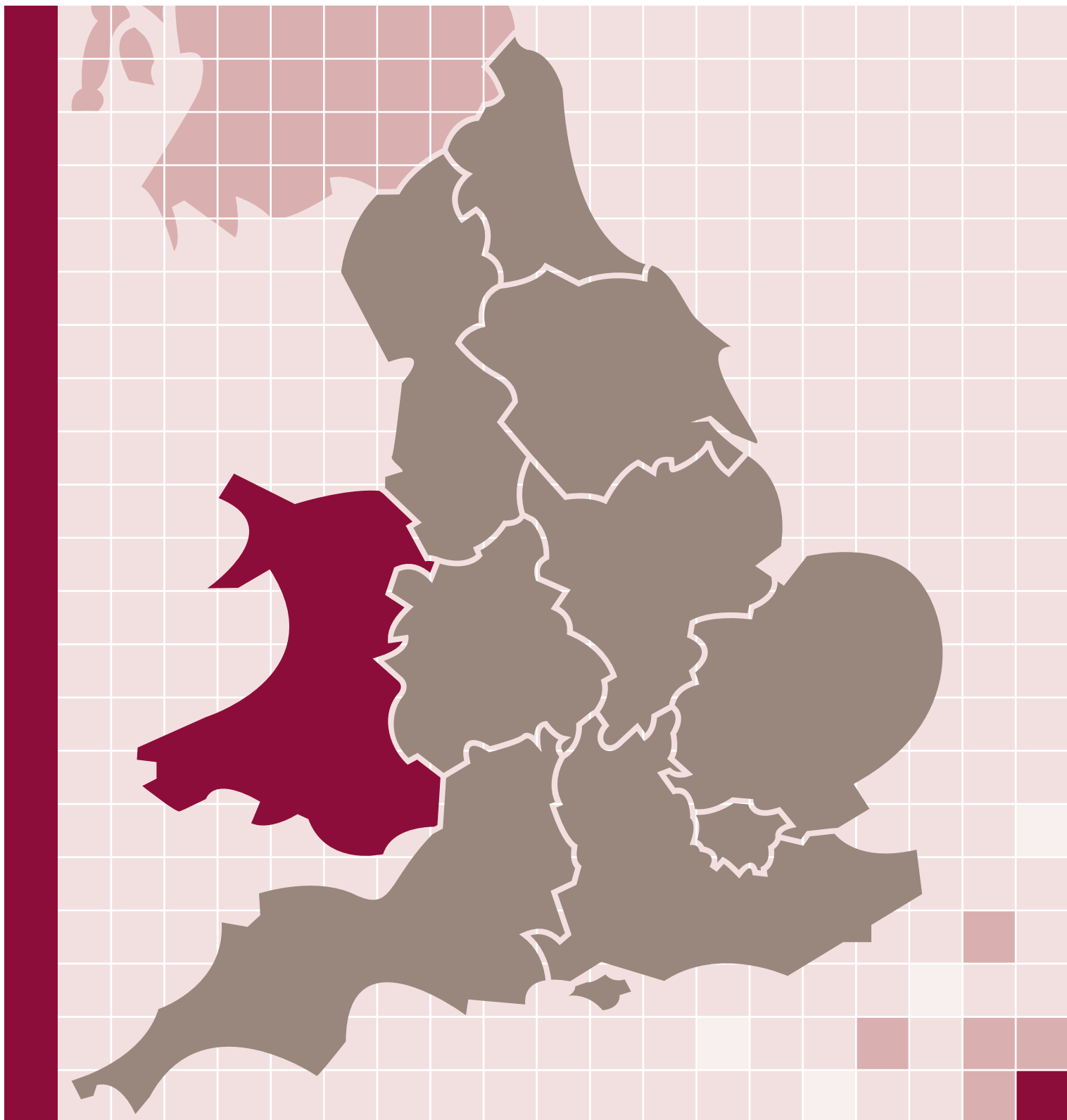


Developing partnerships, enhancing services

Citizens Advice in Wales



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 Wales

In Wales the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 47 high street premises in Wales and providing outreach services from a further 230 outlets.

During 2008/09 more than 100,000 people in Wales were able to turn to Citizens Advice 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 Wales advised on 298,119 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues in Wales, are:

- debt **37%**
- benefits and tax credits **33%**
- employment **8%**
- consumer and utilities **7%**
- housing **5%**
- legal **4%**.

Twenty bureaux in Wales 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.

Five per cent of clients in Wales are from black, Asian or minority ethnic communities; 31 per cent are disabled; 11 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

100

thousand people during 2008/09

We advised on

300

thousand different issues during 2008/09

We operate

47

high street premises in Wales

We provide a further

230

outreach services across Wales

Informing policy

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

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 Wales.

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.

Partnership examples include:

- Bringing evidence to anti poverty coalitions to bring about policy change.
- Delivering new financial capability services in schools, community centres and prisons.
- Working in GP surgeries and hospitals across Wales bringing advice to people when they need it most.
- Developing partnership projects with Credit Unions and Housing Associations.
- Designing and delivering pre- retirement and redundancy support workshops.

Case study

Vale of Glamorgan Citizens Advice Bureau is working in partnership with Newydd Housing Association, Shelter Cymru and the Vale of Glamorgan Council on the mortgage rescue scheme (MRS). Working together as a group progresses as many suitable applicants as possible through the scheme quickly and efficiently.

The group meets regularly to review all on-going cases, sharing information (with the client's consent) and reviewing any problems so that, through teamwork, these can be resolved easily.

The bureau's specific role is to interview all clients initially referred to the scheme (after their Vale of Glamorgan Council appointment) to independently check the scheme is the only option that will enable them to remain in their home .

The bureau also deals with any other income/debt issues that might prove a hindrance in them being able to progress efficiently through the process.

The local authority area has been recognised by both the Welsh Assembly Government and LSC as being the most effective in progressing MRS.

We have

20

bureaux in Wales providing civil legal advice

5%

of our clients are from BAME communities

31%

are disabled

11%

are below the age of 25

11%

are over 65 years

Developing the economy in Wales

- Citizens Advice bureaux in Wales are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 379 local staff. In addition we train and rely on 783 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in Wales is estimated at over £4 million.
- Almost a fifth of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across Wales 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, 7,647 clients were helped in Wales during 2008/09 through our successful national programme – funded by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.
- The Citizens Advice service hosts two financial capability forums in North and South Wales and is expanding its work in money advice.

Our strategic priorities

Across Wales 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 Wales please contact:

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We train
783
volunteers each year

We employ
379
local staff

4
million pounds
contributed in Wales