

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

January 2010

Easterhouse Citizens Advice Bureau

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1 INTRODUCTION AND AUDIT OUTCOME

Easterhouse Citizens Advice Bureau is based at 46 Shandwick Square, Glasgow. The Bureau was established in 1974 and operates within the East End of Glasgow. The area experiences high unemployment, low income, poor housing, low educational attainment, poor health and high crime rates.

The Bureau has 7 paid members of staff and between 15 - 20 volunteers.

The remit of the service is to provide quality advice, information, representation and practical assistance to the residents in the Greater Easterhouse area. The Bureau provides; comprehensive benefits advice to clients, assisting them to maximise their incomes and challenge decisions where appropriate; comprehensive money advice services to assist clients to stabilise their financial situation and reduce indebtedness; advice, negotiation and representation services which assist clients to remain in their home and to prevent homelessness. Advice and assistance is delivered by means of an office base, both open door and appointments system, home visiting, outreach and telephone services.

1.1 AUDIT OUTCOME

The on-site audit visit took place during Monday 16th and Tuesday 17th December 2009.

Following the audit visit, it was concluded that the advice service provided by Easterhouse Citizens Advice Bureau meets the requirements of the Scottish National Standards for Information and Advice Providers (the Standards).

Easterhouse 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	III	III
2.2 Mortgages/Secured Loans	III	III
2.3 Housing Benefit/Council Tax Benefit	III	III
2.4 Disrepair in Rented Housing	II	II
2.5 Housing Options	I	I
2.6 Discrimination in Housing	I	I
2.7 Eviction	III	III
2.8 Anti Social Behaviour	II	II

2.9 Harassment and Illegal Eviction (includes race discrimination)	I	I
2.10 Homelessness	II	II
2.11 Relationship Breakdown	II	II
2.12 Rent: Private Sector	II	II
2.13 Security of Tenure	II	II
2.14 Statutory Tenancy rights	II	II
2.15 Repair and Improvement Grants	II	II

Money and welfare benefits topics accredited

TOPIC	Topics Applied for	Topics Accredited to
4.1 Means-Tested Benefits	III	III
4.2 Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit	III	III
4.3 Tax Credits	II	III
4.4 The Social Fund	III	III
4.5 The Impact of Work on Benefits	II	III
4.6 Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance	II	III
4.7 State Retirement Pension	II	III
4.8 Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance	III	III
4.9 Benefits for People who are Incapable of Work	III	III
4.10 Benefits for Work-Related Illnesses and Disabilities	III	III
4.11 Benefits for Veterans	III	III
4.12 Carer's Allowance	II	III
4.13 Jobseeker's Allowance	III	III
4.14 Benefits for Maternity, Paternity and Adoption	II	III
4.15 Bereavements Benefit	III	III
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	II	III
4.19 Ancillary Benefits	II	III
4.20 Financial Statements	III	III
4.21 Liability for Debts, Extortionate Credit, Unfair Contract Terms, Unenforceable Debts, Creditor Malpractice, Codes of Practice, etc	III	III
4.22 Identifying and Agreeing Options in Debt Cases	III	III
4.23 Negotiating and Making Offers to Creditors	III	III
4.24 Diligence, Diligence Stoppers and Court Proceedings	III	III
4.25 Bankruptcy and Sequestration, Voluntary Trust Deeds	III	III
4.26 Recalls and Appeals against Court Decrees and Orders	III	III
4.27 Utility Debts	III	III
4.28 Local and National Tax Debts	III	III
4.29 Rent Arrears	III	III
4.30 Mortgages and Secured Loans	III	III
4.31 Civil and Criminal fines and other Financial Penalties	I	I
4.32 Business Debts	I	II

2 AUDIT FINDINGS

2.1 STRENGTHS

The Auditors found a number of strengths:-

There is a good internal communications culture within the Bureau and staff are well motivated and committed. The manager is very positive and forward thinking and it was apparent during the audit that an open door policy operates for staff to discuss any issues arising. There are good team discussions with everyone being involved.

Regular staff meetings are held and minutes from the meetings showed that the agenda is well structured including current issues, casework procedures, training etc. and that staff have effective input to these meetings. An action list from the meeting is also attached to the minutes when these are issued.

The Bureau has an excellent Case Management System. The system is simple but well planned and ensures that the volunteers are well supported, therefore allowing the Bureau to utilise the volunteers well.

The review of the daily case sheets completed by volunteers by paid staff works well. This provides a good support mechanism for volunteers and allows for the early identification of any errors and facilitates corrective action. This system is also used to identify any gaps in knowledge which in turn informs training requirements. This is a simple but effective system.

The Bureau runs a 'check week' system to supplement the daily monitoring system, this ensures that quality is maintained and casework progressed.

The Bureau applied for accreditation in a number of Welfare Benefit Areas of Law at Type II. It was apparent from the case work evidenced that the advisers have the skills, knowledge and competence to provide a service to Type III in these areas should this be required. This also applies to Money Advice Area of Law 4.32. The Bureau applied for Type I accreditation, however during the audit of cases the auditor found that Type II casework was being carried out competently. The Bureau has thus been accredited to Type II and III accordingly.

2.2 AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS - Quality of Advice

a) Case Notes

Recommendation: The Bureau should consider introducing a typed notes system. (Standard: 4.4)

b) Case Review

Recommendation: Case reviews should be noted in the case notes in a clear manner that is apparent to anyone viewing the case, e.g. 'Case Review' marked boldly in the case recording sheet. (Standard: 4.6)

c) Training and Development

Recommendation: Staff are under recording their training. The agency should record any shadow or cascade training and any training that takes place during staff meetings. (Standard: 5.3)

3 GOOD PRACTICE

Case Management System

Easterhouse Citizens Advice Bureau has a case management system in place that has been developed over a number of years and this is an ongoing process.

The overall aim of the system is to ensure that clients receive the highest quality of service. The system details the procedures etc. for the relevant duties of all staff.

The volunteers deliver the front line advice and assistance and the case management system details clearly the procedures for the volunteers regarding case records and client interviews.

The system also details procedures for the support staff regarding completed case records and facilitates 100% case checking to take place. By checking completed case records, training needs of advice workers can be highlighted, checks can be made on advice given and appropriate action recorded and support staff can ensure that any ongoing work is completed.

This system also includes procedures for the 'check week' system whereby all paid support staff check specific cases on a weekly basis ensuring that they do not check the same case on consecutive weeks thereby also facilitating a peer checking process.

The Assistant Manager reviews the day to day work undertaken by the support workers and where necessary completes the quality of advice case assessment sheet to discuss and feedback to the relevant support worker.

Within this system are procedures for case closure, case storage and destruction of cases. There is also a multi debt checklist for support workers with regard to the order of cases.

This is an extremely robust system and the auditors were impressed with the simple but highly efficient system. It is a system that other agencies should consider replicating.