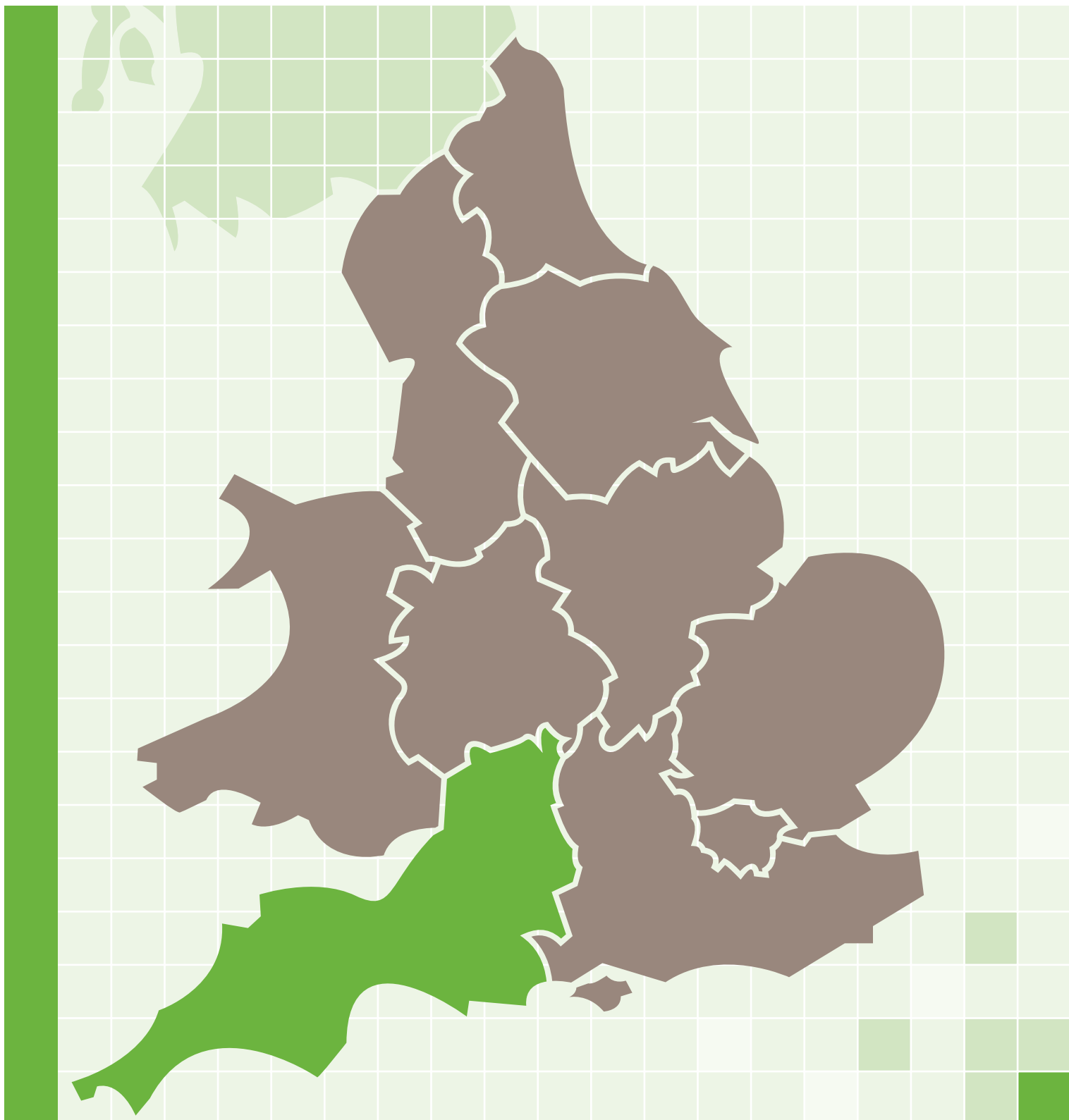


Developing partnerships, enhancing services

Citizens Advice in the South West



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 South West

In the South West region the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 59 high street premises in the region and providing outreach services from a further 294 outlets.

During 2008/09 almost 200,000 people in the South West region 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 the South West region advised on 565,664 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues in the South West region are:

- debt **32%**
- benefits and tax credits **29%**
- employment **10%**
- housing **7%**
- consumer and utilities **7%**
- legal **4%**.

Twenty six bureaux in the South West 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.

Six per cent of clients using the service in the region are from black, Asian or minority ethnic communities; 23 per cent are disabled; 12 per cent are below the age of 25 and 13 per cent are over 65 years.

We achieved

96%

in public polls for trust and recognition

We helped

200

thousand people during 2008/09

We advised on

565

thousand different issues during 2008/09

We operate

59

high street premises in the South West

We provide a further

294

outreach services across the South West

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 South West.

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 South West region.

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. In 2009 we established the SW Advice Alliance, with partner advice agencies, to act as the regional voice for advice and information services across the South West. Our existing partnerships include the sharing of statistical information to facilitate advice needs assessment, as well as the development of new and existing services.

Some bureaux, such as Mid Somerset, have secured partnership funding from the health service to provide outreach services in GP surgeries and other health settings.

Many bureaux in the South West are at the forefront of developing 'preventative' measures, such as training in money management, to combat financial exclusion. The service also hosts two sub regional financial capability forums across the South West.

West Devon, Plymouth, Bristol and Torbay bureaux participate in and lead networks of advice agencies. Bureaux operating within counties, such as the eight bureaux in Dorset have formed consortia. In 2009 the Cornwall bureaux came together as one legal entity - CAB Cornwall providing a single advice service and a networked telephone service.

Case study

Plymouth CAB has set up a new mental health forum in Plymouth which brings together voluntary, private and statutory organisations in the city with an interest in mental health. Over 60 organisations now belong to the forum which is fostering much closer relationships between commissioners and service providers. NHS Plymouth, Plymouth CAB and Job Centre Plus worked together in 2008/09 to organise a conference to consider improvements to mental health services in Plymouth, which was attended by 170 delegates. The forum members are also working together on a public campaign to tackle the stigma surrounding mental health, and have produced a directory of mental health services in Plymouth.

We have

26

bureaux in the South West providing civil legal advice

6%

of our clients are from BAME communities

23%

are disabled

12%

are below the age of 25

13%

are over 65 years

Developing the regional and local economy in the South West

- Citizens Advice bureaux in the South West are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 598 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 2,000 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in the South West region is estimated at over £11.2 million.
- Over a fifth of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across the South West 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, 2,464 clients were helped in the region during 2008/09 through our successful national programme – funded by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.

Our strategic priorities

Across the South West 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 South West, please contact:

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We train
2,000
volunteers each year

We employ
598
local staff

11.2
million pounds
contributed in the
South West region