

Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau



A Review of the Year
1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005

NEW METHOD OF CASE RECORDING

This has been my second year as Chair of Trustees and I continue to be amazed by the scope of the bureau's work and the dedication of the staff and volunteers.

Our advice service operates face to face, by phone, by letter and by e-mail. We reach into the courts and the prison. With home visits we give advice to those who are unable to visit the bureau for whatever reason. Our specialist money advice and mental health advice services are always in great demand.

To deal with nearly 20,000 enquiries we have more staff and volunteers than ever before and a budget to match. Not surprisingly accommodation became a problem and we have created additional office space and improved interview rooms this year within our premises in The Winchester Centre.

We now provide a regular outreach advice service to South Wonston and Alresford and are grateful for the accommodation and facilities provided by the Doctors surgeries in those areas.

Like any modern efficient business, CAB is reliant on computer systems. All the bureau's case records are now held on computer and over the last year the staff and volunteers have grappled with mastering the system. In addition, the information system, which is the bible for all advisors, is now only accessed by computer. This transition has put a huge load on staff and volunteers for training and adjusting to the "electronic culture" but all have approached it with enthusiasm and commitment.

The Trustees take a long view of the Bureau's affairs and are addressing the prospect of unusually severe financial constraints in the coming years. Winchester City Council, which is our main funder, faces major financial constraints across all its services and the Trustees recognise that our grants will fall short of our needs. The Outreach Service funding from the national lottery Community Fund will also come to an end next year. The Trustees are therefore reviewing all aspects of the Bureau's work and finances with a view to reduce costs and to continue to look for new sources of funding wherever possible.



⁴ HEARING LOOP On 26 October 2004, Mr and Mrs Gladstone, in the presence of the The Right Worshipful Mayor of Winchester, Cllr Cecily Sutton, made a presentation of hearing loops donated by them in memory of their daughter Alex, one of our volunteer advisers, a great disability campaigner who died in March aged 24.

David Marklew Chair
Trustee Board

Projects/services accommodated within Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

Mental Health Benefits Adviser

Jean Horn (20 hours per week) and Administration Officer - Liz Sladen (3 hours pw)

This project only takes referrals from the Community Mental Health Team and this was another extremely busy year with over 2400 enquiries brought to the adviser. Less than 50% of these enquiries concerned welfare benefits and the adviser completed 107 new or renewal claims for Disability Living Allowance resulting in notified awards of over £63,000. Once again debt was an ongoing problem for many clients with debt enquiries nearly one half of the workload. Several clients seen at the Melbury Lodge Psychiatric Hospital had made suicide attempts because of their financial situation. The adviser attended a Money Advice Association Conference to discuss the impact of mental health problems on debtors. A volunteer undertook a customer satisfaction survey of the project. There was a high response rate and the outcome was very positive showing that clients valued the project.

Winchester Housing Association Money Advice Worker

Jean Horn (10 hours pw) and Administration Officer - Liz Sladen (3 hours pw)

This project only takes referrals from WHA Housing Officers and during the past year the adviser has dealt with over 1200 enquiries for 281 client contacts. Most cases are complex involving several issues. As well as rent arrears the clients typically have Council Tax and utility debts along with a large amount of consumer debt. There are frequently benefit entitlements that clients can be assisted to access. It is only by the Citizens Advice holistic approach to all of these issues that clients can be helped to see their way out of very difficult and worrying situations.

Citizens Advice Outreach Service

Kate Gedye (20 hours pw), Denise Cox (24.5 hours pw)/David Ross (12.5 hrs pw job-share), Administration Officer - Maggie Schofield, (10 hours pw)

This is the second year of a 3-year project funded by the Community Fund. The service has three elements: home visiting, weekly advice sessions in Alresford and South Wonston GP doctors' surgeries and a Disability Advice Line. The service offers home visits to clients in Winchester and the northern parishes of the district who are unable to access the main bureau due to age, health, disability, caring responsibilities or transport problems.

- £241,590 in benefits gained for clients (annualised figure)
- 259 new cases (58% were older people and 27% had a disability, 55% from a rural area)
- 239 home visits (68% were to older people).
- Total client contacts 1025.

Winchester City Council Money Advice Worker

Meg Chant (10 hours pw) and Administration Officer - Lynne Vincent (3 hours pw)

This project started in September 2003 taking referrals from WCC Housing Officers. Vulnerable tenants with rent arrears are referred to a project worker who specialises in debt and benefits advice but could also give CAB advice on all other issues. Quite often the problems have been caused by the client paying non-priority bills like credit cards, catalogues and unsecured loans first as these companies can be quite aggressive when chasing late payments. Entitlement to benefits is assessed as many clients are unaware of what they can claim or may need help to complete the claim forms. We currently have 34 clients on this project. Statistics for the year: Client contacts 354, Total enquiries 1152.

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, by fax or email. 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.

Some major changes in work practices and premises and resources occurred during the period of this review.

CASE is a computer software programme bringing major change to the way case recording is undertaken.

PREMISES The bureau closed for two weeks over Christmas 2004 to allow for the creation of a fifth interview room and check in area out of the existing waiting room and counter area.

Prison The service visits the prison on Monday afternoons. Four advisers helped 155 clients with 265 enquiries, and wrote 42 letters on clients' behalf. Changes to the use of Westhill annexe have meant that women are no longer accommodated.

County Court desk The duty desk on fortnightly possession hearing days continues its 100% record, ensuring clients do not receive outright possession orders and offering ongoing bureau help with benefits and debts. Six volunteer advisers undertake this service on a rota basis and liaise with the County Court staff and local social landlords.

Volunteers During this period we achieved our highest number of bureau volunteers (62), with 27 fully trained advisers and 15 administration volunteers. Nine volunteers were recruited for adviser training in September 2004.

Due to the revised premises and ways of working we recruited volunteers for a CASE inputting and receptionist role.

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

The bureau continues to be fortunate to have Mary Barnard, Jean Horn, Jenny Meadows and Lizzie Williams, all experienced tutors who are able to cascade their experience and knowledge, particularly around welfare benefits, debt, consumer, information technology and recently the new employment grievance procedures to our volunteers.

We will achieve 100% take up of the in-bureau Mental Health Awareness course as Jean Horn is now a Citizens Advice tutor in this subject. Mary Barnard is a Citizens Advice tutor in money advice and consumer and has trained all our trainees in house on these subjects. We also held two full days Housing training provided by our specialist support National Homelessness Advice Service.

Social Policy We sent 123 bureau evidence forms to our national office. We continue to be very concerned at the level of debt we are seeing and the high charges of Debt Management Companies. Successful local social policy has included issues with inappropriate language and behaviour used by council tax bailiffs.

Winchester Citizens Advice Bureau

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

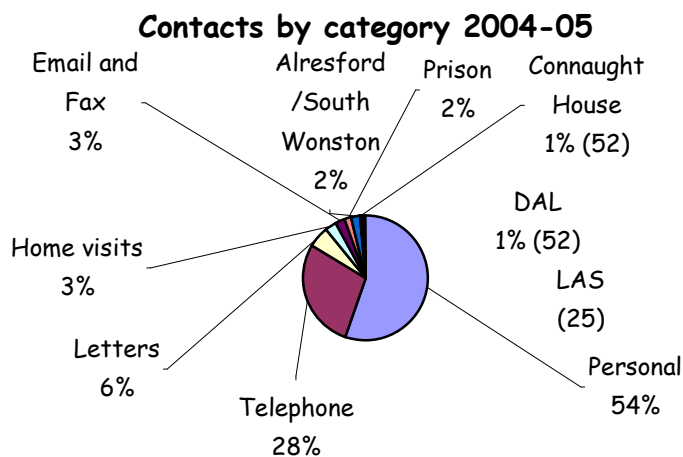
Aim: To ensure that individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available; or through an inability to express their needs effectively and equally to exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and service, both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

OPENING HOURS	
Monday	10 - 4
Tuesday	10 - 1
Wednesday	10 - 4
Thursday	10 - 4
Friday	10 - 1
Alresford GP Surgery	Mon 1.30 - 3.30
South Wonston GP Surgery	Wed 9.30 - 11.30

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 2004 - 31 March 2005	
Bureau Manager	Jenny Meadows
Deputy Manager	Mary Barnard
Training Officer	Lizzie Williams from Jan 04
Admin Officers	Liz Sladen (Bureau) Liz Sladen WHA/MH (from July 2004) Ian Tattersall (Bureau) Lynne Vincent (WCC) Denise Cox (CAOS) (until July 2004) Maggie Schofield (CAOS) (from September 2004)
Mental Health Benefits Adviser	Jean Horn
WHA Money Advice Worker	Jean Horn
Citizens Advice Outreach Service	Maggie Schofield, Manager (until July 2004) Kate Gedye, Manager (from July 2004) Kate Gedye Adviser (until July 2004) Denise Cox/David Ross (job-share)
WCC Money Advice Worker	Andrew Sedden (until Sept 03) Meg Chant (from Nov 2003)
27	Volunteer Advisers
21	Vol Trainee/Trainee Advisers
13	Volunteer Admin workers

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



We would like to thank our funders Winchester City Council (Community and Housing Departments); Community Fund, Hampshire County Council; Winchester Housing Association; H M Prison, Winchester and Winchester Group for Disabled People. One-off grants received from Friends of Citizens Advice