**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 normally 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. Pre COVID 19 we operated 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. 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.

**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 2019/20 was just over £453,000.

**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 2019-20 we provided advice to more than 3,300 people on just over 14,000 issues across 15 areas of law. Social security benefits are about 34% of our workload with legal issues, housing and debt the other key areas.

We achieved re-accreditation to the Scottish National Standards for Information & Advice Providers in 2019. 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 and appointments five days per week with an email and web enquiry options offering out of hours contact. The In-Court Lay Representation Project provides advice and representation at mortgage repossession, eviction and sequestration court hearings and accepts referrals from four Bureaux, 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.

**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.

**Generalist Service**

The team consists of volunteer Generalist Advisers with some volunteers working at Type II casework in social security benefits and money advice. Help2Claim and a Lanarkshire Wide Multi –channel helpline offers support for new claims for Universal Credit. We provide Money Talks checks, support for EU Nationals, ASAP and Pension Wise appointments. A community-based adviser provides targeted community support working with partners. An energy advice caseworker provides support to volunteer advisers, supports community initiatives and carries a caseload. The money advice caseworker is part of this team and will support the Team Leader providing session supervision on a rota.

**Money Advice Post**

This post in various iterations has been funded for more than 10 years and we anticipate it will continue to be funded, however we currently have annual funding awards and therefore it is not possible to offer this post beyond March 2021 at the moment.

A Money Advice Link Worker works within the in-Court Advice Team and with the In-Court Team Leader will provide peer support and technical supervision.

The focus of this post is supporting Volunteer Advisers and providing a casework service. Casework support is provided.

**COVID 19**

Since the 30th March we have adjusted our way of working to comply with the Public Health and government advice. We currently operate a rota system with a mix of office based triage/ support team and home based advice staff. Volunteer advisers will begin to join this rota week beginning 13th July. Both the court and Cadzow Street office are currently closed. We are working on plans for the next few months which include reintroducing face to face contact in a managed way.

We are actively seeking premises in Hamilton Town Centre which if secured would lead to an extension of our working week to include a Saturday / weekday evening depending on facility and demand. We anticipate this would work on a rota basis.