

A map of the United Kingdom is shown in the background, with various regions colored in different shades. Overlaid on the map is a target graphic with concentric circles, centered on the Yorkshire and Humberside region. The innermost circle is yellow, and the outer rings are grey.

# Developing partnerships, enhancing services

## Citizens Advice in Yorkshire and Humberside

### 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 Yorkshire and Humberside

In Yorkshire and Humberside the Citizens Advice service is one of the largest third sector providers of advice, operating from 32 high street premises in the region. There is at least one bureau in every local authority district, providing outreach services from 320 outlets.

During 2007/08, 160,000 people in the Yorkshire and Humberside 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 Yorkshire and Humberside advised on 488,021 issues. Many clients are advised on multiple issues as their problems are dealt with holistically.

The most common issues dealt with in Yorkshire and Humberside are:

- debt 40%
- benefits and tax credits 25%
- employment 7%
- housing 6%
- consumer and utilities 6%
- family and relationships 4%.

Twenty two bureaux in the region 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.

Nineteen per cent of clients using the service in Yorkshire and Humberside are from black or minority ethnic communities; 20 per cent are disabled; 12 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 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 Yorkshire and Humberside.

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 Yorkshire and Humberside region.

The five bureaux in Sheffield have been key players in setting up an Advice Consortium which has grown out of a long-term commitment by advice centres in Sheffield to work collaboratively to serve the needs of local people, especially those who are most disadvantaged. The Consortium has 30 members including bureaux, Advice<sup>UK</sup> members, the Law Centre and others. The Consortium is a strategic response to the growing requirement to establish joint, large scale tendering arrangements, bringing a number of separate, independent providers together under one umbrella synonymous with a 'single point of contracting'.

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 study**

Barnsley & District Citizens Advice bureau were the lead partners in the project 'Access to Advice' along with members of their Community Legal Service Partnership. The project extends the availability and appropriateness of advice to local community organisations that already have face-to-face contact with local people, such as the local domestic violence group, women's refuge, credit union and youth workers. It includes the provision of training to community organisations enabling them to give appropriate advice and information in-house to their specific client groups and provides case recording, supervision/appraisal models for organisations to use.

This model of working with community organisations is ongoing as the bureau has developed service level agreements with several community partnerships to offer training, consultancy and quality of advice checks.

## Developing the regional and local economy in Yorkshire and Humberside

- Citizens Advice bureaux in Yorkshire and Humberside are both small businesses and training agencies, employing and training 570 local staff. In addition we train and rely on over 1,060 volunteers each year.
- Based on current rates of pay for employed staff, the value of the contribution made by volunteers in the Yorkshire and Humberside region is estimated at £5.3 million.
- Almost a third of volunteers go into paid employment following training and support in bureaux.
- Across Yorkshire and Humberside 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, 61 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 region and is expanding its work in money advice.

## Our strategic priorities

Across Yorkshire and Humberside 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 Yorkshire and Humberside region, please contact:

Allyson Whisker  
Partnership Development Manager  
Citizens Advice North Area  
5th Floor Wade House  
Merrion Centre  
Leeds  
LS2 8NG  
0113 283 1655  
[allyson.whisker@citizensadvice.org.uk](mailto:allyson.whisker@citizensadvice.org.uk)