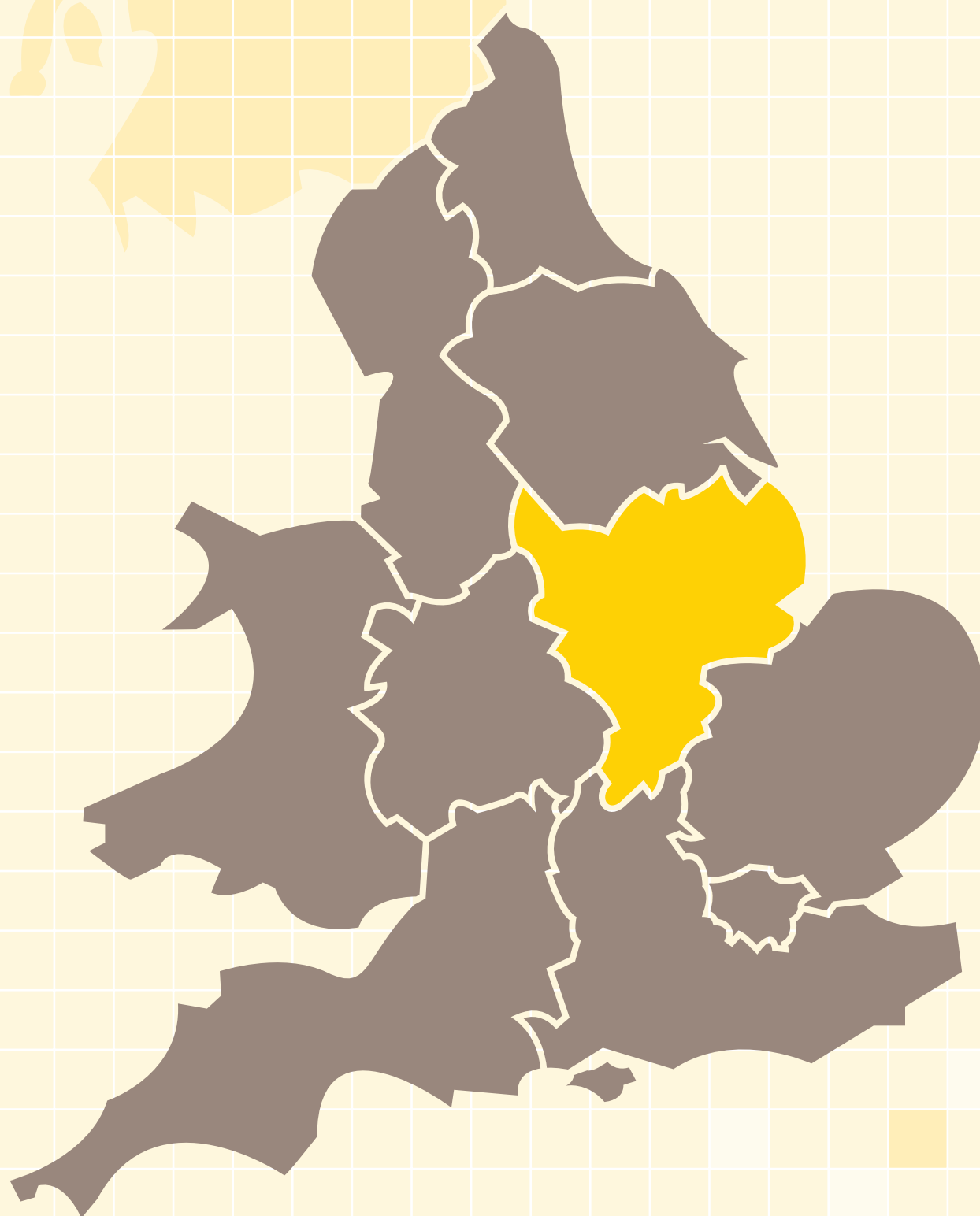


Developing partnerships, enhancing services

Citizens Advice in the East Midlands



Introduction

The Citizens Advice service is one of the best known organisations in England and Wales. We score highly on trust and recognition in public polls, with 96 per cent of the population having heard of us.

We provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity and challenge discrimination. Our aims are two-fold; to provide the advice people need for the problems they face, and to improve the policies and practices that affect their lives.

Partnership

The Citizens Advice service works in partnership with agencies from all sectors, at local, regional and national level. We are always striving to achieve more and recognise this is often best done by partnering with others. This briefing sets out the benefits of working with the Citizens Advice service for regional agencies and the local communities they support.

Comprehensive coverage in the East Midlands

In the East Midlands the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 42 high street premises in the region, and providing regular outreach services from a further 225 outlets.

During 2008/09 over 130,000 people in the East Midlands were able to turn to the Citizens Advice service for help to resolve their money, legal, employment or other problems.

High quality advice

Every Citizens Advice Bureau is an independent charity and a member of Citizens Advice, the national body that:

- provides bureaux with training and specialist support
- audits the operational efficiency of bureaux and the quality of their advice
- coordinates national policy and campaigning work.

Together we are the Citizens Advice service, combining the resource and experience of a national organisation with the intimate local knowledge of frontline agencies.

All issues, all people

In 2008/09 the bureaux in the East Midlands region advised on 402,128 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues in the East Midlands region are:

- debt **34%**
- benefits and tax credits **28%**
- employment **10%**
- consumer and utilities **7%**
- housing **6%**
- legal **4%**.

Fourteen bureaux in the East Midlands region are able to provide civil legal advice through contracts with the Legal Services Commission.

The Citizens Advice service is also a leader in equality and diversity best practice. We aim to develop and deliver discrimination advice, from first point of contact to resolution, in partnership with others.

Eight per cent of clients using the service in the region are from black, Asian or minority ethnic communities; 22 per cent are disabled; 12 per cent are below the age of 25 and 11 per cent are over 65 years.

We achieved

96%

in public polls for trust and recognition

We helped

130

thousand people during 2008/09

We advised on

402

thousand different issues during 2008/09

We operate

42

high street premises in the capital

We provide a further

225

outreach services across the East Midlands

Informing policy

Bureaux record all enquiries in a central database, providing a unique picture of the problems faced by residents in the region. This service data can be analysed at national or local level, and allows for tracking trends year on year.

This intelligence informs the development of local services as well as the setting of policy objectives for the East Midlands.

In addition to statistical data on enquiries, bureaux record detailed, anonymous descriptions of cases. These provide rich, qualitative information which demonstrates unquestionably to policy makers and service providers, the impact of their decisions on individuals' lives.

Partnership working for client-centred services

Bureaux belong to networks of statutory and third sector community agencies. They frequently identify common goals and separate strengths, leading to partnership work that delivers more joined up, client-centred services for people throughout the East Midlands.

As a service, we recognise that it is only by working with a range of partners that we can improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable groups in society.

We currently work with partners from the public, private and third sectors to ensure our experience, and that of our clients, is used proactively to inform policy and practice for the better. Our existing partnerships include the sharing of statistical information to facilitate advice needs assessment, as well as the development of new and existing services. Examples include:

- Anti poverty coalitions, for example on social policy work around rent arrears.
- Working with partners in delivering new financial capability services in schools.
- Promoting advice services and support to employers around pre-retirement, health and absenteeism..

We have

14

bureaux in the East Midlands providing civil legal advice

8%

of our clients are from BAME communities

22%

are disabled

12%

are below the age of 25

11%

are over 65 years

Case study

'Advice on prescription' is a service which works to maximise the income of older people and vulnerable adults to help them to continue to live independently. Funded by Lincolnshire Primary Care Trust (PCT), it began as a pilot in Boston CAB and quickly expanded to include all seven county bureaux in Lincolnshire.

Referrals for advice are sought from GPs and other health care staff using a 'prescription pad' which the doctor signs and hands to the patient. The prescription states that the patient is being referred for confidential advice on benefits and money issues. The pad has the name and phone number of the CAB caseworker, so the patient can make immediate and direct contact.

In year one of the project we received funding for a 0.5 Welfare Benefits Caseworker in each of the seven bureaux, plus a 0.5 Co-ordinator based in Boston. We generated nearly £2 million in disability benefit income and, on the strength of that, funding has now been increased to seven full-time caseworkers and a 0.5 Co-ordinator. Budgets were based largely on FIF funding.

Developing the economy in the East Midlands

- Citizens Advice bureaux in the East Midlands are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 470 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 1,000 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in the East Midlands region is estimated at almost £5.7 million.
- Over a fifth of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across the East Midlands region the Citizens Advice service brings money into the pockets of families and individuals through benefit take-up, management of debt, and advice on employment and housing. This extra wealth often stays in the community, boosting the local economy.
- In the course of delivering projects to improve financial inclusion, over 40 new financial inclusion advisers have been brought into the region during 2008/09 through our successful national programme – funded by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.
- The Citizens Advice service hosts a financial capability forum across the East Midlands and is expanding its work in money advice.

Our strategic priorities

Across the the East Midlands bureaux are making an important contribution to regional priorities and the service is actively seeking to develop partnerships to deliver on our ambitious 2008-11 strategy, of which the key priorities are:

- Easier and faster access to advice and information for more people.
- To strengthen our voice in social policy.
- To develop the Citizens Advice Bureaux network.
- To develop new initiatives in advice.
- A commitment to equality.

We recognise that it is only by working in partnership that we can achieve more and we welcome contact from other agencies and stakeholders as to how we can work with them on these shared agendas.

If you want to talk about working with Citizens Advice in the East Midlands please contact:

Samuel Scharf
Partnership Development Manager
Citizens Advice Central Area
9 Signet Court
Swann Road
Cambridge
CB5 8LA

Mobile: 07833 050666

samuel.scharf@citizensadvice.org.uk

We train

1,000

volunteers each year

We employ

470

local staff

5.7

million pounds
contributed in the
East Midlands region