

A map of the United Kingdom is shown, divided into colored regions. Overlaid on the map is a target graphic with concentric circles and a central orange shape. The title 'Developing partnerships, enhancing services' is written in large blue font to the right of the map.

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 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 London

In London the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 310 outlets.

Across the capital 180,000 people were able to turn to the Citizens Advice service during 2007/08 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 London advised on 542,012 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 29%
- debt 23%
- housing 11%
- employment 8%
- consumer and utilities 7%
- legal 6%.

Seventeen 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.

At least 60 per cent of clients using the service in London are from black or minority ethnic communities; 17 per cent are disabled; 10 per cent are below the age of 25; and nine 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 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, solicitors, 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 and contribute regularly to London-wide strategies.

Advice networks are being established in sub regions across London. The service works with other advice agencies through the London Advice Forum and the Third Sector Alliance and is represented on a number of pan-London groups. Bureaux also work closely with their local boroughs and a number are funded by the London Councils.

Case study

Enfield Citizens Advice bureau has been working in partnership with the City Parochial Foundation and four South London bureaux in establishing the pan London Eastern European Migrant Advice Project. The project has recruited two Polish outreach workers to work with London's Polish population and to recruit new volunteers to work in the bureaux. The volunteers give advice in Polish on a range of issues, from immigration to personal finance.

Developing the economy in London

- Citizens Advice bureaux in London are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 580 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 1,290 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, six new financial inclusion advisers have been brought into 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:

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