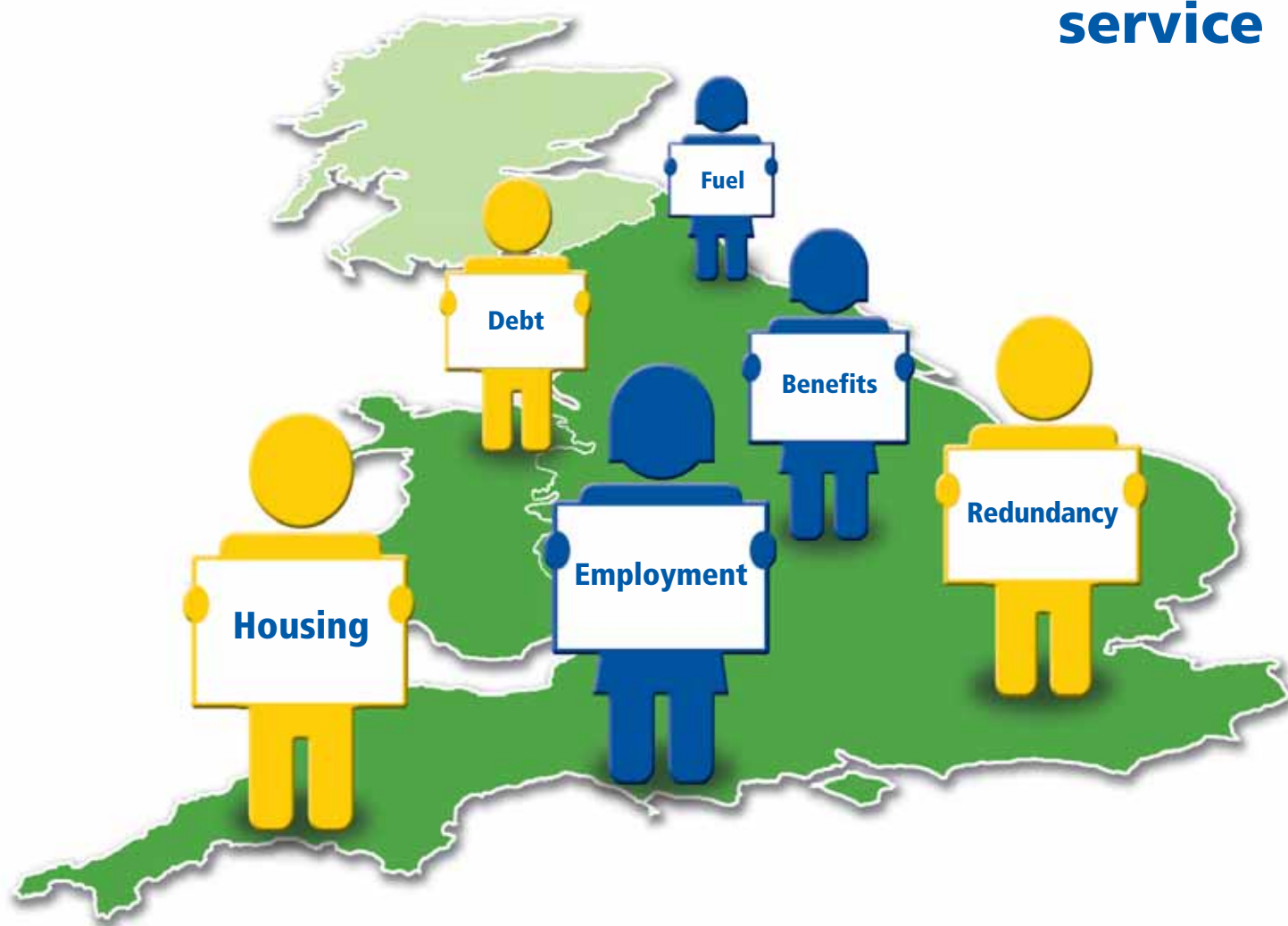


Local authorities and the recession

Solutions from the Citizens Advice service



Helping people with debt, providing housing and employment advice, encouraging benefit take-up and tackling fuel poverty are among the everyday work of a Citizens Advice Bureau.

The effects of the current recession are far reaching and in recent months Citizens Advice Bureaux have seen a massive increase in the incidence of issues that require their support.

Bureaux have responded swiftly to minimise the cost of unresolved problems and speed community recovery. In collaboration with their

local authorities, they have been using the unique insight that their client evidence affords them to develop solutions that are appropriate to the needs of residents. These joint initiatives include debt prioritisation campaigns and reviews of the local benefits system. Can your Citizens Advice Bureau help you?

The effects of the recession

A quarter of employers have drawn up plans to make redundancies in 2009, according to recent research¹. As well as the cost to UK business, the recession has human costs, which can be hard to predict and complex to deal with.

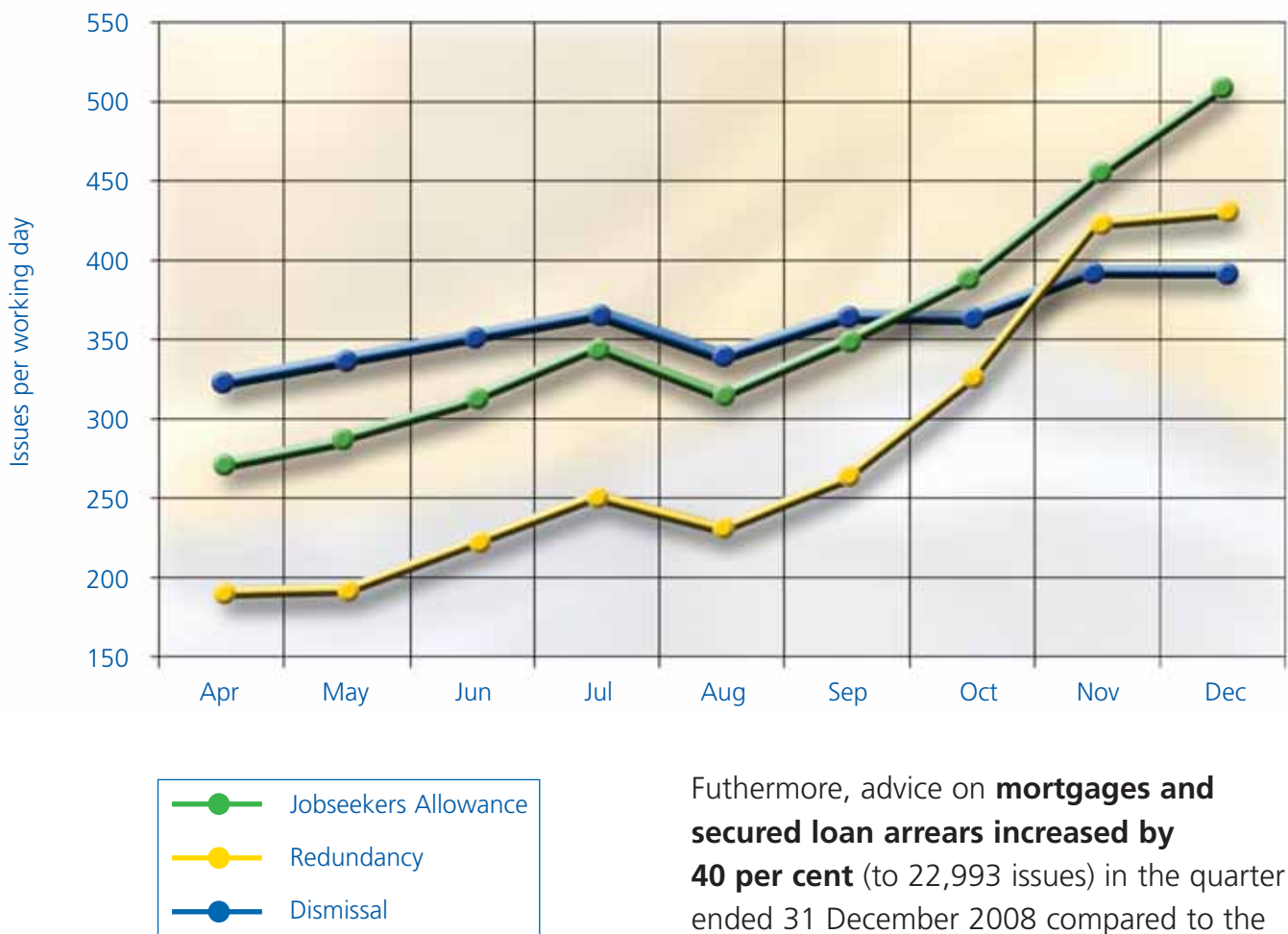
Redundancy may come with little warning and result in mounting personal debts, the prospect of repossession, failed relationships and even ill health. All of these scenarios bring with them specific information needs and, as the recession has taken a grip, Citizens Advice Bureaux have witnessed a marked increase in the demand for advice.

Citizens Advice evidence

In the quarter ended 31 December 2008, Citizens Advice Bureaux dealt with a five per cent increase in issues presented by clients compared to the same period in the previous year, and the demand is expected to increase further.

The increase in demand for advice on certain issues was far greater than the overall increase in demand, though. During the same period of comparison, **redundancy advice was up 162 per cent** (to 23,536 issues) and **Job Seekers Allowance was up 68 per cent** (to 26,982 issues), as the graph below shows.

Unemployment issues advised on per working day – April to December 2008



Furthermore, advice on **mortgages and secured loan arrears increased by 40 per cent** (to 22,993 issues) in the quarter ended 31 December 2008 compared to the same quarter the previous year.²

¹ Research by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development and management consultancy KPMG, released October 2008.

² Issues are topics advised on not clients – one client may be advised on several issues.

The implications for local communities

The recession takes its toll on whole communities, not just individuals, affecting the economy and culture of a place for the worse. Without the right services and support, the communities affected by this year's crisis could become neighbourhoods experiencing long term decline.

When people's income drops so does their spending power, compounding the effects of the recession on local businesses. If local residents miss rent payments or go through the trauma of losing their homes, the administrative cost to the council is substantial. Any growth in deprivation hampers the progress of social inclusion efforts as even bus fares and telephone calls, for example, become unaffordable to some. The stress of living with problems can also have dramatic effects on people's physical and mental health, adding to the strain on public services.

"The anxiety of the debts and the stress was bringing on my angina. I felt like I was drowning."

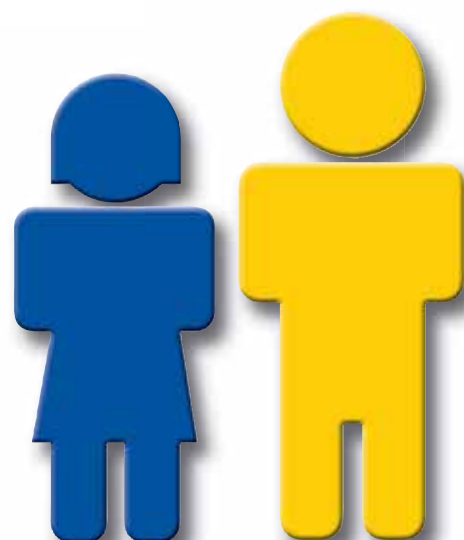
CAB client

Responding to crises

The Citizens Advice service has a history of responding swiftly and efficiently to crises, including the outbreak of Foot and Mouth, major floods and the decline of the coal mining industry.

By training specialist advisers, extending opening hours, offering outreach sessions and using the media to inform people about their rights, bureaux played a crucial role in minimising the potential long term effects of these crises. Bureaux are now responding to the challenges of this current crisis in just as comprehensive a way, and with the same sense of urgency.

Case notes are recorded by bureaux for each and every client they advise; these are categorised by issue and entered into a vast database of evidence, which can be analysed to get a real-time picture of the problems that people are encountering. Bureaux have been proactively sharing this knowledge with their local authorities and collaborating to develop services that are appropriate to the specific needs of local residents.



Examples of joint initiatives between local authorities and Citizens Advice Bureaux

In communities around England and Wales, Citizens Advice Bureaux are helping local authorities find solutions to problems that can often feel insurmountable for those who have the worry of facing them.

1 Rossendale CAB is working with Rossendale Borough Council to help people prioritise their debts and, in doing so, improve council tax collection rates. This will involve the inclusion of a leaflet about debt advice with council tax reminders as well as a local publicity campaign. Self-help debt packs will also be made available for distribution by the council and the CAB will start taking direct referrals from council staff.

2 Fylde Borough Council and Fylde CAB are collaborating to provide housing and debt advice in a coordinated way that will improve accessibility and efficiency. The council has also allocated funding to set up a new credit union so the CAB is providing a valuable insight into people's very varied experiences of managing their personal finances, which will inform the council's plans.

3 Selby District Council is drawing on evidence from Selby CAB clients to review the customer journey through the local benefit systems. Together they are determined to make it as easy as legally possible for the local community to claim the benefits they are entitled to.

Take action

Ensuring access to high quality information and advice should be part of any strategy to rebuild communities after a crisis.

Your local Citizens Advice Bureau would like to share their evidence with you and spend time, together, developing joint initiatives to address the local effects of a global downturn.

For more information contact the Chief Executive or Manager of your local Citizens Advice Bureau. Contact details can be found below or at citizensadvice.org.uk/getadvice



Our principles

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.

Our aims

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Citizens Advice

Telephone: 020 7833 2181
www.citizensadvice.org.uk