

Shepway Citizens Advice Bureau

Annual Report 2010/11



Shepway CAB is an independent local charity. We provide information and advice to everyone who needs it regardless of race, sex, disability, sexuality or nationality.

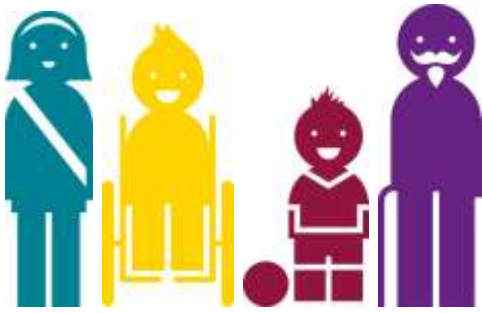
Our aim is that the service is:

- independent
- free of charge
- confidential
- impartial
- easily accessible

We are part of the largest advice-giving network in the UK.

Along with our advice work we also campaign locally and nationally to influence government and organisations to bring about change in policies and laws.

Volunteers are the core of our advice service and any paid management staff employed by that service have a focus on developing and supporting volunteers. We believe the training and development opportunities we offer allow volunteers to build on their strengths whilst contributing to the community.



Chair's Report

Welcome to the 2010/11 annual report for Shepway Citizens Advice Bureau. My name is Anita Ellerby and I am the Chair of the Trustee Board.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank each and every member of staff for their contribution to the achievements of Shepway CAB. I also wish to record my thanks to our funders, in particular, Shepway District Council, Kent County Council, Citizens Advice, Legal Services Commission, Dover District Council, EDF, Southern Water Trust Fund and the Big Lottery Fund – without their support Shepway CAB would not exist. It has been another year of changes, successes and challenges for Shepway CAB.

At the end of June 2010, our new District Manager, Steve Inett, took up his post. Steve and his team have embraced the changes of the last twelve months with great determination. One of the most significant changes has been to legal aid. The government announced its intention to radically reduce the amount of legal aid funded work in areas such as welfare benefits, debt and housing. These specialist areas of advice work have been for some time a major part of the services provided by Shepway CAB. Work is currently underway to find alternative ways of funding these specialisms so that the residents of Shepway are not disadvantaged when the reduction in legal aid comes into effect from 2012.

Citizens Advice, the national membership organisation for the 394 citizens advice bureaux across England and Wales is undergoing major changes in its structure. There is an expectation that in future citizens advice bureaux will work much more closely together, sharing resources where possible. For several years, Shepway CAB has been working closely with the other citizens advice bureaux in East Kent. It is hoped that any changes introduced by Citizens Advice will complement and encourage the development of the current partnership working.

During the early part of 2011, Shepway CAB had a very successful external audit of its quality of advice and its organisation. This audit is undertaken every three years on behalf of Citizens Advice. The audit provides independent recognition of the high quality of the advice services provided by Shepway CAB.

The current recession continues to put pressure on the residents of Shepway, increasing their need for quality assured, independent, impartial, accurate and free advice. Meeting this need is a major challenge and Shepway CAB is constantly exploring ways to improve and expand its services by making best use of all its available resources. Shepway CAB continues to recruit and train volunteer advisers who in turn provide the much needed advice to as many people as possible. The use of the gateway assessment both face to face and by telephone, is proving effective in diagnosing quickly the type and level of support needed by a client. This has enabled more clients to be seen and has reduced the time taken before a client receives appropriate advice. During 2012, this work will continue and will incorporate a greater use of technology, including a new telephone adviceline.

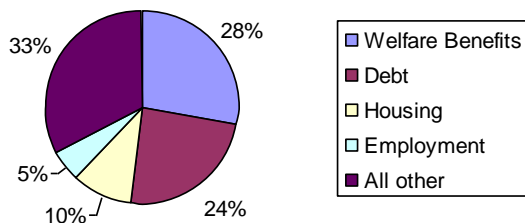
Anita Ellerby

Advice

The need for free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities is greater than ever in the current climate.

We continue to see high numbers of clients, mainly around debt, welfare benefits, housing and employment, but the issues we give advice on continue to cover a huge number of topics.

In 2010/11 we had **4073** client enquiries which raised **16,400** separate issues.



We provide advice face to face at the bureau and in our community outreaches, online at www.adviceguide.org.uk, via email and on the telephone.

We started our debt and fuel efficiency advice service funded by Charis Grants' EDF fund which employs a full time caseworker for 2 years.

Thanks to our volunteers, we have been able to maintain the additional opening hours we had been delivering when government funding for this ran out.

We work closely with the Advice Partnership for East Kent (APEK) and the other East Kent bureaux to share good practice and raise concerns for the region.

In February 2011 we underwent a full quality audit by Citizens Advice. The audit assesses the quality of the advice we give

as well as how the organisation functions. This is conducted 3 yearly and we are delighted to say we passed with flying colours. We continue to hold the Specialist Advice Quality Mark for our Legal Services Unit.

Community Outreach

This service has been most affected by the need to consolidate our services following loss of funding. However our relationship with the Children's Centres in Shepway is hugely important to us as we work together with a large number of vulnerable people. Volunteers have taken over from paid staff in delivering the advice service but this has meant we have had to plan to deliver from fewer locations; namely Hythe, Hawkinge and New Romney Children's Centres, with only one venue in New Romney whereas we have previously also delivered from The Old School House.

We also work closely with the Citizens Advice Over 50's project, funded by Nationwide, which targets the needs of older people in the rural areas of Shepway.

We also provided advice to users of the Winter Homeless Shelter Project from December to February. This helped to ensure people came off the streets and moved into sustainable accommodation.



Specialist Advice

We have dedicated volunteers giving advice in employment and immigration issues, but much of our specialist advice in debt, welfare benefits and housing is delivered by our Legal Services Unit and funded by legal aid.

If passed, the **Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill 2010-11**, currently going through Parliament, would render most of the work we do out of the scope of legal aid funding, reducing access to justice for many people on low incomes and preventing us from being able to provide the service we currently offer to over 1000 people every year in Shepway. For this reason we have dedicated a substantial section of our report to the vital work of our specialist advice team.

98% of clients seen by the team achieved a positive outcome. **96%** of clients were very satisfied with the service they received.

The Justice for All campaign has more information at www.justice-for-all.org.uk.



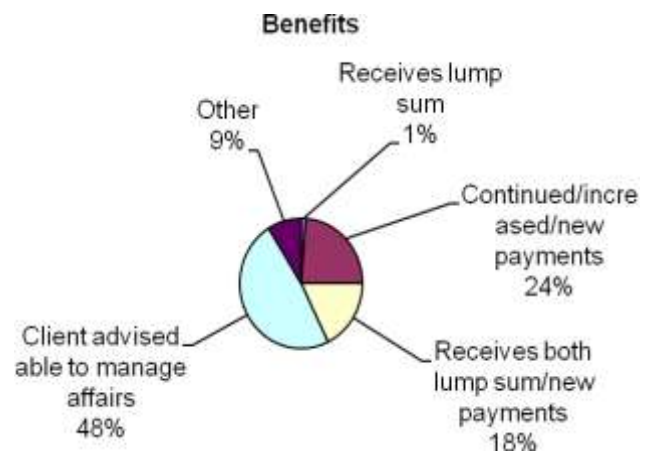
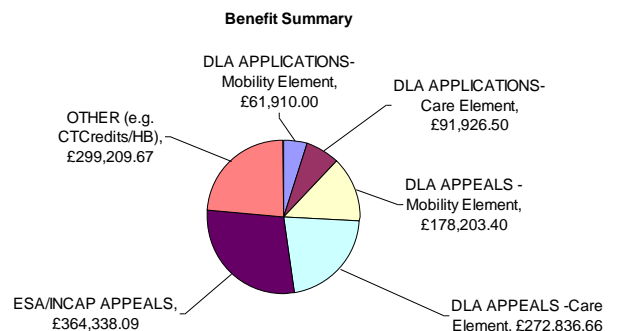
Welfare Benefits

The Benefit Summary provides a helpful representation of the main areas of social security benefits requiring both specialist advice and assistance up to tribunal stage. Disability Living Allowance continues to feature as the main benefit that generates assistance to secure entitlement from making a claim through to securing entitlement. Closely followed by Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) that has replaced Incapacity Benefit

(IB) and Income Support for those who are accepted as being incapable for work after attending a medical where the more stringent Work Capability Assessment is completed. It is anticipated that this appeal statistic will steadily increase as existing long term IB recipient's are 'migrated' on to ESA over the next 2-3 years.

Please note: The appeals statistic prediction is based on the assumption that Shepway CAB continues to be funded to deliver this vital specialist benefits service as currently it is solely reliant on legal aid.

Lesley Riding
Team Leader

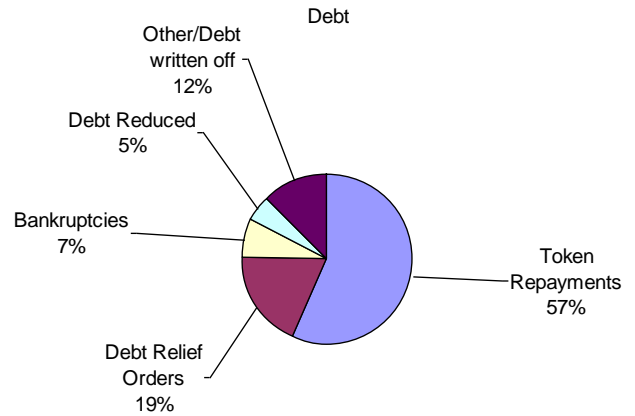




Debt

The level of advice given to clients who are having difficulties in paying their mortgage and/or secured loans has risen significantly over the last year, which is a reflection of the current economic climate and the number of people we are now advising who have lost their jobs due to redundancy. Mortgage, rent and council tax arrears represent a significant threat to client's housing, the latter due to the fact that the Council is now using charging orders to secure the debt owed to them. However consumer credit debt, which represents nearly 50% of the total debt we have given advice on, can also lead to a risk of homelessness, as clients are harassed into making payments to creditors and collection agencies, which very often results in them falling behind with their priority payments.

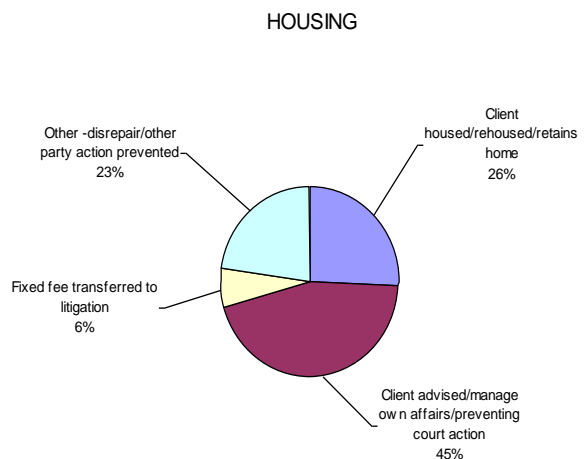
Alison Lightfoot
Debt Caseworker



HOUSING

A better life starts with a better home, a basic social amenity that all should have. Everybody is entitled to a home and our goal in the housing unit of the Shepway CAB Legal Services Unit is to assist as many residents of Shepway and its environ to get suitable accommodation.

Over this last year, we have been able to assist people to manage their housing affairs so as to avoid any court action. This is a special way of avoiding conflict between landlords and tenants as they need to build a relationship of trust and mutual respect. We are aware of the need to rebuild a cordial relationship and that is what is involved in the work during this past financial year shown in the purple section of the pie chart





There are situations where we are unable to achieve this and we have to attend court to establish the rights of our client and that this litigation service is reflected as involving 6% of the work undertaken. This year, the Unit is already recording a significant increase in the number of clients being assisted by way of court representation and managing this demand is now one of the current challenges to the service.

Disrepair is another major area that we deal with, also demonstrated in the pie chart. Our fear is that this aspect of our work is under threat of being ruled out of scope under the proposed new legal aid scheme that is presently going through parliament. If it is enacted into law, it is expected that anybody who has a disrepair problem would not be eligible for legal help unless it is life threatening.

Our aim is to assist in preventing homelessness and we can achieve this if legal aid funding continues to be made available to deliver this vital service to the Shepway community.

David Ashogbon
Housing Solicitor

Social Policy

We're not just here for times of crisis – we also use clients' stories anonymously to campaign for policy changes that benefit the population as a whole.

The sheer number of clients we see each year means that if there is a recurring injustice out there, it is inevitably being played out in our interview rooms and recorded on our database of client evidence. This database is analysed by the national policy team, who are then able to bring problem areas to the attention of those who are – often inadvertently – causing them.

Some of the issues we've raised or campaigned on this year:

Child Benefit Delays - examples were passed to the national office where claims had not been processed correctly. We also wrote to the head of Child Benefit contributing to national CAB work.

Housing Disrepair/ Homelessness - Shepway completed a survey of cases and together with the Advice Partnership for East Kent then presented the results to the East Kent Homelessness Forum.

Legal Aid Cuts, Justice 4 All Campaign - Shepway has taken part in the national campaign getting over 400 signatures on a petition, with members of other organisations in Folkestone also signing. Street signing of the petition by the public was also completed with volunteer help.



Volunteers

The service is truly volunteer led. Everyone you meet when first coming into the bureau; receptionist, assessor, advisor, supervisor, administrator, are all volunteers and we extend our thanks to them all for their time and dedication. This year approximately 48 volunteers contributed 22,400 hours of work to the bureau. We estimate the value of this help at £274k.



Finance & Funding

Financial Statements for the year ended 31st March 2011

Under Charities legislation companies with income exc. £500k are obliged to undergo a full audit. This was undertaken by our auditors Spain Brothers.



A snapshot of our financial activities during the year:

Income was £535k. Our main funders were Legal Services £309k, Shepway District Council £68k and Big Lottery £77k.

This represented a decrease on the previous year of £106k. Main changes were:

Shepway District Council - extra funding from vat review in previous year	£25k
Big Lottery APEK project - start-up funding in previous year	£31k
Southern Water financial support project concluded May'10	£24k
Kent County Council recession support funding in previous year	£20k
Special government national provision to Citizens Advice per recession support in previous year	£19k
Legal Services overpayment per new contract to be reimbursed	£16k
E D F funding of new project providing financial advice to clients	£20k
Dover District Council court desk grant - full year effect	£7k

Expenditure was £597k. However, this included £64k transferred out to APEK in respect of the Big Lottery APEK project.

Therefore actual expenditure was £533 a decrease of £38k. Main changes were:

Payroll costs	£49k
Big Lottery APEK project - start-up costs	£11k
Recruitment costs previous year	£6k
Redundancy as a consequence of reduced LSC contract and reorganisation	£18k
Premises overheads rent, utilities, repairs and maintenance	£11k

This generated a deficit of £62k

At yearend total reserves were £144k of which £55k represented unrestricted funds which will provide contingency funding and contribute to building refurbishments



Conclusion –future challenges

The ongoing need for advice is in the context of funding streams shrinking or disappearing altogether.

We are fortunate that our core funders, Shepway District Council, understand the value of the service we offer and have not made any changes for this financial year. Due to their ongoing budget pressures, it is unclear if this can continue for the future.

Other funding streams, which we rely upon to cover all our running costs, have ended this year, and have caused a significant drain on our reserves, but we have shown how the support from and empowerment of volunteers has meant we can continue with some services after funding is cut.

However, this is not true of all services and we would not expect those who give their time freely to us to carry the workload that was previously held by full time paid staff, such as the specialist advice of the Legal Services Unit..

Additional funding must be made available to provide the support network of paid staff to allow the volunteers to develop.

We continue to look at new ways to make ourselves more accessible, and from January 2012 will join with the other East Kent bureaux as a virtual call centre with a single telephone number, called Adviceline.

We are also striving to see more clients each day at our face to face sessions and extend our opening hours.

We are positive about the future and continue to develop our partnerships within the community to ensure we continue to bring advice services to those in need.

Steve Inett
District Manager



Our contact details

20 Church Street
Folkestone
Kent
CT20 1SE
Telephone for advice: 08444 994118
Bureau Telephone: 01303 249310
Web site: www.shepwaycab.co.uk

Company No. 5063463
Registered Charity No. 1102964