

citizens  
advice  
bureau



Walsall citizens advice bureau  
Annual Report  
2010–2011



# Who and how we helped in 2010-11

Walsall CAB saw a record number of clients in 2010 – 2011. Our total number of client contacts for the year was 54,116 – the largest number since we first opened our doors in September 1939. In total we helped local people with 66,519 separate issues.

Apart from the main Town Centre Bureau we also delivered advice at 10 venues across Walsall. On each weekday the CAB service was available in at least 3 different places. In addition clients accessed our advice services by telephone, post and email and where appropriate, we visited clients in their homes.

## Gateway Assessments

2010 saw the Bureau introduce Gateway assessments for all clients. A Gateway interview is very much like the initial assessment you receive when attending an A & E department of a hospital. It is a short time limited assessment of a problem and is designed to determine the next step that needs to be taken to help clients.

It allows staff to quickly identify issues that clients can deal with themselves with some assistance and information from the Bureau. This saves time and allows us to concentrate on clients with issues or enquiries that require a higher level of support and intervention.

The chief benefit for clients is that almost all can be seen within a few minutes of visiting the Bureau. This has allowed us to see over 4,000 more people this year with less staff. Moreover, it provides a consistent initial response to all our clients.

## Who are our clients?

We see clients from all parts of Walsall but the greatest number come from economically deprived wards and those closest to the town centre Bureau and outreach venues. Focusing on client need and accessibility are key issues for the Bureau. Men and women accessed our services in equal numbers - 53% female/47% male.

The number of our clients who considered themselves disabled rose to 35% - a massive increase on previous years. All ages were represented although our clients have a slightly older profile than the local general population. We see people from all backgrounds - around 24% of clients are from black and minority ethnic communities.

## What issues do we deal with?

Clients came to us with 66,519 issues covering a wide range of problems. The recession continues to have an impact on our workload. Debt and welfare benefits remain the areas of greatest demand but the number of employment enquiries has sustained the increase seen in previous years.

Nature of enquiry	Issues	Percentage
Benefits	21,889	<b>32.9%</b>
Consumer	870	<b>1.3%</b>
Debt	25,815	<b>38.8%</b>
Education	251	<b>0.4%</b>
Employment	6,077	<b>9.1%</b>
Financial	906	<b>1.4%</b>
Health	332	<b>0.5%</b>
Housing	2,633	<b>4.0%</b>
Immigration	1,327	<b>2.0%</b>
Legal	2,116	<b>3.1%</b>
Other	596	<b>0.9%</b>
Relationship	2,103	<b>3.2%</b>
Signposting	240	<b>0.4%</b>
Tax	338	<b>0.5%</b>
Travel/Transport	403	<b>0.6%</b>
Utilities	623	<b>0.9%</b>
Total	66,519	<b>100.0%</b>

Collating statistics on the number and type of enquiries is vital as it allows us to review the way we do things and plan our extensive training schedules for staff and volunteers. The quality of our advice matters just as much as how many people we see. We spend a lot of time and effort on quality assurance and have our work independently assessed by our national association - Citizens Advice. We were audited in 2010 and gained a pass rate of 77% - an excellent score for a Bureau serving a metropolitan area, and remarkable when one considers how busy we are.

The Bureau has a large team of experienced, well trained staff whose work is complemented by a dedicated team of volunteers. They are all committed to dealing with Walsall's citizens with courtesy, dedication and above all integrity. Being an Adviser isn't easy but our staff and volunteers carry out their duties with an approach that is truly client focused. The Adviser's willingness to do all they can for people is why the Bureau's work is held in such high esteem by our key statutory, voluntary and private sector partners. Partner agencies know they can refer their clients to Walsall CAB, confident in the knowledge that the advice they receive will be first class.

But it is our clients whose opinion we value most and we know from the feedback we receive how important our services are to the thousands of people who seek our advice each year. With the information and advice we provide, the people of Walsall are better informed and more able to tackle their problems.

# Funding

Walsall Citizens Advice Bureau is a registered charity, reliant on the support of a wide range of funders. In 2010-2011 the Bureau received funding from:

1. a) **Walsall Council - £287,292 (Core Grant)**
- b) **Walsall Council – £ 40,836 (Social Care)**
- c) **Walsall Council - £ 41,000 (Supported Housing)**

The core grant is linked to a Service Level Agreement which sets out the services the Bureau will deliver, minimum client numbers, opening hours, standards of service, financial procedures and governance. In addition the Bureau receives benefits in kind – chiefly office accommodation worth many thousands extra.

The Social Care grant allows the Bureau to undertake home visits to residents over 50 who are housebound.

The Supported Housing funding aims to reduce homelessness and in addition to casework services funds a CAB presence at County Court on possession days.

2. **Legal Services Commission - £215,251**

The Legal Service Commission contract funds specialist benefits and debt casework services; and from February 2011 - housing. Clients assisted under the contract are means tested and must be eligible on grounds of low income.

3. **Financial Inclusion Fund - £215,226**

The Financial Inclusion Fund is a government initiative to fund money advice for financially excluded individuals and allows the Bureau to employ an additional four experienced debt caseworkers.

4. **NHS Walsall - £115,075 (Outreach & Mental Health)**  
**NHS Walsall - £ 45,000 (Cancer Project)**

The Service Level Agreement with NHS Walsall funds advice services at the NHS Walk-in-Centre and other health venues around the borough. The funding also pays for a designated Adviser for clients who use residential and community based mental health services. The Cancer Project represents matched funding towards the Macmillan Cancer Project.

5. **Macmillan Cancer Support - £30,978**

This is the fourth year of a five year agreement with Macmillan Cancer Support to run a project for people living with cancer to provide advice on benefits, tax credits and other financial assistance.

6. **Working Neighbourhood Fund - £110,673**

This is a two year project which began in December 2009 to advise people under threat of redundancy. It funds three Advisers and has allowed the Bureau to extend its telephone advice to 8pm on weekdays and from 9am to 1pm on Saturdays.

7. **Big Lottery - £95,771**

This is the second year of a five year partnership to increase the availability of telephone and e mail advice and help train and support other advice agencies in Walsall. £30,000 of this money is paid out to partner agencies leaving a net £65,000 contribution to the Bureau.

8. **Walsall Housing Group - £12,000**

Funding from Walsall Housing Group contributes to money advice services run by the Bureau. Housing officers working for WHG are able to make direct referrals to specialist debt caseworkers where tenants have money problems. In addition to the funding WHG seconded a member of staff to the Bureau for twelve months.

9. **Future Jobs Fund - £25,462**

Another central Government scheme that allowed the Bureau to recruit and train four young people – three of whom remain with us twelve months after the funding ceased.

10. **Citizens Advice – Additional Hours - £20,388**

This money came from central Government via Citizens Advice and was a response to the additional demand for Bureau services during the credit crunch. It has now ceased.

Many people wrongly believe that partner agencies fund the Bureau solely because of our benefit take up work. This aspect of our work is an important tool in the fight against poverty but the Bureau does so much more than help people on low incomes increase their spending power. Our debt work helps people prioritise their spending so that rent, mortgage, council tax and utility bills are paid first. We also safeguard people's homes and help reduce homelessness in the borough. Our employment advice helps sustain people in their jobs and makes sure employers and employees understand their rights and responsibilities. Our partnership work with NHS Walsall and Macmillan improves access to Bureau services for vulnerable people in the community and helps tackle health inequalities in Walsall. It is this holistic approach to advice giving that makes Walsall Citizens Advice Bureau a key partner in tackling the wide range of social and economic challenges facing the borough.





# Walsall Citizens Advice Bureau - How to contact us 2011 – 2012

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## **Town Centre Bureau, 139-144 Lichfield Street, Walsall, WS1 1SE**

Opening Hours: Monday to Friday, 09.00am - 5.00pm

Open Door Service – open every day except Public Holidays

Gateway assessment only between 2pm – 5pm

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## **Aldridge, Anchor Meadow Health Centre, (Anchor Meadow)**

Opening hours: Monday, 10.00am – 1.00pm & 2.00pm – 4.00pm

## **Brownhills, Park View Centre, (Chester Road North)**

Opening hours: Tuesday, 10.00am – 1.00pm & 2.00pm – 4.00pm

## **Willenhall Youth and Community Centre (Gomer Street)**

Opening hours: Wednesday, 10.00am – 1.00pm & 2.00pm – 4.00pm

## **Pheseay, Collingwood Community Centre, (Collingwood Road)**

Opening hours: Wednesday, 10.00am – 1.00pm

## **Blakenall Village Centre (Thames Road)**

Opening hours: Thursday, 2.00pm – 4.00pm

## **Darlaston Health Centre (Pinfold Street)**

Opening hours: Thursday, 10.00am – 1.00pm & 2.00pm – 4.00pm

## **Bloxwich, Pinfold Health Centre (Field Road)**

Opening hours: Friday, 10.00am – 1.00pm & 2.00pm – 4.00pm

## **Walsall Wood, St John's Medical Centre (Lichfield Road)**

Opening hours: Friday, 10.00am – 1.00pm & 2.00pm – 4.00pm

All venues are closed on Public Holidays and during August

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## **Telephone Advice Line 01922 700600**

Opening Hours: Monday to Friday 9.00am – 5.30pm

## **Redundancy Advice Line 01922 700600**

Opening Hours: Monday to Friday, 8.30am – 8.00pm

Saturday, 9.00am – 1.00pm

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**Website:** [www.walsallcab.org.uk](http://www.walsallcab.org.uk)

**E-mail Advice:** [advice@cab.walsall.org.uk](mailto:advice@cab.walsall.org.uk)

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**Home Visiting** - available through certain projects i.e. older people and people living with cancer

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**Advice Guide:** [www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

**The online CAB service that provides independent advice on your rights -**

- practical, up-to-date information on a wide range of topics, including benefits and housing, employment rights and discrimination, debt and tax issues
  - information in a wide range of languages
  - a wide selection of fact sheets to print off
  - details of other reliable online sources of information.
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**Walsall Citizens Advice Bureau, 139 – 144 Lichfield Street, Walsall WS1 1SE Tel: (01922) 700600**

Company Registration Number 3491720 Charity Registration Number 1067723