



Annual Report 2011

Chairman's Report

Every year I start with a review of the year, and compare it to previous years. Well this year definitely goes down as a good year. The bureau undertook the Citizens Advice standards audit and our score put us in the top 23% of bureaux in the country. I believe this is down to the professional way the bureau is run, and the exceptional contribution made by our volunteers.

Last year we were hoping that a new treasurer, Mr Bala, would be joining us. Unfortunately, he was unable to take up this post because of his work commitments. We are, however, delighted to report that Charlotte Barnes has stepped in to take up this role. She has introduced new accounting procedures to enhance the way we process and view our accounts, and she has fitted in extremely well; she has become a great asset to the board of trustees.

What next?

- We are looking in great depth at how we can reduce our overheads, in line with Test Valley Borough Council's directive. It is extremely difficult to find savings that are meaningful as we have always saved money wherever possible as a matter of course. However, we will continue to review the way we work, make adjustments where we can—however small. For example, by buying our milk from supermarkets rather than having it delivered has made a saving of £200 a year. This shows just how thoroughly we are looking at the bureau's finances.
- We only have three years left on our lease at our current premises on South Street so we are now looking for a suitable, affordable alternative. We would prefer to be centrally located but are finding it hard, if not impossible, to find accessible premises at the right price in, or close to, the town centre.

Once again Bill Baughen has taken the lead in fundraising and I really believe we have had the best fundraising year ever. We were lucky to be match funded by Barclays for the dinner dance, and we had a further substantial cheque from the Mayor's Gala Night. The dinner dance was once again the highlight of the year. This event takes a great deal of organising, so we thank Bill and his small committee for all their hard work.

I believe we have moved forward this year; we have again increased the number of clients seen and expect that, with the financial state of the country, the number of people needing our help will continue to rise.

So a good year, but only because we have a great team running the bureau. Once again our thanks to Ange for a job very well done, and also the paid staff and volunteers for their commitment and very hard work.

Chris Lynn

Supported by:



In the year
April 2010 - March 2011

we had:

11,005

client contacts,

7,150

non-client contacts

and dealt with over

9,000 issues.

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Andover Citizens Advice Bureau
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Charity registration number:
1045964

Company Limited by Guarantee

Registered number: 3041792
England

Manager's Report

Welfare Benefits

We have had a successful year for our clients, residents of TVBC, gaining £70,978.32 worth of benefits.

In 14 of the appeals we represented at, or produced submissions for, the decisions were changed and benefit allowed. A further eight cases were reviewed immediately the DWP received our appeal and benefit was allowed. This saved clients the worry of having to attend a hearing at either Southampton or Salisbury. The travel distance for clients who do not have their own transport causes extra anxiety and the whole procedure is very stressful. So if DWP change their decision at this stage it is a huge bonus to the client and it is down to the well prepared appeal our advisers have prepared. We were also able to obtain the correct benefits in another case by completing the relevant application.

During this year we also lost five appeals which for Andover Bureau is very unusual but does show how difficult it is becoming to obtain benefits for clients even when it appears they should qualify.

My grateful thanks to Joan, Pat and Rosemary who continue to rise to the ever increasing difficult challenge of managing the benefit appeal work.

*Maralyn Ings
Deputy Manager*

I would like to start my report by thanking the volunteers who work in various guises at Andover CAB. Every year in my report I describe the volunteers as the lifeblood of the bureau and this could not be more true. The roles carried out at the bureau range from adviser, assessor, receptionist, to clerical help and Trustee. All of these roles are paramount to the efficient function of the bureau. The added value these roles provide to our service has been estimated at £224,916 per annum.

The bureau team have seen the departure of three long standing advisers who have moved to pastures new, and we take this opportunity to welcome seven new members to the team of volunteers.

We are fortunate to receive funding from the Local Authority, Test Valley Borough Council, allowing us to open our doors to the public for 24 hours a week, operate two outreach sessions, provide specialist services in employment, debt and benefits, provide a telephone service, and home visit clients not able to attend our sessions.

Support to the volunteers is provided by seven paid members of staff (3.9 full-time equivalents). This paid team work closely with the volunteers ensuring they feel supported whilst working at the bureau and also help offer guidance with complex cases. Every three years the bureau is audited by Citizens Advice to ensure we meet quality standards; the paid team are responsible for checking all the work undertaken, and that advice given meets the required level.

The bureau continues to work closely with Citizens Advice Hampshire and receives services through them funded by Hampshire County Council. We must also thank Basingstoke and Deane for the funding they provide for our Whitchurch Outreach.

As a charity we are constantly looking for donations and fundraising ideas. We have been fortunate this year that our Chair, Cllr Chris Lynn, was Mayor which helped with our fundraising. Our fundraising committee has worked very hard holding various collections and events to keep this aspect of work on target for the future.

We are grateful for the continued support offered by Asda, Tesco, Waitrose and Sainsburys where we have held collections this year. Langdowns DFK and the Whitchurch Welfare Trust continue to offer donations, and we continue to be allocated Thrupton Circuit collection days. Thank you to all these companies for their help.

Ange Moon

Employment

The Equality Act introduced in October 2010 brought some much-needed harmonisation to the various strands of discrimination, in equal pay, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, religion and belief, and age. In April 2011 the default retirement age of 65 was phased out, giving employers 6 months of transitional arrangements to manage the change.

Difficulties in the economic situation continue to make themselves felt in employment advice in the bureau, especially with claims for monies owed as a result of companies ceasing to trade. We have also been concerned at the increasing number of foreign workers, often in low paid work, who need assistance with problems in recovering wages owed as well as other problems.



Employment caseworkers continue to guide our clients through an increasingly stretched Employment Tribunal system with a wide range of cases from claims for redundancy pay and other monies owed to unfair dismissal and discrimination cases. Last year, clients were awarded, or settled for, more than £57,000 in cases in which they were assisted by the bureau.

We are very grateful to John and Linda for their continued dedication in this demanding area. Our grateful thanks are also due to the Hampshire Consortium for continuing to supply the invaluable employment consultancy to guide us, as well as providing the opportunity for us to meet and share experiences with colleagues from other bureaux through regular forums.

Jacky Gilks—Employment Specialist

Outreach

The original lottery funded project started a very valuable service reaching out to the community. Outreach today continues to serve areas where the need is the greatest with venues at King Arthur's Way in Andover and Whitchurch town.

King Arthur's Way is in one of the larger estates in Andover, and our Outreach works from a hall in the heart of the estate. Recent renovations to the hall have made a big difference. We have benefited from refurbished office areas and a clean, well organised kitchen. There is a large residential area around the hall and shops in the vicinity. Anyone can call in for advice, and this year we have implemented an appointment system which works in tandem with the drop in service.

Whitchurch lies about 6 miles east of Andover and although within Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council is nearer geographically to Andover. Clients have access to advice without the need to travel. We have been able to call on the Whitchurch Welfare Trust to help clients with several grants this year. We are also grateful to the Andover Food Bank who have recognised a need in the Whitchurch area and have organised a distribution point in the town this year.

I couldn't continue without help and was delighted that additional volunteers have come forward this year. Thank you to the advisers; Alan, Connie, Dave, Lotte, Lucille, Mel, Philip and Rochelle, for being willing to take the service out into the community.

With the large scale building of additional housing around Andover the need to reach out to the communities in these areas can only increase.

Caroline Stone—Outreach Coordinator

Money Advice Report

It has continued to be a busy and demanding time for the bureau with everyone committed to exploring the best option open to clients regarding their finances.

The high demand for assistance in dealing with debt has continued during 2010/2011.

The bureau has seen an increase in the numbers of clients who are facing the real risk of losing their home. These clients are helped by exploring all their options and continuing to work closely with Testway Housing and the other suppliers of social housing and landlords in the area. The number of clients facing difficulty with mortgaged property is also on the increase and more clients than before are facing repossession and charging orders.

In 2010/11 we managed £2 million worth of debt for our 200 or so clients that have joined our money advice programme.

The Bureau continues to explore all options for clients including other free debt management programmes and also Bankruptcy and Debt Relief Orders which allow clients to make a fresh start.

During the last year we have successfully helped 19 clients apply for a Debt Relief Order seeing £314,222 written off for clients.

Our programme encourages and enables clients to look at and manage their budgets more effectively and it negotiates affordable payment to creditors.

The bureau is facing more complex issues and problems that are more difficult to resolve. One public company has changed its policy and now applies directly to the High Court to enforce payment on County Court judgments. By going to the High Court the enforcement is dealt with quicker and bailiffs can be sent in much earlier – not good news for clients who come to us for help.

The bureau continues to be extremely busy with an increase in the complexity of debt issues seen. Everyone at the bureau is committed to exploring the best options for clients facing these issues.

Joan Gittings—Money Advice Specialist

Home Visits

During this past year we have carried out 18 home visits to clients who have been unable to access the bureau.

Although this is fewer than the previous year we did not turn down any requests. This is a valuable service and all the visits are carried out by volunteers. I am very grateful to the advisers who have helped; Connie, Dave, Joy and Pat. Without them the clients would not have received the advice which was so important to help them work through their problems. My thanks also go to the 'sitters' who accompany the visiting adviser.

Social Policy

Within Citizens Advice, we have two main aims:

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

This last statement is what we call Social Policy.

We have been very fortunate to have had two conscientious workers helping with the gathering and preparation of this information to be passed to our central office who can assess the National problem.

We also have a small dedicated team made up of Trustees, advisers and paid staff, which manage local issues and may visit or contact other groups to make them aware of how their behaviour affects local people.

*Maralyn Ings
Deputy Manager*



Citizens Advice Hampshire

Andover CAB is a member of Citizens Advice Hampshire. The aim of this charity is to identify and develop options for improving services throughout Hampshire.

Citizens Advice Hampshire's role is:

- enabling collaboration between the CAB and other charities and organizations;
- providing a single point of contact for funders, partners and policy makers;
- partnering with other organisations and charities on special projects;
- supporting Hampshire's individual bureaux by facilitating the sharing of knowledge and skills, and by providing training;
- campaigning for better services in Hampshire; and
- influencing policy makers.

In the last year we have worked closely with Citizens Advice Hampshire to look at our social policy work on a county wide level.

The Hampshire Advice Plus Project provides access to translation services and in the last year we have been able to use the British Sign Language service as well as translators in Portuguese and Russian.

In the coming year we will be working closely with the Advice Plus Project on organising training for the all of the Hampshire Bureaux locally.

Training in the Bureau

The aims the Citizens Advice Service are:

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

We offer free, confidential, independent, impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. The Service values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.

In order to do the above, to the standards expected of the bureau, means that all volunteers have to be trained. There is training available for all roles. Everyone has the same induction but then the training varies according to the role being undertaken. All training is a mix of self study booklets and Elearning. A trainee assessor has two separate days of training away from the bureau whilst a trainee adviser has three. In addition, in Andover, each trainee has a mentor who they observe and who assists them in learning about bureau practice. There are learning journals that have to be completed, too.

Trainee assessors and advisers have to give a lot of time and commitment to their training. Before they are able to assess or advise, independently, they have to have three assessed interviews. Upon completion of training a certificate is awarded.

Training, however, doesn't end there. All bureau workers are permanently training whether by independently completing bite size modules or by attending courses. Whole bureau training has to be undertaken when a new system/process is introduced, for example, when the new case recording system, Petra, is introduced later this year.

At Andover bureau the staff successfully delivers a service which upholds the aims and principles of Citizens Advice. This is acknowledged in our recent audit but we recognise that we need to continue to update our knowledge in order to continue to provide the best possible service to the community.

*Joy Windram
Training Supervisor*

Enquiries 2010/2011

The chart below highlights the wide variety of issues that the bureau has dealt with over the past year.

Debt management continues to be the most frequent issue affecting our clients, with benefits and employment enquires maintaining high proportions. These three areas are symptomatic of the current economic situation nationally.

