
Citizens Advice Scotland



Corporate Plan

2008 / 2011

About Citizens Advice Scotland

Together Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) and its member bureaux make up the CAB service in Scotland. The service is independent and exists to provide free, confidential, impartial advice to everybody, regardless of race, gender, disability, religion or sexuality; while using this experience to influence the development of social policies and services.

Bureaux provide advice to individuals through a national network of CAB offices. Over 2,000 volunteers in some 70 offices deal with three quarters of a million clients every year on a wide range of issues, the top five of which are around Benefits, Debt, Employment, Housing, and Consumer problems. This includes, for example, working to help clients manage over £200 million worth of personal debt. The amount of money gained for clients by bureaux (for example in back-dated benefits) is over £50 million a year – more than four times the total funding which all bureaux receive.

The role of CAS is to:

- provide a range of services, advice and support to member bureaux in their work to meet the needs of existing and potential clients. This includes information systems, training, management consultancy, and IT support
- set quality standards, and audit bureaux' compliance with these standards
- be the voice of the CAB service in Scotland and its clients, achieving changes in public policy, and promoting and positioning the service so that it has the support and recognition it needs to put across its case as effectively as possible.

More information about CAS and the service, including the latest CAS Annual Report, is available at www.cas.org.uk.

Introduction

The impressive results from last year's MORI survey show that the Scottish public, and other organisations, trust the CAB service to deliver accurately the advice they need, and they respect the values that underpin our work. This gives us the confidence to address the challenges ahead, as outlined in this plan, secure in the knowledge that the service has a strong record in evolving successfully, while holding firm to our core values.

The CAB service exists to meet the needs of our varied groups of clients, needs which are not only growing, but getting more complex. And we know that there is unmet need for advice, so improving access to the service is something we have to address.

In order that bureaux can focus on advice-giving, and representing the voice of clients, CAS will work with them on the key issues of getting stable and adequate funding, and resolving the support and management issues posed by the increasing use of IT.

A key challenge for CAS is to keep a balance between continuing, and building on, the core services which we know meet bureaux', and clients', needs; while working with bureaux to introduce new developments in response to the changing world. This plan gives the framework to take us forward with that balance.

The plan is the product of six months' consultation with bureaux, as well as the external organisations that we work with. I would like to thank all who contributed their ideas and comments, and those who translated these into the clarity we now have in the plan.

Discussions with other organisations during the consultation process towards this plan have underlined the value that they attach to the CAB service. The process has also deepened our understanding that the external environment continues to change, and so CAS (and bureaux) must adapt to this. The plan has been prepared in a period of change and uncertainties: in the political landscape; over the future shape and direction of advice services; and over funding. This period offers opportunities for the service to secure its position, and funding – especially if we are prepared to be open, and positive, in working with others.

I hope all who are concerned for the well-being of the CAB service and its clients will recognise the potential and the challenges that are here, so that we can build the way forward together. Any plan relies on people to deliver it; I'm confident we have the people – in CAS and in bureaux, as staff and as volunteers – to work together to get us there.

Graham K Blount
Chair.

Principles of the plan

1. **A client-focused plan** – we are led by the needs of bureau clients, and give equal importance to the twin aims of providing advice services, and influencing social policy.
2. **A working partnership** – the plan shows how the combined efforts of bureaux and CAS are addressing the needs of the client.
3. **One size does not fit all** – the plan accepts different delivery models of support to bureaux, depending on the local context: bureaux vary considerably in size, resourcing and local environment.
4. **Maintaining adequate core services** - recognising that much of our work over the next Plan period will be in a tighter funding environment, it will be important to decide and focus on priorities in order to optimise the use of limited resources.
5. **Ensuring best value** – being able to demonstrate that we use resources efficiently and effectively to provide a quality service.

How this plan is structured

The Plan comprises five equal **Goals** to move towards, fulfilling the **Aims** of the service. The first three Goals focus on the direct work of CAS in supporting bureaux, and influencing social policy; while Goals four and five underpin the other three, and are necessary to enable progress towards Goals one to three. The three main Goals (one to three) are effectively aspirational and 'timeless'. CAS is likely to retain them in future plans.

For each Goal, there are sections providing:

- **Context:** this encapsulates the main issues to emerge from the various consultations with bureaux, external stakeholders, and staff
- **Corporate Objectives:** what we will achieve to get towards a Goal
- **Key Activities** to be carried out during the plan period in order to help us reach an Objective.

The Key Activities listed are not exhaustive, nor listed in any particular order, and may change during the course of the plan period if circumstances change. Some Activities will contribute to more than one Objective. The plan is intended to set a direction for the service, and establish objectives for CAS. As such, it builds on, and includes, existing CAS services which are essential to the operation of bureaux.

Each Goal has **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs), which are key elements which will be monitored and measured (or otherwise assessed) in order to determine the degree of progress towards a Goal. The KPIs are currently **under development**, and will be completed before the start of the plan period.

The wider environment

The following sections of this plan provide Context statements in which each of the five goals is placed. More generally, there are key aspects of the wider environment which should be understood when reading this plan.

In 2006, the DTI carried out a Zero-Based Review of both CAS, and Citizens Advice England and Wales, in order to consider how the CAB service can best meet client needs, and the challenges of the future, (including being able to demonstrate Best Value). The recommendations of that Review have contributed to the shaping of the plan.

This Corporate Plan has been prepared during a period of significant uncertainty in the external environment. The outcome of the Treasury's Comprehensive Spending Review, which will apply to the plan period, may well impact on CAS's core grant-in-aid income.

There are political uncertainties, with a new party landscape in Scotland both nationally and locally. The implications of this for the service are still to emerge, but divergence in the policy agendas in Westminster and Holyrood may increase, generating further complexities which the service will have to address. Constitutionally, in Scotland there are discussions on choosing Scotland's future, while there is also the UK government's interest in reviewing the governance of Britain; both offer opportunities for CAS to offer its views on the challenges of navigating the responsibilities, policies and legislation of the two jurisdictions.

The strategic direction for the delivery of legal advice in Scotland is at present unclear. More generally, there is a developing framework of Local Outcome Agreements, and Community Planning Partnerships, through which advice services will be expected to operate. Such developments will have implications for the future shape of the CAB service, and it may well be that the service is expected to work more closely with other advice providers, both locally and nationally.

The 2006 Varney Report on Service Transformation, while directed to the public sector, has lessons for the service; and has led to government stakeholders initiating discussions around, for example, the greater use of telephone, and web channels for delivering information and advice, in the context of government departments rationalising their own services. This is related to addressing the volume of unmet need for advice; the changing expectations of citizens; and the varieties of technologies which some clients may prefer to use. Any such diversification should develop channels in ways that give primacy to meeting the information and advice needs of clients.

For both bureaux and CAS, funders and other stakeholders are increasingly requiring, or requesting, a variety of data around performance, outcomes, statistical patterns, and evidence on clients' experience of legislation and social policy. We know that existing systems constrain our ability to deliver this as well as we might. The implementation of an electronic case management system would address this, as well as delivering significant other benefits around better case management, and more efficient quality assurance. Such an implementation would be a major change project for the service. But if the service cannot introduce a new case system in this plan period, then bureaux, and CAS, will be struggling to meet the expectations which stakeholders, quite reasonably, hold.

Such are the challenges, pressures, and opportunities that surround CAS and the CAB service. But in considering them, the driver for the plan must be, constantly, addressing the needs of the client, guided by CAB principles.

Summary

Principles of the Service

Free service; Confidentiality; Impartiality; Independence; Accessibility; Effectiveness; Community Accountability; The clients right to decide; Voluntary service; Empowerment; Information Retrieval; A generalist service

Aim of the CAB Service (CAS & bureaux)

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

Goal 1

To support bureaux to meet the advice and advocacy needs of as many people as possible, while making sure that those in greatest need get the personalised support they require.

Goal 2

To ensure the service offers quality advice

Goal 3

To work for social policy change at local, national and UK levels to address the underlying causes of the problems our clients face.

Goal 4

To develop a coherent service while supporting a wealth of different local solutions.

Goal 5

To secure, focus and manage resources in achievement of the Aims and other Goals.

Goal 1

To support bureaux to meet the advice and advocacy needs of as many people as possible, while making sure that those in greatest need get the personalised support they require.

Context

The unmet need for advice in Scotland is continuing to grow. In addition there is an increasing complexity in the issues that are presented to advisers in bureaux. Clients often bring a wide range of issues that require complex routes to solutions – and they need to be supported in finding a way through the advice maze. At the same time new technologies are enabling us to help a wider group of advice seekers find their own solutions. We must find the balance between helping as many people as we can, while having a personalised approach which provides a face to face service for those for whom that is essential. And this needs to be balanced against the second goal of ensuring a quality service. All this is occurring at a time of tightening budgets.

Goal 1 Corporate Objectives

What we want to achieve by 2011 is:

- 1.1 A citizens advice service that has integrated different methods of delivering information and advice, and continues to explore new ways of delivering its service
- 1.2 A service that continues to promote social inclusion and diversity
- 1.3 More accessible distribution of advice provision across Scotland, with standards maintained, and improved
- 1.4 More effective partnerships with other appropriate agencies, including other advice providers, locally, regionally, and nationally; and using frameworks such as Community Planning Partnerships where appropriate
- 1.5 Increased public awareness of the CAB service
- 1.6 An efficient CAB service.

Key Activities to support the achievement of Goal 1:

- Widen the geographic reach of the CAB service in Scotland
- Work with bureaux to develop and implement an integrated access strategy which responds to clients' needs in a variety of ways, for example: face-to-face; telephone; e-mail, web - with a particular consideration for those people in greatest need

- Seek and focus resources on becoming a gateway to human rights and discrimination advice, and the services of the Commission for Equality and Human Rights
- Carry out a programme of development to target disadvantaged groups
- Seek additional resources to enable us to focus on the review and development of money services, which include debt advice, financial education work, and generic financial advice
- Identify and address emerging areas of advice need
- Develop models for more efficient service delivery by bureaux
- Increase the amount of public information, with improved access to, and awareness of, it
- Maintain and develop new areas for partnership working
- Develop bureaux' engagement with e-government services
- Identify opportunities offered by technological change to provide increased access to information and advice.

Draft Key Performance Indicators

- % of clients satisfied with quality of service received
- % of clients satisfied with type of service received
- Number of issues raised by clients
- Number of clients from each equality profile group
- Narrative reporting of research studies into the impacts of specific areas of advice work.

Goal 2

To ensure the service offers quality advice.

Context

Over the past years the service worked hard to ensure quality-assured advice is given to clients, through focussed support services from CAS. We will continue to embed and support these services. CAS will work to continuously improve the services it offers to bureaux.

However the quality of advice across the whole advice sector is variable. Over the next plan period we aim to share our learning about quality assurance with other agencies in the field, so that bureaux can be confident that if clients are referred to them, they will be guaranteed good quality advice. There are increasing expectations that organisations should engage positively with others, where this best meets the needs of the client group. We can learn from others where they have experience we can benefit from. We will also continue to develop our own standards to fit with other standards being developed within the sector (such as the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers), searching for the best value solution for both bureaux and clients.

The last plan period saw bureaux' dependence on IT increase significantly, and managing this is a major challenge for bureaux. It is important to ensure that CAS provides a range of support services that addresses this.

Goal 2 Corporate Objectives

What we want to achieve by 2011 is:

- 2.1 High quality support services and products for bureaux, including the implementation of an electronic case management system
- 2.2 Sufficient volunteers trained to meet the level of client demand
- 2.3 An enhanced Membership Scheme, externally recognised by relevant partners as being aligned with the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers
- 2.4 Speedier resolution to client problems through systems established for more efficient working with external partners, for example referral protocols
- 2.5 Strengthened bureau governance.

Key Activities to support the achievement of Goal 2:

- Address the IT management and support issues experienced by bureaux
- Implement an electronic case management system
- Develop new models to increase bureau recruitment, training and retention of volunteers
- Provide support for member bureaux in their management, and governance
- Maintain and further develop the information system to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of bureau advisers and their clients
- Complete a programme of blended learning for adviser training
- Play a leading role in the further development of initiatives to ensure quality standards are in place across the advice sector; thus encouraging referrals and partnership working where appropriate
- Provide effective intervention to support bureaux in difficulties
- Develop and implement a strategy for specialist support
- Produce and pilot an enhanced Membership Scheme, and negotiate with other organisations to ensure that it is recognised as equivalent to all other relevant quality assurance schemes
- Negotiate new protocols with other organisations (for example access to special telephone hotlines)
- Develop a continuous improvement model at CAS.

Draft Key Performance Indicators

- Number and % of bureaux improving their rating of the current Membership Standards
- Number and % of non-compliances in bureaux with current Membership Standards
- % of all cases audited that comply with Membership Scheme criteria
- Number and % of bureaux satisfied with the effectiveness of support received from CAS.

Goal 3

To work for social policy change at local, national and UK levels to address the underlying causes of the problems which clients face.

Context

Since devolution the service has had to ensure that it is influencing the development of policy in Scotland, as well as UK and local council levels. At a UK level CAS will continue to influence reserved issues, which includes our joint work with Citizen Advice England and Wales, and the Northern Ireland Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NIACAB). At a national level CAS will continue to build contacts and lobby the Scottish government and COSLA on devolved issues. At a local level CAS will support bureaux in building relationships with local councils, and promoting the value of the service.

Goal 3 Corporate Objectives

What we want to achieve by 2011 is:

- 3.1 A CAB service that has a continuing influence on determining public policy at a national and local level
- 3.2 Recognition of the CAB service's role in effecting change
- 3.3 All bureaux in Scotland engaged in influencing public policy
- 3.4 CAS and bureaux used as an authoritative and impartial source of comment.

Key Activities to support the achievement of Goal 3:

- Produce evidence-based publications on reserved, and devolved matters; in order to both influence and set government policy agendas
- Influence legislation, policy direction and practice through a range of mechanisms
- Use client evidence to highlight emerging areas of public interest and concern
- Influence policy and practices through building relationships with key people in private companies
- Increase the service's capability to gather useful and accurate data necessary to influence social policy at local, national and UK levels, through the introduction of an electronic case management system and associated data analysis capability
- Develop work with Citizens Advice England and Wales, and NIACAB, to ensure that the Scottish perspective on relevant UK issues is heard

- Increase influence on government and other policy makers through building relationships with partner organisations, for example Money Advice Scotland, Ethnic Minorities Law Centre, or Shelter
- Position the service as a key influencer and commentator on social and public policy.

Draft Key Performance Indicators

Level of awareness among stakeholders of CAS/CAB influence in effecting change in social justice and consumer public policies

- Narrative reporting of:
 - major CAS and national policies in which the impact of bureaux and CAS was directly influential
 - assessment of contribution to policy development
 - positive quoting of the CAB service as playing a key role in driving towards social justice in Scotland.

Goal 4

To develop a coherent service, while supporting a wealth of different local solutions.

Context

Over recent years there has been considerable change in how local authorities are funding, or are proposing to fund, advice provision. Consequently, there is a variety of models being proposed and implemented at bureau level, with one key trend being a shift away from core funding to project funding – and monies being tied to specific uses. There is a major concern that inadequate and insecure core funding is affecting the fundamental principle of providing free, generalist advice to all. In periods of change, effective internal communication, and consultation, is critical, and bureaux have raised concerns in this area. Over the plan period CAS should continue to support bureau applications to secure core funding; support bureaux in proving the value of our generalist advice service through increased accountability and outcome reporting; and through using evidence based lobbying, improve further the service's reputation with key stakeholders.

In recognising the changes that are occurring, and in supporting bureaux as they manage them, a 'One size fits all' approach is no longer appropriate. CAS needs to tailor support to fit the differing local contexts.

Whilst there may be a wealth of local solutions, it is necessary that the service works together so we can better engage with funders, decision-makers, and partner advice organisations. This means promoting greater synergy between CAS and bureaux, so that the development strategies of the network, and the advice service delivery priorities of bureaux, are mutually understood, and agreed and supported for optimum impact.

Goal 4 Corporate Objectives

What we want to achieve by 2011 is:

- 4.1 Stable core funding for bureaux which is adequate for the needs of their communities
- 4.2 Increased involvement of the membership in emerging strategies or new developments
- 4.3 Improved communication within the service
- 4.4 Improved consultation by CAS with bureaux
- 4.5 Increased internal understanding of the impact of the service as a whole
- 4.6 Consistent communication with external audiences to promote the value and impact of the service

4.7 The CAB service positioned in a leading role in the development of advice services in Scotland.

Key Activities to support the achievement of Goal 4:

- Review and implement a strategy to negotiate and secure new resources for bureaux
- Improve methods of CAS's consultation with bureaux
- Produce and implement an internal communications strategy
- Redevelop Caslink intranet
- Implement a strategy for better evaluation of the service's impact
- Free up bureaux to deliver advice (by reducing the demands which CAS makes on bureaux; and provide more support services directly, where appropriate)
- Develop the service's capability for sharing best practice; and CAS's role in facilitating the service's development through the introduction of relevant experience from elsewhere
- Produce, with bureaux, national and regional development strategies.

Draft Key Performance Indicators

Narrative report on CAS national services and partnership working

- Additional resources (financial and non-financial) secured for bureau
- Bureau satisfaction with CAS/Bureau relations
- Level of stakeholder satisfaction with relationships with CAS.

Goal 5

To secure, manage & focus resources in achievement of the Aims and other goals.

Context

To achieve the other goals, CAS needs to ensure that it has sufficient resources in place, and targeted at the right areas to meet these challenges. This includes securing the CAS core budget; having a well trained and supported workforce; operating a prudent budgeting process which focuses constantly on value for money; and developing IT systems to support changing organisational needs.

Goal 5 Corporate Objectives

What we want to achieve by 2011 is:

- 5.1 Sufficient core grant-in-aid secured from central government
- 5.2 The continuity of a highly skilled and motivated workforce at CAS, matched to the service's operational needs
- 5.3 Additional resources secured including non-central government funds, and new revenue streams
- 5.4 Prudent financial management and efficient administrative systems, backed by comprehensive procedures designed to ensure best value.

Key Activities to support the achievement of Goal 5:

- Maintain good working relationship with government, especially central government funder(s), and Scottish government, to maximise grant funding
- Carry out internal audit investigations (through the Audit and Finance Committee) into key areas each year
- Maintain Investors in People accreditation
- Maintain CAS Information Technology (IT) infrastructure, and develop it to meet changing needs
- More concentrated focus on fundraising
- Complete changes to the staff appraisal scheme to meet better the needs of the organisation

- Develop more flexible ways of working, in a way which also enhances staff development
- Review infrastructure/property costs in order to reduce cost base
- Work with Citizens Advice England and Wales to identify efficiencies and savings
- Plan and implement the process for developing Corporate Plan 2012 / 2015.

Draft Key Performance Indicators

- Spend against budget
- Efficiency of operations
- Additional resources secured for CAS operations
- Outcome of CAS staff satisfaction survey.