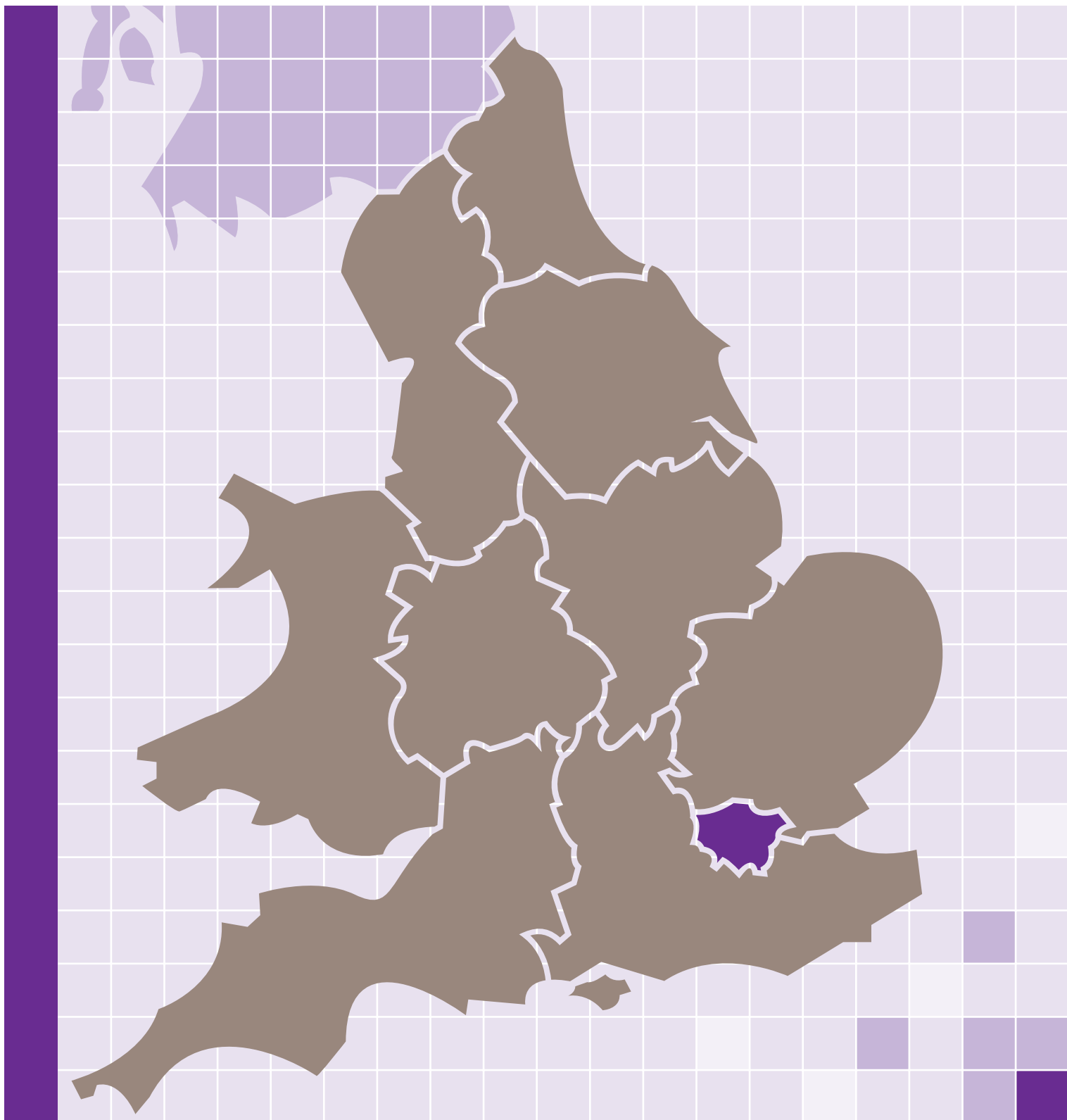


Developing partnerships, enhancing services

Citizens Advice in London



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 London

In London the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 66 high street premises in the capital and providing regular outreach services from a further 257 outlets.

Across the capital, over 210,000 people were able to turn to the Citizens Advice service during 2008/09 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 London advised on 553,357 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues dealt with by bureaux in London are:

- benefits and tax credits **30%**
- debt **23%**
- housing **11%**
- employment **9%**
- consumer and utilities **6%**
- legal **6%**.

Sixteen bureaux in London 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.

Fifty two per cent of clients using the service in London are from black, Asian or minority ethnic communities; 21 per cent are disabled; nine per cent are below the age of 25; and nine per cent are over 65 years.

We achieved

96%

in public polls for trust and recognition

We helped

210

thousand people during 2008/09

We advised on

553

thousand different issues during 2008/09

We operate

66

high street premises in the capital

We provide a further

257

outreach services across London

Informing policy

Bureaux record all enquiries in a central database, providing a unique picture of the problems faced by residents in London. 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 London region.

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 capital.

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.

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 are already working in partnership with agencies from all sectors and in London have partnerships with hospitals, mental health centres, childrens' centres, prisons, housing associations and national agencies such as Macmillan.

Across London bureaux are making an important contribution to the capital's priorities. We have developed a social policy campaign to evidence child poverty, work with the GLA on region-wide benefit take-up campaigns and contribute regularly to London-wide strategies and consultations.

Advice networks are being established in sub regions across London. The service works with other advice agencies; we work strategically on pan London advice sector issues as part of the London Advice Executive and we are represented on the London Advice Forum, Third Sector Alliance and a number of other pan-London groups. At a local level, bureaux also work closely with their local boroughs and a full range of small to medium sized community organisations.

Case study

'Advice Barnet' was the result of Barnet CAB's successful bidding for funding from the Big Lottery Fund under round two of its Advice Plus programme – to the tune of £500,000 over three years.

The funding enabled the formation of a partnership of 11 voluntary sector organisations, one statutory advice provider (Barnet's Welfare Rights Unit) and five local firms of solicitors, as well as the opening of a call centre to provide the single point of access to advice for Barnet residents.

This gateway to most of the advice services in Barnet should increase the number of Barnet residents who are able to access them, as well as enabling more training to skill more volunteer advisers and gateway assessors – which will improve quality and increase capacity within the sector.

We have

16

bureaux in London providing civil legal advice

52%

of our clients are from BAME communities

21%

are disabled

9%

are below the age of 25

9%

are over 65 years

Developing the economy in London

- Citizens Advice bureaux in London are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 609 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 1,600 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in the London region is estimated at £8.9 million.
- Almost a third of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across the capital 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 London economy.
- In the course of delivering projects to improve financial inclusion, five financial inclusion advisers continue to deliver advice in Camden through our successful national programme – funded by the Department of Business, Employment and Regulatory Reform.
- Seven bureaux work in partnership with the London-wide Capitalise project based at Toynbee Hall. The service also hosts two financial capability forums across London.

Our strategic priorities

Across the capital bureaux are making an important contribution to London's 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 London please contact:

Partnership Development Manager
Citizens Advice South Area
Myddelton House
115–123 Pentonville Road
London N1 9LZ

partnership.development@citizensadvice.org.uk

We train

1,600

volunteers each year

We employ

609

local staff

8.9

million pounds
contributed in the
London region