

Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau



A Review of the Year
1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003

Winchester celebrates its 50th anniversary

This review comes half way through the Golden Jubilee Year of the Winchester Bureau. The original Bureau, then in a room at the old Guildhall (now Lloyds TSB Bank) achieved official recognition in 1953. The anniversary was marked in January 2003 with a visit by HRH Princess Royal, Patron of Citizens Advice, during which she met many of the people involved in the running of the Bureau. She showed considerable interest and an understanding of the problems coming to the Bureau day by day. We look forward to a further instalment of the celebrations on Saturday 6th September with a garden party at Wolvesey, home of the Bishop of Winchester.

In April 2003, the bureau passed its Citizens Advice Membership Scheme Audit with flying colours. This was an audit of all aspects of the running of the Bureau from Trustee Board

proceedings through to the quality of advice and file maintenance. Few Bureaux, we are told, had achieved such success and congratulations are due to Jenny Meadows, Mary Barnard and their team. We remain grateful to those who fund the Bureau and to Winchester City Council in particular. The budget in respect of the Bureau's core services, monitored with great care by our Treasurer, remains very tight, but we look forward to the future with optimism. Thanks are due to David Marklew for collating all the information necessary for the new five-year business plan, prepared as part of this year's audit. Notwithstanding any funding problems, which may loom in the future, every effort will be expended to maintain this service for the life of the business plan and beyond.

John Lunt *Chairman*
Trustee Board



Projects/services accommodated within Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

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

This project funded by Social Services started 6 years ago to ensure that clients with mental health problems were able to access the full range of CAB services. To this end the adviser holds a "surgery" at Connaught House, the mental health day hospital and visits clients in Melbury Lodge Psychiatric Unit, in their own home or at a venue of their own choice. Clients are also encouraged to visit the bureau to see the adviser when they feel well enough and are assisted to claim all the benefits to which they are entitled including Disability Living Allowance. The claim form for this benefit is very long and can take 2-3 hours to complete. The adviser completed 83 of these forms this year. They are also helped to manage their debts. In the first instance, clients must be referred by members of the Winchester Community Health Team. The project had 405 client contacts.

Winchester Housing Association Money Advice Worker - Jean Horn (10 hours pw) and Administration Officer - Chris Janson (3 hours pw)

This project, now in its sixth year, was started to assist vulnerable tenants. WHA Housing Officers refer tenants if their tenancy is at risk. The adviser can assist these vulnerable tenants with benefit claims and backdating issues particularly around Housing Benefit, help with debt counselling and budgeting and if necessary, represent them at a Court hearing for possession. This year has seen the appointment of many support workers under the Supporting People legislation. The adviser has worked with and supported these workers in order to enhance the service given to tenants.

Home Visiting Service to December 2002 - Jane Robinson (20 hours pw to Sept, Acting Home Visiting Co-ordinators Kate Gedye (11 hours pw)/Liz Sladen (1 hour pw) from Sept- Dec Citizens Advice Outreach Service (CAOS) from January 2003- Maggie Schofield, (20 hours pw), Denise Cox/Kate Gedye/David Ross (37 hours pw job-share), Administration Officer - Denise Cox (4 hours pw)

In September the bureau were sad to lose Jane Robinson who had been a volunteer and paid worker for nearly 6 years. Jane consecutively held the roles of Older Persons Adviser/Rural Outreach Advice Direct Co-ordinator and Home Visiting Co-ordinator. This year, once again the bureau had been able to continue the home visiting service with one-off funding from Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council and the Mid-Hants Primary Care Trust. However, the project was under threat due to lack of ongoing funding and the bureau has been fortunate to receive, in consortium with Winchester Group for Disabled People (WGDP), a £187,000 grant over 3 years from the Community Fund (the old Lotteries Board). This will provide not only home visiting but also a disability advice line and due to be developed, an outreach service to the northern parishes of the Winchester District. The project was able to recruit experienced staff from within the bureau. The bureau's loss was the project's extraordinary gain enabling the new project to start immediately. The bureau had provided a disability advice line on behalf of WGDP. The home-visiting volunteers had shared their time between this project and the bureau and we particularly have to thank them for ensuring a service has continued during this time. The statistics for the year: 1032 client contacts needing support on 2204 issues. A total of 291 home visits were made. We are delighted that this very important service to clients unable to access the bureau continues.

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 2002/03 Winchester Bureau again received nearly 20,000 enquiries.

Our main enquiry areas continue to be consumer and debt and welfare benefits totalling approximately 50% of our work, although we have had a marked increase in the number of legal enquiries received.

Following on from successfully achieving a preliminary award last year of the Community Legal Service Quality Mark at General help level and with casework in welfare benefits and in debt, the bureau was passported to the Quality Mark this year by passing its 3-yearly Membership Review Audit with our national association. For the first time this incorporated a Quality of Advice Audit, which the bureau passed with no corrective action needed.

Prison Our weekly visits to Winchester Prison continue to be welcomed by prison residents both male and female. Four advisers helped with 256 enquiries.

County Court desk The duty desk on fortnightly possession hearing days continues its 100% record ensuring clients do not receive outright possession orders. We continue to have excellent liaison with the County Court who welcome our 9 volunteer advisers who undertake this service on a rota basis

Volunteers For the first time in recent history the bureau has a reduction in numbers of volunteer advisers. The bureau lost 9 experienced volunteers and 8 during training. However 12 new volunteer trainee advisers were recruited in April. One

adviser joined us from other bureaux. Another of our experienced volunteer advisers retired from advising but remains as a volunteer, taking a role as receptionist which is a post we hope to develop easing the burden on the volunteer advisers.

Training Four volunteer advisers achieved their *Certificate in Generalist Advice Work*.

The bureau is lucky to have Ann Gilbertson, Mary Barnard, Jean Horn and Jenny Meadows, as experienced tutors who are able to cascade their experience and knowledge, particularly around welfare benefits, debt and recently consumer issues to our volunteers.

We achieved 100% take up of the bureau run Tax Credit training to take into consideration this major change in welfare benefits. We also held two full days Housing training provided by our specialist support National Homelessness Advice Service.

Social Policy We sent 160 bureau evidence forms to our national office, a marked increase on the previous year. Local social policy action took place when a volunteer undertook a mystery shopper exercise and then produced information about basic bank accounts available in Winchester and Alresford. This will be important local information for our clients in view of benefit books being withdrawn

We are delighted that we will be managing a money advice service for Winchester City Council tenants in our area and supporting and training Housing department staff.

Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

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

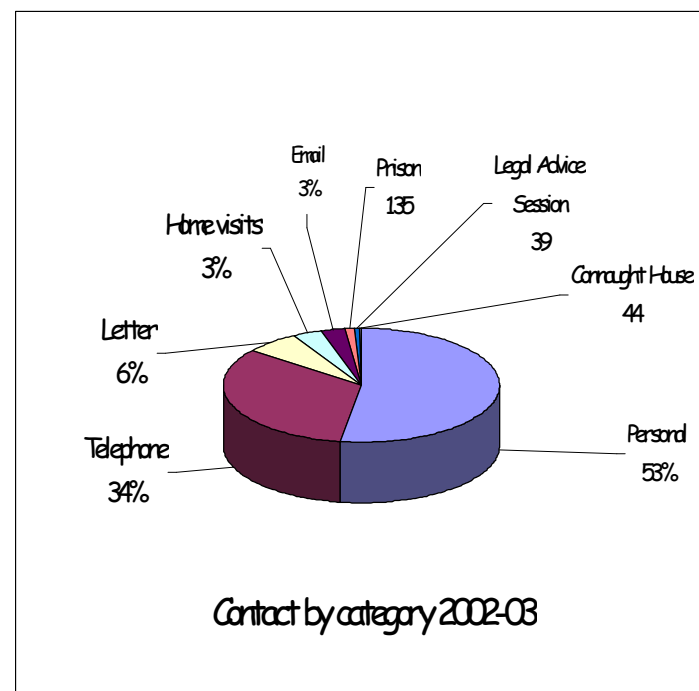
Aim: To ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available; or through an inability to express their needs effectively and equally to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and service, both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

OPENING HOURS	
Monday	10 - 4
Tuesday	10 - 1
Wednesday	10 - 4
Thursday	10 - 4
Friday	10 - 1

OTHER SERVICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 2002 - 31 March 2003	
Bureau Manager	Jenny Meadows
Deputy Manager	Mary Barnard
Training Officer	Ann Gilbertson
Admin Officers	Liz Sladen Ian Tattersall Chris Janson - (WHA) Denise Cox (from Jan 03 - CAOS)
Home Visiting Service	Jane Robinson to Sept 02 Kate Gedye/Liz Sladen from Sept-Dec 02
Mental Health Benefits Adviser	Jean Horn
WHA Money Advice Worker	Jean Horn
Citizens Advice Outreach Service From Jan 03	Maggie Schofield, Manager Denise Cox/Kate Gedye/ David Ross (job-share) Adviser
33	Volunteer Advisers
6	Volunteer Trainee Advisers
10	Volunteer Admin workers

PROJECTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Benefits Adviser • Winchester Housing Association Money Advice • Citizens Advice Outreach Service



We would like to thank our funders Winchester City Council, Hampshire County Council, H M Prison, Winchester, Mid Hants Primary Care Trust, Winchester Group for Disabled People, and Winchester Housing Association

PROJECTED FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

- Winchester City Council Money Advice Service
- Citizens Connect (bureau upgrading IT and working with e-government)
- Development work H M Prison, Winchester
- Winchester Neighbourhood Mediation Service
- Winchester Credit Union Group