**Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau**

**Background Information**

**The Organisation**

Citizens Advice Bureaux are the major providers of information, advice and assistance, operating from 300+ locations across Scotland, from the islands to the city centres.

The Bureaux are staffed by trained volunteer advisers, paid support, specialist and management staff, and provide responses to client enquiries covering the whole range of social issues. Despite being a generalist service, most enquiries are concerned with matters related to problems of poverty and deprivation.

Bureaux are autonomous bodies under the control of a local Board of Trustees. All bureaux are members of Citizens Advice Scotland (The Scottish Association of CABx), and as such must meet specific conditions of membership related to standards of service and other matters.

Enquiries are across a wide range of fields, and clients expect high quality advice and assistance (including representation at tribunals and in Court when appropriate) on what are, at times, highly complex matters.

**Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau**

The Bureau has been providing an independent advice service in Hamilton since 1970. It currently operates from two offices: Regent Way in Hamilton Town Centre and Almada Tower in Almada Street, which is very close to the Sheriff Court and South Lanarkshire Council Offices. Both offices are close to railway stations and several bus routes.

The Bureau was incorporated as a company limited by guarantee in January 2010 and is a charity registered with the OSCR. Our work is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Hamilton CAB operating area includes Larkhall, Stonehouse, Blantyre, Bothwell & Uddingston. Some of our services have a wider geographical catchment – primarily the In-CourtLay Representation servicewhich covers the Hamilton and Lanark Sheriff Court areas.

Pre COVID 19 we operated both a drop-in at the Bureau and a responsive outreach service in 9 health and community settings as well as offering home visits where required. We have started to recover these services and are currently delivering outreaches in both Larkhall and Blantyre.

**The People**

Our Board of Trustees provide support for the Chief Officer and ensure the good governance of the organisation.

We currently have 26 volunteers, in various roles and stages of training. We participate in the employability schemes offering employment opportunities in advice and customer service. A team of 18 paid staff provide specialist advice and management support across the services. The Chief Officer has day-to-day operational management control within the agreed strategic and policy framework.

**Funding**

The Bureau has service level agreements in place with South Lanarkshire Council for core, money advice and child poverty related advice; the Scottish Legal Aid Board for the In-Court Lay Representation service; SL Health & Social Care Partnership fund the Health & Welfare Service; CAS fund welfare reform; SLC Alcohol & Drugs Partnership fund our Beacons Project. We have other smaller funded projects too. Total Income in 2022/2023 was just over £600,000.

**The Service**

We provide information, advice and representation in a wide range of areas including; social security benefits, housing, debt, employment, consumer, family and relationships, legal, health, utilities etc. In 2022-23 we provided advice to more than 3,900 people on just over 14,964 issues across 16 areas of law. In 2022/23, the top 5 advice areas were;

* Welfare benefits (30%)
* Debt (22%)
* Utilities & Communications (16%)
* Finance & Charitable Support (13%)
* Housing (6%)

We achieved accreditation to the Scottish National Standards for Information & Advice Providers in 2011 and were re-accredited in February 2023. We provide advice and representation to Type III level (representation in sheriff court and benefits tribunals) in housing, money and welfare benefits.

We normally operate a mix of drop-in, telephone advice and face to face appointments five days per week, with email and web enquiry options offering out of hours contact. The In-Court Lay Representation service provides advice and representation at mortgage repossession, eviction, Simple Procedure and sequestration court hearings and accepts referrals from five CABs, two local authorities and other public and third sector organizations. Our Health & Welfare Advice Hubs operate within health centres and alongside GP surgeries in the Hamilton area taking referrals from GPs and health practitioners.

Since March 2020 we have been primarily offering a triage service by telephone, email and web enquiry. Face to Face appointments have continued to be available as required. We have well established video and teleconference systems and try to adapt to individual preferences. Home Visits are offered on a risk assessed basis. All services operate within an organisation-wide rota.

**Strategic Planning & Development**

We launched our new Strategic Plan for 2023-2026 in March 2023 and our Chief Officer is responsible for taking this forward over the next three years.

**Generalist Service**

The team consists of volunteer Generalist Advisers with some volunteers working at Type II casework in social security benefits. We provide support for EU Nationals, ASAP (Armed Services Advice Project), PASS (Patient Advice and Support Service) and Pension Wise appointments.

The triage team and reception staff take initial enquires from the public. The team is managed by a Team Leader with operational management and quality of advice responsibility. This member of staff leads on volunteer recruitment and training and reports to the Chief Officer. There is also a part time Session Supervisor who provides coordination and session support 3.5 days per week.

**Money Advice Service**

A money advice caseworker takes referrals from the General Service. The money advice caseworker work closely with the In-Court Advice team and in particular the Money Advice Link Worker. The In-Court Team Leader will provide peer support and technical supervision.

**In-Court Advice Lay Representation**

The service has been operating in Hamilton Sheriff Court since 2004 with extension to Lanark Sheriff Court in 2012. Our work is highly regarded by Sheriffs and Sheriff Court staff with excellent working relationships. The In-Court Advice Team consists of a Team Leader / Lay Representative, 2 Lay Representatives, and a Money Advice Link Worker. The Service Co-ordinator provides casework and admin support.

The Team Leader post is currently vacant. We have had ongoing issues with recruiting someone into this role due to the short-term nature of the service’s funding. Currently, the TL of the Health and Welfare team is managing this team for 5hrs per week. Legal Services Agency (LSA) currently provide the caseworkers with legal advice and support for 2 hrs per week whilst the post remains vacant.

Funding for this service is currently only confirmed into June 2024 due to ongoing issues with Scottish Govt budget decisions. Referrals into this service are currently limited to emergencies that are considered on a case by case basis.

**Health & Welfare Team**

Set up in 2014 with National Lottery funding this service has developed over the past 10 years to provide targeted advice and representation for people living with long term physical and mental health conditions. A team leader manages the 2.5 caseworkers.

The team work closely with health and social care practitioners, community link workers, third sector organisations and a mix of self-referral, informal and formal referral arrangements are in place. The service is funded by SL Integrated Joint Board, NHS Lanarkshire until March 2025.

The workload is primarily social security benefits with some housing and health/community care enquiries and incudes complex and intensive casework and sometimes longer-term work with individuals.

**Beacons Project**

Set up in 2022 in partnership with The Beacons in Blantyre. Funding came initially from The Corra Foundation for one year, with additional match funding from South Lanarkshire Alcohol & Drugs Partnership to allow this to become a 2-year project. The project consists of two part-time peer support workers and a caseworker who are managed by the TL Health & Welfare.

The aim of this project is to help people in recovery from addiction get their benefits, money, utilities and other issues fixed so they can focus on the recovery process. The service has recently expanded to include The Beacons in East Kilbride and Lanark.

Funding is currently only secured until the end of May 2024.

**Energy Advice**

The caseworker deals with complex energy related issues, including billing and meter reading, energy debt, green deal mis-selling and energy efficiency measures. Referrals come from the Generalist Service, our specialist services and external agencies.

Funding for this service comes from various energy suppliers via Citizens Advice Scotland, with funding currently secured until March 2027.