**Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau**

**In-Court Lay Representation Project**

**Team Leader / Lay Representative Recruitment Pack**

**Background Information**

**The Organisation**

Citizens Advice Bureaux are the major providers of information, advice and assistance, operating from 219 service points that cover Scotland from the islands to the City Centres.

The Bureaux are staffed by trained volunteer advisers, paid support, specialist and management staff, and provide responses to clients' enquiries covering the whole range of social issues. Despite being a generalist service, most enquiries are concerned with matters related to problems of poverty and deprivation.

Bureaux are autonomous bodies under the control of a local or Board of Trustees. All bureaux are members of Citizens Advice Scotland (The Scottish Association of CABx), and as such must meet specific conditions of membership related to standards of service and other matters.

Enquiries are across a wide range of fields, and clients expect high quality advice and assistance (including representation at tribunals and in Court when appropriate) on what are, at times, highly complex matters. The main enquiries at the present time relate to problems with welfare benefits and money; employment; goods and services; housing; and family and personal situations.

**Hamilton Citizens Advice Bureau**

The Bureau has been providing an independent advice service in Hamilton since1970. While not being in the Town Centre, the Bureau is very close to the Sheriff Court, the Jobcentre Plus and South Lanarkshire Council Offices. It is close to several bus routes and a few minutes walk from Hamilton West Railway Station.

The Bureau became an incorporated company limited by guarantee in January 2010 and is a charity registered with the OSCR. Our work is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Hamilton CAB operating area includes Larkhall, Stonehouse, Blantyre, Bothwell & Uddingston. Some of our services have a wider geographical catchment – primarily the In-CourtLay Representation Projectwhich covers the Hamilton and Lanark Sheriff Court areas; our Health Hubs operate in five centres across Hamilton & Clydesdale and our Domestic Abuse project worker covers all of South Lanarkshire.

We operate from two main facilities: the Bureau and an additional administrative office – both in Almada Street; we also provide a full-time service from our office within Birnie House at Hamilton Sheriff Court. Funding permitting we operate outreach services which have included various locations in Larkhall, Fairhill Lifestyle Centre in Hamilton and Blantyre Credit Union. Recently we have co-located in five health centres to strengthen links with health practitioners and reach people with ill-health.

**The People**

Chair of the Board of Trustees is Mushtaq Ahmad OBE, former Provost of South Lanarkshire Council and currently Lord Lieutenant of Lanarkshire. The Chair provides support and line management for the Bureau Manager. Our Financial Trustee Neil Kennedy supports the manager and advises the Board on financial planning and management matters.

In February 2015, we have 15 volunteer advisers and four admin support volunteers delivering the service. We participate in the Community Jobs Scotland Scheme offering employment opportunities to younger people in advice, customer service and promoting the service to young people. A team of fifteen paid staff provide specialist advice and management support across the services. The Manager has day-to-day operational management control within the agreed strategic and policy framework.

We achieved Investor in Volunteers accreditation in April 2013.

**Funding**

The Bureau has service level agreements in place with South Lanarkshire Council for core and money advice services; the Scottish Legal Aid Board for the In-Court Lay Representation Project and two Big Lottery funded projects working in partnership with NHSL Total Income in 2013/14 was £283,399.

**The Service**

We provide information, advice and representation in a wide range of areas: benefits, housing, debt, employment, consumer, family and relationships, legal, health, utilities etc. In 2013-14 we provided advice to 2501 people on 12840 issues across 15 areas of law. Welfare benefits and multiple debt, problems are about 65% of our workload with legal issues, housing and employment issues the other key areas.

In April 2011 we achieved the Scottish National Standards for Information & Advice Providers in 46 areas of Housing, Welfare Benefits and Money Advice law. We provide advice and representation to Type III level (representation in sheriff court and benefits tribunals) in housing, money and welfare benefits.

We operate a mix of drop-in and appointments five days per week with an email advice service offering out of hours contact. The In-Court Lay Representation Project provides advice and representation at mortgage respossession, eviction and sequestration court hearings and accepts referrals from four CABx, local authorities and a range of organizations. Our Health & Welfare Advice Hubs operate within five health centres across South Lanarkshire taking referrals from GPs and health practitioners and the Lanarkshire Domestic Abuse Housing & Welfare Adviser works across South Lanarkshire in partnership with NHSL, Police Scotland and a range of specialist support organisations.

**Strategic Planning & Development**

We are currently developing our plan for 2015-18 which will enable us to transform HCAB service from a reactive service providing advice at times of crisis to proactively providing education, information, advice and support to help with life changes/ transitions and meeting different community needs.

**In-Court Lay Representation Project**

This service has operated in Hamilton Sheriff Court since 2004 and in Lanark Sheriff Court since April 2013. It is a well-established, busy and dynamic service which enjoys an excellent reputation with sheriffs, court staff, local authorities, advice organisations, the local faculty and other key agencies.

The current staffing consists of 1 fte (two people) lay representatives providing advice and representation on rent evictions / mortgage repossession; one full-time money advice link worker; 1 fte (two people) providing small claims advice and representation. The Team Leader/ Lay Representative will be required to provide advice and representation at mortgage repossession and sequestration court hearings and support complex casework.

The Project is funded by the Scottish Legal Aid Board through the Scottish Government’s Economic Downturn Programme and funding has recently been extended to September 2016. The service currently deals with around 70 new cases each month and an active caseload averaging 140 in any month.

Our CASTLE electronic case management system also allows for collation and reporting of statistics and the SLAB database collates information required by funders on activities and outcomes.

There is an office within Hamilton Sheriff Court (Birnie House) which is public facing and includes a small interview room; there is also a Project office at 101 Almada Street which is a short walk from the court and close to Hamilton CAB. Interview room facilities are available at the Bureau. Staff also operate from Lanark Sheriff Court and the CABx in the area as required.

The Project objectives have been reviewed and refocused for 2015-16 and our organisation is currently planning for a Scottish National Standards Audit, so excellent management and leadership skills will be required to ensure these are achieved.

 **Updated: February 2015**