

# Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers - Summary Audit Report

January 2010

Argyll & Bute Citizens Advice Bureau

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## 1 INTRODUCTION AND AUDIT OUTCOME

Argyll & Bute Citizens Advice Bureau is located at Riverside, Oban Road, Lochgilphead and is open three days a week from 10am - 4pm. The service is also available five days per week via telephone and e-mail and at monthly outreach surgeries in Campbeltown, Dunoon and Oban.

The bureau delivers an independent housing advice line on behalf of Argyll & Bute Council which has a designated telephone number and e-mail address.

The bureau has five paid staff members, two full-time and three part-time, and one volunteer adviser with a further eight in training.

The remit of the service is:

To provide a free and independent housing, benefits and money advice service within Argyll & Bute by diagnosing problems, identifying objectives, providing information & exploring options to enable them to make an informed decision and achieve their preferred option.

Referrals are made to other agencies where it is identified that a client may benefit from further advice and/or representation. The bureau is also committed to reaching all citizens, particularly the disadvantaged and socially excluded. They work closely with other advice agencies through Argyll & Bute Advice Network to identify trends and sharing best practice with members of the Money Advice Forum.

### 1.1 AUDIT OUTCOME

The on-site audit visit took place during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> December 2009.

Following the audit visit, it was concluded that the advice service provided by Argyll & Bute CAB meets the requirements of the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (the Standards).

Argyll & Bute Citizens Advice Bureau is accredited to the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers in the topics and for the types of service shown below until January 2014.

#### Housing topics accredited

TOPIC	Type Applied for	Type Accredited to
2.1 Rent Arrears	II	II
2.2 Mortgages/Secured Loans	II	II
2.3 Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit	II	II
2.4 Disrepair in Rented Housing	II	II

2.5 Housing Options	I	I
2.6 Discrimination in Housing	I	I
2.7 Eviction	II	II
2.8 Anti Social Behaviour	I	I
2.9 Harassment and Illegal Eviction (includes race discrimination)	I	I
2.10 Homelessness	II	II
2.11 Relationship Breakdown	I	I
2.12 Rent: Private Sector	I	I
2.13 Security of Tenure	I	I
2.14 Statutory Tenancy rights	I	I
2.15 Repair and Improvement Grants	I	I

**Money and welfare benefits topics accredited**

TOPIC	Topics Applied for	Topics Accredited to
4.1 Means-Tested Benefits	I	I
4.2 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit	I	I
4.3 Tax Credits	I	I
4.4 The Social Fund	I	I
4.5 The Impact of Work on Benefits	I	I
4.6 Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance	I	I
4.7 State Retirement Pension	I	I
4.8 Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance	I	I
4.9 Benefits for People who are Incapable of Work	I	I
4.10 Benefits for Work-Related Illnesses and Disabilities	I	I
4.11 Benefits for Veterans	I	I
4.12 Carer's Allowance	I	I

4.13 Jobseeker's Allowance	I	I
4.14 Benefits for Maternity, Paternity and Adoption	I	I
4.15 Bereavements Benefit	I	I
4.16 Benefits for People in Public Care	I	I
4.17 Benefits for Students	I	I
4.18 Benefits for People from Abroad and/or who are Subject to Immigration Control	I	I
4.19 Ancillary Benefits	I	I
4.20 Financial Statements	II	II
4.21 Liability for Debts, Extortionate Credit, Unfair Contract Terms, Unenforceable Debts, Creditor Malpractice, Codes of Practice, etc	I	I
4.22 Identifying and Agreeing Options in Debt Cases	II	II
4.23 Negotiating and Making Offers to Creditors	II	II
4.24 Diligence, Diligence Stoppers and Court Proceedings	I	I
4.25 Bankruptcy and Sequestration, Voluntary Trust Deeds	II	II
4.26 Recalls and Appeals against Court Decrees and Orders	I	I
4.27 Utility Debts	II	II
4.28 Local and National Tax Debts	II	II
4.29 Rent Arrears	II	II
4.30 Mortgages and Secured Loans	I	I
4.31 Civil and Criminal fines and other Financial Penalties	I	I
4.32 Business Debts	I	I

## 2 AUDIT FINDINGS

### 2.1 STRENGTHS

The auditors found that the agency worked well together as a close team and that there was a great deal of trust and excellent communication between them. The auditors were impressed with the degree of support provided to all staff from the Manager. The Manager checks all advice provided and all letters prior to these being issued - this allows for any knowledge gaps/training needs to be instantly identified, and shares information with staff on legislative changes etc. Furthermore, there is a good internal communications culture within the bureau and staff seemed well motivated and committed.

### 2.2 AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS - Quality of Advice

#### a) Casework Procedures

##### Recommendations:

- Case notes should clearly identify all information sources.
- Time monitoring of casework should be introduced.
- Recordings relating to client options should be comprehensive and include clients' rationale for the choice of option.
- A list of all acronyms and abbreviations used in recordings should be produced.

(Standards: 4.4, 4.5)

#### b) Case Review

##### Recommendation:

- The 'activity output' function can be utilised more by staff as a pro-active measure in casework; cases can be diary forwarded to remind the Adviser to re-establish contact on a specific date.

(Standard: 4.6)

#### c) Training and Development

##### Recommendation:

- Personal training and development portfolios for all staff should include internal, one to one and cascade training and include; date, training and development received, the provider and time spent. Each member of staff should be encouraged to keep their portfolio up to date and central copies should be held by the Manager.

(Standard: 5.3, 5.5)

#### d) Supervision

##### Recommendation:

- Supervision should be recorded and copies of this held in individual advisor's personnel files along with their Appraisal Records.

(Standard: 4.6, 5.6)