



Torbay Citizens Advice Bureau

**Representation in relation
to proposed funding cuts
and Service Level
Agreement**

**John Cooper
District Manager
January 2013**

While we understand these are difficult times for Local Authorities who are experiencing a 28% cut in their grant over 4 years, a cut of the magnitude proposed in our grant for the next financial year would have a severe impact on the front line advice services we are able to deliver and our capacity to meet the current and future needs of Torbay residents during these particularly difficult times.

The proposed cut comes at a time of growing demand for our services with substantial year on year increases in enquiries (22% increase April to November 2012 compare to same period in 2011) and significant issues such as welfare reform and the continuing economic problems likely to be with us for many years to come. For instance in 2013/2014 the introduction of the localised Council Tax benefit reduction scheme, Universal Credit and Personal Independent Payments(to replace Disability Living Allowance) will combine with other major welfare changes to in-work benefits and increase dramatically the demand for our service. The vast majority of the welfare benefit reforms scheduled to continue apace until at least 2017 will lead to significant changes and often reductions in the amount of entitlement available. This necessitates guiding people through the process to help them understand the changes, challenge decisions when they are incorrect, supporting individuals and families with money management issues as they struggle to adjust to often significantly reduced incomes. The need for debt/money advice and other financial help to enable working age people to manage their reduced finances more effectively means services(like Torbay CAB) that people turn to at times of difficulty will increase in importance.

With many Torbay residents increasingly struggling to make ends meet in the current economic climate the availability of quality assured advice from a trusted source has never been more important. We are the only not for profit advice agency working throughout Torbay which is quality assured and delivers holistic advice on such a wide range of issues to **all** client groups. Our advice and support is given in many ways including help to increase income, manage debts, make the most effective use of reduced incomes through budgeting and financial capability, secure homes, tackle relationship issues, employment advice to overcome the barriers to work etc. - which ultimately improves health and well-being and helps people take control of their lives. We provide an early intervention service, helping to prevent the problems faced by Torbay residents escalating into issues that can be costly both in terms of their own/ families lives and to the public purse.

We currently offer a cost effective high impact service, some key points of which are illustrated below:-

- In 2011/12 we dealt with 13,945 contacts from people seeking advice
- We dealt with 24,172 enquiries from these people across a wide range of issues affecting their lives.
- We helped clients increase their incomes by over £1.7 million which not only enhanced the lives of recipients but provided a substantial inflow of resources into Torbay with consequent benefits to the local economy
- We helped clients manage over £14 million worth of debt and through this work helped to alleviate the social costs to the wider community resulting from debt including homelessness, family break up, child poverty and mental illness
- We have 45 volunteers from across the social and economic spectrum from our Torbay communities working within the service and were planning to train a further 10 people next year

- We provide an holistic 'one stop' advice service so that a person seeking help can have their problems dealt with in one place
- We achieve high levels of customer satisfaction and are trusted by the local community
- We are a quality assured service and hold the Advice Service Alliance Quality Mark and the Community Legal Service Quality Mark.
- We provide an early intervention service, helping to prevent the problems faced by Torbay residents escalating into issues that can be costly both in terms of their own/ family lives and to the public purse

If the proposed cuts were implemented this would have a significant impact on the front line advice services we are able to deliver and our capacity to meet the current and future needs of Torbay residents during these particularly difficult times.

There are no alternative funding streams available to us to replace the core grant funding we receive from the Council on a permanent basis. In common with bureaux across the country, local authority funding for core services provides the foundation on which the service operates. Therefore any loss in funding will be permanent and severely reduce our capacity to provide Torbay residents with the help and advice they need in the future. In recognition of this I understand that Devon County Council has recently entered into a new 3 year grant funded service level agreement with the 8 Citizens Advice Bureaux operating within their geographical area.

In conclusion, the cuts being proposed will devastate the service we are able to provide significantly reducing the number of people we are able to help and make it impossible to meet the evergrowing need for our services. In view of this we would ask you to reconsider these proposals and if possible, maintain our current funding level, rolling forward the current Service Level Agreement for a further 2-3 years in order to ensure that the advice needs of our Torbay communities continue to be met during these challenging times.