

Figures in brackets relate to the previous quarter and are for comparison purposes

Overview of service delivery

In Quarter 4 of 2015-16 Northumbrian CAB assisted 3,749 (3,303) clients. Of these clients 24% were helped through our Hexham office (including the Prudhoe and Haltwhistle offices). 158 (131) clients helped by the service were from Prudhoe wards. This equates to 4% of all Citizens Advice Northumberland clients.

What problems are we helping with?

During Quarter 4 of 2015-16 bureau workers assisted Prudhoe clients with 586 (421) different queries of which 53% (36%) related to welfare benefits and tax credits compared to 38% for Northumbrian CAB as a whole. 22% (28%) related to debt compared to 27% for Northumbrian CAB as a whole. The other main subject areas included housing and relationship issues both at 5%.

The top 3 areas of welfare benefits advice related to -

- Employment support allowance
- Personal independence payments
- Tax credits

The top 3 areas of debt advice related to -

- Debt relief orders
- Unsecured personal loans
- Council tax arrears

Updates and future developments

- As advised separately, from 1 April 2016 DAWN Advice CAB in Morpeth became part of Northumbrian Citizens Advice Bureau and following completion of the merger process we are changing the operating name of the organisation to Citizens Advice Northumberland to better reflect the geographical area we cover.

- 22 February 2016 saw the introduction of Universal Credit in Northumberland. This is the first phase of the full roll out in the county and in the initial stages only a limited number of people will meet the 'gateway' conditions. Primarily this will be single, unemployed claimants with no children who are not receiving any of the existing 'legacy' benefits and who are British Citizens at the time of making the claim.

We will be closely following the roll out as experience in other parts of the country indicate a number of common problems including: claimants who have problems meeting rent, food and heating costs during the initial 6 week period before the first Universal Credit payment is made; claimants not being made aware that they can apply for a short term benefit advance to help them manage their finances and claimants not being advised of an entitlement to Council Tax Support.

- To help support the roll out we have agreed with the local authority that we will deliver Personal Budgeting Support to new Universal Credit claimants. The aim of the Personal Budgeting Support service is to help claimants to adapt to three key changes that Universal Credit brings: one payment per household into a bank account; a single monthly payment instead of weekly or fortnightly payments; a requirement for the claimant to pay their own rent instead of rent being paid directly to the landlord.

Moira Macfarlane
Chief Executive
April 2016