



Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau:
Business Plan 2010 – 2013
Executive Summary

Chapter 1: Executive Summary

Introduction

Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau is an independent local charity, run by local people for the benefit of local people. It is also a member of Citizens Advice, the national umbrella body that provides support to bureaux. Within the past five years, the number of enquiries has doubled, from around 10,000 to 20,000 per annum. The largest category of enquiry today concerns debt, followed closely by welfare benefit entitlements. The need to provide specialist advice in complex cases and to offer outreach services means that it must employ paid workers in addition to a significant number of dedicated volunteers. The bureau employs over 20 staff, and uses the services of around 45 volunteers as advisers and admin support workers.

The Bureau is proud of its track record and reputation in Darlington – feedback from partners and clients remains positive. However, despite a good grounding in the local community and many successful initiatives that have expanded and refined the service to meet specific local needs, the next three years present a challenging environment that will test DCAB and its resources to the full. This business plan is therefore realistically set in the context of the analysis of the anticipated environment and wherever possible builds upon the bureau's past successes.

Statement of Purpose and Strategic Objectives

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.

Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau aims to:

- **Provide the advice people need for the problems they face**
- **Improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives**
- **Train all workers to provide an accurate, high quality client centred service**
- **Provide services that work to:**
 - **Inform people about the law and how it affects them**
 - **Advise people of the possible options available to them and the potential consequences of different courses of action**
 - **Listen to and support people as they consider and decide what to do**
 - **Assist people in pursuing their chosen course of action**
 - **Influence those responsible for policies and services by recommending changes based upon people's experiences**

Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau's key objectives are:

- **The maintenance and development of high quality client-centred services**
- **Increased partnership working as a means of meeting client expectations**
- **The provision of support and advice particularly for clients with the greatest needs**

- **Increased efficiency and responsiveness to clients by taking innovative and proven business opportunities**
- **To maintain effective governance and increase the reputation and profile of the bureau in Darlington**
- **To build upon the commitment of the staff through effective recognition and personal development strategies**
- **The development of a finance strategy that supports the aims and aspirations of the Bureau and its long-term viability**

The business plan and key objectives are aimed at maintaining the current level and quality of service whilst addressing identified needs through sound business cases that also contribute to the future financial stability of the bureau and re-equip it for a changing world and economic environment.

Environmental Analysis

General

Darlington has a population of 100,500 living in around 46,000 households. The majority of residents live in the urban area. Residents from black and ethnic minority (BME) backgrounds make up about 3% of the population. It is thought that the population will remain fairly static for the next few years. The most significant demographic change will be the aging of the population.

The Borough rates as the 95th most deprived of the 354 local authorities in England. 45% of residents live in 10 wards which are amongst the 25% most deprived in the country. Seven wards are amongst the 10 % most deprived in the country and over 30% of residents live in these (2007 Index of Multiple Deprivation). The most deprived wards have been most affected by the economic downturn, with numbers claiming Job Seekers Allowance significantly increased.

Economic

The impending general election and disputes about how to sustain recovery have introduced a degree of uncertainty which affects business and consumer confidence. The national unemployment rate currently stands at 8% or 2.5m and is the highest since September 1996.

Looking further ahead, it is expected that the pace of recovery of the UK economy beyond 2011 will be held back by the need to tightly constrain public spending as part of a programme of fiscal austerity (probably including significant tax rises) designed to reduce the budget deficit. It is highly probable that there will also be increases in indirect taxation levels. All or just some of these factors in combination will create a difficult environment for those individuals who have lost their jobs, experienced a drop in income or a change in circumstances (e.g. divorce or bereavement). It can therefore be reasonably concluded that, unless there is a significant improvement in the national economic performance, Darlington CAB will be faced with increasing demand for its services and uncertainty regarding resources.

Client Profile/Client Satisfaction Survey

Each year, Darlington Citizens Advice Bureau sees around 5000 people: 5% of the population of the Borough. It surveys annually approximately 10% through exit surveys. The 2009/10 figures are particularly positive:

- 99% of people found it very easy (77%) or fairly easy (22%) to find out about the CAB, and 100% were very happy (79%) or fairly happy (21%) with its location
- Only 3% were dissatisfied to any degree with opening hours (down from 9% the year before)
- Waiting times: The figures (with those of the previous year in brackets) are: Very Happy 54% (38%), Fairly Happy 39% (43%), Unhappy 6% (5%), Very Unhappy 1% (14%). This represents a significant improvement in the 12-month period
- Time dedicated to discussion of the clients' problems: 72% of clients remaining 'Very Happy' and 27% 'Fairly Happy', while those describing themselves as 'Very Unhappy' reduced from 4% to 1%
- Quality of advice: 79% of clients felt that the adviser understood their problem very well, compared to 74% the year before, while 86% were confident that they knew what they were talking about, as against 77%. The year before 6% of clients felt that the adviser had failed to understand their problem; the figure is now zero
- The number who found the information they were given easy to understand increased from 80% to 83%. Three-quarters of all clients felt clear about their next step rather than two-thirds the year before
- The only negative note is that 6% more clients felt the advice given was no more than 'Fairly Useful' rather than 'Very Useful'. However, a cumulative figure of 99% of usefulness should be a cause for congratulation

Performance Analysis

The Performance Analysis gives an insight into the way the bureau has deployed its resources to meet demand over the last 2/3 years. It identifies significant trends or changes in the way in which the bureau has worked and indicates that the demand for services is showing a steady upward trend with a need for more complex case management.

Past performance is no more than an indicator of future trends. Nevertheless, it provides a basis for consideration of how needs may be met and how the bureau could use its finite resources to maximum effect. The analysis will also be useful in underpinning future business cases for additional resource or bidding opportunities over the next 3 years.

The bureau has significantly exceeded all targets except for the number of unique clients. Whilst that number has broadly remained stable, the number of client contacts has increased substantially. This suggests that the bureau is dealing with more cases of greater complexity than in the past, supported by the increase in volunteer hours and the introduction of Gateway assessments. It also adds weight to the view that the most vulnerable people in the community (whom the bureau predominantly serves) are disproportionately finding their lives adversely affected by the downturn.

Client contacts	07/08		08/09		09/10
Number	12,348		15,308		19,751
Increase (number)		2960		4443	
Increase (percentage)		24%		29%	
Increase 2007 – 2010 (number)		7403			
Increase 2007 – 2010 (percentage)		60%			

The table above examines the year-on-year increase in client contact numbers. This shows the number of visits made to the bureau, and is thus the best single indicator of activity. This indicates a rise of almost a quarter between 2007/08 and 2008/09 and an even steeper rise between 2008/09 and 2009/10. In two years, the bureau has handled a 60% rise in contacts (with nothing resembling a commensurate increase in resources). This increase in activity is both significant and material and goes far to explain the considerable pressure that the bureau and its staff have experienced over the last 12 months.

Plans and Initiatives

This section deals with the ‘shape’ of the bureau structure, and indicates how this may change over the coming years. Within each section, there is a description of the activities currently being carried out and possible developments.

It is important to state here that the bureau’s general assumption is that funding and other resources will continue at a steady level. However Chapter 7 considers a range of alternative financial scenarios (positive and negative) and their probable implications. In view of the increased activity delivered by the bureau in recent years, which far outstrips the increase in resources, the Trustee Board does not believe that significantly more can be achieved under current conditions. The Board is aware of the danger of deterioration in quality in the pursuit of quantity, and considers that this would be in the interests of neither clients nor the bureau itself.

Financial Strategy

Historical Performance

The financial performance of the bureau over the past three years can be summarised as follows:

Year ended 31 March	2007	2008	2009
	£	£	£
Total incoming resources	380,159	426,805	462,545
Total outgoing resources	(406,518)	(424,872)	466,235
Net incoming/(outgoing) resources for the year	(26,359)	1,933	(3,690)
Funds:			
Unrestricted funds	2,240	7,279	3,371
Restricted funds	5,013	1,907	2,125

Balance sheet total	7,253	9,186	5,496
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Over the three years the bureau has been able to increase incoming resources through the diversification of funding sources. This has increased further during the year to 31 March 2010. This strengthens the bureau position should individual funding streams be lost.

Framework for budget-setting for next three years

The 2010/11 budget is set out in Appendix V. The projects and their level of financial security are as follows:

- Legal Services Commission: The LSC contract is currently out to tender, with the new contract commencing 1 October 2010. The bureau has placed itself in what it considers as a strong position to win this tender, but the outcome will not be known until July 2010
- Children's Services: This income is not secured but is expected to continue indefinitely subject to the council being able to provide funding. There may be potential for expanding this service and this is currently under investigation
- Court Desk: The bureau is a subcontractor of this service. The continuation of this contract may be affected by the outcome of the main LSC tender
- Hospital: Not formally secured but a service valued by the Mental Health Trust which has cost-saving implications for the hospital. This service is therefore expected to continue for the foreseeable future
- Health & Wellbeing : Three years of funding have been received in advance from the PCT
- Financial Inclusion Fund (FIF): Funding is secured until 2011, but uncertain beyond this point
- Big Lottery: This is a three-year grant that ceases September 2012
- Macmillan: Funding from Macmillan ceases on 31 March 2011, but the PCT has given a commitment to continue the funding thereafter
- Money Guidance: This is a pathfinder project for which funding is secured until December 2010. Current expectation is that the programme will then continue for at least the next three years
- Additional Hours of Advice: This project has been extended until November 2010 but is currently expected to cease at this date

In addition the bureau receives a grant from Darlington Borough Council to fund the volunteer and generalist advice services. Based on historical evidence we would expect this funding to continue, although in future there may be a move towards competitive tendering for the provision of this service.

The bureau has projected income of £648,000 for 2010/11. This is a 70% increase in comparison to 2007.

Based on the above comments, the bureau's currently projected income for the next three years is as follows:

Year ended 31 March	2011	2012	2013
Total incoming resources	<u>£648,000</u>	<u>£654,000</u>	<u>£454,000</u>

Year 3 is reduced due to the loss of the FIF contract. This may be extended further, but the bureau will need to plan for the loss of this contract if this is not the case. In addition, the Big Lottery grant finishes September 2012 and the bureau will need to look to secure alternative funding to continue outreach services.

Financial Risk Analysis

As demonstrated above, much of the bureau's income is relatively short-term in nature, much of it renewed on an annual basis. This creates a significant risk to the bureau in respect of loss of funding and the potential for redundancy or restructuring costs.

The large majority of expenditure of the bureau is represented by salaries (80% in 2009). Many of the staff are employed directly on the projects, although the management and administration structure must be funded by full-cost recovery against individual projects.

The historical demand and current economic climate has placed increasing pressure on already stretched services. At the same time nationally there is the need for cuts in government spending, which means a decrease in funding available. This may affect income streams to the bureau that were previously thought secure e.g. core funding from the council.

DCAB is heavily reliant on public funding: 78% of income in the year ended 31 March 2009 is from public sources, either directly or through Citizens Advice.

Managing risk will be key to the future of the bureau and therefore a range of different situations have been modelled to help manage the potential implications both in downside and upside scenarios – these can be seen in detail in Chapter 7d.

Development Matrix

The matrix in Chapter 9 provides a response to the purpose and strategic objectives of DCAB and the environmental context expected over the next three years as identified within the plan. It is also based upon a realistic reflection of where DCAB currently finds itself in terms of its historical development, current quality and quantity of service provision and attitude to managing perceived risk. Key areas covered include:

- Governance
- Services
 - Volunteers
 - Outreach

- Specialist
 - Prevention
- Support Services
 - Training
 - Management & Administration
 - Workforce

- Buildings and Infrastructure
 - Bennet House
 - ICT
- Partnerships
- Marketing and Publicity
- Finance
- Risk Management

The matrix represents a management agenda that the Board will utilise to assess performance and incremental development year on year over the 3-year period of the plan. The development matrix, like the business plan itself, is a live document which will be updated annually and support the continuous development of Darlington CAB both financially and to meet the needs of the population of Darlington, focusing particularly on those who have the greatest needs.

Chapter 9: Development Matrix

The matrix below is a response to the purpose and strategic objectives of DCAB a detailed risk assessment (see Appendix VI) and the environmental context expected over the next 3 years identified within the plan. It is also based upon a realistic reflection of where DCAB currently finds itself in terms of its historical development, current quality and quantity of service provision and attitude to manage perceived risk. The matrix represents a management agenda that the Board will utilise to assess performance and incremental development year on year over the 3 year period of the plan.

Development	Funding Status	Delivery Risk	Priority
<p>Governance</p> <p>Board development & training to improve effectiveness. Agree business plan delivery responsibility with sub committees as part of a performance framework. Develop a succession plan for board & management that embraces the diversity of the local community.</p>	2010/11 budget	Low	Essential
<p>Volunteer Service</p> <p>Increase the pool of volunteers to maintain existing service commitments and quality. Review the role of the ASM in the context of service delivery and Gateway function. Review staffing to ensure there are sufficient to support extended opening particularly on Wed. & Sat. Explore options to reinstate the telephone advice service - the lack of which was seen as an audit weakness - during 2010/11. Explore options and funding sources to develop a tailored service to meet the needs of young people.</p>	2010/11 budget /bids Partnership approach/Big Lottery bid	Medium High	Essential Essential
<p>Outreach Services</p> <p>Ensure the commissioning of 5 new outreach clinics to selected GP surgeries. Explore the option of further funding to expand this service to other GP practices Explore the provision of outreach services to clients with specific needs on a bespoke basis. This would include provision for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extending the Sure start service • Refugees and asylum seekers 	2010/11 budget Bids Big Lottery/bids	Low Medium High	Essential Highly desirable Highly desirable

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victims of domestic violence • People with Learning Difficulties and Mental Health problems in the community 	Big Lottery	High	Desirable
<p>Consider reinstating the home visit service - withdrawn due to lack of funding.</p> <p>Specialist Services</p>	LSC tender	Medium	Essential
<p>Successfully retender for the LSC contract – 20% of DCAB income – decision due in July 2010 and service to commence in October 2010.</p> <p>Prevention Services</p>	Tender	Medium	Highly desirable
<p>Consider developing a range of specialist literature and lesson plans and offering good practice financial advice and training.</p> <p>Extend the Money Guidance Pathfinder Project subject to funding being available after Dec. 2010 by extending the existing P/T post to F/T.</p>	Successful bid	Low	Essential
<p>Implement the Santander financial advice project with Sure start in May 2010.</p> <p>Support Services</p>	2010/11 budget /bid	Medium	Essential
<p>Training - explore more cost effective funding options through partnership working.</p> <p>For 2009/10, Government funding through the Additional Hours of Advice programme enabled the Bureau to expand the 10-hours-per-week post of Guidance Tutor to a full-time-equivalent. This project has now been extended to November 2010, but efforts must be made to seek funding to maintain this level.</p>	2010/11 budget	Low	Essential
<p>Additional training will be offered to Volunteers to improve the reception service at Bennett House.</p>			
<p>Management & Administration - the current Chief Executive has indicated his intention to retire in October 2010. This provides an opportunity to review the structure, taking account of the two large-scale funding bids that are pending.</p> <p>Further action will be taken to ensure the administrative staff have the skills and capacity to maintain effective and support services.</p>			
<p>Human Resources/Workforce - The Board will develop an effective human resource framework based upon current good practice and the aspiration of staff and volunteer retention and development. The framework will be reviewed annually by the board and updated accordingly</p>	2010/11 budget	Low	Essential

<p>Buildings and Infrastructure</p> <p>Bennet House – In the short term action will be taken to maximise the effective utilisation of the premises as the main base of the bureau. This will include addressing H&S issues and improvements to furnishings and equipment. However in its current form it is acknowledged the building has significant limitations that must be addressed to prevent an adverse impact on the quality of service offered to clients. Therefore an option appraisal will be completed during 2010/11 to find the best and most cost effective long term solution to meet the accommodation needs of the bureau.</p> <p>IT – In the past action has been taken to improve the bureau I.T. equipment. However it is now acknowledged that the current infrastructure is at best adequate to meet current needs. The Board are committed to a systematic upgrade of the I.T. infrastructure of the bureau which will commence in 2010/11.</p>	<p>2010/11 budget /bid</p> <p>2010/11 budget /bids</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>Medium</p>	<p>Essential</p> <p>Highly desirable</p>
<p>Partnerships</p> <p>The bureau has entered into several formal partnerships successfully and expects to expand their number using its current experience to guide future initiatives. A particular priority will be to explore opportunities for both formal and informal working with other Tees Valley bureaux.</p>	<p>2010/11 budget</p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Highly desirable</p>
<p>Marketing & Publicity</p> <p>The funding and marketing group will be re- established as a subcommittee of the board with revised Terms of Reference. The group will identify opportunities to build upon the CAB brand and maximise the profile of DCAB.</p>	<p>2010/11 budget</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>Essential</p>
<p>Finance</p> <p>The bureau income is relatively short-term in nature. Much of the income is renewed on an annual basis. This creates a significant risk to the bureau in respect of loss of funding. The board will therefore explore opportunities to build up the reserves of the bureau and to broaden the financial base which is the current source of income.</p> <p>In addition the finance subgroup will undertake regular risk assessments and scenario planning to manage financial volatility and risk.</p>	<p>Bids</p> <p>2010/11 budget</p>	<p>Medium</p> <p>Low</p>	<p>Highly Desirable</p> <p>Essential</p>
<p>Risk Management</p> <p>The board recognise the value of risk assessment and management. It will therefore undertake an annual risk assessment and action plan for incorporation into the annual refresh of the business plan and planning cycle.</p>	<p>2010/11 budget</p>	<p>Low</p>	<p>Essential</p>