



Citizens Advice Scotland Annual Report 2007/08





Together Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) and its member citizens advice bureaux make up the Scottish CAB Service. The service is independent and exists to provide free, confidential, impartial advice to everybody, regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, and sexual orientation; while using this experience to improve the policies and practice that affect people's lives.

CAS is the umbrella body for the Scottish CAB Service. We provide bureaux with essential help, support and infrastructure to ensure they remain at the heart of advice delivery in Scotland.

Chair's foreword

What a year it's been, for all of us.

We've seen some big changes in Scottish Government, nationally and locally, and the emergence of the economic conditions that we now know as the Credit Crunch.

At our AGM in 2007, I noted that, as we met, the Finance Minister was meeting with local authorities to achieve a concordat; the impact of that meeting and its implications for local government finance have already been felt in many bureaux, and will continue to impact in the year ahead. CAS has been working with bureaux to support their response to these developments.

Yet, in many ways, it's been business as usual for CAS in this constantly evolving environment. We've reached the end of one corporate planning cycle and have been busy preparing for a new phase of growth and development. We've maintained and even raised our high standards and continued to develop the range of services we deliver to bureaux and our other stakeholders, even as we've further tightened our belts. We've succeeded in extending the CAB Service to new locations and new groups of marginalised people. We've ensured that the voices of our clients have echoed

through the corridors of power in Holyrood and Westminster.

Behind every one of the many achievements we celebrate this year, there is a dedicated team of individuals working across Scotland. Without the tremendous commitment shown by those working in the Scottish CAB Service – as staff and volunteers, in bureaux and at CAS - we could not deliver what we do, and the nation would be much the poorer.

And now, together, we look to the future once again. The profound global economic uncertainties that seem likely to remain with us for some time yet will surely impact upon our work, as more people experience problems with debt, housing, employment, health – all kinds of problems, for all kinds of people. That's what we're here at CAS for – to help our member bureaux continue to deliver the essential free, confidential, independent and impartial advice and information service that is unrivalled in its depth and breadth. As long as there's a need, we hope to be there to help, and to keep looking for new ways to do that.

Graham K Blount
Chair



A fairer Scotland through quality advice

Since the CAB Service was founded in wartime Britain almost 70 years ago, we have been committed to achieving fairness for the people of Scotland.

Research has shown the positive impact of quality assured independent advice in tackling social and financial exclusion. We want to carry on helping to solve such major societal issues. However, we believe that bad advice can be worse than no advice, so ensuring bureaux deliver high quality advice is critical to the operation of the Service.

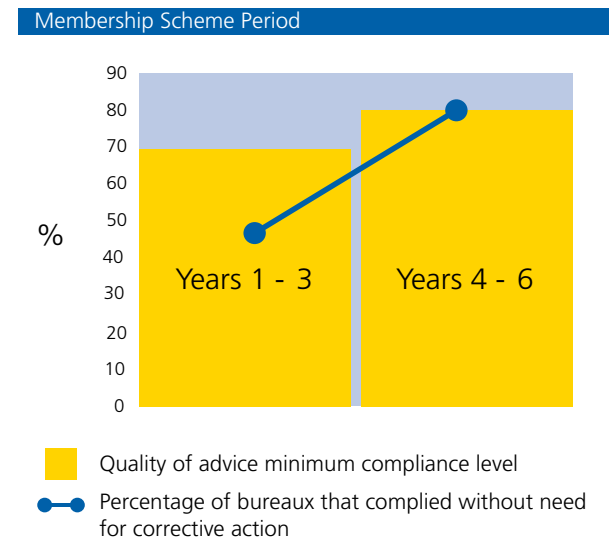
“You empower people who feel disenfranchised and over their heads in debt, and put them on the path to finding a way out, and taking control of their lives again.”

*Alex Salmond, First Minister
CAS conference, August 2008*

Membership Scheme Standards

Our commitment to continuous improvement is ongoing. Over two cycles of membership audits we have raised the standards with which bureaux are required to comply with – and our bureaux are meeting the challenge.

The graph (right) illustrates both our elevated standards and the huge improvements in first-time bureau compliance with these standards.



How CAS supported a quality advice service this year

Our structure allows for a flexible, versatile, local response to the needs of the communities in which bureaux are based. CAS regulates and supports this local variation in provision. This ensures that CAB advice is high quality, reliable and delivered in a professional manner, regardless of where in Scotland it is offered. We do this through a robust membership scheme and a support infrastructure that underpins Scottish bureaux.

In 2007/08, we accomplished what we set out to do in supporting a quality advice service. We raised our membership standards and, despite budgetary constraints, supported an increased number of member and probationary member bureaux in a variety of key ways.

Learning opportunities

To ensure that no adviser works beyond their competence, CAS provided a comprehensive competence based training framework for almost 2,500 paid staff and volunteers working in Scottish bureaux. We:

- increased our e-learning resources. We piloted the new materials (modules on benefits and the first stage of the Adviser Training Programme) with bureaux in the Highlands to ensure effective delivery and maximum benefit both there and in the rest of Scotland
- directly trained 829 people through 76 consistently well-received advice-related courses
- reviewed and updated 69 training units, tutor notes and other training materials which form the basis of the cascade training model used within the Scottish CAB Service
- enabled peer support through four regional days for tutors that were attended by the majority of bureaux
- secured funding from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to deliver human rights and discrimination training for bureaux.





Information

AdviserNet, our online information system, is the basic tool for the delivery of a quality assured national advice and information service. It is written, updated and maintained by CAS and our sister organisation, Citizens Advice (England and Wales). In 2007/08, CAS maintained the accuracy of AdviserNet by incorporating all of the relevant new legislation from the Scottish Parliament and Westminster. This involved:

- amendments relating to 18 separate pieces of legislation
- checking on a daily basis all amendments made by Citizens Advice (England and Wales) to AdviserNet and Adviceguide, our shared public information website, for any impact on the Scottish system
- answering all consultancy enquiries from bureaux and other users of AdviserNet within agreed timescales
- researching the information needs of kinship carers in Scotland to produce advice documents for CAB advisers. This forms the basis of a three-year project funded by Scottish Government which will launch to the general public in 2008/09.

Specialist support in advice giving

CAS provides specialist support using a variety of models, notably in the areas of money advice, housing, representation and issues relating to legal process and points of law. In 2007/08, our specialist support services experienced high levels of demand:

- 430 enquiries to the Money Advice Training Resource Information and Consultancy Service (MATRICS)
- 44 referrals to the Free Representation Unit (FRU) and 11 to the Free Legal Services Unit (FLSU), with all referrals taken on as cases by the Faculty of Advocates
- Law at Work, the legal consultancy service, reported 786 calls from bureaux – an increase of 60% on the previous year
- there were continuing high levels of demand for the Scottish Housing Advisory Service – over 100 contacts per month
- the Part V Legal Aid Office maintained productive relationships with bureaux in Highland, Western Isles and Moray, despite funding uncertainties.

Management of bureaux

Each bureau is an independent charity, responsible for its own management and accountable to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), CAS and the community it serves. CAS supports our member bureaux to ensure that they meet our standards of organisational management and comply with all legal obligations.

In 2007/08 we:

- supported bureaux in dealing with over a hundred staffing issues
- aided the recruitment of more than fifty new bureau staff
- attended over sixty bureau management committee meetings
- provided induction and training for new CAB managers and new committee members
- delivered a programme of management training to 176 participants
- created or revised almost 140 pages of bureau management information on Caslink, the Scottish CAB Service intranet
- assisted bureaux in coping with new priorities and procurement demands from local authorities and other funders

Quality assurance

The Scottish CAB Service has an absolute commitment to quality, and continues to raise and extend the standards we expect our member bureaux to achieve. This year, we:

- audited 21 bureaux
- provided coaching, training and ongoing support to eight bureaux with quality of advice non-compliances
- developed a model for the assessment of specialist level casework
- participated in the development of the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers and Signet Accreditation Scheme for solicitors
- participated in the National Occupational Standards for Legal Advice Steering Group, to ensure these standards are applicable in Scotland. This group will be developing qualification routes for CAB advisers across the range of subjects on which bureaux offer advice.



ICT infrastructure and support

Effective use of information and communications is vital to the delivery of a modern, high-quality advice service. Our ongoing commitment to implementing CASTLE, an electronic case management system, was progressed during the year through a Phase 2 pilot. The national rollout of CASTLE will commence in 2008/09.

Meanwhile, we provided our bureaux with a robust and reliable ICT infrastructure from which to deliver an excellent service. Our IT helpdesk experienced a 20% increase in demand from bureaux, handling a total of 2,989 calls. We also:

- introduced SPAM e-mail filtering for all bureaux
- introduced an online system to enable bureaux to book training with CAS, to go live next year
- completed a new version of the Statistics Program with the capacity to analyse outcome data - this will be superseded by CASTLE as part of our next development cycle
- completed parliamentary and social policy databases to enable improved information management and significantly enhance our policy and public affairs work.

What next?

Service developments in 2008/09 will include accelerating the programme of e-learning resource development, further infrastructure support for the national Kinship Care Advice and Information Service, piloting an assessment model for specialist casework and the roll-out of CASTLE, our electronic case management system.

“The Government greatly values the work Citizens Advice Scotland and individual Citizens Advice Bureaux carry out in major areas such as debt, welfare rights and employment.”

Anne McGuire MP, Minister for Disabled People



***“You are the
suffragettes
of decency.”***

William McIlvanney
Scottish author

A service with extended reach

In 2007/08, there were 58 Citizens Advice Bureau members of CAS, operating from 78 CAB offices and a total of 216 service points.

In the past four years:

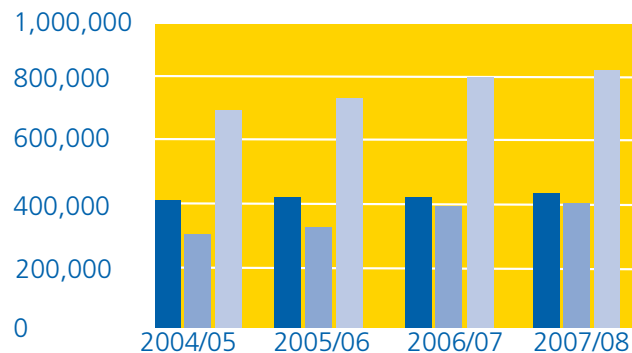
The number of enquiries brought to bureaux increased by 19% to 884,225. Complex work – issues requiring a number of contacts with the CAB – increased by 35% to 424,308 enquiries.

The five biggest single issues brought to Scottish bureaux have remained constant for four years in a row.

“Helping to lift people out of poverty, for example by ... enhancing the availability and quality of advice and information services; promoting benefit take-up to ensure that people entitled to benefits and tax credits maximise their incomes”

Taking Forward The Government Economic Strategy: A Discussion Paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation in Scotland, p9

enquiries



top five single new issues



How CAS extended the reach of the CAB Service this year

Managing the tensions in a dynamic funding and technological environment has been challenging this year. Despite this, CAS has undertaken a number of strands of activity to improve access to CAB services at national, regional and local levels.

We haven't achieved everything we set out to do. For example, progress was slower than planned with the exploration of the potential for CAB services in Inverclyde and South Ayrshire (the only two local authorities in Scotland currently without a CAB presence). A lack of funding hampered the roll-out of financial education projects.

However, with these two exceptions, CAS delivered all of our planned activities for the year. Particular highlights were:

New services

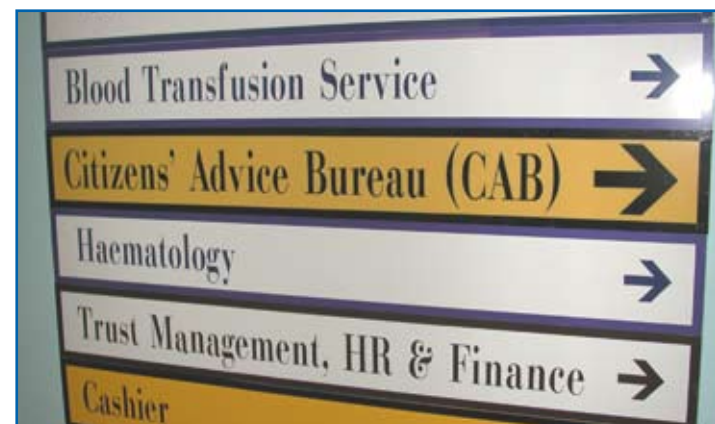
We supported:

- five independent agencies and two probationary member bureaux to work towards membership of the Association. This will result in a 10% increase in our membership
- the Independent Advice and Support Service (IASS), which became operational in most geographic Health Board areas. This service will be available across every Health Board in the next financial year.

Extension of existing services

We assisted with the establishment of:

- a benefit and advice service in Argyll
- a mediation service in Shetland
- a two year outreach project in Skye
- an advice service in Porterfield prison in Inverness
- a three-hub bureau in West Dunbartonshire.



Partnerships

We facilitated:

- a project between the Ethnic Minorities Law Centres in the Highlands, in North and South Lanarkshire, and in Edinburgh to tackle immigration and discrimination issues
- Lanarkshire CAB forum partnerships with voluntary and statutory agencies
- the roll-out of a Macmillan partnership in Fife to provide advice to people whose lives are affected by cancer
- the development of the CAB Service as a gateway to human rights and discrimination advice by working with the EHRC and Citizens Advice (England and Wales). Funding was secured for action research to support race and discrimination advice in rural areas, training in discrimination issues for bureau advisers and participation in the PROGRESS Towards Equality project
- Citizens Advice International (CAI) events that ensured the continued existence and development of CAI. CAI promotes world-wide the provision by independent non-governmental bodies of free, impartial and confidential advice and information to the public about their rights and responsibilities.

Funding

Over the four years of this corporate planning cycle, the total amount of funding to bureaux increased by 41% to £14,482,638*. 50.5% of this amount was core funding. This does not mean that all bureaux have benefited equally, as considerable disparities remain in the levels of CAB funding across the country.

Additionally, our membership has grown in this period, as has the number of offices and service points from which these members operate.

CAS works with bureaux to help secure additional resources nationally, regionally and locally.

In 2007/08, Scottish bureaux received direct grants totalling in excess of £1,347,000 through CAS. This includes:

- funds from the Scottish Government for a national advice service to Kinship Carers across Scotland
- funds from HMRC to increase benefits uptake
- a Fuel Poverty Innovation Fund, working with Citizens Advice (England and

Wales) and Scottish and Southern Energy, for bureaux wishing to undertake work with people in, or at risk of, fuel poverty.

We also assisted bureaux with over 60 requests for identifying and applying for funding, and 18 bureaux, including Citizens Advice Direct, with their negotiations for core funding.

*based on information supplied by 56 out of 58 member bureaux. The true total will therefore be higher.

Working with our stakeholders

We implemented a local government election strategy that included post-election induction meetings with new councillors and a regular e-newsletter for local authority elected members and officers.

We also provided bureaux with briefings on local outcome agreements and assistance with best value reviews.

We engaged extensively with our stakeholders to shape the 2008/11 Corporate Plan which was approved at our Annual General Meeting in November 2007.

We delivered an exceptional Annual Conference with the First Minister, Alex Salmond, and William McIlvanney as keynote speakers.

What next?

We submitted an application to the Big Lottery Fund for a Volunteer Support Team that aims to recruit hard-to-reach volunteers and improve recruitment and retention of volunteers within bureaux across the country. A decision is expected on this application in September 2008.

Other development priorities include the delivery of advice services to kinship carers and exploration of advice services for veterans and for people with long term limiting illnesses.



Making a difference

Campaigning for change takes time, patience and lots of hard work. This year we saw many of our efforts come to fruition with some notable achievements of which we can be proud. Successes achieved include:

[Concessions on LILA regulations](#)

As a direct result of CAS campaigning, a new route to bankruptcy for people in receipt of low income and an with low assets was introduced in April 2008. In announcing the scheme, Fergus Ewing, the Minister for Community Safety, said that: “this government has listened to the views of Citizens Advice Scotland who say that over a thousand people across Scotland with low income and assets desperately need a new way to find relief from their debt”.

[A commitment from Scottish Government to reverse land attachments](#)

After a year of campaigning against the introduction of land attachments for people’s homes, we were pleased when Alex Salmond, the First Minister, announced at our conference: “During that debate [Stage 3 of the Bankruptcy & Diligence (Scotland) Act], the SNP and others opposed the land attachment – and it was on the basis of briefings from

CAS that we based our arguments...Our commitment remains to exempt the main dwellinghouse from land attachment”.

[Raising the small claims limit](#)

In September, the Justice Minister Kenny McAskill announced an increase in small claims limits from £750 to £3,000 – the first rise in 19 years. CAS had campaigned for reforms to the system over a number of years, including an increase in the limit to £3,000.

[A new customer liaison position at HBOS](#)

As a result of our meetings to raise issues concerning bank practices, this year HBOS appointed a Money Management Liaison Manager to act as a focal point for issues brought forward by CAS and by bureau advisers.

[Justice Minister support for amending the prescriptive period for community charge](#)

We met with the Justice Minister, Kenny McAskill, to discuss our forthcoming briefing sheet on community charge. He provided support to our proposal to review the prescriptive periods which allow this defunct tax and council tax to be collected for periods of twenty years. We will be taking this proposal forward in the next financial year.

[An early day motion in Westminster on improving utilities complaint handling](#)

In January, 51 MPs supported an early day motion lodged at Westminster in relation to our briefing sheet on problems with gas and electricity suppliers. The motion called on the UK Government to increase pressure on Ofgem and the industry to improve complaints handling.

[Debt Arrangement Scheme amendments](#)

As a result of our campaigning, the current Debt Arrangement Scheme (DAS) was amended from June 2007 to incorporate the freezing of interest and charges throughout the DAS term. This is a major improvement and has resulted in many more people in debt being able to access the scheme. We will continue to campaign for further reforms to include debt relief, allowing even greater access for CAB debt clients.

[Post Office access criteria policy reversal](#)

Following a joint submission from CAS and Citizens Advice (England & Wales), the UK Government reversed its policy on access criteria, thus giving protection to 38 extra postcode districts which had originally been excluded, 37 of which were in Scotland. This meant that rural areas in Scotland would be afforded the same protections as the rest of the UK.

How CAS exercised its influence this year

CAS is recognised by our stakeholders as making an invaluable contribution to the development of fair policies and practices. We present the experiences of bureau clients to policymakers and make suggestions on how improvements could be made – to benefit our clients and to make our country fairer for everyone.

Some of the ways in which we made an impact with our social policy work in 2007/08 were:

Briefing sheets

We produce concise, two-page briefings for use in a variety of contexts that are suitable for a range of different stakeholders. This year, notable briefing sheets included:

Community Charge

CAS highlighted concerns about the Scottish debt collection system for local authorities that allows debts for community charge and council tax to continue almost indefinitely. Focusing on community charge, bureaux reported of nineteen year old debts being pursued, often with little warning. CAS called for a review of the

debt collection period that can be applied for local taxes.

Gas and electricity

we published a briefing demonstrating that power companies continue to cause misery for CAB clients through inaccurate billing, punitive debt recovery and inadequate complaints handling.

Consultation responses

CAS regularly responds to Government consultations on both reserved and devolved matters. This year, notable submissions included:

Low Income Low Assets

In June, we responded to a consultation on a new route into bankruptcy for clients in receipt of low incomes and with few assets. Our response highlighted the problems that some of our clients face due to debt they cannot repay, and an inability to access bankruptcy as a way of resolving this. We were pleased to see that many of our views were taken on board with the introduction of The Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act 1985 (Low Income, Low Asset Debtors

etc) Regulations 2008, although we will be monitoring this over the next financial year.

Welfare reform

Our consultation response to the DWP's Green Paper *In work better off: Next steps to full employment* highlighted concerns about proposals to move certain groups of lone parents from income support to jobseeker's allowance. CAS also submitted a joint response to the Green Paper, as part of our ongoing work with the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform.

The Social Fund

CAS submitted written evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee's one-off evidence session on the subject, describing the problems CAB clients and advisers face in terms of access to and administration of the fund. Our views were well represented in the Committee's report, and our briefing gained both print and broadcast media coverage.

Partnership working

We work with a range of organisations to effect change and exercise a responsible influence on policy in the UK and beyond. Some of our key collaborations this year have been:

[Citizens Advice \(England and Wales\)](#)

CAS undertook partnership working with Citizens Advice (England & Wales) on the issue of rogue employers. A joint report was published, *Rooting out the Rogues*, which highlighted why vulnerable employers and good employers would both benefit from a fair employment commission. This was also submitted as a response to the TUC's Commission on Vulnerable Employment consultation.

[Department for Work and Pensions \(DWP\)](#)

We continued to work in partnership with the DWP, building on the progress we have jointly made over recent years. In addition to regular liaison meetings, CAS Chair Graham Blount was invited to give the opening address at the DWP's Annual Scottish Forum in November 2007, and a Jobcentre Plus representative attended CAS's annual social policy conference to

highlight how benefit problems have been raised and resolved using our feedback mechanisms.

[Accountant in Bankruptcy \(AiB\)](#)

Throughout the last year, we have worked closely with the Accountant in Bankruptcy – the Scottish Government division responsible for debt collection (diligence) policy. As a result of our joint work, we were able to influence the new low income low asset provisions – in particular ensuring that income levels would be set high enough to benefit CAB clients. In addition, as a result of our influence the Debt Arrangement Scheme was amended in June to allow for freezing of interest and charges, thus widening the scheme to benefit more people.

[UK Credit Options Conference](#)

In May, we held the second UK Credit Options Conference, in conjunction with Debt on our Doorstep and the European Coalition for Responsible Credit. The aim was to explore the drivers behind over-indebtedness and the initiatives designed to combat it. The conference provided

a forum for a wide range of delegates from private, public and voluntary sectors to hear and take part in discussions led by the major players in their field. The conference's keynote address was given by the Minister for Communities in his first public engagement.

[Administrative justice](#)

CAS was invited to sit on the Administrative Justice Steering Group reporting to the Scottish Government on the administrative justice framework in Scotland.

[Central heating](#)

An inquiry into fuel poverty was called for by thirteen organisations, including Citizens Advice Scotland, over concerns that current policy was insufficient to meet the 2016 target for eradication of fuel poverty. This led to the Local Government and Communities Committee accepting the call and conducting an inquiry, to which we submitted evidence. The inquiry is ongoing.

Oral evidence

We are frequently asked to give evidence to parliamentary committees in Holyrood and Westminster. Two notable instances this year were:

Scottish Affairs Select Committee

Early in the summer of 2007, CAS gave evidence alongside Easterhouse CAB to the Scottish Affairs Committee, when it visited Govan as part of its ongoing inquiry into poverty in Scotland, with a particular focus on debt. Our evidence was referenced four times in the final report, influencing a key recommendation in relation to debt that “more action on irresponsible lending is necessary...”. In March 2008, we were invited to give evidence on debt to the same Committee’s inquiry into credit unions.

Social Security Advisory Committee

In June 2007, CAS was invited to make a presentation to the Social Security Advisory Committee on current benefit issues. Supported by the manager of Perth CAB, we focused on problems experienced by CAB clients and advisers in relation to Jobcentre Plus and sickness & disability benefits.

What next?

We will continue our campaigning social policy work. Research priorities next year will include debt, older people, migrant workers and fuel poverty.



Treasurer's report

The Association publishes full formal accounts as prescribed by law and other guidance relating to charities. The level of detail in the accounts can confuse readers unfamiliar with formal accounts. Consequently, this short report is intended as a more readily understandable summary of the Association's finances. A full set of accounts can, however, be obtained from: CAS, Spectrum House, 2 Powderhall Road, Edinburgh, EH7 4GB.

Income

Income for the year was £5.5 million (2006/07: £3.9 million). Citizens Advice Scotland is grateful for the significant and continued support from BERR (formerly the DTI) which provided a grant of £2.9 million to fund core activities.

The Association continues to seek additional sources of funds, in addition to the grant-in-aid, to finance other projects and relevant activities. During the year, a total of £2.2 million was received (2006/07: £616,000) including £1.4 million from the Scottish Government to fund a number of projects in areas such as kinship care, money advice, financial education, health support and the national roll out of an electronic case recording system.

Expenditure

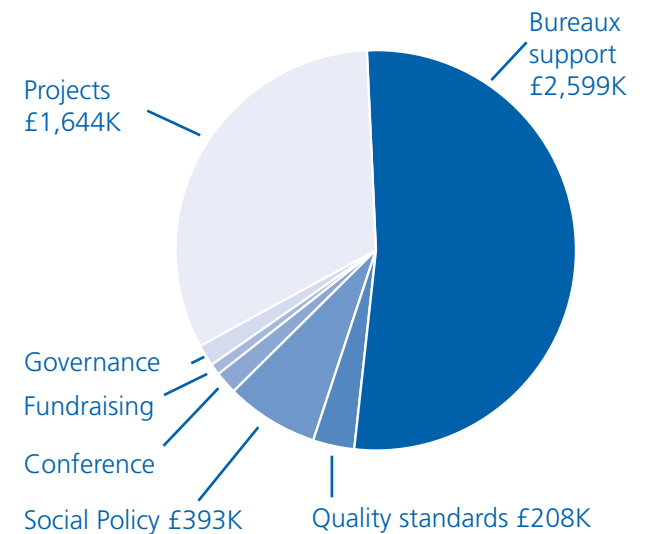
Total expenditure in the year was £5.0 million (2006/07: £4.3 million).

Core expenditure on services including support to bureaux, the audit and setting of quality standards and social policy work was £3.3 million (2006/07: £3.5 million). It continues to be monitored closely, in order to ensure that expenditure remains within budget despite pressures from inflation and the growth in bureau numbers. A small fund was established to allow the organisation to take forward strategic developments.

Approximately 20% of the Association's core income from the BERR is spent in local service developments through the award of grants to its member bureaux in order to support the cost of new bureaux and to improve and maintain existing bureaux. In the current year, grants of £628,903 were awarded.

Expenditure on projects was £1.6 million. Project funds arise when money is granted to the Association or set aside by the directors for a particular purpose. Such funds are kept separately and can only be used for the purpose specified by the donor or directors. A significant proportion

of these funds was distributed to bureaux under the Financial Education project (£235,324) the Kinship Care Advice and Information project (£348,000), the Migrant Workers project (£70,718) and the HMRC Tax Credit project (£53,000). Progress continues to be made on the Money Advice, Blended Learning and NHS Health Support projects.



Reserves

At the year end, the Association had general reserves of £736,661. Free reserves represent two months operating expenditure. In addition, the Association has funds of £1.3 million which have been received for, and which are committed to, specific projects.

CAS board and management

Management Team

Kaliani Lyle
Chief Executive Officer

Susan McPhee
Head of Social Policy and Public Affairs

Annabelle Ridley
Head of Training

David Brownlee
Head of Field Services

David Finlay
Human Resources Manager

Calum Coulter
IT Manager

Seonaid Fowler
Finance Manager

Elizabeth Sykes
Head of Information

Board of Directors

The CAS Board is elected annually.
Serving members in 2007/08 are:

Graham Blount [†] Chair
Dominic Notarangelo [†] Vice Chair
Brian Evans [°] Treasurer
Peter Boyd ^Σ Treasurer

Margaret Burgess [†] Mary Kinninmonth ^{*}
Alasdair Christie ^{*} Tom Leggate [†]
Duncan Dennett [°] George Lochrie [°]
Gloria Fleming [†] George MacDonald [†]
Kirsteen Gunnion [†] George MacKenzie [†]
Sam Hewitt [†] Irene Mungall [†]
Bob Irving ^{*} David Ogston ^{*}
Rosaleen Kavanagh [†] George Russell ^{*}
Gavin Kenny [†] Len Scott [†]

* elected 8th November 2007
† re-elected 8th November 2007
° served until 8th November 2007
Σ served as Board member until 8th November 2007, when elected as Treasurer

Citizens Advice Scotland

Spectrum House
2 Powderhall Road
Edinburgh
EH7 4GB

Tel 0131 550 1000
Fax 0131 550 1001
email info@cas.org.uk
website www.cas.org.uk



