**Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau**

**Background Information**

**The Organisation**

Citizens Advice Bureaux are the major providers of information, advice and assistance, operating from 219 service points that cover 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 clients' 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 or 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. The main enquiries at the present time relate to problems with social security and money; housing; goods and services; employment; and family and personal situations.

**Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau**

The Bureau has been providing an independent advice service in Hamilton since 1970. While not being in the Town Centre, the Bureau is very close to the Sheriff Court, the Jobcentre Plus and South Lanarkshire Council Offices. It is close to several bus routes and a few minutes walk from Hamilton West Railway Station.

The Bureau became an incorporated 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 Projectwhich covers the Hamilton and Lanark Sheriff Court areas and our Health Hubs operate in five centres across Hamilton & Clydesdale.

We operate from three bases: the Bureau which is our registered office; Cadzow Street in Hamilton where most of our caseworkers and management staff are based and we also provide a full-time service from our office within Birnie House at Hamilton Sheriff Court. We operate a both a drop-in at the Bureau and a responsive outreach service in health and community settings as well as offering home visits where required.

**The People**

Our Board of Trustees provide support for the Bureau Manager and ensure the good governance of the organisation.

We currently have 23 volunteer advisers. A group of 10 volunteers are in the first stage of the Adviser Training Programme. We participate in the Community Jobs Scotland Scheme offering employment opportunities to young people in advice and customer service. A team of 18 paid staff provide specialist advice and management support across the services. The Manager has day-to-day operational management control within the agreed strategic and policy framework.

We operate within Investor in Volunteer Standards.

**Funding**

The Bureau has service level agreements in place with South Lanarkshire Council for core and money advice services; the Scottish Legal Aid Board for the In-Court Lay Representation service; SL Health & Social Care Partnership fund the Health Hubs; CAS fund welfare reform and energy advice work. Total Income in 2017/18 was just over £473,000.

**The Service**

We provide information, advice and representation in a wide range of areas: social security benefits, housing, debt, employment, consumer, family and relationships, legal, health, utilities etc. In 2018-19 we provided advice to more than 3,300 people on almost 14,000 issues across 15 areas of law. Social security benefits are about 33% of our workload with legal issues, housing and debt the other key areas.

We achieved accreditation to the Scottish National Standards for Information & Advice Providers in 2011 and we are currently at the final stages of reaccreditation. We provide advice and representation to Type III level (representation in sheriff court and benefits tribunals) in housing, money and welfare benefits.

We operate a mix of drop-in and appointments five days per week with an email advice service offering out of hours contact. The In-Court Lay Representation Project provides advice and representation at mortgage respossession, eviction and sequestration court hearings and accepts referrals from four CABx, local authorities and a range of organizations. Our Health & Welfare Advice Hubs operate within five health centres across South Lanarkshire taking referrals from GPs and health practitioners and the Lanarkshire Domestic Abuse Housing & Welfare Adviser works across South Lanarkshire in partnership with NHSL, Police Scotland and a range of specialist support organisations. We will shortly launch a new website with the ability to extend channels of advice.

**Strategic Planning & Development**

We have had an ambitious plan in place which is enabling us to transform HCAB service from a reactive service providing advice at times of crisis to proactively providing education, information, advice and support to help with life changes/ transitions and meeting different community needs.

**Lay Representation Service**

The Service is based at Birnie House, Hamilton which is also the Civil Court Building of Hamilton Sheriff Court. This enables us to provide urgent advice and where required representation to court users who do not have legal representation.

The Service provides advice and representation to anyone who is facing court action for eviction for rent or mortgage arrears or against whom an action has been raised for debts of £5,000 or less. We also appear on behalf of court users who are threatened with sequestration and assist people who wish to raise actions to recover money due to them.

We can offer advice and representation in other areas of court work outwith these core areas but this will be restricted depending on the nature of the case.

We accept referrals from CABx within our catchment, other advice providers, local authorities, the sheriff clerks and from sheriffs at court hearings. We provide these services at Hamilton and Lanark Sheriff Courts.

The Team consists of Team Leader, two full time lay representatives, a full time money advice link worker and a part time service co-ordinator who provides admin and casework support. The service is funded to 31st March 2020 by Scottish Legal Aid Board.