

A map of the East of England region, colored in various shades of blue, green, and purple. A large, stylized gear icon is overlaid on the map, with a dark red center and concentric circles in shades of blue and green.

Developing partnerships, enhancing services

Citizens Advice in the East of England

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 95 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 of England

In the East of England the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 53 high street premises in the region and providing outreach services from 320 outlets.

During 2007/08 240,000 people in the East of England 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 2007/08 the bureaux in the East of England advised on 728,302 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues in the East of England, are:

- debt 28%
- benefits and tax credits 25%
- employment 11%
- housing 8%
- consumer and utilities 8%
- family and relationships 7%.

Nineteen bureaux in the East of England 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.

Seventeen per cent of clients in the region are from black or minority ethnic communities; 15 per cent are disabled; 12 per cent are below the age of 25 and 12 per cent are over 65 years.

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 of England.

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 of England.

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.
- Delivering new financial capability services in schools.
- Promoting advice services and support to employers around pre-retirement, health and absenteeism.

Case study

Hertfordshire Citizens Advice bureaux work together both on a range of existing projects and to develop new client services. Examples include making joint applications for funding to provide specialist advice and sharing knowledge systems and expertise.

A consortium of bureaux and other key advice agencies also work together across the region in partnership to provide community care advice via funding from the Legal Services Commission. The partnership ensures that the specialist community care advice needs of an individual client are met in a seamless and holistic way with the additional benefits to each of the agencies involved of sharing training and working practices.

Developing the economy in the East of England

- Citizens Advice bureaux in the East of England are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 590 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 2,100 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in the East of England is estimated at more than £10.6 million.
- Almost a third of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across the East of England 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, 10 new financial inclusion advisers have been brought into the region through our successful national programme – funded by the Department of Business, Employment and Regulatory Reform.
- The Citizens Advice service hosts a financial capability forum across the East of England and is expanding its work in money advice.

Our strategic priorities

Across the East of England 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 quality 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 of England region, please contact:

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