



Summary of Activities April 2017 – March 2018

Citizens Advice Bromley is an operating name of Bromley Citizens Advice Bureaux Limited Charity Registration no: 299762
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What our clients are saying about us

I would like to thank you and your team for helping me get my DLA money. I'm sure I would not have done this without your help. Thank you ever so much.

Thank you for all the work you have done for me.

You were very kind and understanding.

It is very rare to find someone who goes above and beyond what is expected of them and I am more grateful than you will ever know.

I was very stressed and anxious about my problem but since meeting with CAB they have been really supportive both practically and emotionally and I now feel more confident in dealing with my situation. I have great trust in the service and find CAB really helpful.

Thank you so much for the time you spent with me yesterday. I really felt as though you did more than just a job and felt you genuinely cared.

Thanks to you we did forward a Mandatory Reconsideration letter to the DWP and have now been informed my husband is entitled to the higher rate Attendance Allowance. To receive this extra money will make such a difference to our lives.

I just want you to know that every time I contact Citizens Advice I am treated with much kindness and respect. Nothing is too much trouble.

Thank you so much for helping me today. I really thought I was going to go under! You really are a special lady so kind and patient.

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

The service aims:

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Citizens Advice Bromley adheres to the following principles:

Independence

The service provided by Citizens Advice Bromley is completely independent and enables us to offer impartial advice to all clients and to take up any issue with the appropriate authority on behalf of individuals or groups.

Impartiality

The service provided by Citizens Advice Bromley is impartial. It is open to everybody, irrespective of ability, age, gender, gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and social or economic status. Advice and help will be given on any subject without any preconceived attitude on the part of the office

Free

Citizens Advice Bromley's services are provided free to clients at the point of delivery.

Confidentiality

The service offered by Citizens Advice Bromley is confidential to enquirers. Nothing learned by us from enquirers, including the fact of their visits, will be passed on to anyone outside the service without their express permission.

Citizens Advice Bromley achieves this by offering advice services at Bromley Town and also a number of outreach centres across the borough.

Chair's Overview

At the time of writing we are almost a year into our new way of working as part of the Bromley Well partnership and the feedback we have had so far from both clients and stakeholders is very heartening for such an innovative and uniquely joined-up service for Bromley residents.

We have used the opportunities presented by Bromley Well to work with Bromley College designing a training programme in collaboration with their Tutors, providing real on the job training and experience for selected students so they can work to help our team assist new clients.

We are also looking to expand our services via our current outreach locations in St Paul's Cray, Anerley and Orpington and we are also considering some new locations too, so watch this space.

Through all this change, the work of all our staff and volunteers has again been exemplary showing both flexibility, expertise and commitment while the new systems and procedures were set up and displaying a real thirst for knowledge in finding out more about all our new Bromley Well partners' services so we can offer the best options for the increasing number of clients coming our way as indicated later in this report.



Ian Dawson
Chairman Trustee Board

CEO's Overview

It would not be right for me to start without saying a huge thank you to all our volunteers and staff for their perseverance and commitment over this past year.

It has been a challenging year which has seen the office go through some changes. Thank you to Fiona and Gulsah for always being there through thick and thin.

Challenges, when they arise, can have a positive impact and this has indeed been the case. Most notable is the work we are doing as the Single Point of Access on our Bromley Well contract. This contract has allowed us to work together with our partners in the voluntary sector to offer a holistic health & well-being service which serves as an early intervention for people in low level crisis.

We now have caseworkers who are able to work with our most vulnerable clients to help with issues which often have a major impact on a person life such as debt, housing, employment and benefits.

In May our Housing Caseworker Dawn joined forces with Community Links, Thackray Williams, Age UK Bromley & Greenwich and Bromley, Greenwich & Lewisham Mind to create a toolkit for Landlords and Tenants.

Our other projects have been equally successful with targets being exceeded.

The coming year looks to be another exciting one for us and it goes without saying that I am proud to be moving forward with a great team alongside me!



Loraine Whittaker
Chief Executive Officer

Our year in figures:



2,871 unique clients seen



£425,537 income gained
£139,281 debt written off



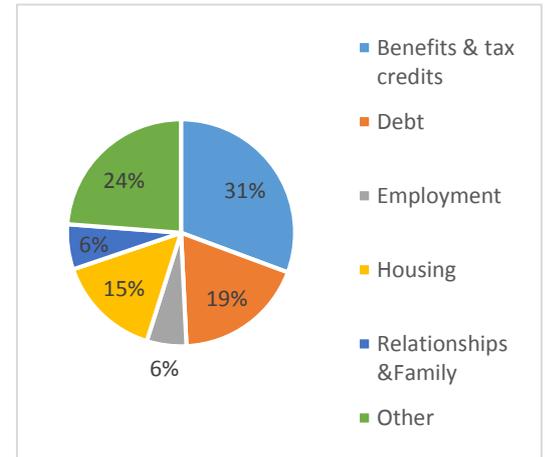
12,478 issues dealt with



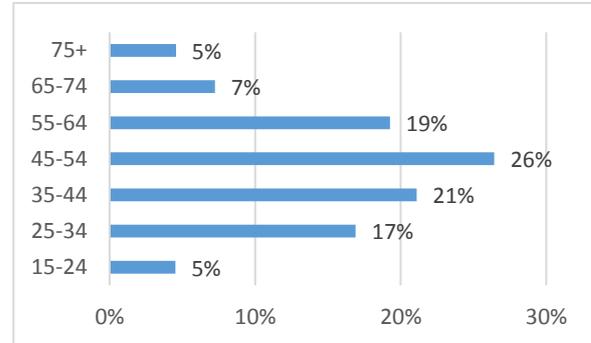
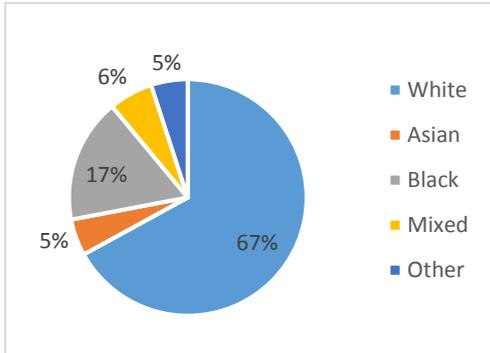
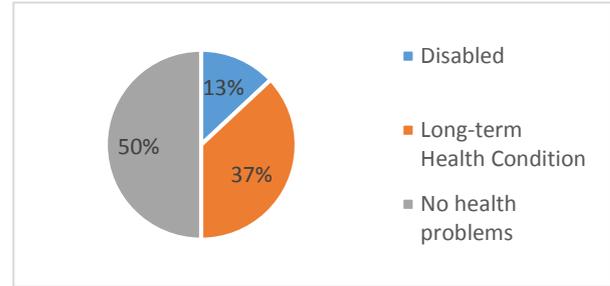
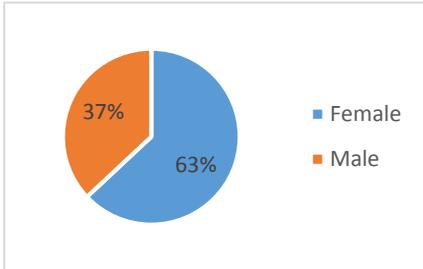
6,953 telephone referrals (October – March SPA)



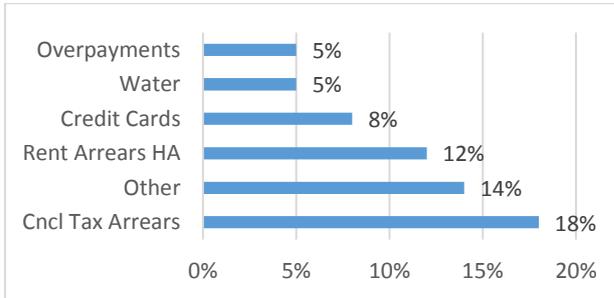
2,445 referrals to pathways (October – March SPA)



The people we help in Bromley:



A total of 898 clients were helped generating 3,517 issues during the year.

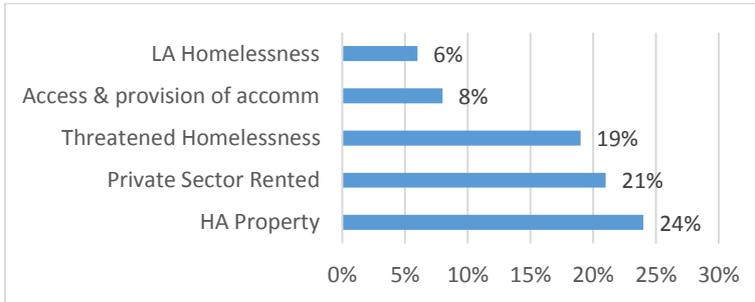


Case Study

The client, who had mental health issues, came to see us with debts arising from rent arrears and Council Tax arrears. The client was receiving other disability benefits and housing benefit (HB). HB was covering the full amount of rent, but due to furniture and water rates the client had to pay an amount every week which the client was not aware of. The client had poor literacy skills and was distressed about the rent arrears. Once the client had managed to get his SMI and Debt Mental Health evidence form signed by the GP the adviser was able to apply for SMI Council Tax exemption and also contacted the landlord to apply for a payment arrangement.

The Local Authority exempted the client and backdated the claim from the date the client moved into the property. The client was eligible to claim a refund. The adviser worked with the client to make regular payments every fortnight to cover the rent shortfall and arrears which the client adhered to. The client was pleased about the refund and was happy that concerns about eviction were resolved.

A total of 722 clients were helped generating 1,443 issues during the year.

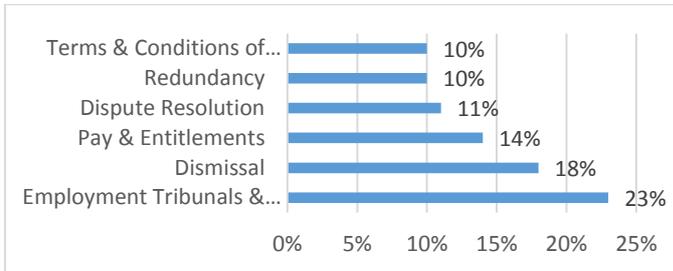


Case Study

The client, who was elderly contacted Citizens Advice Bromley seeking advice and assistance after the landlord (a Registered Provider of Social Housing) commenced possession proceedings due to rent arrears. The client's landlord informed the bureau that they would seek a suspended possession order which meant that the client would not be evicted if the current rent plus £5 per week was paid towards the outstanding rent arrears.

CAB took the view that the burden of a suspended possession order was not in the client's best interests and the client was accompanied to the court hearing with a view to asking the Judge to give consideration to adjourning the case on terms of current rent plus £5 a week towards the outstanding rent arrears and dispensing with the need for the suspended possession order. The matter was settled in discussions as the landlord accepted the points raised by CAB and agreed that the case should be adjourned on the terms proposed. The Judge who heard the case was pleased to make an order on these terms and the court hearing was, to the client's relief, concluded within a few minutes. The client continues to reside in his home and he is aware that he can return to CAB should further assistance be required in the future.

A total of 272 clients were helped generating 922 issues during the year.



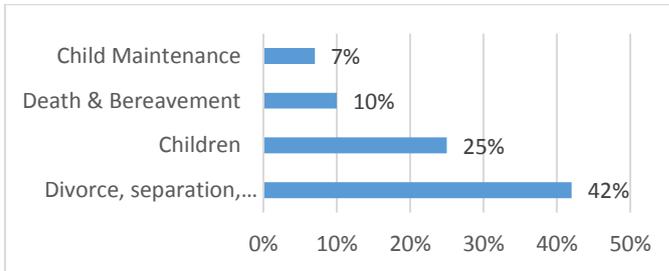
Case Study

The client had worked for their employer for 17 years. Client's employer had moved client to do work which was in direct conflict to the work that she had been employed to do and as a result client became ill and was off work suffering with stress. Client's pay had been reduced and client came to see us stating that it was impossible to return to work due to the stress.

The adviser explained all the options available to the client in detail and booked the client an appointment with our pro bono solicitor. Over a number of months the adviser continued to support the client. The client eventually decided to pursue her legal rights with the solicitor. A few months later the client wrote to us to explain that the case had been settled and stated the following:

"In regards to how the Citizens Advice were helpful, I would say that the information giving on where I stood and what options I had was really useful, I had never been in that situation before and it was quite overwhelming. I also found it really helpful that you called every week that support was invaluable to me at the time, and also the free consultation with the solicitor".

A total of 311 clients were helped generating 473 issues during the year.

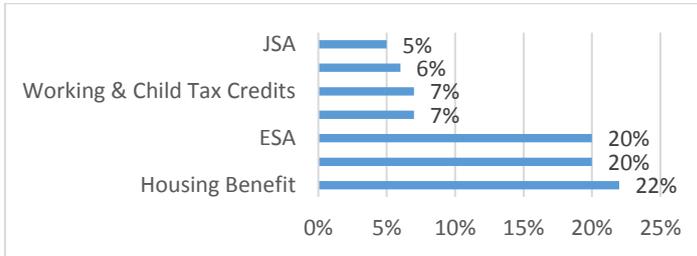


Case Study

The client is married and living with their parents after a relationship breakdown with their partner. Both are joint tenants and in receipt of Child Benefit, Tax Credits, Housing Benefit and Council Tax reduction. The client has been unemployed for two years due to poor health and was very emotional and explained that he was unable to see his children, and that this had affected him both emotionally and mentally during the period of his relationship. The client was booked an appointment with the housing solicitors to get specialist advice and given detailed information on relationship breakdown.

As the client required legal advice on his family issue, the advisor took him through information on legal aid and domestic violence and booked a specialist appointment with solicitors. The client was made aware that if he can prove he suffered domestic violence and is eligible for help under legal aid then he can obtain a solicitor to help represent him to get access to the children.

A total of 1,405 clients were helped during the year generating 4,299 issues.



Case Study

Client was extremely anxious and said on numerous occasions that they felt suicidal. Their Personal Independence Payment (PIP) benefit had been stopped since January 2018 and they had been given a date to appeal at Medical tribunal. The client did not feel able to attend the tribunal especially as the hearing date was on a Saturday.

The client was supported by our voluntary welfare benefits caseworker who prepared an appeal to the first-tier tribunal and represented the client at the tribunal.

Client said that had it not been for the support of the caseworker he would not have attended the tribunal.

The tribunal allowed the clients appeal and awarded him the enhanced rate of PIP for both the daily living and mobility component backdated to the original DWP decision (in January 2018) and to run for five years.

This meant that the client would receive an additional £88.20 per month which over five years would equal £22,932 at current level of benefit plus the backdated benefit to January.

Citizens Advice Bromley has been involved with the following projects during the year:

Bromley College

The increase in demand for our services from the introduction of Bromley Well provided an opportunity for student placements. The first group of four students started in April and undertook mandatory training and taking calls from the public wanting help with various issues. The students gained knowledge, customer service experience and increased confidence, all valuable skills when looking for permanent employment. We are hoping to develop our working relationship with the college in the next financial year.

Capitalise

As in previous years Citizens Advice Bromley continued to work with Capitalise. A specialist debt case worker, Cas who has extensive experience and qualifications in this area joined the organisation. Since joining Cas and the team have assisted with Debt Management plans, write offs, DRO and bankruptcy applications helping clients to maximise income. Cas brought excellent ideas to help deliver a more efficient service to clients. These proved to be an asset, when an external review of the work was carried out by the Money Advice Service (MAS) and we were able to demonstrate good examples of assisting clients with excellent outcomes.

DWP

Working closely with the London Borough of Bromley we continued to receive referrals for clients who had made claims for Universal Credit. Although not in an area where Universal Credit is in full service, we did provide budgeting support to those people who struggled to manage monthly benefit payments. These opportunities further developed partnership working and we received invitations to attend vulnerable customer service group meetings.

Research and Campaigning

Aastha, a specialist in this area joined the team and led on the Big Energy Week and was involved in the Fitness for Human Habitation Campaign. We continued to campaign on Universal Credit and its implementation across the country. Graham, an adviser, met MP Ellie Reeves in her surgery to discuss local issues affecting her constituents. The increase in staffing has provided the opportunity to campaign on local and national issues, to attend forums and meet stakeholders.

Big Energy Work

We were granted a bronze award to deliver Energy information to clients. The aim of the project was to educate clients on how to check their energy costs and to switch providers if necessary, and to spread awareness on programmes such as Energy Best Deal and Priority Services Register.

Bromley Well

Bromley Well provides a variety of services to help support local people to stay both emotionally and physically well, avoid or delay the use of health and social care services and remain independent.

This innovative project has involved close partnership working with the main client facing organisations within the borough to deliver the service to clients.

The Single Point of Access operates seven days a week from 9 am to 5 pm and is staffed by our trained assessors and volunteers. We have developed links with Bromley College and have successfully trained and developed a number of students to assist on our helpline as part of their introduction to work studies.

In addition our caseworkers provide casework, including tribunal and court representation in the areas of Debt, Housing, Welfare Benefits and Employment and have achieved many successful outcomes during the inception of the project.

Future developments will include:

- Re-evaluation of the demands on the service
- Increased presence at the outreach sites
- Greater recognition of this service with the London Borough of Bromley
- Continued expansion of partnership working





Staff and Volunteers during Volunteer Week 2017

Citizens Advice Bromley operates with both permanent staff and a high number of volunteers to provide services to clients throughout the borough. Without the range of commitment, skills and time that is generously given Citizens Advice Bromley would be unable to operate as it does. Bromley has over 70 volunteers giving one or two days of their time and performing roles covering advice giving, Trustee Board membership, receptionists, computer and IT support, training and administration. An ongoing recruitment programme is in place which is supported by training in the relevant areas.

“It’s because of our incredible volunteers that we’re able to help so many people find a way forward.

Thank you for the amazing work you do.”

Gillian Guy
Chief Executive

Our thanks go to the following organisations who have assisted or supported Bromley Citizens Advice during the year

Age UK Bromley and Greenwich
Anerley Town Hall – Crystal Palace Development Trust
Batchelors
Bromley and Croydon Women's aid
Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group
Bromley College
Bromley and Lewisham MIND
Brown & Co Solicitors
Bromley Third Sector Enterprise (BTSE)
Bromley Voluntary Sector Trust (BVST)
Children and Families Centre
Clarion Housing Group
Community Links Bromley
Cotmandene Resource Services Centre
DWP
Haines Watts Bromley
Hope Church
Kesar & Co Solicitors
London and Quadrant
London Borough of Bromley
Love London Working
Bromley Mencap
Mindful Money Advocacy Project
MTA Solicitors LLP
Rumm Employment
St Mungo's Broadway
Shelter
Thackray Williams
Toynbee Hall
Wellers Solicitors



Citizens Advice Bromley

The way in which we assist clients has changed. Citizens Advice Bromley is now a member of Bromley Well

In order to access our service Bromley residents will need to ring:

0300 3309 039

Monday to Sunday 9 am to 5 pm.

Or email the Single Point of Access

SPA@bromleywell.org.uk

Website: <http://www.bromleywell.org.uk/>

Outreach Drop-In Sessions are available at:

Beckenham & Penge

Anerley Town Hall
Anerley Road, Anerley SE20 8BD

Monday 10 am – 12.30 pm
Thursday 10 am – 12.30 pm

Orpington

Cotmandene Community Resource Centre
64 Cotmandene Crescent, St Paul's Cray BR5 2RG

Tuesday 10 am – 1 pm

The Goodmead Centre – Hope Church
36 Chislehurst Road, Orpington BR6 0DG

Tuesday 10 am – 1.30 pm
Friday 1 pm – 3 pm

Website: www.bromleycab.org.uk

Online advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk



@CAB_Bromley