

Our history and what's next

For everyone,
for 80
years

cyngor ar
bopeth

citizens
advice

Torfaen




Citizens Advice Torfaen

We don't know much about our early history. The lack of a surviving newspaper archive for the Pontypool Free Press along with our own lack of archives leaves us guessing.

We think that originally the Eastern Valley Citizens Advice in Pontypool would have been a separate organisation to the one we believe existed in Cwmbran. The Eastern Valley CAB is documented as coming into being around 1960 but logically there is likely to have been a much earlier service dating back to the formation of Citizens Advice on the eve of World War II.

It is likely that they would have eventually merged into a Torfaen wide CAB service following the creation of the Torfaen Borough Council in 1974 and this will have developed into the service we know today.


Citizens Advice Torfaen has consistently operated advice services from office locations in Cwmbran and Pontypool throughout this period and today provides advice to 4,000 local residents annually, employs over 60 staff and is home to around 30 volunteer advisers who support the advice needs of people from our local communities.



1935 The Government is considering the need for an information service linked to the fledgling social welfare service.

1938 The prospect of a world war looms so the National Council of Social establishes a group to look at how to meet the needs of the civilian population in war time. "Citizens Advice Bureaux should be established throughout the country.."

4 September 1939
The day after World War II begins, Citizens Advice open in 200 locations to help people with the impacts



From the start, volunteers run the service. Advisers deal with problems relating to the loss of ration books, homelessness and evacuation. They also help locate missing relatives and prisoners of war. Debt quickly becomes a key issue as income reduces due to call-ups.

1942 The number of bureaux peaks at 1,074

1950s Despite the success of Citizens Advice Bureaux, funding from the Ministry of Health is cut after the war, and by 1953 the number of bureaux has halved. The service continues thanks to the support of charitable trusts such as the Nuffield Foundation, Carnegie Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.



1957 The Rent Act results in a big increase in enquiries.



1960 Eastern Valley Citizens Advice opens in Pontypool - very little is known of the history of Citizens Advice in Torfaen, anyone with information is urged to reach out and help us discover our past.

1960 Funding from the Government for the national body is restored.

1960s A quarter of enquiries relate to housing and the number of bureaux has reduced from 1,074 to 416.

1965 The national total for enquiries reaches 1.25 million.



1970s Consumer protection becomes a priority.

1973 A development grant from the Government is given to the national charity, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB), to extend the network.



1980s Two recessions mean a growth in poverty and enquiries rise in line with this.

1984
A review of Housing Benefit regulation is announced after Citizens Advice present evidence to parliament

1984
For the first time, social security is the most common enquiry, reflecting the increasing numbers of people who are reliant on it



1985
The miners' strike leads to a spike of enquiries on benefits, fuel, housing and consumer debts

1987
Enquiries about benefits and help to understand major welfare reforms increase throughout the whole of the 1980s, but are particularly high between 1987 and 1989



1990
The first half of the 1990s Citizens Advice help people struggling with poll tax arrears, and then with council tax arrears from 1993 onwards

1993
Spike of enquiries around the Child Support Act





1998

Citizens Advice successfully campaign against changes in court fees which made it difficult for poor people to gain access to justice



1999

Self-help website advice.org.uk is launched



2000s Debt, housing and employment continue to be key problems that Citizens Advice Bureaux deal with, particularly in relation to asylum issues.

2001 Better Health – Better Lives launches to provide welfare benefits and generalist advice to patients in local GP Practices to alleviate their practical problems and improve their quality of life.

2002

Digitalisation of the service. The first electronic case recording system CASE is rolled out across Bureaux. Enabling us to move from paper based filing systems to online ones.

2003 Our Adviceguide self-help content is made available in Welsh, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu and visits continue to increase,

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux changes its name to Citizens Advice and, in Wales, to Citizens Advice Cymru (Cyngor ar Bopeth Cymru).

Citizens Advice Bureaux become the first in the advice sector to audit the quality of their advice.



2003 An independently commissioned review of the service by the Office for Public Management concludes that "the Citizens Advice service provides excellent value in return for the public funding it receives."



2003

Enquiries on tax credits rise and a high number of enquiries around welfare changes continue for the next two decades peaking in 2017



2004 Torfaen Citizens Advice Bureau becomes a registered Charity and incorporates as a company.

After a ten year campaign using evidence from Citizens Advice service clients, the Government added an amendment to the Housing Bill to include a tenancy deposit protection scheme.



2005 Citizens Advice issue a super-complaint to the Office of Fair Trading on the cost and effectiveness of payment protection insurance (PPI)



2007

Citizens Advice receive a large number of enquiries around the non- return of tenancy deposits up until 2007, when a new tenancy deposit protection law comes into force after 15 years of campaigning on the issue



2008

An influx of enquiries from those who had very high levels of borrowing up until the financial crash in 2008, after which enquiries around unemployment rise.

2011 Citizens Advice Bureaux deliver advice services from over 3,400 community locations in England and Wales, run by 360 registered charities, helping people to resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free advice and information, and by influencing policymakers. The network relies on 22,200 trained volunteers to keep the service running, and provides advice from in person in bureaux as well as by phone, in people's homes and via the internet. Visits to our Adviceguide self-help website, have risen to over 11 million.

2012 More than two million people came to our service for face-to-face or phone advice. More than 12 million people used our digital services. We launched our first equality strategy – Stand up for equality that will ensure we place equality at the centre of everything we do.



2013

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 sees the end of Social Welfare Contracts for Legal Aid reducing staff, funding and advice capacity at Citizens Advice Torfaen by a third.



4 September 2014 Citizens Advice service celebrates its 75th birthday.



2014

Citizens Advice telephone service 'Adviceline' takes its millionth call

2014

Citizens Advice present evidence to government and regulators showing a growth in bad lending and debt collection practices by payday lenders. This results in a cap on the cost of payday loans and tightened regulation

2015 Citizens Advice Torfaen relocate its advice services in Blaenavon from Church View to Blaenavon Resource Centre

Citizens Advice introduce web chat and begin a major redesign of its digital services in line with how people search for help online

April 2015 Citizens Advice took on 2 new services. The Citizens Advice network provides the face-to-face service for Pension Wise. The Citizens Advice Witness Service provides free, independent support for witnesses in criminal courts in England and Wales.

2016 The EU referendum leads to spikes in enquiries about Brexit. For the first time, the number of people accessing citizensadvice.org.uk via mobile is higher than those using a laptop and desktop. The government announces a ban on letting agents' fees after years of Citizens Advice campaigning.



2016

We see a rise locally in Fuel Poverty issues and take a lead on combating these with a new Energy Champion working with other energy advisers across South Wales

2016

For the first time, people accessing citizensadvice.org.uk via a mobile is higher than those using a laptop or desktop



2017

Citizens Advice's new case management system, "Casebook" is rolled out.

2017

The Supreme Court rules that employment tribunal fees are unlawful, after years of Citizens Advice campaigning to make fees fairer

2017

Citizens Advice present evidence on problems with the Universal Credit rollout to the government. After months of campaigning, the government announces £1.5 billion in extra funding



2017: Citizens Advice Torfaen opens its first call centre delivering the National Consumer Helpline following a successful bid to run the service



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2018 We issue a super-complaint on the 'loyalty penalty' showing loyal customers pay too much for services like broadband. We persuade energy networks to give money back to people in Great Britain after finding that they made £7.5 billion in excess profits.



2020: Citizens Advice Torfaen closes its offices in Gwent Square Cwmbran and Castle mews, Pontypool and relocate to Cwmbran Library and Portland Buildings in Commercial Street Pontypool

Coronavirus outbreak begins across the UK. Our face-to-face services, drop-ins and outreaches close. Our advice service is delivered via telephone, emails and webchat to minimise the risk of the virus spreading.

2023 The Cost of Living Crisis creates new levels of hardship in our local communities and leads to the busiest ever year for Citizens Advice Torfaen

We're looking to the future

We're continuing to transform our services to meet the changing needs of the people we help, keep pace with rapid technological advances and stay ahead.

Our Vision for 2024:



You won't ever struggle to get help from us



You'll get the level of support you need



Our service will be joined up



You know that we'll speak up for you



We'll help you find a way forward,
whatever your problem



Thank you

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