

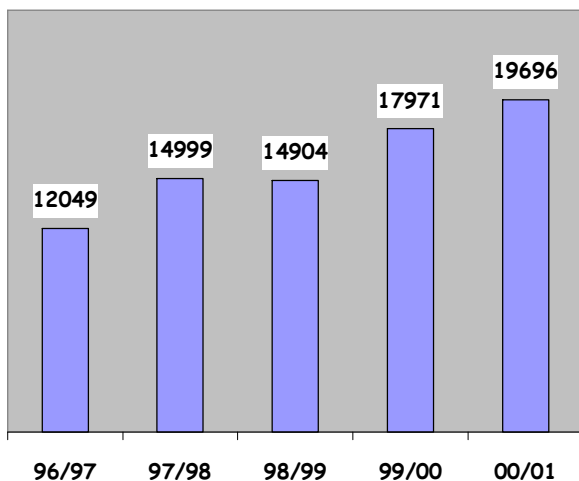
Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau



A Review of the Year
1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001

Enquiries up 10% on last year

Total number of enquiries
Comparison over last 5 years



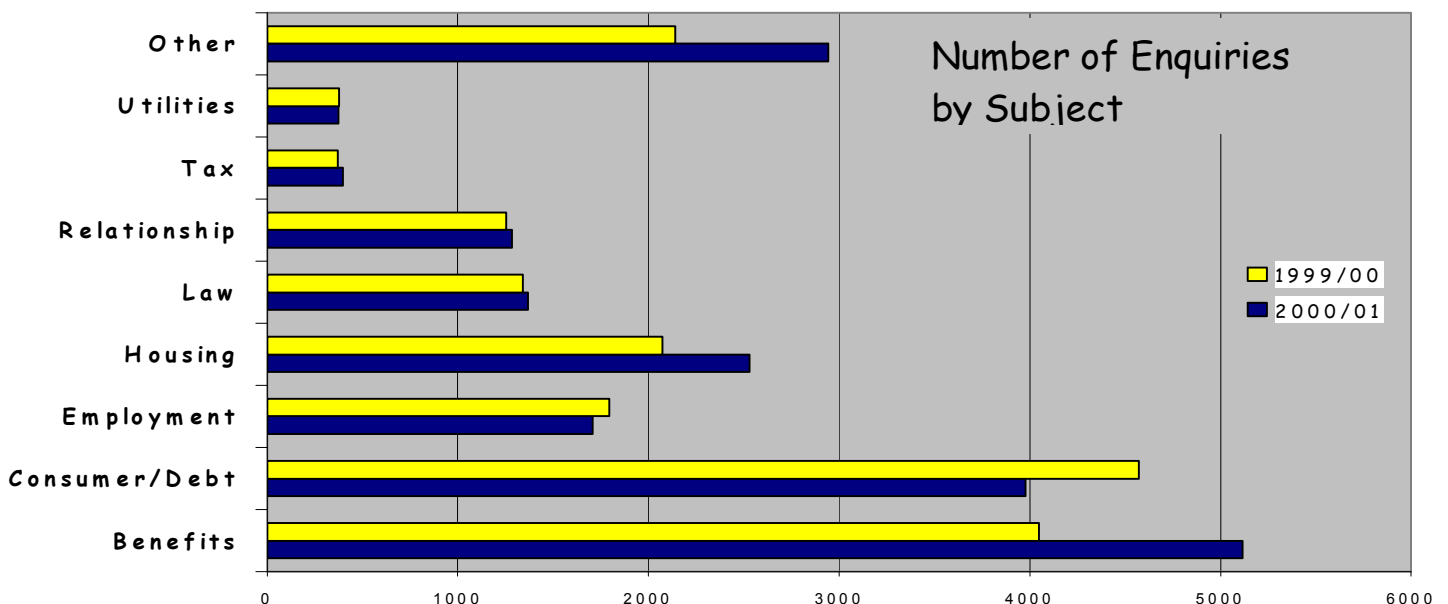
and new developments, including increased opening hours and a service based at the County Court in Winchester - all thanks to a committed and enthusiastic Bureau team.

The Bureau's Management Committee has been strengthened with some new members. It has initiated a review of the Bureau's constitution to meet with NACAB guidance.

We have been most fortunate in having the services of an excellent Treasurer (Dick Rutter) and Secretary (Andrew Beadle) who have ensured financial and constitutional probity through the year.

I am pleased to introduce the Annual Review of Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau. Once again, we have had a year marked by increased activity

*Beth Taylor, Chairman
Management Committee*



Projects Accommodated within Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

Mental Health Benefits Adviser – Jean Horn (20 hours per week)

This year several clients were assisted in making claims for the Welfare Benefit called Severe Disablement Allowance, which was withdrawn in April 2001. As usual the adviser was kept busy with both new and renewal claims for Disability Living Allowance. She also successfully represented clients at Tribunal Hearings. Many clients received help with Housing Benefit issues and one was successfully represented at a Housing Benefit Review Board Hearing with help from a Barrister from the Free Representation Unit. The kinds of problems that clients with mental health problems bring to the adviser are much the same as all clients bring the Bureau. Many, though, would not be able to cope with the bureau's waiting room and seeing someone different at every visit. They appreciate the fact that they can get to know the adviser and be seen by appointment either at the bureau or at a venue of their choice.

Winchester Housing Association Money Advice Worker – Jean Horn (10 hours per week)

(Total number of enquiries: 1050 compared with 610 last year. 347 client contacts compared to 275 last year)
This project, in its third year, takes referrals from the association's Housing Officers. Clients are referred when they are in serious rent arrears and are at risk of eviction and/or when they are having Housing Benefit problems. Many of them are in low paid work and some are in and out of benefits. Over the past year the new Working Families Tax Credit has caused problems when clients do not realise that if they are awarded this benefit that it affects the amount of Housing Benefit received. By the time the details are known clients have often been seriously in arrears with their rent. The adviser helps to explain how the benefits interact and can calculate new awards in advance of notification. 12 clients were successfully represented at court during this year. Rent arrears, consumer debts and benefits continue to be the main enquiry areas.

Rural Outreach Advice Direct (ROAD) – Jane Robinson (20 hours per week)

The demand for our home visiting service has continued to increase and we have completed 329 home visits. Clients who are unable to get into the bureau because of ill health, disability, caring responsibilities or low income, whose enquiries cannot be dealt with sufficiently by telephone or in writing, can be visited at home, in hospital or residential care homes. Referrals can come directly from clients and their families, via health and social service departments or other voluntary agencies. The majority of our clients are elderly, often frail and mostly not well informed or confused about the range of care and support available. Disability benefit claims account for a large proportion of the work, - we have assisted with 83 claims this year. A total of £130,000 has been awarded to our clients, enabling them to pay for care and mobility needs and in many cases allowing them to remain in the community.

Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

The Bureau provides an open door policy to provide advice and/or information on any subject to personal callers or on the telephone. Subject areas include: Social Security benefits, sickness/disability benefits, housing, debt counselling/management, employment, legal matters, consumer problems, family and personal issues, health, immigration and nationality, community care, tax, leisure and access to other services.

During 1999/2000 Winchester Bureau received nearly 20,000 enquiries. This was a 10% increase over the previous year. The number of client contacts made was 11,249 Home-visits totalled 441. The balance were either handled on the telephone or by letter (see back page).

Our main enquiry areas continue to be consumer and debt and welfare benefits totalling approximately 50% of our work.

Most of our volunteer advisers are now helping clients by the use of our Electronic Information System via CD-ROM. Many volunteer advisers have become expert in using PG Debt (a computer debt management package), which has ensured a very professional and accurate method of helping our clients.

Volunteer Advisers continue to represent clients at Employment and Social Security Appeal Tribunals, Housing Benefit Review Boards and at the County Court. Although each case involves much time in preparation and attendance at a hearing it has over the past year shown that clients who are assisted have a much greater success rate than those appearing on their own.

Nearly £14,000 was awarded to a client who was helped by the bureau via the Free Representation Unit in a Race Discrimination case.

We continue to have the services of local solicitors who have provided our free fortnightly Legal Advice Sessions. We look forward to continue this partnership with most of them when Community Legal

Services referral protocols come into play during 2001.

Our weekly visits to Winchester Prison continue to be welcomed by prison residents both male and female. Four advisers helped with 138 enquiries.

Court desk In January the first ever duty desk offered advice and representation in housing possession cases. Those facing the threat of homelessness receive information about the service with the court papers. During the first three months 20 clients sought advice and 15 were represented.

Social Policy is an important area of work. We sent 82 bureau evidence forms to our national office.

Problems with Housing Benefit continue to be a real problem both locally and nationally. Locally this has mainly been due to the new verification requirements and clients having successfully claimed Working Families Tax Credit being unaware this has an impact on their Housing Benefit entitlement.

Although the bureau lost 10 volunteer advisers it has gained a further 10 volunteers. Some have returned to bureau work after an absence and one has moved to the area. Three trainees successfully went on to become trainee advisers and a further 6 trainees started. The new programme has involved volunteers in extra commitment, but feedback has indicated that they felt it was worth it.

During the year two new members of staff joined the bureau (see back page).

Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

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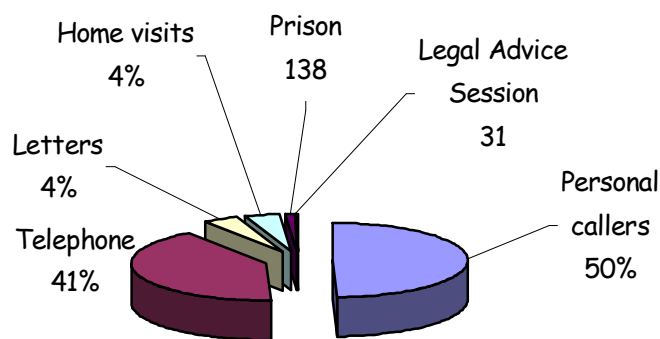
The Citizens Advice Bureau is an **independent** service providing, **free, confidential** and **impartial** advice.

Aim: To ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available; or through an inability to express their needs effectively and equally to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and service, both locally and nationally.

OPENING HOURS	
Monday	10 - 4
Tuesday	10 - 1
Wednesday	10 - 4
Thursday	10 - 4, (4 - 7*)
Friday	10 - 1
Saturday	(10 - 1*)
*Telephone and appointments only	

OTHER SERVICES:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-visiting • Outreach at Winchester Prison (Mon pm) • Legal Advice Session (2-weekly) Thurs pm • County Court Desk - lay representation at possession hearings (bi-monthly)

PROJECTS AND STAFF	
1 April 2000 - 31 March 2001	
Bureau Manager	Jenny Meadows
Deputy Manager	Mary Barnard
Training Officer	Ann Gilbertson (from Aug 00)
Admin Officers	Ian Tattersall Chris Janson (from June 00)
Rural Outreach Advice Direct	Jane Robinson
Mental Health Benefits Adviser	Jean Horn
WHA Money Advice Worker	Jean Horn
42	Volunteer Advisers
6	Volunteer Trainee Advisers
7	Volunteer Admin workers



Contacts by Category

We would like to thank our funders Winchester City Council and our Project funders: Hampshire County Council Social Services, Winchester Housing Association and Consortium for Opportunities for Volunteering.

PROJECTED FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- Community Legal Service Quality Mark
- Partnership working with Winchester Group for Disabled People
- Primary Care Trust (working with GP surgeries)
- Winchester Neighbourhood Mediation Steering Group
- Winchester Credit Union Steering Group
- Web page development

Company Limited by Guarantee
 Registered in England & Wales No. 302999
 REGISTERED OFFICE: The Winchester Centre, 68 St Georges Street, Winchester, SO23 8AH
 Charity Registration number 1045169