



AUTHOR(S):

TITLE:

YEAR:

Publisher citation:

OpenAIR citation:

Publisher copyright statement:

This is the _____ version of an article originally published by _____
in _____
(ISSN _____; eISSN _____).

OpenAIR takedown statement:

Section 6 of the "Repository policy for OpenAIR @ RGU" (available from <http://www.rgu.ac.uk/staff-and-current-students/library/library-policies/repository-policies>) provides guidance on the criteria under which RGU will consider withdrawing material from OpenAIR. If you believe that this item is subject to any of these criteria, or for any other reason should not be held on OpenAIR, then please contact openair-help@rgu.ac.uk with the details of the item and the nature of your complaint.

This publication is distributed under a CC _____ license.

Rural citizens' information needs: a survey undertaken on behalf of the Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau

Susan F. Beer , Rita Marcella and Graeme Baxter

Abstract:

Reports results of a study of the rural information needs in the Shetland Islands areas aimed at gaining a greater understanding of the operation of the Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau (SICAB). The objectives were: to analyse the operation of the Citizens Advice Bureau in Lerwick and the use made of it by clients; and to gather data on the information and advice requirements of the rural population via interviews with 50 leaders within the rural community who might be consulted by those needing information and advice, within two parishes in the North Mainland of Shetland. Those interviewed included: social workers; nurses; doctors; youth and community workers; teachers; care workers; shopkeepers; a tenants association representative; and both Community and Shetland Islands Councillors. Findings suggest that these community leaders are acting as a major rural advice and information source and that provision could be greatly enhanced if greater use were made of the Citizens Advice Bureau as a resource whose trained staff and library could provide a wider and more current knowledge base. Concludes with suggestions for publicizing SICAB services and making them more easily accessible for people who are wary of being perceived as being in need of advice.

Keywords:

Citizens Advice Bureaux, Citizens Advice Service, Rural advice, Rural information, Shetland.

Introduction and background to the project

The Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) Service offers free and independent advice and information on a wide range of subjects, practical help in filling out forms, at courts and tribunals, and liaison with creditors on the scheduling of debt.

The aims of the CAB service are:

- To ensure that individuals do not suffer through ignorance of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available, or through an inability to express their needs effectively.
- To exercise a responsible influence on the development of social policies and services, both locally and nationally.

An impartial service of information, guidance and support is provided to all individuals. Support services are provided by CAS (Citizens Advice Scotland), which receives core funding from the Department of Trade and Industry.

The birth of the Citizens Advice Bureaux came with the outbreak of war in September 1939; around 200 information centres for the citizen were set up within a month and by 1943 there were 1,060. Glasgow Bath Street Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) opened in 1939 and was the first of 60 in Scotland, all operating under the Scottish Council of Social Service and 90% staffed by volunteers.

Wartime enquiries included advice on what to do after being bombed out, tracing relatives whose homes had been bombed and replacing lost ration books. Queries changed after the war and government funding was channelled to the Resettlement Advice Offices, but the public continued to turn to the familiar CABx for independent advice.

The new health and social insurance services generated increasing numbers of enquiries in 1951. Differences between the legal and education systems in Scotland and England caused Scottish dissatisfaction with London's CAB Information Services and contributed to the eventual autonomy of the Scottish Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (SACAB) in 1975, and independence in 1980, when SACAB bureaux became Associate members of the National Association and the ultimate authority for the CAB service in Scotland. SACAB became Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) in 1984.

In 1986 the freephone Shetland Advice Line was established to a CAB on the Scottish mainland for Orkney and Shetland residents. In 1990 debt advice moved to Voluntary Services Shetland in Harbour House. A particular need for welfare advice for the single parent was seen and the Welfare Rights Group was set up in 1991.

The need for a local CAB, providing a focused point of contact in Shetland, was felt by some in the community and a steering committee sought development funding from the Council and CAS over a 2 year period. The Shetland Islands Citizens Advice Bureau (SICAB) opened its office in Harbour House, Lerwick, in May 1992, taking on the debt advice service. Shetland Welfare Rights merged with the Bureau in November 1992. In March work started on the SICAB premises on Lerwick's main shopping street. April 1993 saw the introduction of complex legislation in the form of Community Care, Child Support, the Bankruptcy (Scotland) Act and Council Tax.

In October 1993 SICAB was accepted as a full member of Citizens Advice Scotland. The Bureau took on the management of the Crofting Advice Service, jointly funded by Citizens Advice Scotland and by the Scottish Crofters Union. An outreach service to the north of Shetland was attempted in 1994, but later abandoned, due to insufficient numbers of experienced volunteers. Clinics begun in the Mental Health Drop-in Centre and the Shetland Drugs Project were later incorporated within the general service of SICAB. The Crofting Advice Service developed into the Crofting Advice Line, now also funded by the Crofters Commission and the European Regional Development Fund.

The SICAB is the only un-incorporated property owning CAB in Scotland; it is hoped that it will become incorporated in 1997; becoming a limited company would reduce the liability of the management committee but the bureau would retain charitable status. SICAB is largely reliant on funding from the Shetland Islands Council Charitable Trust. As at March 1997 SICAB has 24 volunteers: 10 licensed advisers, 6 probationary advisers and 8 trainee advisers. Workload figures for the 12 months ending March 1997 showed 4,921 issues raised. The need for larger premises is a major current concern. Client profile reports and client satisfaction surveys were undertaken over three weeks in October-November and September-October 1996 respectively. There is ongoing discussion between SICAB and community leaders as to their perception of client needs.

SICAB endeavour to maintain staffing levels and expertise through recruitment and training. Advertising and promotion of the services provided by SICAB is offered at stalls at Shetland agricultural shows as well as a weekly advertisement in *The Shetland Times*. Training has a high profile within SICAB; staff might spend up to two weeks per year being trained. Cases are becoming increasingly complex as both the client needs and their expectations of the Bureau become greater. The Bureau has three CAS-qualified tutors and a programme of tutor training.

The Management Committee of SICAB includes representatives from the Social Work Department and Housing Departments of the local Islands Council, a Councillor and a representative from the Association of Community Councils; the Manager of the Benefits Agency and a representative from the Shetland Trades Council. Membership of the CAB

allows local residents and groups or organisations the opportunity of involvement in what the Bureau does, permitting attendance at general and special meetings, standing for and voting in elections of the Board of Directors and having a say on the services offered by the CAB and how it is run.

Training of staff is initiated and organised by CAS but increasingly may be carried out by outside agencies. There is a move towards bringing trainers to Shetland as more people can be trained at lower cost. Individuals who have received specialist training are used as a resource of the bureau and ideally will transfer skills to others. Training of volunteers takes between 6 and 12 months altogether. Volunteers then become probationers and are assessed internally and by self-assessment to identify any areas of weakness. Once they are considered proficient and feel comfortable they go forward for licensing before a licensing panel. Advanced training of probationary and licensed volunteers in specialised areas and to maintain currency of expertise is a continuous process.

Interaction between information providers in Shetland occurs fairly frequently and is based upon opportunities such as the 1998 launch of Business Information Source in Shetland, where local information providers met to exchange details of services and to provide updates on their activities. SICAB regularly canvasses local information providers in order to keep up to date with the full range of sources held and services available, particularly in support of their signposting function.

The needs of the SICAB differ from those of other CABx by virtue of the isolation of Shetland from the mainland of the United Kingdom. Shetland lies 211 miles north of Aberdeen and 225 miles west of Bergen in Norway. At 60°N Shetland is on the same latitude as St Petersburg and Cape Farewell in Greenland.

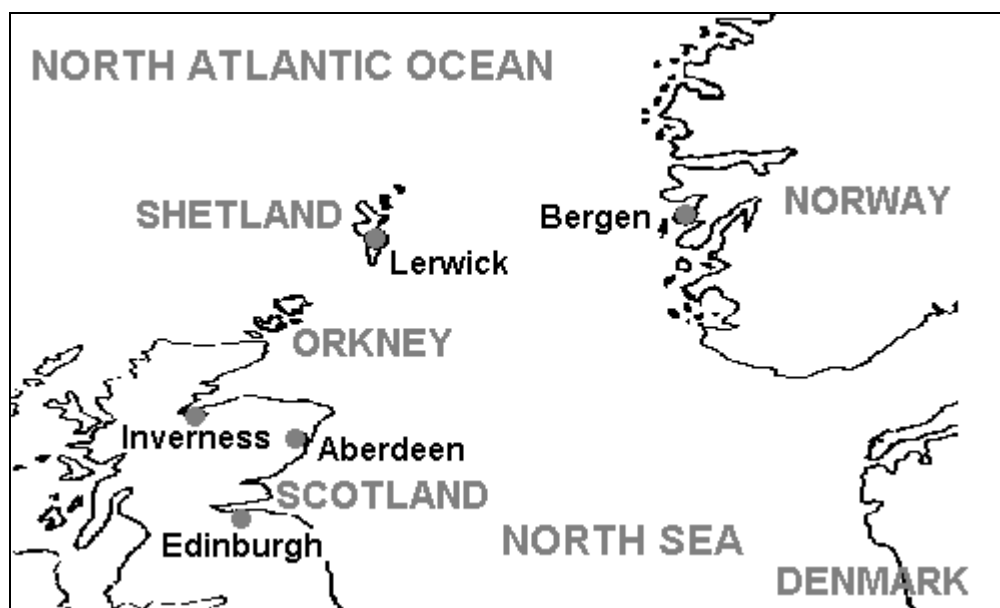


Figure 1 - The Location of Shetland

Shetland is the northernmost county in the United Kingdom, and with Orkney forms the UK's most northerly constituency, consisting of over 100 islands, 15 of which are inhabited. The total population of Shetland, as at the 1991 census, was 22,522; the total area of Shetland is 567 square miles (1,468 square kilometres).

Characteristics of Shetland's isolation include the time and expense of travel and of shipping freight to and from the mainland, the distance from professional expertise such as medical consultants and specialist solicitors, and the particular consumer problems associated with the

market forces of a very small market with a poor record of consumer service. The information need of the citizens of Shetland can further be broken down into the need of clients or potential clients of SICAB from Lerwick, the capital of Shetland and only town; and those from the rural areas. Although 32% of Shetland's population live in Lerwick, 45% (at year ending March 1995) of clients using SICAB lived in Lerwick. Most of the enquiries made to SICAB are by telephone.

The two areas in which the present survey was conducted each comprise two Electoral Divisions (within the Shetland Islands Council, which has a total of 26 such divisions): on the North Mainland of Shetland Delting West and Delting East; and on the Westside of Shetland Walls & Sandness and Sandsting & Aithsting.

The northern area includes the Sullom Voe Terminal, Europe's largest oil and liquefied gas terminal. Although the terminal is still a large local employer, employment at Sullom Voe has declined and facilities such as public transport and shops have deteriorated. The western area has a less industrial economy with employment in fishing and fish farming, as well as crofting (though largely part-time). The islands of Foula and Papa Stour in the parish of Walls and Sandness were included in the survey.

Table 1 illustrates the low levels of employment in these rural areas in comparison with Lerwick.

Population Figures	Sandsting & Aithsting Walls & Sandness (Westside)	Delting East & West and (Nesting) (North Mainland)	Lerwick	Shetland Total
Population, 1991	1,498	2,491	7,280	22,522
Employment, 1994	484	1,476 + (45) = 1,521	6,200	11,116
% population employed	32%	61%	85%	49%

Table 1: Population Figures

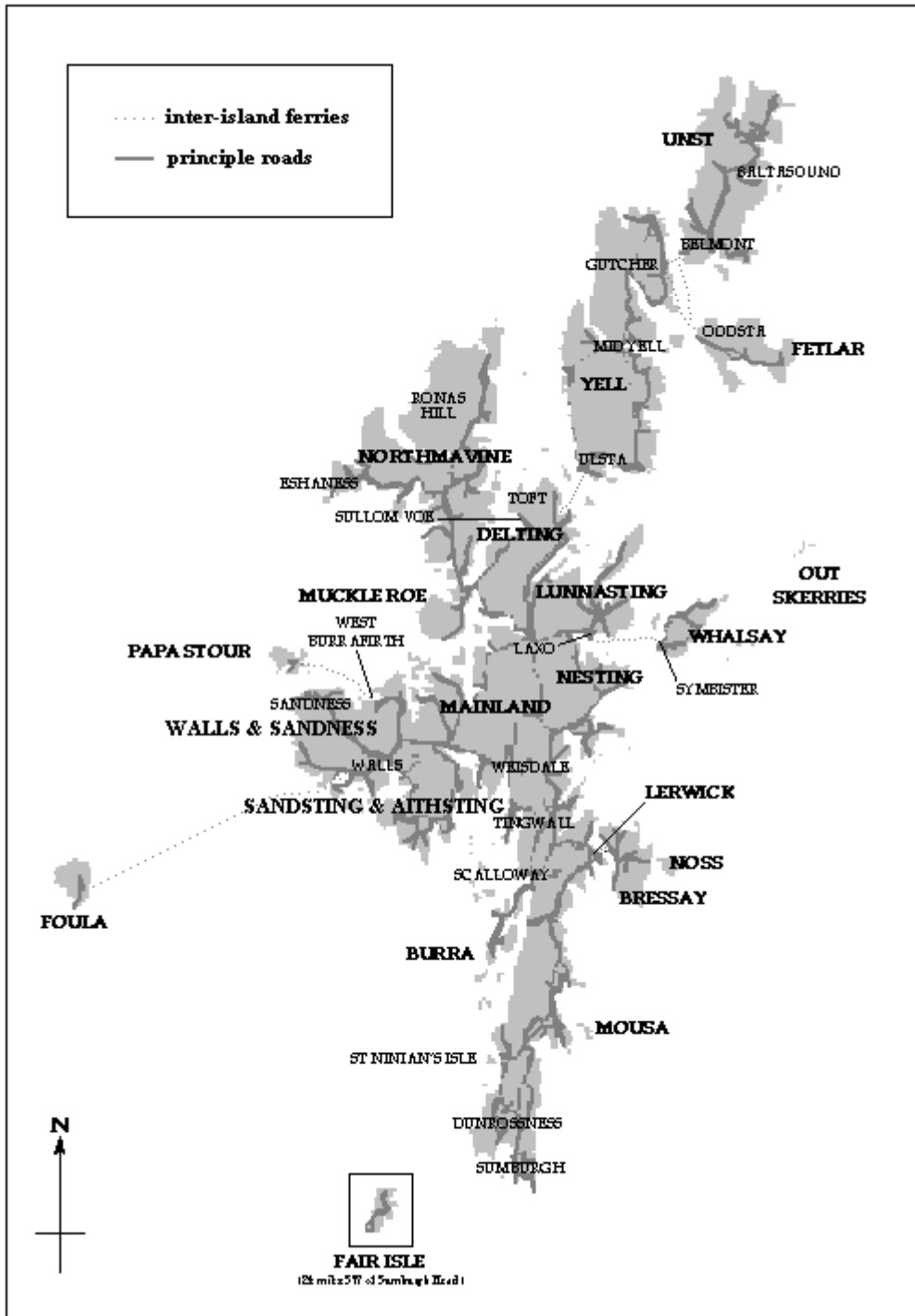


Figure 2 – Shetland showing principal islands

Literature Review

Most of the literature in this field is produced within the Citizens Advice Service. An extensive literature search, for all papers dealing with CABx from an ILS perspective, revealed very little published literature of any great depth. Some of the articles are from the 1980s, but the essentials of problems they address have changed little.

Dunkley (1989) relates the experiences of CABx in Cornwall and Devon and distinguishes between lack of resources and information deprivation; she highlights the difficulty that, if people are unaware of resources or do not know how to access them, then these resources might just as well not exist. Elliot (1984) describes a village contact scheme conducted by the Northumberland Rural CAB, concluding that using a network of individual volunteer advisers is not the most effective way to provide advice and information in rural areas; and that telephone contact is just as effective as face-to-face contact, with the added advantage of total confidentiality, a significant problem in small communities.

Heaton (1984) describes a joint project to create a microcomputer database of local community information. James (1989) discusses a joint project between the Library and Information Service, the Social Service Department and the Education Department of Clwyd County Council, set up to address high levels of unclaimed benefit, benefit changes and a high demand for welfare rights information from workers with little direct access to training and support.

Williamson (1986) summarises the results of her thesis, a study of the Moorabbin Citizens Advice and Aid Bureau, in Australia, over a seven week period.

Studies of computerisation within the CAB service have included that by the Information Policy Group of the Policy Studies Institute (1991) commissioned by the NACAB in 1991; this recommended the use of word-processing in the information production task with benefits including the speeding up of the updating process, and the maintenance of a full-text database system for the information system. Steele (1993) describes a feasibility study by the Policy Studies Institute on further computerisation of NACAB and the current and future needs of the bureaux and of the public examining the costs and advantages of maintaining an electronic database for the CAB information systems.

The Manchester CAB (Manchester CAB Service, 1997) have a website with details of their own activities and a directory of CABx in the Greater Manchester and East Cheshire area, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The site is one result of a joint project, Manchester Community Information Network, with Manchester Public Libraries (Gallimore, 1997) and other local services. Manchester's use of new technology gives an indication of services which could be provided in other bureaux. The eight Manchester CABx (East and Shah, 1994) subscribe to Manchester Host, with support from Manchester City Council, private sector funding and BT. The system allows emailing between bureaux as well as with other subscribers and a CITIZENS-ADVICE bulletin board with associated database.

The Manchester Blackley bureau delivers the Electronic Mail Inquiry Service of the Manchester CABx (Manchester CAB Service, 1997) which was launched on a trial basis in June 1996. Preference is given to enquiries from the Manchester area; enquirers with questions involving more complex issues for which email replies are inappropriate are referred to their nearest bureau. In July 1997 the Manchester CABx launched the first MAGIC Touch public information kiosk.

NACAB has now made two unsuccessful bids to the Millennium Commission to fund the CABNet 2000 initiative (Computanews Information Systems for Advice, 1997). The second bid proposed a standard bundle of equipment for bureaux with 4/5 personal computers, two printers and a notebook computer; and software control of statistics, social policy work and

case management, with local information and signposting databases and leaflet management. The original bid had included bureau networking with high speed data links; the later a more modest CD-ROM system. The Commission's grounds for not supporting the bid were that the project was not considered to be 'sufficiently distinctive' in comparison with other submissions.

Most of the published information specifically on the SICAB came from annual reports (SICAB, Annual Reports, 1992 - 1996); other information was gleaned from a client satisfaction survey, a client profile report, a statistical enquiry record sheet and from workload statistics (SICAB, 1996a, b, c, d).

One of the most important components of the resources available to any CAB office is '*The Information System*' (Citizens Advice Scotland, monthly). The source for the categories used within the rural information survey and those recorded in the office audit came from 'Statistical Recording' (Citizens Advice Scotland, 1996a); information on the CAB service in Scotland came from *A Scottish Voice: Annual Report 1995-1996*, supplementary information coming from *Conditions of membership, Corporate plan and Service Specification Document, Corporate Plan, 1996-1999*, and *Financial Statements, year ending 31st March 1996*. The *Press Pack* is a compilation of recent press articles on the CAB service sent out from CAS to bureaux. Other literature consulted consisted of factsheets and brochures from CAS, and brochures from NACAB in London.

Since the completion of this project, major change has been heralded by the result of the referendum on a Scottish Parliament. This is seen by some as likely to be a catalyst that will focus attention on the development of an information strategy for Scotland. However, at the time of writing, the outcome of this process is still very much in debate (Bell, 1997) with a small working party being set up to look at how library services might best be supported in the event of constitutional change and to examine what kind of organizational structure might be required to provide advice to government, institutions, related bodies and individuals (SLIC/SLA Working Party, 1997). Such an information strategy would be likely to have implications for Scottish CABx in the future, as for the full range of information agencies.

The research problem and methodology

SICAB had identified the need for more information on the advice requirements of the rural population of Shetland, in order to make the Bureau more attractive and useful. Data were available on current use by rural inhabitants through the Enquiry Record Sheets, and it was agreed with the Manager of SICAB that an effective way of assessing unmet need would be through interviewing 'community leaders' to whom people might turn for advice and information.

The aim of the project was to gain a greater understanding of the operation of the Shetland Citizens Advice Bureau and of rural information need in Shetland, such that these requirements might be better met by SICAB.

The objectives of the project were:

- to analyse the operation of the Citizens Advice Bureau in Lerwick, and the use made of it by clients;
- and to gather data on the information and advice requirements of the rural population via interviews with leaders within the rural community who might be consulted by those needing information and advice, within two parishes in the West Mainland and two parishes in the North Mainland of Shetland.

Analysis of the operation and use of SICAB

This objective was achieved by gathering data in two areas: on the information sources used by and of the information needs of staff of the bureau; and on client use of the bureau and information flow during the client consultation process.

The major information source used by staff and volunteers of SICAB is the NACAB's Information *System*, and this system was investigated primarily by examination of the contents sheets and the accompanying *Guide*, in order to gain a broad overview of the subjects covered, and to identify the major areas of information provision within CABx. The manager of SICAB was interviewed to gather information about the computer based information sources.

Interviews were carried out with staff and volunteers of SICAB in order to establish which reference sources they used most often, and the areas of advice they personally found most problematic. Staff were questioned separately. The questions were kept deliberately open, to allow for interpretation in two (or more) ways. The questions asked of the volunteers were restricted to these two in order to minimise disruption to the service. A summary of the client consultation process developed from the picture built up during the analysis of the enquiry record sheets (see below) was then drawn up and substantially revised in consultation with bureau staff.

A brief audit of the general information needs of the Bureau was conducted in relation to a number of categories of information:

- health and safety;
- contacts with people and organisations;
- legislative and regulative information;
- governmental;
- statistics;
- market research;
- scientific and technical information;
- news and current affairs;
- local events and activities.

This identification of information needs was developed via a variety of methods: consultation of internal documentation such as reports, factsheets, manuals and booklets produced by CAS and NACAB, from the SICAB Annual Reports, by staff and from knowledge gained through updating the local information system.

An analysis of cases over a short period was undertaken in order to explore present patterns of use of SICAB. Enquiry record sheets are completed by staff after each consultation with a client, and the data derived from these are sent to CAS for statistical collation. While summary statistics collated within the Bureau were also available, the advantage of analysing the enquiry record sheets themselves was that as well as providing data on the contacts made, client profile and issues raised, perusal of the sheets also helped to build up a picture of the consultation process itself.

One hundred and forty six record enquiry sheets were analysed and the following contact data were noted:

- method of initial contact (in person, telephone, or by letter);
- whether the client had come with single or with multiple issues;
- client breakdown by gender;
- the address of the contact (broken down into eight categories within Shetland, plus 'other', no fixed abode and not known).

These contacts had raised 239 issues (117 presented with single issues and 29 with multiple issues) which were recorded according to the categories used by NACAB in statistical recording, and examples of simple and more complex issues raised were noted.

Gathering data on the information and advice requirements of the rural population

The major data gathering tool used in the project was a rural information survey. In consultation with SICAB management two parishes were selected for the purpose of the survey. Fifty interviews were held with community leaders who it was felt would be knowledgeable as to the information needs of a collectively wide and representative sample of the community. The criteria for choosing the interviewees was that they should be people who were easily accessible to the rural population and had some status of respect within the community. Interviews were conducted with all consenting and available social workers, doctors, district nurses and health visitors, community and youth workers, tenants associations representatives, island councillors, shopkeepers and sub-postmasters/mistresses. Since there was a total of 29 community councillors from which to choose interviewees it was decided to concentrate on those from more remote communities. Teachers, particularly primary school teachers, are professionals with whom parents and other relations of school-pupils would be familiar and who would be easily accessible at school. Each of the two areas has one secondary school and associated primary schools; the deputy headteacher of one of the secondary schools was interviewed and the head teachers of all the other schools.

There are many Christian denominations within Shetland, so it was considered justifiable only to approach the three full-time ministers in the two areas. Of these, one was unavailable during the time the interviews were conducted, and one did not choose to be interviewed, on the grounds that people only approached them on matters directly concerned with ceremonies and procedures within the church. Those spoken to in the 'care workers' category were managers of the care centres in Walls and Brae.

One unanticipated problem was the necessity of clearing the interviews with line managers, in the case of social workers and of nurses. On the whole the response from potential respondents was very positive with only three individuals choosing not to be interviewed. In retrospect it was felt that additional interviews with care workers, post(wo)men and shopkeepers would have been useful in gathering data about the most isolated individuals in the community.

Personal interviews, rather than questionnaires, were chosen as the medium for data collection since it was felt that there would be both a higher response rate, and a more detailed response. Most the interviews were conducted face-to-face, but three interviews were conducted by telephone, as this was more convenient for the respondents. Despite the lack of visual signals the telephone interviews yielded high quality information.

The interview was designed to be short enough that it could be answered very speedily, but sufficiently comprehensive that it could bring out any relevant points that the respondent might feel were significant. Interview times ranged from 10 minutes to over an hour. Because many of the respondents were being interviewed in relation to their activities in a voluntary capacity, some of the interviews had to be conducted at the weekend and in the evening, and some at their place of work.

The formal interview schedule contained a mixture of closed questions, easier both to answer and to analyse, and open questions, more difficult to answer and analyse but more likely to produce revealing and significant points. Before the interview began an introductory passage was read out, reinforcing the information given when the interview was first arranged, and giving the respondents the opportunity to ask questions about the interview, or to refuse to be interviewed.

The initial question 'First of all, what is your job or responsibility that might bring you into contact with people with enquiries or problems?' was inserted to put the respondents at their

ease and show them how easy the questions were going to be to answer. Subsequent questions focused upon:

- the normal location for encounter with people with enquiries;
- which questions respondents found difficult to answer;
- on which topics from a list of categories respondents were most frequently asked questions; (The categories used here are those used within the CAB system for recording issues on enquiry record sheets: benefits, consumer issues, employment, housing, legal problems, relationship problems, tax, utilities, community care, education, health, immigration, nationality, signposting (or other).
- when respondents would make use of the Citizens Advice Bureau;
- when respondents would recommend use of the Citizens Advice Bureau to enquirers;
- if there was a specific area of advice that respondents would not seek, nor recommend seeking, from the Citizens Advice Bureau and if so, what that area was;
- finally whether respondents had any comments on, or solutions to, the question of the advice seeker not wishing to be observed to be seeking advice.

The interview was terminated by thanking respondents for their time, and reassuring them that what they said would remain non-attributable.

The combination of multiple methods used in the course of this project allowed different perspectives to be drawn on the central problem: information provision in a rural community. The data on client contact and issues brought to the Lerwick Bureau came from record sheets completed at the time of enquiry, following a well set-out procedure; although only a small sample was analysed this sample was of data meticulously collected. The data collected from the survey of rural community leaders drew upon a group of respondents that collectively had knowledge and experience of the information needs of a wide and representative sample of the public. By its nature it was far more anecdotal in nature. Inevitably there may be an influence on answers gained during such a survey by the interview process itself, not least in the wish of the interviewee to please; however, those answers elicited from open questions came without the prompting which a multiple choice type question can suggest, and may therefore be considered to be more significant.

The scope of the research could usefully have been extended to compare information and advice need in Shetland with that of another rural area, ideally both by similar analysis in a rural Citizens Advice Bureau and by survey of a matching group of rural community leaders using the same questionnaire. Similarly, although there were no available data about urban needs, a broader study comparison could have been made with information need in an urban area.

Information sources used and problems encountered

NACAB's *Information System* is a Lever Arch file with monthly updates, which is supplemented by the *Guide*, a manual for bureau managers and workers which explains the content and structure of the system, gives sources of supplementary material such as leaflets, and suggests guidelines for the organisation and maintenance of the information system in the bureau. The system contains contents sheets, which are completely updated annually; supplementary contents sheets are provided as needed monthly for major changes. Scottish subscribers obtain all new contents sheets for all regions from CAS.

Contents sheets list all items and leaflets in the system (from both CAS and NACAB). Blue contents sheets apply to Scotland and yellow contents sheets do not apply to Scotland. Sheets list, for each item: Classification number, Title, Date and Extent. The Classification Number may have the suffix (B) (W) or (L) indicating format and display method.

Contents sheets headings are:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Communication | 8. Family and Personal |
| 2. Travel, Transport and Holidays | 9. Social Security |
| 3. Immigration and Nationality | 10. Health |
| 4. Administration of Justice | 11. Housing Property and Land |
| 5. Education | 12. Taxes and Duties |
| 6. Employment | 13. Consumer, Trade and Business |
| 7. National and International | 14. Leisure Activities |

There are also copies of information not applying to Scotland for certain sheets, such as education and employment, where Scottish citizens may require information relating to other parts of the United Kingdom. The main differences between the Scottish and national collections stem from the distinct legal and educational systems in Scotland.

The local component of the *Information System* consists of sheets, coloured pink to distinguish them from the national information sheets, with classification numbers, headings and subheadings designed for completion within each bureau. SICAB also holds a card index file; local directories; three files containing documents and forms, from the local authority, the Shetland Islands Council (SIC) and the Shetland Health Board; documents concerning Community Care; and other local information in the form of documents, leaflets and cuttings.

Communication with people within all organisations that provide a service to the public is vital within the Citizens Advice Bureaux both as sources of information and advice and as signposters to the CABx for people with problems. SICAB see themselves as a gatekeeper to the public for many benefits and services.

Keeping up with current legislation is by far the largest part of training with 90% of ongoing staff training being devoted to new legislation; 40% of staff training of volunteers is on legislation and regulation. Changes of national government are only influential in as much as they introduce new legislation and interpret its implementation. The current emphasis on the concept of citizenship information is expected to increase the workload of all organisations which deal with the consumer. CAS keep all the Scottish CABx up-to-date with current affairs in a monthly bulletin, *Press Pack*, which since 1996 has included press cuttings on the CABx in Scotland from the Press Data Bureau.

Shetland in Statistics, an annually updated publication, is consulted for local data; national data are derived from *Social Trends*, *Regional Trends*, and *Family Spending*. Information is held by SICAB on local organisations and charities and their activities and events, particularly those which cater for people with care needs and their carers. This information is held both within the *Local Information System* and in leaflets and brochures within the waiting area.

Computer based information sources include the *Child Support Agency Program*, the *Benefit Check Program*, an expert system which is commercially purchased as a group subscription with CAS and updated periodically, and *Tolley's Employment Law* on CD-ROM, which includes a database library on Legislation and Case Law. There is also a commercially purchased calculator, *Helper Plus*, for means-tested benefits, which has updateable cards but is limited in its application. Computer training is an integral part of the training programme with volunteers gaining SVQ and RSA qualifications in IT. The Bureau has links to and a presence on the Internet within the community section of the Shetland Times Bulletin Board providing information on crofting, money, employment and the bureau's activities, and allowing email. Internet e-mail access is available through this bulletin board at Shetland-cab@shetland-times.co.uk and through Shetland's local Internet provider at sicab@zetnet.co.uk.

Computer use within SICAB is largely restricted to administrative work, statistical collation and off-line information sources. As well as a shortage of available computers, many of the

volunteers within the Bureau are of an age or background where computers may seem a little frightening.

In order to determine what additional reference sources were most frequently used, staff/volunteers were asked, 'What reference sources, apart from the Information System, do you use most often?' and their responses are given in Table 2. The Child Poverty Action Group benefit handbooks were most used; each of those interviewed regularly used at least one of them. Other books, such as Selwyn's Law of Employment, were only cited by one interviewee.

Reference Source	Respondents citing						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Arbitration and Conciliation Advisory Service							✓
CAB Advisory Officer							✓
Citizens Advice Notes Service				✓			
CPAG Handbooks on Benefits (at least 1 of)		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expert Individuals within the Bureau							✓
Individuals within Outside Bodies (unspecified)				✓			
Leaflets (from CAS and local organisations)				✓			
Legal Books							✓
Local Information Card File	✓			✓			
Local Information File				✓			
Personal Knowledge				✓			
Scottish Charity Choice		✓			✓		
Selwyn's Law of Employment						✓	
Shetland Directory (local telephone book)		✓			✓	✓	
SIC 'Documents and Forms' File	✓						
SIC Community Directory					✓		
SIC Internal Phone Directory	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
The Phone Book		✓				✓	
The Voluntary Agencies Directory					✓	✓	
Whitakers Almanack	✓	✓			✓		

Table 2: Use of Reference Sources by staff/volunteers of SICAB

The Crofting Advice Line receives around 10 requests per month for advice or information. Current and topical issues (as at March 1997) included 'counting sheep', in line with new government directives, snow plough damage, grants help, and crofting administration. Requests for legal advice include land valuation and crofting law. The adviser was asked what were his principle information sources for the Crofting Advice Line, and his response was: his own experience; CAB information system; Crofters Commission; Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland; Scottish Crofters Union; Scottish National Farmers Union; informal enquiries of solicitors; network of individuals; and Flyn and MacCuish's *Crofting Law*.

The information held internally is intended to be the first place where information is sought; seeking information already held from outside sources is actively discouraged as being inefficient, costly and potentially annoying. There is some intentional duplication of information held, for example the national information system exists both as paper-based files and on microfiche, to enable separate access to the information at the bureau (paper based) and in outreach clinics (microfiche). Local information may be accessed both from the Local Information card file system or through the pink local sheets within the Information System.

The client consultation process begins with a visit by the client to the Bureau or a telephone call or letter from the client to the Bureau. The client approaches the bureau initially with a request for information; the volunteer responding may need to ask a series of potentially invasive questions in order to establish the full nature and extent of the problem. The volunteer will consult the *Information System* and other relevant reference material, and possibly a more knowledgeable colleague with specialist knowledge applicable in the case. If necessary the volunteer may telephone an external individual or organisation or may advise the client that their information need would be best met by consultation with, for example, a solicitor, in which case lists of appropriate solicitors could be provided.

The client is then advised immediately or given another appointment. Should another agency need to be contacted on the client's behalf then the client signs a mandate authorising the CAB to act on their behalf. Subsequent appointments are made to review the progress of the case, the aims of the client and further action to be taken. An Enquiry Record Sheet (ERS) is completed after each appointment. Data are derived from each ERS and monthly statistics sent to CAS. Once the case is completed the ERS are filed and subsequently archived.

In order to determine what difficulties staff/volunteers encountered in answering questions, they were asked: 'What types of question do you find it most difficult to answer?' One respondent highlighted the difficulty in asking intrusive/invasive questions in order to explore and respond to the enquirer's problem. Another found marital and debt problems particularly difficult, where clients may be evasive. Significantly, five respondents cited benefits questions as problematic, both in terms of their complexity and of their potentially delicate and intrusive nature. Two respondents mentioned Child Support Agency questions. Two respondents highlighted specific geographic problems faced by residents in relation to consumer questions, stemming from the lack of competition, the heavy reliance on mail order or retailers who spend only a few days on the islands, and the fact that it is costly and difficult for customers to follow up on problems. One respondent cited a feeling of lack of expertise in relation to foreign legal questions and one felt that health and safety queries presented difficulties, as only basic information is held at SICAB and most enquiries are passed directly to the Health and Safety Executive.

<i>Clients and issues: an analysis of cases</i>

An analysis was made of enquiry record sheets from cases between the 8th and 16th July 1996. Bureaux within the Scottish CAB Service record statistics as part of a national recording system. The main components recorded are the number of client contacts and method of contact (whether by phone, letter or in person), the issues brought by clients to the bureaux, and information on the types of work undertaken by the bureaux on behalf of the client (see Table 3).

Benefits	Employment	Utilities
benefit debts: overpayment of benefit discrimination/intimidation (benefits) income support	employment debts: overpayment wages repayment training costs on leaving job discrimination/intimidation (employment)	utilities debts: arrears of electricity, telephone, gas, water rates discrimination/intimidation (in supply of

housing benefit	schemes for unemployed people & training	other utilities issues
community charge benefit	self-employment business	Other categories
family credit	terms and conditions of employment	Community care
social fund	dismissal	Education
sickness benefits	redundancy	Health
disability benefits	other employment issues	Immigration
disability benefits	Housing	Nationality
unemployment benefit	housing debts: mortgage & rent arrears	Miscellaneous
NI contributions	discrimination/intimidation (in housing)	Signposting
child support	actual homelessness	
council tax benefit	threatened homelessness	Workload:
all other benefits	housing costs (excluding arrears)	<i>Signposting</i>
Consumer Issues	housing conditions	<i>Listening Ear</i>
consumer debts: mail order, HP/credit	environmental and neighbour issues	<i>Information/advice within Bureau files</i>
sale, loans, rental/insurance arrears	security of tenure (from April 1996)	<i>Negotiation with outside bodies</i>
discrimination/intimidation (consumer)	other housing issues	<i>Representation work</i>
goods and services	Legal Problems	Contact location:
credit and finance	legal debts: non-payment of court fines/costs	CAB
insurance	discrimination/intimidation (in legal affairs)	Home Visit
other consumer issues	legal proceedings	Brae Outreach
Contact method:	legal aid	Mental Health Drop In
<i>P Personal Caller T Telephone</i>	compensation for accidents and injuries	Drug Drop In
<i>L Letter</i>	other legal issues	Crofting

Table 3 - Statistical Recording Data Categories

One hundred and forty six contacts were made during the period, and a breakdown of how the initial contact was made, the gender of the client and the area from which the contact came is contained within Table 4: Contact Profile. The preponderance of initial contacts was by telephone, with 52 telephone contacts from a total of 146. 116 clients brought single issues, only 29 came with multiple issues.

Twelve contacts were by people from outwith Shetland; in one case because the client had been unable to get through to their local bureau on the telephone, in another because the client wished to ensure anonymity. Of the 112 clients with fixed addresses in Shetland, more than half came from Lerwick, with the next largest group coming from the North Mainland. A gender breakdown showed that 85 of the clients were female and 59 male plus one unidentified person; one contact was made by a couple.

Initial Contact											
Person	Telephone	Letter	Totals								
52	93	1	146								
Number of Issues											
Single	Multiple	Totals									
117	29	146									
Contacts											
Male	Female	Couple	Unidentified		Totals						
59	85	1		1	146						
Contact Address											
Lerwick	North Mainland	Central Mainland	South Mainland	West Mainland	North Isles	Whalsay	Outer Isles	Other	No Fixed Abode	Not Known	Total
62	18	7	6	7	8	2	2	12	2	20	146

Table 4: Contact Profile 8th - 31st July 1976

Simple, single contact enquiries ranged from a request for directions to a local hotel to an enquiry as to the parental access rights of an ex-boyfriend. There were various enquiries about statutory entitlement to holiday pay and public holiday pay for both full and part-time workers. More complex enquiries included queries on benefit entitlement, housing rights and debt problems; the latter cases calling for the largest number of contacts.

Categories used in Table 5: B = Benefits; C = Consumer issues; E = Employment; H = Housing; L = Legal problems; R = Relationship problems; T = Tax; U = Utilities; XC = Community Care; XE = Education; XH = Health; XI = Immigration; XN = Nationality; XM = Misc.; XS = Signposting.

Benefits were the most prevalent issue, then employment queries closely followed by housing and consumer issues, with relationship queries not far behind. There were no contacts made on immigration or nationality issues, nor any queries on education matters.

	B	C	E	H	L	R	T	U	Total	X	
0	2	9	1	3	1	3	1	3	23	C	2
1		1	2			1			4	E	
2	6	12		2	7	8	4			H	4
3	6	4	1	2	1	4	1			I	
4	1	1	16	4	2	1	1			N	
5	2		4							M	11
6	7		1	4						S	7
7	5			4						Total	24
8	11										
9	3										
10	2									Contact Count	
11	3										
12	4										146
13	5										
99	8		10	8	5	4	2	2			
Totals	65	27	35	27	16	21	9	5			

Table 5: Issue Count: 8th - 31st July 1996

Rural information need in Shetland

This section details the results of the survey carried out with ‘community leaders’ in the four Shetland parishes of Walls and Sandness, Sandsting and Aithsting, Delting East and Delting West. The survey was conducted in order to assess the information need of rural advice providers, with the ultimate goal of improving the SICAB’s understanding of this need.

The first question that people were asked was, “What is your job or responsibility that might bring you into contact with people with enquiries or problems?”

The composition of the 50 interviewees (see Figure 3 - Category of Respondent) was: 4 social workers; 7 nurses (a Macmillan Nurse, and a community psychiatric nurse as well as 3 district nurses and 2 health visitors); 4 doctors; 2 community workers and 3 youth workers; a tenants association representative; 6 shopkeepers; 3 care workers (2 managers of care centres and one home help); 8 teachers (the head teachers of the 6 primary schools in the two areas and the head teacher of one primary/junior high school and the depute head of the other); 14 councillors with the 4 Shetland Islands Councillors and Community Councillors from the more remote areas, including the islands of Papa Stour, Foula and Muckle Roe; a minister; a crofting adviser; a health board chairman; and a Director of the Islands Council.

The sum of interviewees listed is 56, since some of these respondents were interviewed in more than one capacity. Twenty-two of the interviewees came from the parishes of Delting East and West (designated North in the charts) and 28 came from the parishes of Walls & Sandness and Sandsting & Aithsting (which are designated West).

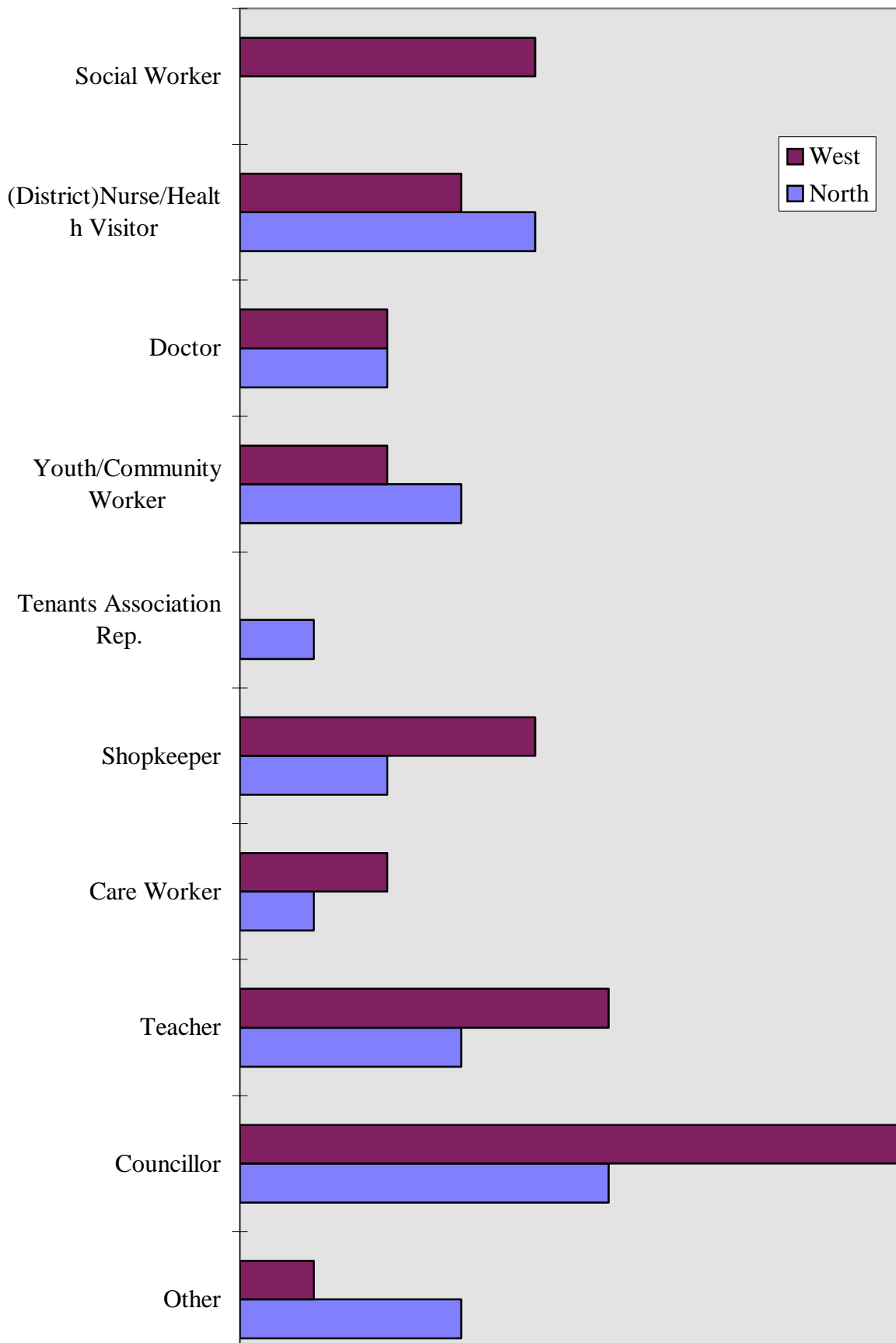


Figure 3: Category of Respondent

When community leaders were asked where they normally encountered people with enquiries, results showed that 39 were contacted by people with enquiries at their work, 23 at the enquirer's home, 12 in their own home, 19 on the telephone and 10 elsewhere; elsewhere included volunteer venues, in the supermarket and out in the community (see Figure 4).

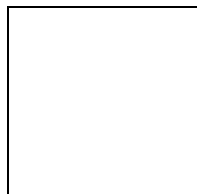


Figure 4 - Contact Means

There are marked differences between the means of contact shown here, (which cannot sensibly be expressed as percentages since they are not mutually exclusive categories, but indicate all normal contact means) and those reported in the SICAB Client Profile Report (1996, p.3) where contact was almost exclusively made either by telephone, or by personal visit to the SICAB office. The details of this 1996 report are: phone contact of 68.9% by female and 55% by male clients, personal contact of 28.5% by female and 44.22% by male clients and letter contact of 1.7% by female and 0.8% by male clients. Workload Statistics for the year ending March 1996 give personal contact 39.2%, telephone contact 54.5%, letter 6.3% and fax 0.1%.

Unlike the information seekers of the SICAB *Client profile report*, the rural survey was of information providers who, in most cases, would have been known to information seekers in a context other than information provision; and who might be consulted during another transaction, for example as a doctor and patient or shopkeeper and customer. Thirty-nine said they were contacted at their place of work, of those who did not have contact with information seekers at their place of work one was the tenants association representative, who met enquirers exclusively at the local community house, and the other 10 were councillors.

Twenty-three people said they might be asked for information in the information seeker's home, this included all seven nurses, all four doctors and all four social workers interviewed; both the community workers and one of the youth-workers, three of the councillors (who were also respectively a shopkeeper, a home-help and the crofting adviser), one of the care centre managers and the minister. As with contact made at the information provider's place of work, the majority of these enquiries would have been made incidentally whilst the client was being visited as part of the information provider's professional duties.

Twelve people were contacted at their own home: five councillors, two head teachers, three youth/community workers, a doctor and a health visitor, but only one of these, a community councillor, was exclusively so contacted. Nineteen said they were contacted on the telephone. For the 10 people who said they met clients elsewhere venues included a community house, the hospital, on the main street in Lerwick, out in the community, the Town Hall, the Health Board offices, and one of the care centre managers said she might get enquiries in clients' relatives' homes.

When interviewees were asked "What types of questions do you find it most difficult to answer?", two difficulties emerged: those in which the subject itself was inherently problematic, for example land disputes; and those for which the information provider did not have the relevant expertise.

Twenty seven respondents said that they received no problematic questions, or that they knew where to refer on those questions which they could not answer themselves: 'if I don't know the answer I know somebody who does'. (This finding contrasts with that for SICAB staff/volunteers who could readily identify problematic questions). Thirteen had difficulty answering questions on welfare rights, social security and other benefits; four had difficulties with questions regarding social services and two with housing. Three had problems with legal

questions and three specifically with land law; two found difficulties with neighbour disputes and access problems, one with planning issues: 'what serves one section of the community may not serve others', two disliked questions which might involve a local breach of confidentiality; two felt people were seeking their personal commitment before they had had the opportunity to consult with colleagues, and one felt uneasy with questions which might be outside the community council remit.

Three people had problems about people seeking counselling rather than non-directive information, and one of these felt that such guidance by the unqualified was dangerous; two found teenage problems and one family and relationship problems particularly difficult: 'factual questions are easy, problems such as those of teenagers are much harder'; another found the 'what do you think I should do?' type of question particularly hard. One found giving an answer that people did not want to hear difficult, another trying to meet unreal expectations.

Two respondents had difficulty answering financial and savings queries, one bureaucracy problems and one procedures in the event of death. One person was frequently asked 'where can I get something to eat near here?' to which there was no easy answer; only one person said that they attempted to answer questions which people expected them to be clued up on but which they did not know much about.

One person said 'sometimes questioners are sent "round the houses", I find people referred back to me whom I've originally referred on'.

Information on sexuality was an area identified as having particular difficulties, not least for young people who might have problems receiving mail at their parents' home; there was a general feeling that young gay people tended to leave Shetland for good.

The next question was 'outwith your own area of expertise, do you most often get asked questions on . . .' (see also Figure 5). People reported issues raised as follows:

signposting 31
benefits 28
housing 25
relationship problems 19
legal problems 20
employment 17
education 12
health 12
community care 14
consumer issues 6
utilities 10
and other issues 11.

(Here 'signposting' means enquiries on where to find information, or a service or commodity, and this was explained to the interviewees). No-one was consulted on issues of immigration or nationality.

The 'other questions' category consisted of:

- aids and adaptations to houses;
- requests for writing letters;
- sexuality issues;
- travel queries;
- book-keeping and accounts help;
- drugs and alcohol problems in themselves and as a problem in the community;
- child care issues such as childminders.

One person was often asked general information such as bus timetables, phone numbers and doctor's surgery hours; this was in the Mossbank and Firth area, with a high density of council houses, very poor provision of amenities and a high turnover of residents. Those with such enquiries were usually new residents, for whom such information was extremely important.

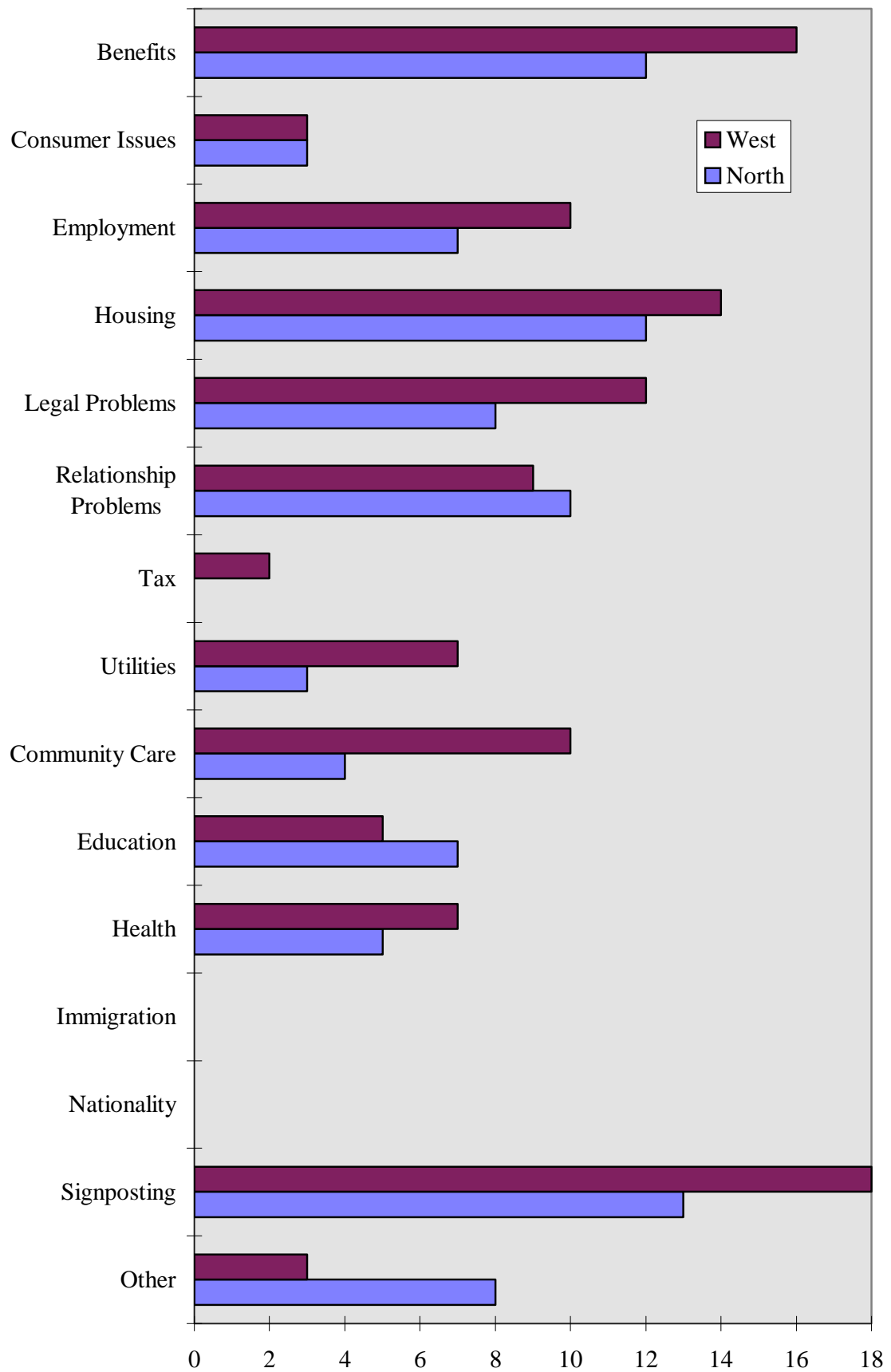


Figure 5: - Issues Raised

Respondents were asked 'when would you make use of the Citizens Advice Bureau?'. This was further elaborated to include instances when respondents had used the CAB on others' behalf or for themselves.

Thirteen interviewees had never used the CAB themselves and one could not remember when they had last consulted the CAB; 14 had used the bureau for legal advice; 13 for welfare rights and/or benefit advice; seven for consumer advice; seven for financial advice or debt counselling; four as a general information resource; three when they did not know where else to go, three for employment law; two if other channels had been exhausted; and two for leaflets.

There was one reply each for: help with filling in forms, procedural advice, housing advice, abortion advice, for help at tribunals, signposting, information on other agencies, advocacy, disputes with other agencies, answers to any questions the respondent could not answer personally, checking the validity of advice given, on behalf of someone with difficulties in contacting the CAB directly, and to check if a problem was within CAB's remit. One response was 'Any situation where they might be able to assist me or enable me to assist somebody else'.

Respondents were then asked 'when would you advise use of the Citizens Advice Bureau?'. Only four interviewees had never referred enquirers to the CAB; one was unsure under what circumstances they would refer.

Twenty-one people would make referrals for legal questions and 19 for welfare rights and/or benefit advice. Thirteen would refer consumer questions, 12 any question for which they had no ready solution or if they were unsure of their facts; eight for housing problems, seven for complaints against or disputes with agencies such as social services, housing or the health service, or where agencies had failed to provide help; six would refer problems with no easily identifiable and relevant agency; and four would refer for any advice or information query; other potential referrals were for tax advice, violence, citizenship rights, child support agency queries, utilities problems, confirmation of advice given, signposting, help with filling in forms, and advocacy. One respondent thought it particularly important to encourage young people to approach the CAB for advice.

The following comments were made:

'It's important that people get the right advice and know to what they are entitled. This is particularly a problem for older Shetlanders.'

'I would refer people to the CAB for benefits issues, in particular if they were scared by the DSS, or getting nowhere with the DSS.'

'I would advise people to use the CAB if they were unwilling to approach professionals, or if the enquirer was too incompetent to proceed themselves.'

'For more complex cases I would act as a go-between, or accompany a young person to the CAB.'

The interviewees were also asked 'Is there a specific area of advice that you would not seek, nor advise seeking, from the Citizens Advice Bureau?'; to which six responded 'don't know', 15 'no', and 29 'yes' (see Figure 6).

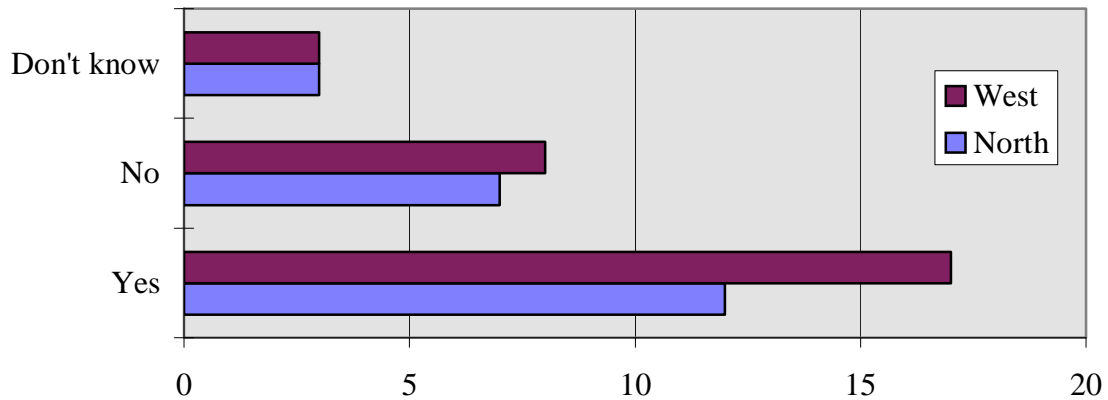


Figure 6: Areas felt to be outside scope of CAB

Of the 'don't knows', one had previously thought that the CAB was 'only for legal advice, claims and so on' until shortly before the interview, 4 felt that they didn't know enough about the CAB service to say, and one was worried that 'you don't know who's at the other side of the phone'.

Of the respondents that answered 'yes', the majority would send people with specific queries to the relevant agency; in particular they felt that medical, health, mental health and drug problems (eight) and relationship, family and domestic problems (six) were not appropriate areas for the CAB. Child protection, rape, abuse were also areas singled out as being best handled elsewhere.

One respondent said that the CAB was not always necessarily the first place advised; one said 'I would suggest contact with the relevant department, unless the problem was with those departments.' One respondent said, of enquiries by young people: 'With health problems I would go to the Health Promotions Department; they, and the Youth Enquiry Service, in some cases are more appropriate agencies, and both are young persons' information points.' Two people would not seek advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau if, or because, this was against the set procedures which they followed as part of their job.

The respondents were asked: 'Do you have any comments on, or solutions to, the question of the advice seeker not wishing to be observed to be seeking advice?' and all agreed it was a problem. In order to best illustrate some aspects of these difficulties, and possible solutions, a representative sample of comments is given.

The responses given were entirely unprompted, constructive suggestions which were made by respondents and may therefore be more significant than the sometimes small numbers might indicate: for example only three people suggested the use of new technology as a solution to confidentiality doubts; had respondents been asked if new technology could solve the problem a higher figure might have been obtained.

Confidentiality and speculation regarding the affairs of others are inherent problems in any small community, as the following comments illustrate:

'Confidentiality is a paramount problem in Shetland.'

'There is a particular difficulty with relationship problems.'

'Some people find it difficult "living in a goldfish bowl" and this leads to difficulties in being seen going to the CAB, the Alcohol Resource Centre and so on.'

'Your business is everybody else's business. People see someone visiting, say, Alcoholics Anonymous "Oh, I niver kent he hed a drink problem!".'

'Many people don't want to be seen going into "a door".'

‘A known car outside the house, for example, the doctor’s car, can lead to speculation.’

‘It’s a very difficult situation: it’s easy to surmise incorrectly why people are seeking help.’

‘Older Shetlanders don’t want to seek advice because they think it suggests failing or inadequacy.’

‘This is a particular problem with, for example, the Shetland Drugs Project.’

‘People may be frightened of seeking psychiatric help because they are frightened of losing their employment; being seen to have “psychological problems” may mean no future employment.’

‘It’s difficult to seek advice in Shetland without everyone finding out about it, eventually, somehow. For example there are Alcoholics Anonymous meetings at Brae on Monday nights: ‘Aah - he comes fae Eid!’’. Identification of the problem by the time and day or by the door entered is another difficulty.’

One respondent was more optimistic, and thought that things were changing for the better:

‘There has been a change in attitude; to a certain extent caused by incomers who have greater anonymity; and there is less self-consciousness than before about being seen.’

Twenty-three people thought that the invisibility of telephone contact could help solve confidentiality problems, nine felt that an initial phone call with a follow-up home visit was the best solution.

‘People can ring up and arrange for someone to go to the house; response to initial telephone contact is very important.’

One respondent highlighted the advantage that: ‘Phone contacts are less emotional and more controlled.’ However, the telephone may bring its own problems, as illustrated by one comment: ‘. . . but who will answer the phone?’

Equally, people do not always have problems in office hours and a 24 hour line may be necessary: ‘People would like the CAB to be open all the time, at least a national phone line.’ Six people saw written enquiries as providing a solution.

Although only three people felt that new technology might hold the necessary solutions, all three raised similar advantages:

‘Telephone contact and fax machines allow greater anonymity; Internet access to advice could be a possible way forward for the CAB.’

‘Computers can lead to greater confidentiality . . . e-mail queries, or a website with “frequently asked questions” accessed from a computer drop-in centre.’

‘Computer links can give greater anonymity and immediacy.’

Ten people felt that getting help from a third party might assist in the process in a variety of ways: an enquirer seeking a supportive second person to accompany them, ‘Get someone you trust to go with you.’; via the establishment of a support scheme, ‘Set up a client supporters scheme similar to that set up by the Health Council’; or by the advisor acting as a go-between, ‘As an advice-giver I personally would gather the information from the relevant agency for the individual.’

Many respondents felt that if there were one building housing a variety of information and advice agencies, then there would be less stigma attached to those people who were observed visiting such a building. It is worth re-emphasising at this stage that this question was an open one, and all comments and solutions offered were initiated by the respondents themselves; these variations on the theme of a multi-purpose advice centre were all proposed by the interviewees and not a response to a prompt. The generic nature of the CAB itself was seen to be an advantage in this context:

‘(Not wishing to be observed to be seeking advice) may be an occasion where people would use the CAB, in that the CAB, being more general, is “safer”.’

Suggestions for multi-purpose advice centres included: a form of one-stop, multi-purpose building that did not identify the nature of client need,

‘One solution might be a large centre containing all information services, including a library, the Youth Enquiry Service, Health Promotions, and the Citizens Advice Bureau’ which acted as ‘. . . a multi-purpose building for different needs’; and a location with no significance on ‘the street’

where anonymity of visitors and their purpose could be ensured,

‘One practical solution is a generic use facility such that type of advice is not identifiable by place or by time. With a mobile clinic there is the problem of flagging need by time of use, for example if it’s Thursday evening it must be family planning advice.’

One particular problem faced by young people was identified, that is their lack of privacy when living with parents, a factor that frequently makes home visits impractical. Potential solutions suggested by respondents included leaflets, the greater use of outreach workers and ‘An anonymous question box, (in a youth club/drop-in setting), with answers given for all to listen to.’

The responses of community councillors from the remote Outer Isles of Papa Stour and Foula were examined separately to determine if any special problems or needs emerged. Both used the Citizens Advice Bureau as a resource and for referral. Both gave the telephone as being the contact means for enquirers, though one said that a meeting could then be arranged as necessary. One found social services problems difficult to answer, the other could usually answer most questions put or signpost to the correct agency. One councillor was questioned on consumer issues, employment, legal problems, relationship problems, community care, and education; the other on housing, legal problems, utilities, signposting and travel.

One councillor said that they would make use of the CAB on a range of queries, for example on who were the suppliers of a certain commodity (much of the shopping done by remote islanders is necessarily conducted by telephone); one would use the CAB for benefit queries, in particular disabled living allowance. Enquiries which would be referred included legal, utilities, housing and benefit queries, as well as land law problems. One would not seek advice on health queries from the CAB nor refer them to the CAB, the other said there was not an area of advice they would not seek nor advise seeking from the CAB. Both felt that the telephone was an aid to advice-seekers confidentiality.

Conclusions & recommendations

SICAB has been in existence since May 1992; three paid and 24 volunteer staff deal with around five thousand issues a year. Most of the funding for the Bureau comes from the Shetland Islands Council Charitable Trust.

As client needs and their expectations of the Bureau become greater the complexity of the cases brought has increased. The necessity of keeping information current drives on-going training programmes and training for new volunteers takes between six and twelve months. In some cases bringing trainers to Shetland may be more economically viable than sending trainees to the mainland. Keeping up with current legislation is by far the largest part of training.

The major information source used within the Bureau is the NACAB/CAS *Information System*, the Scottish and non-Scottish sections of this system reflecting Scotland’s distinct

information needs, for example in the fields of education and the law. The system consists of a filing system supplemented by pamphlets and local information provided from within the Bureau. Further local information is held within a card-index file, local directories, and files containing documents and forms from the local authority, local health board and other local organisations. Of the books held within the Bureau, the most frequently used are the Child Poverty Action Group's handbooks on benefits. Off-line computer sources provide help with, for example, benefit checks. Computer use is largely for administrative and statistical work and off-line information sources. Some information is available on a local bulletin board and e-mail access to the SICAB is available. The Crofting Advice Line provides information and advice with around ten requests per month.

Determining the full nature and extent of the client's query is the first step in the consultation process, then the *Information System* or other relevant reference material is consulted by the volunteer, or if necessary an individual within the Bureau who has applicable specialist knowledge. If necessary the volunteer will make enquiries of external organisations, or advise the client that their need would be better met by consultation with such as a solicitor, where a list of appropriate solicitors could be provided. The client is then advised or, if necessary, a further appointment is made. Where another agency must be contacted on the client's behalf the client signs a mandate authorizing the CAB to act for them.

When asked which questions staff found most difficult to answer benefits problems were the most frequently cited.

Enquiry record sheets are completed after each appointment and data derived from these are sent monthly to CAS as part of a national recording system. Client profile reports and client satisfaction surveys are undertaken, and community leaders consulted on their perception of client needs.

A brief analysis of cases from July 1996 showed that the majority of clients made initial contact by telephone, most were women, and most Shetland clients came from Lerwick. Benefit, employment, housing, consumer and relationship issues occurred most frequently.

The responses gathered from those people interviewed in the rural information survey clearly indicated that community leaders are acting as a major information source for the rural population. This section concentrates on summing up rural information need as shown in the results of the survey of these community leaders and comparing need with that of the clients at the CAB office, and suggests how the Shetland Islands Citizen's Advice Bureau can help in serving this need.

The preferred place of contact by rural enquirers was at the workplace of the information provider, for example a doctor would be asked for advice during a medical consultation and a shopkeeper for information whilst purchases were being made; but in some cases people are just easier to locate at work than they are at home. The telephone was the more popular means of contact in the West, in the North more information providers were contacted in their own homes. The telephone was the most popular means of contact by enquirers at the Lerwick CAB office.

The extent to which each interviewee was approached by enquirers varied considerably, and factors which affected this included the local geography, the mobility of the enquirer, the personality of the individual community leader and their effectiveness as an information provider, ease of access and the availability of an alternative and more suitable advisor. Privacy and non-attributable consultation (of which more later) may also play a major part in the choice of how and to whom an approach for information and advice is made.

Further studies should include more people to whom those with very limited mobility have access, such as post(women) and care workers.

The most frequently raised rural issues from the survey of community leaders were signposting, benefits and housing; followed by relationship, legal, employment and education queries. In the Lerwick Bureau benefits were the most common issue, then employment,

housing and consumer issues, with relationship queries not far behind. In neither case were contacts made on immigration or nationality issues.

Social security, welfare rights and benefit questions gave the most difficulties both to rural information providers and to staff within the SICAB office; in the rural case largely because of lack of expertise. Issues of information and advice for those with sexuality problems were only mentioned by a few respondents, but those that did bring up the topic felt that it was an area of deep concern, particularly with regard to the privacy of the enquirer.

Respondents contacted the CAB most about legal, benefit and welfare rights enquiries, and referred enquirers with the same queries as well as for consumer advice, housing queries, and those in dispute with public agencies; the CAB was also advised for general information enquiries and problems that no other obvious organisation existed to solve.

Health, including mental health and drug problems, relationship problems, child protection, abuse and rape were all areas considered by some to be better dealt with by agencies other than the CAB.

All interviewees felt that the question of advice seekers not wishing to be observed to be seeking advice was a problem in Shetland, particularly in a small or rural community; for the old pride was often an obstacle and for the young the fear of parental involvement.

Using the telephone or writing a letter for the first consultation was seen as one solution to the problem, with follow-up home visits if necessary. Some thought that an answer lay in queries by e-mail and Internet access; the assistance of a friend in accompanying the client or as a go-between who could contact an information provider on the enquirer's behalf was another frequent suggestion, and client supporters or advocacy schemes such as those set up by the Shetland Health Council and Voluntary Services Shetland.

A multi-purpose advice centre was suggested by many as the solution to speculation as to the reasons for attendance at the premises of a specific advice provider; attendance at the CAB was seen as being 'safer' in that it offers general information provision but a multi-use building could help alleviate the stigma attached to attending a service which could be identified by time and venue (particularly attendance at drink, drug, and relationship counselling).

As more people gain access to computers and the Internet an extension of the information available on the local bulletin board (which currently only has around 190 users (Survey of use of Shetland Times First Class System, Eileen Johnson, STEP student, Kildrummy Technologies Ltd & The Shetland Times Ltd, July/August 1997.)) to a web-site on the World Wide Web would have the potential of reaching a larger audience, and would offer an interface which might be more attractive to young people. Links could be offered to Internet services of other Bureaux, such as those offered by the Manchester Citizens Advice Bureaux, though obviously the potential differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK would need to be highlighted. Greater publicity of the e-mail address of the SICAB would mean that people who wanted the anonymity of an electronic enquiry could find out about it.

Outreach workers who could make regular visits to youth clubs and centres could help in an area with unmet information need, with particular privacy problems. The establishment of a client supporter group might be explored for those who are reluctant to attend the CAB on their own but do not have anyone they care to involve in their problems; this could provide useful involvement for those who would like to help at the CAB but do not have the time available to commit themselves to the full training programme necessary for a volunteer.

The ideal solution to the privacy question would appear to be a multi-purpose advice and information centre, housing the Citizens Advice Bureau, Shetland Health Promotions, the Youth Enquiry Service, a Family Planning Service, the Shetland Drugs Project, the Alcohol Advice Centre as well as the voluntary organisations currently housed with the Voluntary Service Resource Centre at Harbour House, and the Library Service. A common entrance and central reception area in conjunction with sensitive design and proper sound-proofing could

help those people who are frightened of being observed attending a specific advice provider. Clearly there might be fears that confidentiality could be compromised, and this would have to be addressed; but there could well be some economies to be found in sharing resources. The new building could ameliorate the shortage of space currently endured by the SICAB, as well as bringing new potential clients.

The training undergone by the staff of the SICAB means that they are able to offer a wide range of information and advice, and ensures that the advice given is current. Currently the SICAB advertises weekly in the Shetland Times, in the Need Help column. Although some of the interviewees made use of the SICAB more than a quarter had never used the CAB themselves; greater awareness of the usefulness of the SICAB as an advice resource could improve the efficacy of the advice and information provided by the rural community leaders since they could avail themselves of the CAB's broader, deeper and more current knowledge base. If the CAB is failing to reach rural community leaders, this may indicate a failure to reach citizens in general; though these community leaders may use their own long established personal networks in preference to what is, for them, an untried service.

References and Bibliography

CHURCH, J. (Ed.) (1997). *Social Trends*. London: The Stationery Office.

CHURCH, J. (Ed.) (1996). *Regional Trends*. London: HMSO.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (monthly). *The Information System*. Lever Arch file system of National Information with monthly updates from NACAB.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND (various years). *Factsheets*. Edinburgh: Citizens Advice Scotland.

Factsheet 1: Quality assurance within the Citizens Advice Bureau service in Scotland.

Factsheet 2: The history of the Citizens Advice Bureau service in Scotland.

Factsheet 6: Citizens Advice Bureaux: The CAB Service at a Glance 1995/1996.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND (various years). *Brochures*. Edinburgh: Citizens Advice Scotland.

Citizens Advice Scotland, Support.

Voicing Your Concerns.

Scotland's Community Based Advice Service.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1995). *Corporate Plan, 1996-1999*. CAS: Edinburgh.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1996a). *Statistical Recording*. Edinburgh: CAS.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1996b). *A Scottish Voice: Annual Report, 1995 - 1996*. Edinburgh: CAS.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1996c). *Conditions of Membership*. Edinburgh: CAS.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1996d). *Corporate Plan and Service Specification Document*. Edinburgh: CAS.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1996e). *Financial Statements, year ending 31st March 1996*. CAS: Edinburgh.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1997a). *Citizens Advice Scotland, Factsheet 1- Quality assurance within the Citizens Advice Bureau service in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Citizens Advice Scotland.

CITIZENS ADVICE SCOTLAND. (1997b). *Press Pack, January 1997, No. 7*. CAS: Edinburgh.

- COMPUTANEWS INFORMATION SYSTEMS FOR ADVICE. (1997). CABx Millennium Bid Fails. *Computanews* 88, (March/April). URL: <http://www.poptel.org.uk/~lasa/>
- DUNKLEY, J. (1989). Advice needs in rural areas. *Libraries Alone: An International Journal* (NWS, Australia), 1 (2), 54-57.
- EAST, JUNE AND SHAH, MILAN. (1994). *Manchester CAB Service, Development of Computer Communications*. Manchester: CAB.
- ELLIOTT, D. K. (1984). Information and advice services in rural areas. *Library and Information Research News*, 7 (25), 21-22.
- FLYN, D., and MacCUIISH, D. J. (1990). *Crofting Law*. Edinburgh: Butterworths.
- GALLIMORE, A. (1997). The Manchester Community Information Network. *Electronic Libraries*, 15 (4), 297-298.
- HEATON, C. (1984). Local community information: a Citizens Advice Bureau joint project. *Library Micromation News*, (8), April, 6-9.
- JAMES, I. (1989). The Clwyd Welfare Benefits Unit. *Public Library Journal*, 4 (6), 134-137.
- KING, J. (Ed.). (1996). *Family Spending*. London: The Stationery Office.
- MANCHESTER CAB SERVICE. (1997a). *The Electronic Mail Inquiry Service of the Manchester Citizens Advice Bureaux*. Manchester: CAB, 1997. Available online at URL: <http://www.poptel.org.uk/cab/query.html>
- MANCHESTER CAB SERVICE. (1997b). *World Wide Web home page*. Manchester: CAB. Available online at URL: <http://www.poptel.org.uk/cab/>
- NAPIER, A. (1996). *Voluntary Groups Hand Book 1996*. Lerwick: Disability Shetland.
- THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAUX. (various years). *Brochures*. London: NACAB.
- Advice that makes the difference.*
- How can I use my experience to help the community?*
- Working for Change.*
- What's YOUR idea of a CAB volunteer?*
- Seven million questions.*
- POLICY STUDIES INSTITUTE. (1991). *Computerising the NACAB information service*. London: PSI Publications.
- SHETLAND COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE. (1996). *37th Annual Report 1995/96*. Lerwick: Shetland Council of Social Service.
- SHETLAND ISLANDS COUNCIL. (1996). *Shetland in Statistics*. Lerwick: SIC Development Department.
- SHETLAND ISLANDS COUNCIL: LEISURE AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT. (1995). *Shetland Community Directory*. Lerwick: SIC Leisure & Recreation Dept.
- SHETLAND TIMES. (1994). *Shetland Directory 1995/96*. Lerwick: The Shetland Times Ltd.
- SICAB. (annual). *Annual Report, 1992-1996*. Lerwick: SICAB.

- SICAB. (1996a). *Client Satisfaction Survey*. Lerwick: SICAB.
- SICAB. (1996b). *Client Profile Report*. Lerwick: SICAB.
- SICAB. (1996c). *Statistical Enquiry Sheet Summary*. Lerwick: SICAB.
- SICAB. (1997). *Workload Statistics: February 1997*. Lerwick: SICAB.
- STEELE, J. (1993). Computerising the NACAB information service. *ASSIGNation: Aslib Social Sciences Information Group Newsletter*, 9 (3), 14-15.
- SULLOM VOE HARBOUR AUTHORITY. (1997). *Shetland Islands Council Ports Handbook 1997/98*. King's Lynn: Compass Publications.
- THOMAS, J. (1995). *Access Guide for Shetland, 1995*. Lerwick: Council on Disability for Shetland.
- WILLIAMSON, K. (1986). Information Seeking by Users of a Citizens Advice Bureau. *Australian Library Journal*, 35 (4), 187-195.