

A map of the United Kingdom is shown on the left side of the page. The map is divided into regions, each a different color. Overlaid on the map are several concentric circles, with the innermost circle centered on the North West region. The circles expand outwards across the rest of the country.

# Developing partnerships, enhancing services

## Citizens Advice in the North 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 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 North West

In the North West the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 53 high street premises in the region with at least one bureau in every district and providing outreach services from 500 outlets.

During 2007/08, over 250,000 people in the North 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 2007/08 the bureaux in the North West region advised on 683,043 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues dealt with in the North West are:

- debt 34%
- benefits and tax credits 31%
- employment 7%
- housing 6%
- consumer and utilities 7%
- family and relationships 4%.

Forty three bureaux in the North West 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.

Fourteen per cent of clients using the service are from black or minority ethnic communities; 24.8 per cent are disabled; 11 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 North 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 North 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. Our existing partnerships include the sharing of statistical information to facilitate advice needs assessment, as well as the development of new and existing services.

## **Case studies**

Blackpool Citizens Advice Bureau and Wyre District Citizens Advice Bureau are working together on a new project to improve access to advice across the two districts, including developing a single number telephone advice service across Blackpool and Wyre.

Citizens Advice Cumbria (CAC) is a co-ordinating body that brings together the seven individual bureaux delivering services across the county. CAC provides a forum for its members to share good practice and expertise, explore issues of shared concern and provide a united and stronger voice in other county forums. CAC is increasingly developing its role as the single contract holder for county-wide contracts and commissions.

Bolton Citizens Advice bureau has three years of funding from the Advice Plus funding stream of the Big Lottery Fund for its Emerging Communities Integration Project (ECIP). ECIP will be providing an advice and casework service to asylum seekers, refugees, those with settled status, 'failed' asylum seekers and accession nationals. It also employs an integration worker to work with new settlers in their homes and community settings.

## Developing the regional and local economy in the North West

- Citizens Advice bureaux in the North West are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 940 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 1,730 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in the North West region is estimated at £9.6 million.
- Almost a third of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across the North 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, 23 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 in the North West and is expanding its work in money advice. Our Speke Financial Awareness Project also runs awareness sessions for groups and individuals covering such issues as the cost of credit, consumer rights, budgeting, investments and pension planning. Accredited training is also provided to a strong network of partner agencies and work has been done in schools, young people's organisations, credit unions with tenants and young offenders.

## Our strategic priorities

Across the North 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 North West region, please contact:**

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