

SCRUTINY PANEL REPORT: Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureaux

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the evidence gathered during scrutiny of Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureaux and the resulting conclusions and recommendations of the Scrutiny Panel.
- 1.2 The scope of the review, which was established and agreed by members of the Panel, was: ***‘How well do Citizens Advice Bureaux work together in order to deliver consistent services across the Falkirk Council area?’***
- 1.3 The membership of the Scrutiny Panel comprised Provost Pat Reid (Panel Chair), Cllr. Joan Paterson and Cllr. John McLuckie

2. EVIDENCE GATHERED: Friday 23rd August 2013

Citizens Advice Scotland

- 2.1 Alison Greg, Development Officer, Citizens Advice Scotland provided an overview of CAS. The presentation is included within the background papers.
- 2.2 Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) is the national umbrella body that provides support services for Scottish citizens advice bureaux and collates client case evidence to shape policy in Scotland and the UK. It is a membership organisation that is democratically governed by its members – Scottish citizens advice bureaux.
- 2.3 In particular, CAS:
 - Provides a range of services and the best possible advice and support to its member bureaux to meet the needs of existing and potential clients
 - Sets quality standards and audits bureaux compliance with these standards, which is tested via an audit of each bureau every 3 years.
 - Is the voice of the CAB Service in Scotland and its clients to raise the profile of the service and make changes to social policy.
- 2.4 Following the formal presentation, Panel Members were offered the opportunity to ask questions. Responses were offered to these questions by Alison Greg and from CAB managers in attendance.
- 2.5 In relation to the structure of CABs, the current local set up CABx was similar to that of the west of Scotland; however it was clearly not “a one size fits all” approach.
- 2.6 Provost Reid asked about what level of immigration advice is offered Alison Greg clarified that there are 3 levels of immigration advice available, with all

CABx within the Falkirk Council area licensed to level 1 standard, which is the lowest level.

- 2.7 In the planning and development of CABx services, CAS provide national comparatives for all CABX. The local CABx are then able to analyse national averages compared to local information. CAS and CABx continually assess where support can be best offered, especially currently with Welfare Benefits concerns and the impact of vulnerable groups, such as mental health sufferers. Cllr McLuckie highlighted that Fairer Falkirk funding had been allocated to CABx to address specific issues in areas of deprivation. Fiona Campbell confirmed that the performance of this funding was monitored regularly, CABx Managers also confirmed that they are able to identify clients by area.
- 2.8 In terms of the role of individual CAB, Alison Greg confirmed:
- Outreach arrangements were a matter for local CAB offices to determine, but traditional outreach can be resource intensive and as such requires effective management. Home visits can be arranged and are undertaken:
 - CAB management committees undertake the strategic management of the organisation, whilst at the same time overseeing financial and resource management:
 - Salaried/paid staff within the service provided specialist advice. Within Falkirk there are no obvious issues in their relationship with volunteers, whose role was pivotal to the organisation.
 - Local management was an issue for each local office, who would take account of all local factors in their decision making.
 - The use of IT and its best use in enhancing levels of service across areas are always being considered by CAS and CABx.
- 2.9 Cllr. Paterson requested further information about how the costs per client calculated. Alison Greg explained that cost per client was determined by equating funding against number of clients, with a proviso built in for volunteer time.
- 2.10 It was the role of the Development Officer to introduce good practice and ensure it was being shared around all offices. Further, the Scottish Managers Forum (meeting on a quarterly basis) was a vehicle for exchanging views and ideas, and there was co-ordination with other local authorities and some participation in live examples – as recently done with Argyll and Bute.
- 2.11 Alison Greg concluded by stating that no areas of immediate improvement could be thought off. The service is regarded as operating successfully at the moment.

Context and Background Information: Overview of local Citizens Advice Bureaux

- 2.12 Lesley MacArthur, Corporate Policy Officer and the Council's Monitoring Officer for the Citizens Advice Bureaux, provided an overview of local service provision. The presentation is included within the background papers.
- 2.13 The CABx are the largest independent voluntary sector providers of information and advice services in the Falkirk Council area. The CABx have a strong ethos to

provide advice which is free of charge, confidential, impartial and independent. The information and advice is generalist but, in some areas such as debt advice, a specialist service is also provided. The CABx in the Falkirk Council area run as three independent bodies, each with their own Board of Management.

- 2.14 The CABx collectively have a staff resource of around 20, most of whom are employed on a part time basis. The main focus for staff is to manage the service, provide specialist and complex advice and also to recruit, train and support volunteers.
- 2.15 The CABx also work with between 60 - 80 volunteers at any given time. The key points to note are that; volunteers come from a range of backgrounds and a range of ages; they bring a huge amount of knowledge and experience to the service; and are required to undertake very intense training before being allowed to advise.
- 2.16 Partly due to the extensive training provided, the CABx face an ongoing issue of high turnover of volunteers. Many volunteers make use of the opportunity of gaining the training and experience as a stepping stone into employment, which is a positive outcome for the volunteer, but a challenge for the CABx. The demand on volunteers has also increased due to the increasing complexity in cases.
- 2.17 Although there are 3 interdependent bureaux with separate management committees and structures, the organisations work closely together on a range of issues for example volunteer recruitment, funding, marketing. Joint working is managed via a Joint Action Group, which has an appointed Chair (Tom Lambie) and is attended by the Managers of each bureau, a member of each bureau board, CAS Advisor and Council Officer, as required. An area business plan has been developed.
- 2.18 In 2013/2014, financial support provided to the CABx from Falkirk Council is £452,396. The Bureaux receive core funding from Corporate & Neighbourhood Services, a contribution from Social Work services to enhance provision of Income Maximisation projects and Fairer Falkirk Funding to enhance provision of debt and money advice.
- 2.19 An additional one-off payment was allocated to Grangemouth & Bo'ness bureau in 2012/2013 due to a funding shortfall which would have resulted in the loss of 1.5 FTE specialist staff within the bureau. We are currently working closely with the bureau to review the situation for the coming year. The bureaux have been successful in securing external funding from a range of sources which minimise the risk of any staff loss or reduction in service.
- 2.20 Each of the 3 bureaux also lever in a significant amount of additional funding into the local area through applying for external funds, for example, from Robertson Trust, Lloyds TSB and various strands of lottery funding. Funding as a proportion to total income varies, but will generally be around 20%. However, this increased recently following the success of a joint Falkirk Council, CABx funding proposal to the Big Lottery's Support & Connect Programme, to help put support in place to mitigate the effects of welfare reform.

- 2.21 All 3 bureaux have carefully had to consider their expenditure and have seen a reduction in reserves to varying degrees. As previously noted, although the bureaux funding has been fairly consistent, no inflationary increase means that in operational terms, funding has slightly decreased.
- 2.22 Although CAB provide a wide range of advice, the greatest demand is on money and debt advice. This is reflected in the funding package. The total spend on debt and money advice in the Falkirk Council area is £1.16million. The CABx currently receive £427,000, which equates to 37% of the total spend.
- 2.23 Although the Bureaux receive a number of strands of funding from the Council, they currently operate to a single key outcome, which is: ***‘Every Citizen in the Falkirk Council area will have access to advice services which are adaptable to suit national reform and local interpretation, and ensures that no individual ‘falls through the gaps’, with a particular emphasis placed on the priority groups identified in Toward a Fairer Falkirk’.***
- 2.24 The single key outcome relates directly to the Falkirk Council Poverty Strategy, Towards a Fairer Falkirk. We expect the bureaux to consider the target groups and areas identified in the strategy and all the work that they do.

3 EVIDENCE GATHERED: Friday 30th August 2013

- 3.1 Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureaux were invited to present evidence to the Scrutiny Panel on 30th August 2013. The CABx were represented by Tom Lambie, Chair of Grangemouth and Bo’ness CAB and the Joint Action Group, Mary Baillie, Manager, Falkirk CAB, Bill Polumbo, Manager Grangemouth & Bo’ness CAB and Margaret Gray, Denny & Dunipace CAB.
- 3.2 The Provost welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Tom Lambie, to open on behalf of CABx. Tom Lambie referred to the establishment in 2008 of the Joint Action Group, which was set up to ensure greater collaboration between the 3 local CABx and to allow an open channel of communication between each Board and their directors. The Joint Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015 sets out the collective aims and priorities of the 3 CABx with the core aim “that every person in the Falkirk Council area has equal access to the Citizens Advice Service when required”.
- 3.3 Mary Baillie addressed the Panel, speaking on behalf of the 3 managers in attendance, to summarise the role of CAB’x and the Joint Strategic Plan. The presentation is included within the background papers.
- 3.4 CABx provide a whole raft of advice and support services but Welfare and Debt issues take up most of the enquiries – 72% in 2011/12.
- 3.5 They try to provide an outreach service to all communities, but it is not a one size fits all approach. In this respect, there is close liaison with Community Learning and Development. In addition, the success of the recent application for Support and Connect lottery funding will assist in enhancing responses to requests from rural areas. The bid for the lottery funding was a joint bid made jointly by the CABx and Falkirk Council.

- 3.6 Key areas of success included the Armed Services Advice Project managed by the Denny office and the response to the Welfare Reform programmes, with consultation taking place with many groups and organisations, also, the Energy Best programme and the work within the new Forth Valley Hospital.
- 3.7 Volunteers are the life blood of the organisation and service delivery was wholly dependant on them. Paid staff are important in providing support to the volunteers and in delivering specialist services.
- 3.8 The challenges that lie ahead include – funding; responding to increased demand in more complex cases; sanctions to job seekers; the ‘bedroom tax’; foodbanks; fallout from ESA and finding suitable premises for the Falkirk office.
- 3.9 The Joint Action Group is looking to address all of these issues by developing partnerships with the Council and other organisations.
- 3.10 Provost Reid asked if there was an expansion in specialist advice offered rather than general support.
- 3.11 Margaret Grey responded that specialist advice had expanded and as a consequence there was a need for a consistent approach. Paid staff are those who gave specialist advice and in the main Money/Debt was the main issue. Law graduates had been recruited as volunteers and closer liaison was taking place with DWP staff. Bill Polumbo supplemented this by advising that legal clinics were providing assistance with employment law.
- 3.12 Mary Baillie referred to the lottery funding and suggested some of it could be used to help in increasing office hours. In many cases joint applications were made but equally local offices tended to deal with local issues.
- 3.13 There was considerable debate on the issue of geographical coverage, in particular the best use of resources to accommodate the rural/outlying areas (Slammanan was referred to). All the managers agreed that this area of service could be examined again; however it was a subject which they consider on a regular basis. Rather than attending a public/church hall and having little or no attendees, consideration should be given to a having a CAB presence when another function/event is being held.
- 3.14 The Provost received confirmation that the Dawson area was the subject of outreach service.
- 3.15 Councillor McLuckie advised that he was not aware that there was a home appointments system for CAB and suggested that this service would benefit from greater awareness/publicity.
- 3.16 Lesley MacArthur intimated that there was close working between CAB and the Community Learning and Development, via Jim MacDonald, in accessing suitable premises and resources. Likewise, Lorna Bryson from Customer First was helpful in identifying available resources. Discussion then continued on the relationship with CLD and ways of enhancing it. Recent examples included the

successful literacy awareness sessions and work done at Bonnybridge Community Centre.

- 3.17 Reference was made to the structure review carried out in 2009 which considered recruitment, joint approach to funding etc. There was no conclusive evidence that centralising CABx was the right action and that it was for each individual CAB to properly run their own office.
- 3.18 Margaret Grey repeated the message that “Reaching the People” was the ultimate aim of the service, and was supported in this by Alison Greig who informed that CAS were working with all Bureaux in developing stronger marketing techniques which would include the appointment of a Marketing Officer.
- 3.19 Baillie Paterson was interested in the relationship with the Forth Valley Hospital and was advised that the service currently operated 3 days a week out of the hospital, between the hours of 10am – 2pm, however it was a matter they were interested in developing further and were communicating with the hospital to examine all the available options in enhancing the service. To this extent they were looking to arrange ward visits and were hoping to discuss with Women’s Aid, better use of facilities within the building.
- 3.20 Bill Polumbo gave an insight into the relationship with Caledonian Clubhouse and commented on the positive aspects of it.
- 3.21 Training and recruitment was then discussed. The organisation had a presence at lots of recruitment fairs and undertook centralised training, which was improving with experience. There was a positive relationship with Stirling University which reaped rewards in the good supply of volunteers. No such relationship currently existed with Forth Valley College but it was an area where progress was hoping to be made.
- 3.22 With regard to monitoring and review, in particular KPT’s, Lesley MacArthur advised that it was the subject of ongoing process.
- 3.23 Margaret Grey listed many of the organisations with which CAB were in partnership with and these included – CLD, Credit Union, Homestart Denny, Caledonian Clubhouse, Health Centres, Falkirk Council Welfare and Benefits section etc.
- 3.24 Provost Reid was advised that the removal of the ESA had impacted on the number of appeals that were being heard and as a consequence this was having an effect on application of resources.
- 3.25 Bill Polumbo advised that CABx were aware of the Scams being undertaken via the internet and were offering suitable advice.
- 3.26 Tom Lambie concluded that the key area of for the CABx was promotion and awareness and that they were committed to ensuring the provision of a worthwhile service to those people in need of assistance and help.

4 EVIDENCE GATHERED: Friday 6th September 2013

- 4.1 External and partner agencies were invited to present evidence to Scrutiny Panel on 6th September 2013. Falkirk Council's Community Advice Service was represented by Carole Jones, Service Manager, Graeme Mitchell, Welfare Benefits Team Leader and George Paul, Debt Advice Team Leader. Women's Aid was represented by Lisa-Marie Prett and Signpost Forth Valley by Karen Duncan.
- 4.2 Graeme Mitchell gave a full and comprehensive presentation on the role of the Community Advice Service. A full note of information provided is included in the background papers. Following the presentation there was considerable discussion and questions on the issues raised.
- 4.3 Provost Reid and Councillor McLuckie both enquired about the relationship between Community Advice Service and CAB. Graeme Mitchell replied that there was a close working relationship especially in the area of representation at Appeals; in joint bids for additional funding; on CAB referrals (currently 63 this year); on the establishment of support teams and the equal distribution of work.
- 4.4 Graeme Mitchell advised that there was £334k in funding available until March 2015; there was an 84% success rates in Employment Support Allowance appeals and that the next potential workload involved personal care/ mobility. He also confirmed that they were in receipt of health referrals, in the main from nursing and GPM, and this medical evidence formed an important component of appeals.
- 4.5 When asked about where he considered CAB could work better, Graeme Mitchell replied that there could be an improvement in the referral programmes for appeals. He suggested that there had been issues in the past, perhaps due to the workloads within both organisations, but was hopeful that improvement would occur. He did advise that in cases of employment advice, these matters were directed to CAB.
- 4.6 The issue of "getting the word out" was significant and fliers/cards/posters had been distributed with contact telephone numbers.
- 4.7 George Paul spoke about the financial assistance service and in particular debt advice. A full note of the information presented is included within the background papers. He recognised in response to a question from the Provost that companies, such as Wonga, were a major problem.
- 4.8 Baillie Paterson enquired about the relationship with CAB and was advised of the procedures involving sequestrations and the certification processes connected with it. Baillie Paterson was also informed that cases had increased by 114% from this time last year and there was a need for additional staff/resources.
- 4.9 Karen Duncan on behalf of Signpost Forth Valley, gave a full and graphic summary of the work of Signpost and spoke of the support offered by the organisation to drug addicts and alcoholics. She emphasised the following:-
 - No typical client – Drugs and alcohol impacted on all areas of society;

- Each client has their very own personal story and their addiction is perhaps only a part of the problem;
 - The services of CAB were offered to clients but not all are in a fit state to accept them. “Chaotic Clients” tend not to be able to visit other offices. However, those that have been through the programme and are at an advanced stage in rehab are at times comfortable seeing CAB;
 - Debt problems are a real issue with D/A addicts; and
 - Success with drop in service; working closely with families and in regular contact with the Police and other services.
- 4.10 Ms Duncan noted that the very fact of the Scrutiny Panel being established had meant that Signpost Recovery would look into more proactively working with CABx for the benefits of their clients.
- 4.11 Councillor McLuckie raised the issue of gambling addiction and was assured that it was not being ignored, so much so that the Drug and Alcohol service for Scotland was appointing a gambling counsellor.
- 4.12 Lisa Marie Pert of Scottish Women’s Aid outlined the services offered by her organisation.
- 4.13 The organisation has a 3 stage trauma programme:
- Stage 1 – Crisis stage – the aim is to stabilise the situation
 - Stage 2 – Counselling/Psychology
 - Stage 3 – Group work – aimed at reintegrating back into the community
- 4.14 The following points were emphasised:
- 90% of their funding comes from Falkirk Council, with the remaining coming from the Scottish Government. Work closely with ARC, Police, Schools and voluntary services;
 - Women’s Aid currently work in conjunction with CAB and find them very useful, with CAB now attending the drop in centres on a regular and planned basis. This service commenced in May 2013; and
 - An out of hours service is provided Friday to Monday and currently has about 60 cases to service. Children are sadly involved in many of the cases.
- 4.15 Councillor McLuckie raised the issue of abuse of men, which was recognised as a problem and one that is not dismissed. He also enquired about use of the service by ethnic groups and was advised that there was an increase in clients from those groups.

5 CONCLUSION

Outreach

- 5.1 During the meetings of the Scrutiny Panel, a significant level of information was provided to Members regarding the provision of outreach by CABx. It is evident from the information presented that traditional forms of outreach i.e. staff and or volunteers providing a service within community based buildings on scheduled days and times, are not an effective use of resources. Over the past years, the CABx have established and publicised traditional outreach in a range of areas across the Falkirk areas, however client numbers making use of the provision are sporadic and generally very low.
- 5.2 During the third meeting of the Scrutiny Panel when other organisations operating in the Falkirk Council area were invited to provide evidence to the Panel, it became clear that, through working with other organisations, the CABx could provide an alternative form of outreach which would specifically target vulnerable groups of people who may not have been able to access the services of CABx. For example, Signpost Forth Valley acknowledged that although their client group would benefit from the support available from CABx, their condition may prevent them from being confident enough to approach either CABx offices or formal outreaches. In this instance, it would be more appropriate for the CABx to run a targeted outreach service within Signpost's premises. This is currently being piloted with Falkirk & District Women's Aid and seems to be very effective. The organisations that CABx might consider working with on this basis are for example, Signpost Recovery, Aberlour and Barnardos Family Support Services, Braes Family Centre and Hone Start Denny.
- 5.3 Recommendations are therefore:
 - Outreach should be revised and modernised to maximise access to vulnerable groups, particularly for those who would not otherwise access the service;
 - The CABx identify further opportunities for targeted outreach, to work alongside other service providers in the Falkirk Council area;
 - CABx work with Council Officers to identify rooms within Council buildings across the area, which can regularly be used as interview rooms; and
 - CABx ensure that the availability of home visits is publicised.

Work with other agencies

- 5.4 The Panel received information regarding the signposting and referral systems that are currently in place between CABx and other agencies. It would appear that there remains a potential for clients to fall between services. There may be a range of reasons for this for example, high level of demand on services and therefore the potential inability to provide a smooth transition between agencies.

5.5 Recommendations are therefore:

- In conjunction with other agencies, consider the development of a client signposting and referral tracking system;
- Provide the opportunity for advice providers to participate in a planning group, which will develop a strategic approach to provision of a consistent pathway of advice across the Falkirk Council area. This could include CABx, Community Advice, Department of Work and Pensions, Homelessness Welfare Advice Team.

Pace of Change

5.6 The Members are very pleased with the work which is being taken forward by the Joint Action Group and commend the CABx for the improvements in joint working over the past 2 years. It is however noted that some of the actions within the Joint Action Group (JAG) strategic plan are not progressing quickly and therefore the results of the joint work are limited in some areas. In addition, Members were not provided with evidence which showed that resources are being used in the most effective way, either by individual bureau or collectively.

5.7 Recommendations are therefore:

- JAG continue the excellent work;
- JAG consider the use of the totality of the resource in terms of funding, staff and volunteers to ensure that best value is being achieved; and
- JAG provide Members with a follow-up report in 6 months regarding progress and any further proposed actions.

Communication between CABx and Community Advice Services

5.8 During Panel meetings, information was provided to Members which highlighted some inconsistency in procedures between CABx and Falkirk Council's Community Advice Service. This was particularly in relation to referrals and suggested that there was a need to improve communication between agencies.

5.9 Recommendations are therefore:

- Ensure that communication between agencies is adequate and consistent; and
- Ensure that procedures across agencies in terms of referrals are clear and consistent.

Premises

5.10 Members noted the different arrangements in place regarding CABx premises. Members noted particular concerns regarding Falkirk Bureau's premises in terms of its fit for purpose, capacity and ability to cope with current demand and the development of future services.

5.11 Recommendations are therefore:

- Council Officers work with Falkirk CAB to consider alternative premises arrangements for the future.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Scrutiny Panel make the following recommendations and would expect that Officers work with CABx to incorporate actions within the Strategic Joint Action Plan:

6.2 Outreach

- Outreach should be revised and modernised to maximise access to vulnerable groups, particularly for those who would not otherwise access the service;
- The CABx identify further opportunities for targeted outreach, to work alongside other service providers in the Falkirk Council area;
- CABx work with Council Officers to identify rooms within Council buildings across the area, which can regularly be used as interview rooms; and
- CABx ensure that the availability of home visits is publicised.

6.3 Working with other agencies

- In conjunction with other agencies, consider the development of a client signposting and referral tracking system; and
- Provide the opportunity for advice providers to participate in a planning group, which will develop a strategic approach to provision of a consistent pathway of advice across the Falkirk Council area. This could include CABx, Community Advice, Department of Work and Pensions, Homelessness Welfare Advice Team.

6.4 Pace of Change

- JAG continue the excellent work;
- JAG consider the use of the totality of the resource in terms of funding, staff and volunteers to ensure that best value is being achieved; and
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6.5 Communication between CABx and Community Advice Services

- Ensure that communication between agencies is adequate and consistent; and
- Ensure that procedures across agencies in terms of referrals are clear and consistent.

6.6 Premises

- Council Officers work with Falkirk CAB to consider alternative premises arrangements for the future.

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CHAIR OF SCRUTINY PANEL: PROVOST PAT REID

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Presentation by Alison Greg, Development Officer, Citizens Advice Scotland
2. Presentation by Lesley MacArthur, Corporate Policy Officer and Citizens Advice Bureaux Monitoring Officer.
3. Notes of presentation on behalf of Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureaux, Mary Baillie, Manager, Falkirk CAB.
4. Notes of presentation on behalf of Falkirk Council's Welfare Benefits Advisory Service, Graeme Mitchell, Team Leader.
5. Notes of presentation on behalf of Falkirk Council's Debt Advice Service, George Paul, Team Leader.
6. Towards a Fairer Falkirk Strategy
7. Citizens Advice Bureaux Monitoring Statements to 31st May 2013
8. Joint Working Agreement
9. Annual Reports (2010/11 and 2011/12)
10. Budget information
11. Following the Public Pound report
12. Joint Action Group: Area Business Plan
13. Individual CAB Development Plans
14. Fraser of Allander Institute report 'The financial benefits of advice provision – the example of the Citizens Advice Services in Scotland'
15. Maps showing areas covered by each office.

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers listed above should telephone Falkirk 01324 506004 and ask for Fiona Campbell.