



Wealden Citizens Advice

Annual Report 2013/14



Crowborough

Wadhurst

Uckfield

Heathfield

Hailsham

Willingdon

Polegate

the charity
for your
community

Chair's report



From the start, volunteers ran the service and many of the queries they dealt with then were directly related to the war. Some of the most complex problems involved finding lost relatives who had lived in a bombed area and this often meant a trip out by bureaux staff to track them down. Family incomes were dramatically reduced when fathers, husbands and sons were called up, so advice often dealt with repairing clothes and radios, and even preparing meals with the few ingredients available on rationing. Tracing missing servicemen or prisoners of war; pensions and other allowances; lost ration books; homelessness and evacuation — they all quickly became pressing issues. As well as offering face to face assistance bureaux stocked numerous leaflets explaining everything from rationing and Red Cross messages to war damage relief.

"it was not until a world war was looming that it was formally proposed that Citizens Advice Bureaux should be established throughout the country..."

It was also through Citizens Advice lobbying during the war that important changes were made to rationing: pregnant women got extra clothing coupons previously only been available to agricultural workers.

There in a nutshell is a picture of the strengths of the Citizens Advice service at its inception. And although the details have changed, our ethos and principles remain the

First a little history.

As early as 1924 a government report recommended that centres should be set up to offer the public advice to help them with their problems, but it was not until a world war was looming that it was formally proposed that "Citizens Advice Bureaux should be established throughout the country, particularly in the large cities and industrial areas where social disorganisation may be acute."

When war was declared, the CAB service was ready: within the first month 200 bureaux had been set up in houses, town halls, libraries and churches: even horse boxes were converted for use as mobile offices which were able to get into bomb damaged areas where the need was greatest. By 1942, there were 1,074 bureaux.

same now as they were then. You will see in this Report that we are still:

- Giving help wherever it is needed — though no longer in horse boxes!
- Responding to current concerns — benefits and debt remain major issues
- Finding the best means to offer help — now to leaflets we have added Advice-guide, email and Skype
- Depending on trained volunteers — today our volunteers are required to go through rigorous and demanding training

- Lobbying government when necessary changes are identified.

None of the achievements that you will read about in this Report could have come about without the amazing commitment of so many people: our dedicated volunteers who include a hard-working Trustee Board; our salaried staff especially our Advice Session Supervisors and excellent Chief Executive Officer; our project workers. 2013-2014 was an exciting year for Wealden Citizens Advice. It has been a privilege to be part of their achievements.

Dorothy Goldman
Chair of Trustees Board

Finance report

- Income for the year to 31st March 2014 was £360,220 compared to £263,910 for the previous year
- Expenditure for the year was £335,109 compared to £249,640 for the previous year
- Reserves increased by £25,111, primarily due to expenditure being below budget
- Expenses below budget include salaries due to difficulties in recruiting and other costs not incurred as budgeted

Expenditure



- Staff Costs- £191,445
- Office, IT & Communications- £60,164
- Premises- £42,987
- Other- £30,324
- Governance- £10,189

Total Expenditure: £335,109

Income



- Other Grants- £144,437
- Wealden District Council- £139,000
- Town & Parish Councils- £61,925
- Donations & Fundraising- £11,793
- Contracts & Fees- £2,555
- Investment Income- £510

Total Income: £360,220

Chief Executive's report



- Create an online referral service between partners
- Reduce duplication
- Provide specialist services in bureaux
- Seek funding to continue the new services.

WCA has delivered a very successful project funded through Citizens Advice Energy Best Deal programme to organise and present six sessions to help residents and frontline workers to reduce energy usage and costs. Our experienced volunteer financial capability worker, Carol Clark, hosted the well-attended sessions and this led to several referrals to WCA's three bureaux for advice in energy issues. In addition this funding enabled WCA to advise 50 clients in reducing energy usage, switching service providers and helping to apply for grants to pay off arrears among other issues.

Financial capability work has also led us to providing workshops for new tenants or tenants with rent arrears of Wealden District Council. Through these workshops people learn to manage their finances and budget, how to be a good neighbour, where to go if they have a problem and to seek advice early, and their rights and responsibilities with regard to their tenancy. WCA hopes to roll this service out to Registered Social Landlords in the next year. So far the courses have been very well received by the delegates.

The volunteers at our three bureaux helped 4,841 clients with over 17,000 problems and for those clients gained £2.2 million in financial outcomes. Volunteers and staff work incredibly

This year has been really exciting for Wealden Citizens Advice (WCA) as we have secured funding to bring new services, new ways of delivering the service and new agencies into Wealden through a successful bid to the National Lottery Big Lottery fund called the Advice Services Transition Fund. This has created 11 new posts funded for two years.

Our project called Better Together (nothing to do with Scotland!) has 10 partners whose services are highlighted later in this review. The purpose of the partnership is to:

- Enable the partners to work more closely together
- Become more sustainable by trialling technological ways of delivering advice such as email and Skype
- Deliver an improved telephone service

hard to find the best options for clients to resolve a myriad of problems. If the problems require specialist support WCA has debt, welfare benefit and housing specialists based in the bureau who are able to support clients and advisers through difficult cases.

In turn Citizens Advice provides in-depth support for these specialists for particularly tricky or unusual cases.

The CAB service has introduced a new case recording system providing a national database of client records. This means that with permission from the client we can access their records from any bureau they chose to visit.

Another advantage is that it gives the bureaux in East Sussex the opportunity to work together to provide a county-wide telephone service from 10am to 4pm each week day. Currently WCA has installed a new telephone system as the first stage in our preparations to improve our telephone service funded by the Better Together project. The new system will ensure that we have the technical ability to undertake this project.

WCA is a member of Citizens Advice East Sussex (CAES), a consortium of the five bureaux covering the East Sussex County Council area. The consortium was successful in gaining funding from Citizens Advice to establish access to advice via email. The project started in September 2013 and was launched on 2nd June 2014. The project worker, Katie Hilsdon, will support the project until the end of August 2013 to iron out any teething problems. The consortium is agreed that access by email will

help those who cannot contact a bureau via their drop in sessions or get through on the phone, for example people who work full time.

Another CAES project funded by the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund is to help people with mental health issues who have debts, where health professionals make a direct referral to a debt specialist. It is hoped that this funding will not only help the clients referred to resolve their debt issues and help them to feel less stressed but also that there will be significant savings to the health budget. In Wealden there is a fully funded 18.5 hour post to help our residents.

The service that WCA provides to the residents of Wealden would not be possible without the dedication of the 130 volunteers and the paid staff. Everyone who works for the bureau works exceptionally hard and is dedicated to the service.

Volunteers provide help not only as gateway assessors and advisers but as admin staff, trustees, payroll clerk, treasurer, bookkeeper, IT support, and many other roles and of course are vital to our cause. We are also extremely grateful to our generous funders mentioned further on in the Report. They truly value our service showing their support by their actions even in these difficult financial times. We also know our clients value our service as our latest satisfaction survey gave us an overall satisfaction rating of 97%.

So a big thank you to everyone for helping to make WCA the successful bureau that it is today.

Caroline Mack

A word from our partners...

Brighton Housing Trust

As part of the Better Together Project, BHT Eastbourne Advice provides a specialist housing and welfare benefit advice service on issues like possession action, homelessness, suitability of accommodation, tenancy rights, disrepair and on a full range of benefit issues including advice on overpayments, mandatory reconsiderations and providing representation at Appeals. This service is free and confidential. Appropriate cases can be referred to BHT housing solicitors.

Since October 2013 the service has seen 47 housing cases and 11 welfare benefit cases. The main priority for clients that we see is to prevent homelessness and ensure that their benefit awards are correct.

Case study: A housing association tenant was threatened with homelessness after receiving a notice of eviction. Upon investigation it was found that the rent arrears were due to issues with benefit entitlement. The benefit issues were resolved and supporting letters were provided by professionals involved with the family. The outcome of the case was that the court agreed to suspend the warrant on terms and homelessness was prevented.

This service runs out of CAB offices in Hailsham, Uckfield and Crowborough.

Please contact our reception on 01323 642615



to arrange an appointment or to speak to someone about the service.

Home-Start South Downs

Home-Start South Downs aims to empower families to find solutions to problems they are struggling with, enabling the whole family to reach a better future.

Many parents feel overwhelmed by family life and may be struggling with postnatal depression, loneliness, disability, poverty, toddler behaviour issues, relationship problems or coping with multiple births. Our core home visiting service is for families with at least one child under five; it provides a three hour visit each week by a trained volunteer who provides practical and/or emotional support, as necessary. We also run Music Therapy groups for children with additional needs.

The Better Together project has enabled us to provide a paid worker who can visit families with pre-school and school age children in their own homes to support them with debt or benefit issues and to help them maximise their income. The worker can help them to organise paperwork to understand their current financial position and help them access specialist services to improve their situation; they can also do benefit checks and help them to find grants.

All Home-Start support aims to help families to identify and build on their strengths and successes and integrate and contribute to the local community.

SEAP

SEAP Advocacy Service provides a support worker, Julia Rolls, to the 'Better Together Project' for four hours/week on a Monday 10am-2pm; she works out of the Hailsham, Crowborough and Uckfield CAB offices on a rota basis.

Julia gives information to members of the public around problems they may have with education, Social Services and NHS care and treatment. She writes letters, makes telephone calls and researches information for people on these subjects; she is also able to attend meetings if requested. Any queries around NHS complaints are referred to the East Sussex Health complaints team for them to deal with whilst Julia supports those around education and Social Services. If appointments fall outside of the four hour Monday session Julia will try to accommodate this; if this is not possible SEAP will aim to provide another worker to attend.

Clued-up.info

Clued-up.info based in Crowborough is an Information Shop for young people aged between 11 and 25 years. We provide advice and information on any subject. These include education, training and employment, sex and relationships, family problems, justice and equality, health, housing and welfare, money, sport, leisure and travel, mental health and depression, bullying, alcohol and drug awareness, as well as counselling and liaising with other agencies on our client's behalf.

As part of the Better Together project we have been provided with a laptop and we are in a position to now offer our young people Skype interviews with agencies that are already participating in the scheme. This is cost effective in both time and money as due to our location most interview/meetings involve a lengthy bus journey. We look forward to many more agencies signing up to the scheme.



Hailsham Foodbank

Today in Hailsham there are families struggling to put food on the table. For people on low incomes, a sudden crisis – redundancy, benefit delay or even an unexpected bill – can mean going hungry. Every day parents skip meals to feed their children and people are forced to choose between paying the rent and eating.

Hailsham foodbank provides emergency food and support to local people in crisis. Non-perishable, in-date food is donated by the public. Once collected, the food is sorted by volunteers who check it is in date and replenish the distribution centre so the food is ready to be given to people in need.

Care professionals such as health visitors, social workers and Citizens Advice Bureau staff identify people in crisis and issue them with a foodbank voucher. Foodbank vouchers are exchanged for three days' worth of food at a foodbank.

With the aid of a tablet from the Better Together partnership, we are currently in the process of setting up a Skype service so that clients can speak to the appropriate agencies to get the help that they require. We will also use the website to be able to refer clients on to further help.

A word from our partners...

Wealden District Council

Wealden Citizens Advice has held four pre-tenancy workshops and four rent arrears workshops on behalf of Wealden District Council. The pre-tenancy workshops, aimed at people who are in band A or B on the housing register, are designed to give them the skills to make a success of their tenancy. The information we cover helps potential tenants to manage their money, to maximise income, to seek advice promptly, complete a household budget, understand their rights and responsibilities under their tenancy agreement, what to do and where to go if problems occur in their lives, energy savings and encourages them to be organised.

The rent arrears workshop covers similar subjects but puts more emphasis on managing their money enabling them to identify priority debts and where they can seek free independent debt advice. We give them information about the eviction process to make sure they are aware of what may happen if they do not take their situation seriously. All attendees are given a pack to make sure they have all the information they need about all the different agencies there are to help them. Wealden District Council gives them a £10 voucher as a thank you for attending and lunch is included in the workshop.

East Sussex Disability Association

ESDA is led by disabled people, where disabled and non-disabled people work together to promote the equality and full participation of disabled people in society. ESDA provides expert advice, information and practical support to disabled people in overcoming any barriers they encounter.

Through ESDA's campaigns, forums, training, research and representation, the voice of disabled people influences the policies and practices of organisations that provide services to disabled people, to be inclusive and move towards equal rights in society. ESDA was commissioned to be the county's Centre for Independent Living in 2011.

As part of the Better Together partnership ESDA provides Disability Equality workshops for advice workers in Wealden. These aim to:

- Explore different approaches to disability; explain how the Social Model of Disability enables organisations to meet legal requirements and provide fair and accessible services
- Develop knowledge of the kinds of barriers which disabled people and others experience; and share good practice in removing those barriers.

We also provide opportunities for disabled people to meet with advice providers to enable a better understanding of the role these services can play in overcoming barriers to independence.

SCDA Sompriti

Sompriti is a project of Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA) developed in response to people's needs. SCDA shapes its priorities from community and individual needs identified through user involvement, feedback and impact assessment.

Sompriti has over 13 years' experience of working for and engaging with Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities across East Sussex. The organisation provides a range of services

including bilingual advocacy, interpreting, translation and community development. Sompriti, through local contracts, provides support to assist individuals with understanding what services they are entitled to and how to access these.

Through the Better Together project, Sompriti is responsible for providing four activities with the BME community to promote access to advice per year. Sompriti will have a stall at four community events during the summer period in the Wealden district. Sompriti has developed a translated flyer to invite members of the BME community to attend the event and visit the Sompriti stall. This has included undertaking targeted publicity.

Participation is being encouraged through provision of family friendly events. Sompriti has translated cards and advice information to be distributed to individuals from BME communities to enable individuals to understand how and where to access advice services locally.

Age UK

Working in partnership with Wealden Citizens Advice, Age UK East Sussex is holding weekly information and advice surgeries at Crowborough CAB. The surgeries form part of Age UK East Sussex's strategy to increase the availability across the county of face to face information and advice tailored especially to the needs of older people. The surgeries are delivered by a trained and experienced volunteer adviser.

Seventeen clients have benefited from the surgeries since they commenced in September 2013. The type of help which clients have received includes welfare benefit checks and support with making applications for benefits such as Attendance Allowance, Housing Benefit and Pension Credit.



The surgeries are held on Wednesday mornings and are by appointment, which can be made by telephoning Jenny O'Connor at Age UK East Sussex's Lewes office (01273 476704 extension 118).

Rotherfield St Martin

Rotherfield St Martin is a Church-in-Community Charity providing support and services for senior citizens in Rotherfield and the surrounding area. Our aim is to help combat loneliness and isolation within our community by offering befriending, a volunteer driver service, therapies, activities and advice. We endeavour to advise our members as much as we can, however this may not always be possible in which case we would normally signpost to more suitable services. Being in a rural location, with limited public transport, anyone requiring an appointment at one of the CAB offices often has difficulty getting there and in keeping an arranged appointment time. The Better Together Partnership means we have access to a Skype video link for our members to use at our centre as well as a network of services and organisations within the partnership that we may refer people to. We currently have a dedicated volunteer who runs the sessions and oversees technical issues. The video gateway has been extended outside of our membership to include the whole community so that anyone may benefit from the project.

Social Policy report - Cas Smith, District Social Policy Co-ordinator

As well as providing advice, Social Policy work is the twin aim of our service - to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives. We do this by not only advising on issues but looking to see if we can campaign locally or take action on an issue that we feel is particularly unfair or unjust.

In 2013-14 our advisers submitted almost 500 evidence reports for cases where they feel the client has been treated unfairly, the majority relating to national systems that were incorrectly or poorly applied. The consequences in some cases resulted in very real hardship, which has

then been reflected in the increase in foodbank vouchers we have issued. Many of the issues our advisers raised continue to reflect the large number of changes within the benefits system.

We contribute our evidence to that being gathered nationally by Citizens Advice, which they then use to inform their campaigns, such as their recent 'Make ESA Fit for Work' and payday loans campaigns.

By carrying out this work, our team is endeavouring to bring around change in the system that will have a real impact on people's lives.

Training report - Pauline Townsend, CAB Trainer and Advice Session Supervisor

There is never a dull moment at Citizens Advice and each day is different. This makes volunteering and working for the Bureau very interesting.

Receipt of extra money via successful funding bids can lead to new ideas and pilot projects, all of which are to benefit clients to access help and information.

With the advances of technology brings new learning and training for all staff and volunteers. Petra (the client data base which is used throughout the country) was introduced last September and led to a great deal of training and new learning for all volunteers and paid staff alike. We have continued to run a rolling recruitment training programme and since September 2013 we have 20 new volunteers across the District currently in various training roles: Reception and Administration, Gateway and Full Advice.

Due to additional funding and extra training, staff are now able to give more support and help to move trainees through the training at a faster pace. We are also encouraging all staff and trainees to visit and work from each of the Wealden bureaux and feedback, so far, has been very positive.

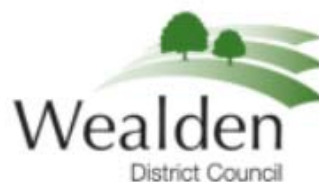
We are currently piloting a new and exciting Young Persons Project and have also had some other young people in for a week's work. The Young Persons Project consists of students aged 16-18 years who are able to give two days a week throughout a six week period. They will initially be taken through Induction and then move quickly on to being trained to Gateway level. It is hoped that they will continue to volunteer during college holidays in the future.

Lastly, I would like to thank all the volunteers and staff, without their continued help we would not be able to run our service.

Thank you!

To the following organisations whose grants contribute towards core funding, rent and rates on our three town centre bureaux.

- ◇ **Wealden District Council**
- ◇ **Crowborough Town Council, Hailsham Town Council and Uckfield Town Council**
- ◇ Parish Councils of: **Arlington, Berwick, Buxted, Chiddingly, Frant, Hadlow Down, Hartfield, Heathfield & Waldron, Hellingly, Horam, Laughton, Maresfield, Newick, Pevensey, Rotherfield, Wadhurst, Warbleton, Willingdon & Jevington and Withyham**
- ◇ **National Lottery Big Lottery Fund** for funding our Better Together Project
- ◇ **Dawson Hart Solicitors** for the provision of free legal advice to bureau clients and in addition for providing a free venue for our Trustee Board meetings
- ◇ **Chris Green of CNG Law** for providing fee legal advice for our clients
- ◇ **Rix & Kay Solicitors** for providing free legal advice to our clients
- ◇ **Kay & Pascoe Solicitors** for providing free legal advice to our clients
- ◇ **Friends of Crowborough CAB**
- ◇ **Polegate Children's Centre** for supporting our Skype outreach service in Polegate
- ◇ **Carillion Cottage/Social Action Project**
- ◇ **Southern Water Charitable Trust Fund** for Money Advice Administrative Support and for two computers
- ◇ **Sussex Community Foundation** for funding towards Volunteer Travel Costs



Southern Water Charitable Trust Fund



About us

Wealden Citizens Advice is an independent charity at the heart of your community making a significant impact everyday on the lives of people in the Wealden area. We have bureaux in Crowborough, Hailsham and Uckfield and run outreach sessions in Heathfield, Polegate, Wadhurst and Willingdon. By telephone and face to face, we give free, confidential, independent and impartial advice. A lot of our work involves providing advice on issues such as debt management and welfare benefits, housing, energy suppliers, consumer complaints and landlord/tenant disputes.

Our aims and principles

We aim to **provide the advice** people need for the problems they face and **improve the policies and practices** that affect people's lives. We provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

How to find Wealden Citizens Advice

Crowborough CAB

Croham Lodge
Croham Road
Crowborough,
East Sussex TN6 2RH

Opening hours

9.30am to 3pm
Monday to Thursday
Adviceline: **01892 655303**

Operates an outreach service in Wadhurst every other Wednesday at Carillion Cottage, Wadhurst High Street, TN5 6AA.



Hailsham CAB

Southview
Western Road
Hailsham
East Sussex BN27 3DN

Opening hours

9.30am to 3pm
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday
& Friday
Adviceline: **01323 842336**

Operates outreach services: Willingdon Library every other Wednesday at Coppice Avenue, Lower Willingdon, BN20 9PN; Polegate every Monday at Polegate Primary School, Polegate, BN26 6PT



Uckfield CAB

The Hub
Civic Approach
Uckfield
East Sussex TN22 1AL

Opening hours

9.30am to 3pm
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday
& Friday
Adviceline: **01825 764940**

Operates an outreach service in Heathfield every Tuesday at Kings Church, Station Road, Heathfield, TN21 8LD.

