

A map of the United Kingdom is shown on the left side of the page, with different regions colored in various shades. Overlaid on the map is a target graphic consisting of several concentric circles, with the center of the target positioned over the South East region of England. The main title 'Developing partnerships, enhancing services' is written in large, bold, blue letters on the right side of the page.

# Developing partnerships, enhancing services

## Citizens Advice in the South East

### 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 South East

In the South East the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 89 high street premises in the region, with at least one bureau in every district and providing outreach services from 452 outlets.

During 2007/08 325,000 people in the South East 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 South East region advised on 960,683 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues dealt with in the South East are:

- debt 24%
- benefits and tax credits 24%
- employment 11%
- housing 9%
- consumer and utilities 8%
- family and relationships 8%.

Twenty five bureaux in the South East 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.

Eighteen per cent of clients using the service are from black or minority ethnic communities; 14 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 South East.

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 East region.

In many counties our bureaux come together to discuss and implement county-wide strategies. For example, in Hampshire bureaux representing all local authority areas have formed the Hampshire consortium. This new legal entity has been formed to ensure that countywide initiatives are developed and the voice of CAB clients across the area is heard in key consultations. Through the Hampshire Consortium our bureaux are working with, among others, Macmillan cancer care to develop integrated advice services and support to those suffering from cancer and their families.

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.
- Working with partners in delivering new financial capability services in schools.
- Working with health trusts and addiction centres in promoting advice surgeries.
- Supporting the development of region-wide equality and diversity networks
- Promoting advice services and support to employers around pre-retirement and redundancy.

### **Case study**

The service provides a specialist welfare benefits and debt casework service to offenders both on probation and in prison and provides a consultancy service to Kent Probation Area staff. The Finance Benefit and Debt Pathway Project works closely with the probation and prison services and provides telephone advice and casework principally to offenders and their families. Much of the work of this project relates to changes in benefits, negotiation of debts and attempting to ensure accommodation is maintained and sustainable. The project has been seen as highly successful and, in addition to working with the Prisons and Probation services across Kent, works closely with Jobcentre Plus.

## Developing the regional and local economy in the South East

- Citizens Advice bureaux in the South East are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 851 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 3,850 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in the South East region is estimated at £19 million.
- Almost a third of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across the South East 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, 12.8 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 two financial capability forums across the South East and is expanding its work in money advice.

## Our strategic priorities

Across the South East 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 East please contact:

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