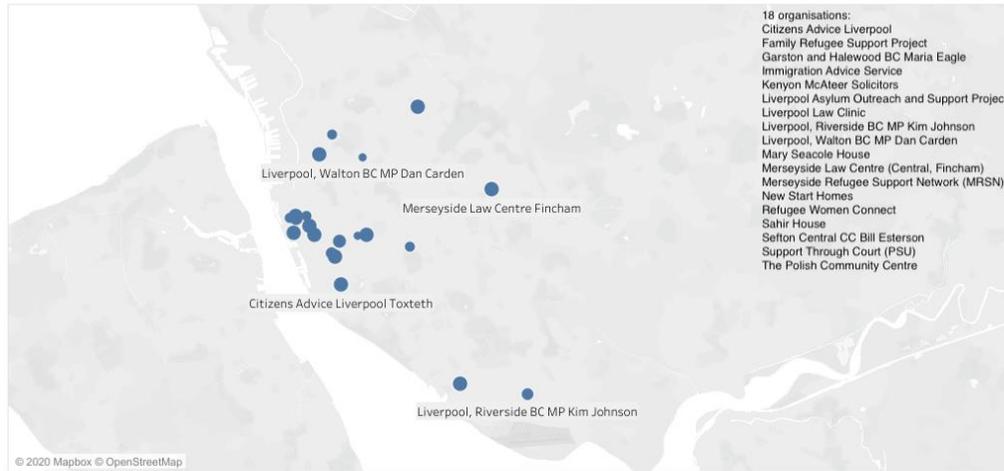


Figure 6. The gap in services identified through our research interviews with participants and the frequency in which each topic was mentioned.

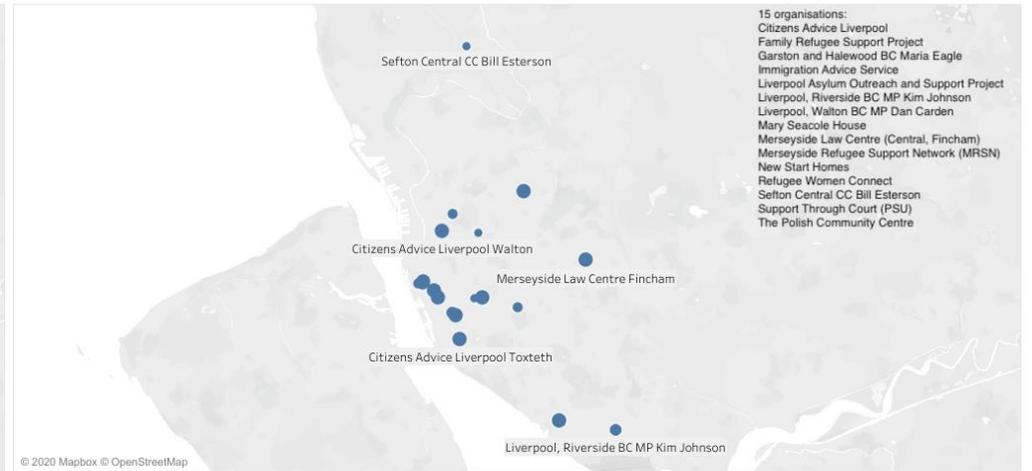


Map 1. Geographical locations of physically placed advice organisations that cover asylum, asylum and housing, community care, and debt. Each image is accompanied by the total number of organisations that offer this type of advice and our working list of those organisations.

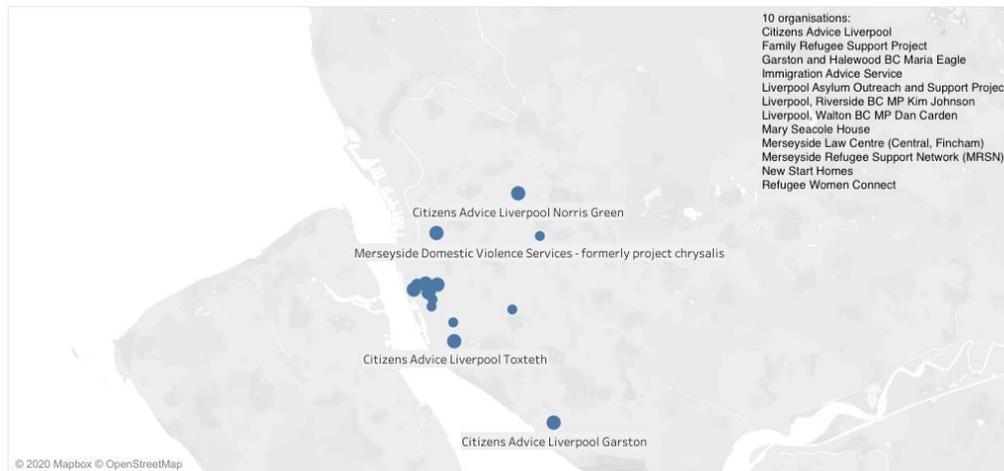
Asylum



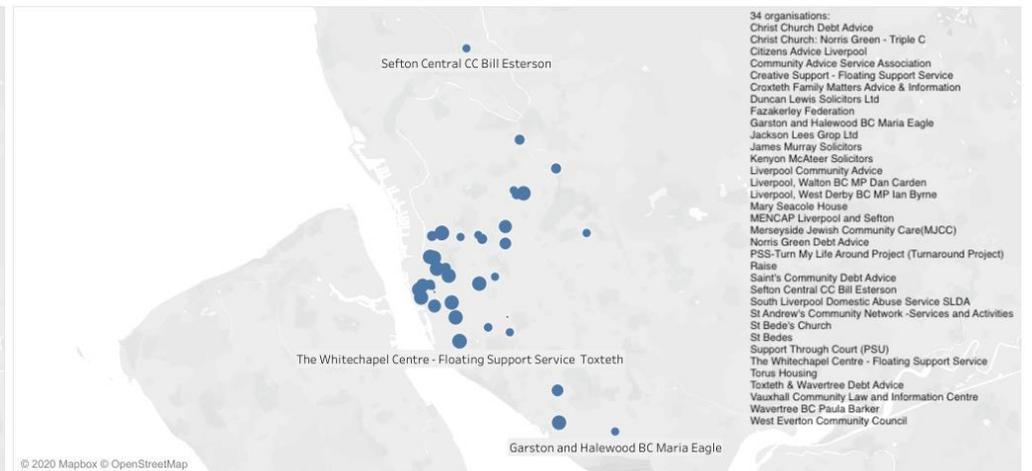
Asylum & Housing



Community Care



Debt



Map 2. Geographical locations of physically placed advice organisations that cover discrimination, employment, family (children) and family (non-children). Each image is accompanied by the total number of organisations that offer this type of advice and our working list of those organisations.

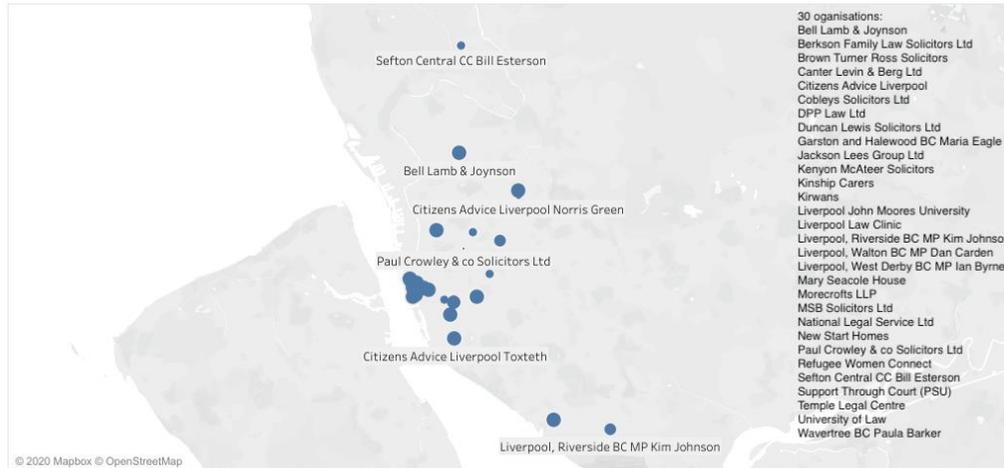
Discrimination



Employment



Family (children)

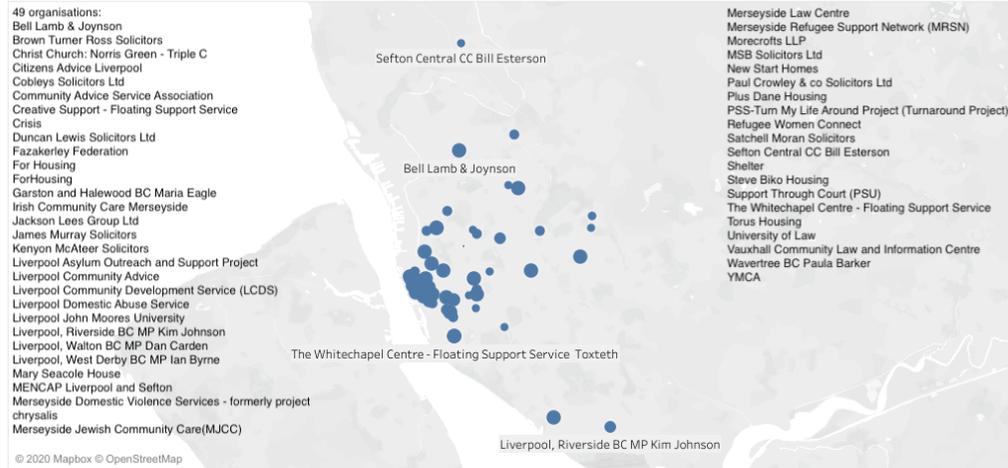


Family (non-children)



Map 3. Geographical locations of physically placed advice organisations that cover housing, immigration (non-asylum), public law and welfare benefits. Each image is accompanied by the total number of organisations that offer this type of advice and our working list of those organisations.

Housing



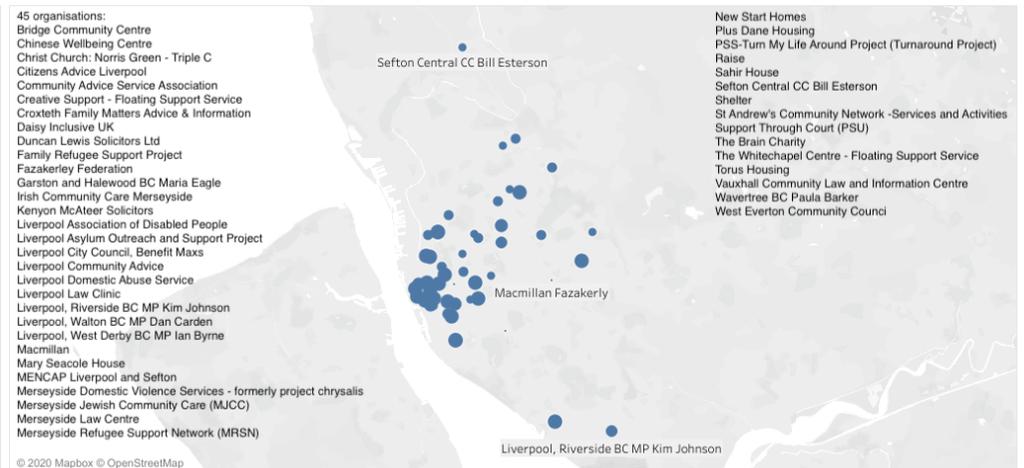
Immigration (non asylum)



Public Law



Welfare benefits



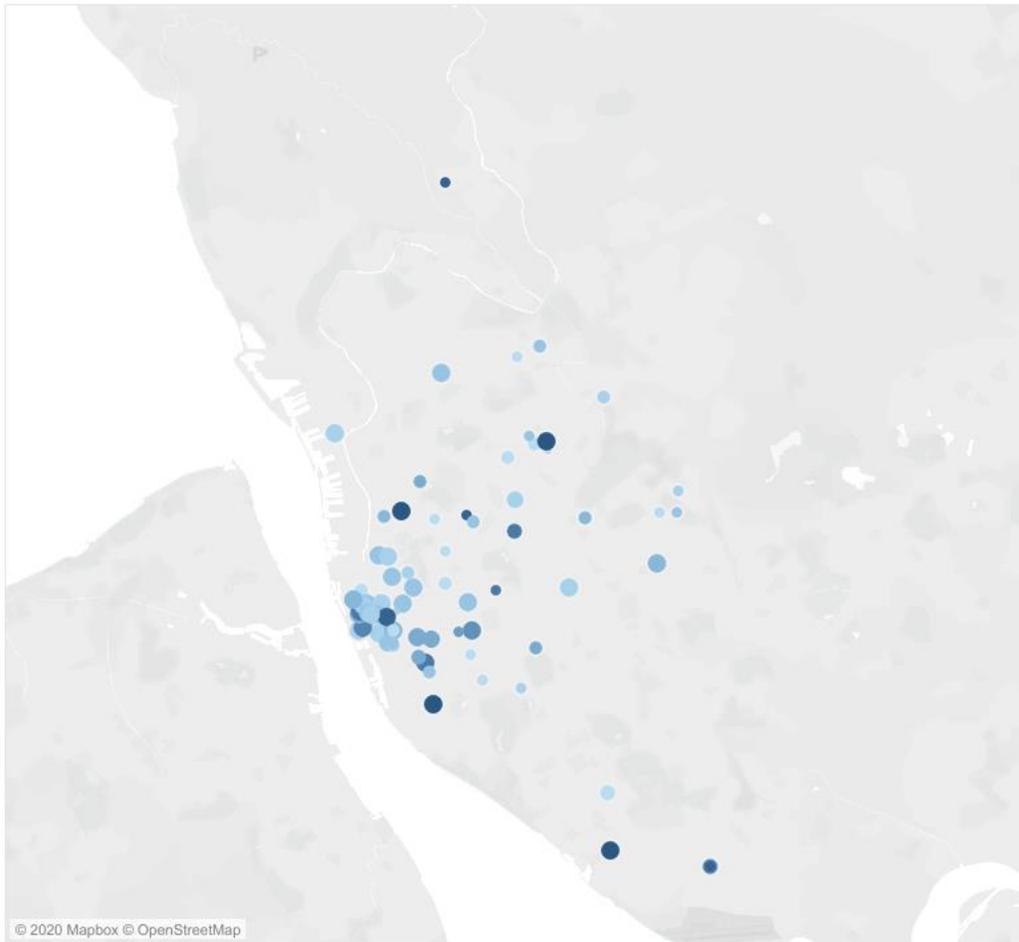
Conclusion

The free legal advice sector in Liverpool is a complex ecosystem with multiple interacting organisations playing an important role in trying to connect people to the legal advice they need, when they cannot afford it or are not aware it is available or beneficial. Some organisations provide access to the advice sector but do not provide advice themselves, other organisations just provide advice, relying on referrals from elsewhere, and others facilitate access to and provide free advice. The importance of the role organisations play in providing access to the advice sector, even if they give little or no advice, has become apparent from the interviews, and needs further understanding. The critical interaction between these different services is highlighted by the increased co-location of advice services with organisations that combat other social issues such as food poverty or ill health. The maps show a clustering of offices around the city centre, as might be expected, but the importance of their physical location for people to access and use advice services needs further exploration.

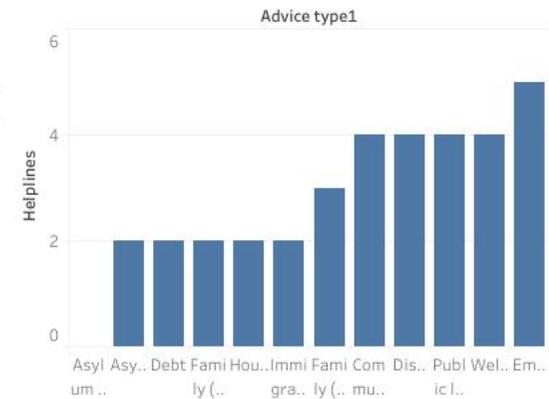
The mapping shows that a widespread, but fragile, organisational infrastructure exists in Liverpool to provide free legal advice and to facilitate people's access to it. The number of organisations in the free legal advice sector must be set in context. The advice sector has suffered severe funding cuts in recent years. This has significantly reduced the number of people organisations can help, and the level of advice that people can get. Liverpool has high levels of deprivation and high levels of demand for social welfare law advice. Austerity driven policies have increased this demand over the last 10 years, and so has this year's Covid-19 crisis. Both have disproportionately affected Liverpool. The organisations that participated in the research spoke about numerous gaps in services that people need, and they expect that this will get worse. There are a number of charities and volunteer-led services in Liverpool trying to mitigate the worst impacts on people, but demand for advice outstrips demand, which in turn exacerbates poverty and other social determinants of health. Reports, policy briefs and articles that discuss these issues further are available on the Liverpool access to advice network website.

Appendix 1. Example of interactive nature of webpage using Tableau – It is clear here that you can the range of advice services that cover all 12 types of advice (dark blue) compared to those that offer fewer (lighter blues). With the webpage, you will be able to select types of services you are interested in and hover over the dots to identify what organisations offer this type of advice. This may be particularly useful when considering complex cases with need of several advice agencies – next step will be to add the referral pathways between these organisations to see how they are currently communicating.

Liverpool Legal Advice Services



Number of advice helplines in Liverpool (by advice type)



Reported gaps in advice service

