

Citizens Advice Mole Valley— 2015 Annual Review

Introduction by Peter Jackson, Trustee Chairman

Welcome to our review of the past year! We started the year as Leatherhead and Dorking Citizens Advice Bureau but recently completed our change of name to Citizens Advice Mole Valley to coincide with a rebranding exercise undertaken by the national Citizens Advice network. This more modern title should help us to



engage more effectively with our potential clients - Mole Valley residents of all ages - while maintaining our core values of delivering advice which is independent, impartial, confidential and free to all.

2015 has been a significant year for us. We faced challenges on several fronts but have emerged as a stronger organisation well-equipped to assist our clients address the diverse problems that they bring to us in an ever more complex world. Some

of the year's highlights are listed overleaf.

Special thanks go to Deborah Jones, our Manager, who, despite joining us little over a year ago as a complete 'outsider' (never having worked with Citizens Advice before) rapidly grasped the reins to maintain and enhance service delivery during a period of some transition. In contrast to many other local citizens advice, which are staffed predominantly by paid staff, we run a very 'tight ship' with only 6 full-time equivalent salaried employees working with a team of almost 70 unpaid volunteers, who typically work one day a week. The dedication of both staff and volunteers over the year has been remarkable and is reflected in our excellent ranking in a quality assurance audit this summer. Our heartfelt thanks go out to our volunteers, without whom there would be no Citizens Advice Mole Valley. But with such a reliance on volunteers who do not have the 'tie' of a regular salary, we are vulnerable to changes as individuals may decide to fully retire, to move away from the locality, or even to return to paid employment. As such, we are

always on the lookout for people of any age or background with a desire to become volunteers to fill a variety of different roles. Our volunteers universally find the experience stimulating and worthwhile at all levels. Whilst the training programme for advisers is lengthy, taking some 12-18 months to complete, there are many other roles of equal interest and value which have a less intense training requirement.

We are also keen to meet potential new trustees to supplement our numbers. This is another vital role – our trustees (likewise unpaid) provide strategic direction for, and monitoring of, our service and bear ultimate responsibility for the bureau, its staff, its clients and its funders. No specific knowledge or experience is required – just common-sense, preferably an element of business experience, and a commitment to the service.

Do please get in touch if you are interested in either a volunteer or trustee role, or know someone who might be.

Annual Public Meeting

All readers are invited to our 2015 Annual Public Meeting which will again be held at the Fairfield Centre, Leatherhead KT22 8AH on **Tuesday 17 November**. Formal proceedings will start at 20.00 with refreshments served from 19.30.

The format will be similar to last year's very successful APM which attracted over 50 participants – introductory talks will highlight key developments followed by small break-out groups at which everyone can contribute to discussions on the future direction of Citizens Advice Mole Valley. Please phone or email the Dorking Office if you propose to attend, just so that we have some idea of numbers.

2014-15 highlights at a glance

- ◇ We helped 3,532 individuals. Welfare benefits, tax credits and debt enquiries accounted for over half of our clients' problems. Housing issues formed the next largest category.
- ◇ 60% of our clients were female. 34% of our clients had some disability. Clients' ages were spread fairly evenly across the age 20 to 70 spectrum, but almost 12% were over age 70.
- ◇ £535,600 quantifiable financial benefits achieved for our clients, plus £222,100 in other equivalent financial benefits such as debt payments rescheduled.
- ◇ 98% of our clients said they were either 'very happy or 'happy' with the information, advice and service we've given them. And 100% would recommend our service to others.
- ◇ Volunteer numbers boosted by a recent recruitment drive; 5 individuals have embarked on the adviser training course this autumn to add to the 8 who completed their training during this last year.
- ◇ Designated one employee and one volunteer to lead our Research and Campaigns initiative.
- ◇ Significant input to the new Dorking Area Food Bank which was launched in spring 2015 and faced an unexpectedly high level of demand.
- ◇ Consistently high standard of advice maintained – a recent 3-yearly audit ranked us well within the top 10% of bureaux nationally for both the Quality of Advice and overall organisation and management, with specific mention of our advice and casework on welfare benefits and debt as well as quality of training and work on Research and Campaigns.
- ◇ Surpassed service level agreements with Mole Valley District Council and other key funders. Renewed service level agreements adopted with Circle Housing Mole Valley and with Surrey County Council for their Local Assistance Scheme.
- ◇ Continuing work for our dedicated website which is to be launched imminently.

Business development plan 2015

Looking to the future, we updated our business development plan to identify issues facing us over the next three years and to prioritise solutions. Key challenges identified include:-

- ◇ Attract sufficient core funding and project funding to maintain our service to the local community, both in the two main town centres and the various Outreaches.
- ◇ Ensure we are adequately resourced with employed staff, volunteers and trustees to meet the public's expectations for advice services and build on our excellent quality rating.
- ◇ Ensure our training programme equips both existing and new advisers with the knowledge and tools required to advise in an ever-more complex environment. Money Advice is one field that we are actively planning to expand so as to fulfil local needs.
- ◇ Actively engage with other nearby bureaux (within the Citizens Advice Surrey network) to address common issues, explore new service delivery modes (telephone, webchat and email), participate in multi-bureau projects with broader funding possibilities and to make our voice heard within national Citizens Advice.
- ◇ Boost our capability in the Research and Campaigns field. This is a two-way process in which we feed back grass-roots issues adversely affecting our clients to national Citizens Advice to raise awareness and influence public policy; we also disseminate national campaign issues locally.
- ◇ Capitalise on the launch of our dedicated website to enhance our profile within the local community.

Finances and fund raising

For the year to 31 March 2015 we achieved a small surplus of £18,000.

Mole Valley District Council generously provided just over half of our income, signalling their recognition that the free advice service offered by Citizens Advice makes a unique contribution to the welfare of those living in our community. The grant from the Big Lottery Fund provided 20% of our income, specifically to enable us to operate the Outreach at 8 locations for those clients who cannot easily reach either of our main offices. The Big Lottery grant ends in January 2016, after a highly successful 5 years during which we have met all our service targets. We are currently exploring several avenues for the funding of the Outreach from 2016 onwards.

The need for advice increases every year, particularly as ever more complex cases arise. So, therefore, does our need for funding. We cannot rely on such funding always coming from the hard-pressed Local Authority; we need to see local businesses step up to lend their financial support.

We have worked hard to raise our profile with local businesses in 2014-15 as it is not always known that we operate as an independent local charity with no funding from central government or national Citizens Advice. A highlight of this campaign was a cheese and wine evening held on 4 March at which three speakers described various aspects of our services after which guests mingled with our staff and trustees.

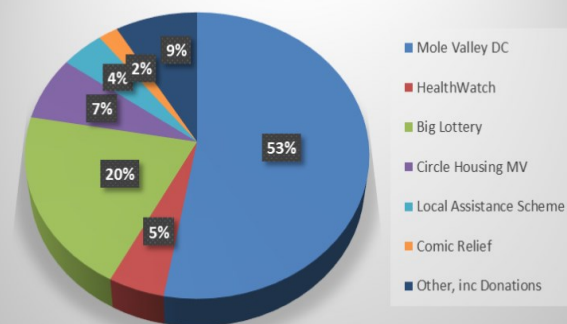
In the past year, we have reached out to a large range of local businesses, many for the first time. To date, we have not achieved significant financial support from this source. We will be reaching out again in the near future, but would urge any members of the local businesses community reading this report not to wait for our approach; instead **please contact us immediately**. We will then arrange a meeting to explore how we can work together, in the interests of all who live in the Mole Valley.

In a separate initiative, we raised almost £800 in public donations from our collecting boxes outside Sainsbury's supermarkets in both towns over the weekend of 30-31 October 2014 held to mark our 75th anniversary.

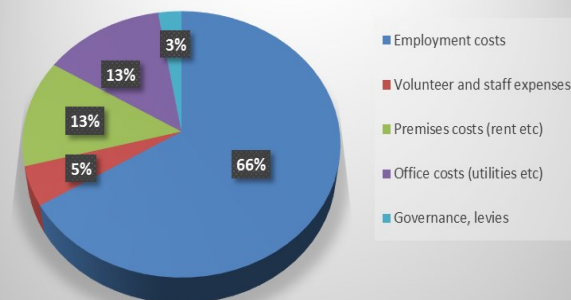
2014-15 accounts

Income	£248,000
Expenditure	£230,000
Surplus	£18,000

2014-15 income



2014-15 expenditure



Report by national Citizens Advice

National Citizens Advice recently issued a report – [The value of the Citizens Advice service: our impact in 2014/15](#) – which demonstrates the difference we make to individuals and how this benefits society. Gillian Guy, Chief Executive, commented:

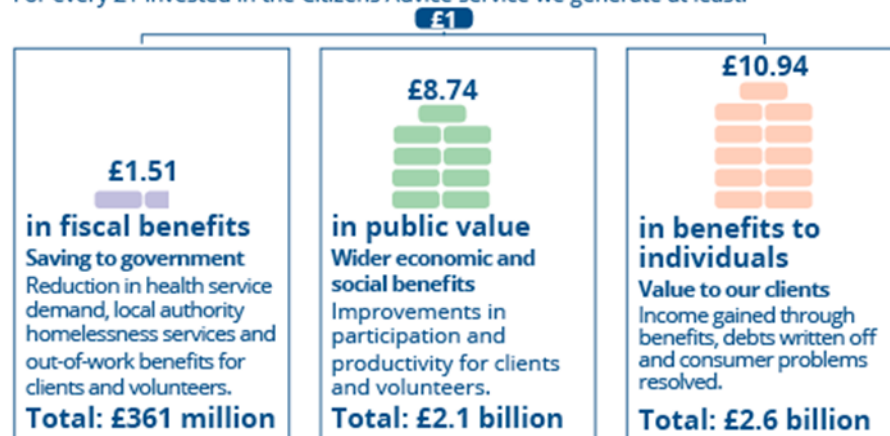
“Citizens Advice is unique for many reasons: our 21,600 dedicated, highly trained volunteers; our presence in every community across England and Wales; our impact in solving 2 in 3 people’s problems; and the wide range of issues we help people with. And so it will come as no surprise to those who work or interact with the service to learn that our value is also unique. For every £1 spent on the Citizens Advice service, we benefit our clients by almost £11 and we save government and public services at least £360

million every year. We estimate our total social and economic value to society to be over £2 billion.

Understanding the high value of advice is essential as the pressures on the public finances continue, and national and local spending is scrutinised further. We have a fundamental responsibility to our clients and the communities we serve, to communicate why we are an essential service and not just a ‘nice to have’. Free, independent, confidential, impartial advice makes society better. We are the first port of call for millions of people each year and help them to overcome their problems. This report is a significant piece of work, intended to help us ensure the Citizens Advice service is available to every single person who needs it for decades to come.”

Our value to society in 2014/15:

For every £1 invested in the Citizens Advice service we generate at least:



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