

Our City Charity

A History of Exeter
Citizens Advice Bureau



Foreword

This book and film have been produced thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund's All Our Stories programme. They are the culmination of a year of research conducted by Suzanne McQueenie and Bex Devaraj.

We have aimed to tell the story of Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau through the voices of its volunteers, paid staff, and most importantly, its clients.

Thanks to Devon Records Office, Westcountry Studies Library, David Cornforth's informative website www.exetermemories.co.uk, and to everyone who gave up their time to help with our research.

Special thanks to the staff and volunteers, past and present, who have worked tirelessly for the Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau to make it such a well-respected and valued organisation.

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Chapter 1 - The Early years

For more than 65 years an Exeter charity has been helping people. Often giving a voice to those who otherwise would not have one; giving advice with life-changing consequences.

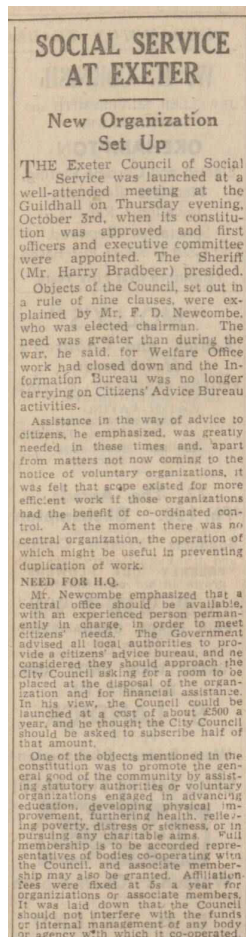
When Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau was established in the city in 1947 it was a time of great change. The city was recovering from the German bombardment with huge swathes of buildings damaged beyond repair.

Here was an organisation offering free, impartial, non-political, confidential advice, helping people to resolve their legal, money and other problems at a time when they most needed it. It continues to do the same today and is as much, if not more, in demand in these times of welfare reform and financial uncertainty.

The years following the Second World War were a time of change in many ways; the introduction of the welfare state saw the fledgling National Health Service taking its first shaky steps, rationing was still in place and would be for many years, but it was also a new dawn and a time of hope for the citizens of Exeter.

With the aid of a £200 grant from Exeter City Council a group of philanthropic residents established the Citizens Advice Bureau, as the lead organisation in the Exeter Council of Social Service (ECSS). Based at Morwenna, in St David's Hill, this organisation encompassed the CAB, Old People's Welfare, the Legal Advice Centre and Neighbourhood Development.

This newspaper cutting from the Western Times of Friday October, 11, 1946, records the beginnings of the CAB when the service was launched at a meeting in the city's Guildhall.



The service opened the door to its first clients in 1947, dealing with issues ranging from war-related questions, to housing and employment.

The organisation's first annual report of April 1948 records how it had established itself as a 'real force in the service of the city' and demonstrated 'examples of what can be done making use of the goodwill in the community' - something we see reflected in the bureau today, with its team of volunteers working alongside paid employees.

Words written by Frank Newcombe, the first chairman of the ECSS, reinforce the importance of the organisation in 1947 and give a glimpse to its relevance in the future. He stated: 'It is the spirit and enthusiasm in which this great voluntary work is undertaken by the various committees that matters.

'The coming year will see the beginning of great schemes of social welfare - the National Health Service Act, the National Insurance Act and the National Assistance Act; and some people express doubts whether voluntary societies can still find a useful sphere of action.

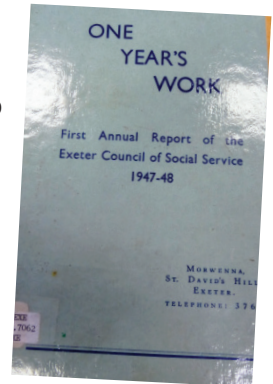
'We believe that they can, and that, as the State takes more and more responsibility in social matters voluntary agencies can turn to new and unexplored regions of service. We look forward with confidence to the value of our work.

He concluded: 'In the near future we hope to break new ground - in the cultural field, for instance - and to go on as times and needs change, working for the good life of the citizens of Exeter.'

And the organisation continues this work today, offering impartial, free, and confidential advice and more than 65 years later - in the words of Mr Newcombe - 'working for the good life of the citizens of Exeter'.

Audrey Deacon was appointed as secretary in January 1947 on a salary of £250 a year. She said: 'The office [in St David's Hill] consisted of one poorly heated room in an otherwise unoccupied house. It had no lavatory of its own and this became distinctly awkward when tenants had moved in and permission had to be sought for use each time.

'The wallpaper was particularly hideous - dark green and dark brown with red splotches. The room was very cold being heated by only an electric contraption of strange design lent by the chair-



man...during the winter I used to work in outdoor coat and sheep-skin boots, a tweed suit and two jerseys, plus mittens.

'The queries ranged from muddles about hire purchase commitments to sheer poverty.' Records reveal how Mrs Deacon helped a widow who was very anxious about her daughter who was living abroad and suffering from tuberculosis. The woman was 'a widow and had lost two sons and a daughter and most of her relations and was in a very run down and miserable state.' Mrs Deacon gave her 'welfare food' provided by the Red Cross and persuaded her to visit her doctor. She was later able to provide news of the daughter through an international social work agency.

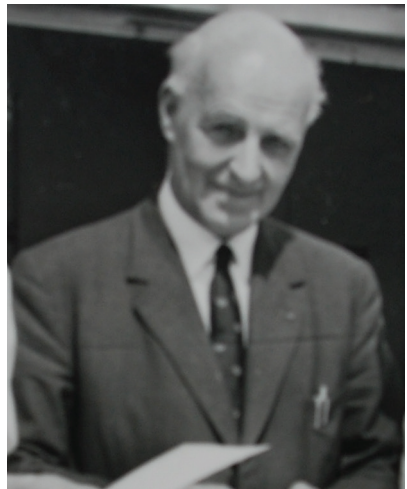
The very first Citizen Advice Bureaux were launched across the country in 1939 at the outbreak of the Second World War. They operated from town halls, shops and even people's homes. After the war this funding was withdrawn and as a result many of the original bureaux closed. However, demand for a service offering independent advice on a huge range of issues continued and by 1952 there were around 500 CAB offices around the country, usually with two or three members of staff and supported financially through charitable trusts.

An article from The Economist of August 30, 1952, recorded how the offices were staffed by 'capable and sympathetic people', many of whom were voluntary workers, and how the centres 'rapidly acquired a vitality and popularity beyond all expectation'.

The article went on to state: 'With the return of peace, winding up [the offices] was postponed from year to year. Local charities stepped in as government funds were withdrawn and as local charities felt the strain local authorities began to vote donations.'

'All, however, have the strongly independent character of voluntary social service, which is preserved by their extensive use of part time volunteer workers'.

The first chairman of the Exeter CAB was Arthur Kettlewell, who took on his role at the foundation of



Arthur Kettlewell was the first chairman of Exeter CAB - a position he held for 26 years

the group and continued to lead it until the early 1970s. He was supported in his work by a committee of 15 local men and women.

Mr Kettlewell was born in Knaresborough, Yorkshire, in 1905. He came to Exeter to become headmaster of the Royal Exeter School for the Deaf in 1944.

His wife, Elizabeth, who he married in 1929, served as the school's matron. He retired from the deaf school in 1965, but continued in his role as chairman of the CAB until 1973, when he was succeeded by George Simey.

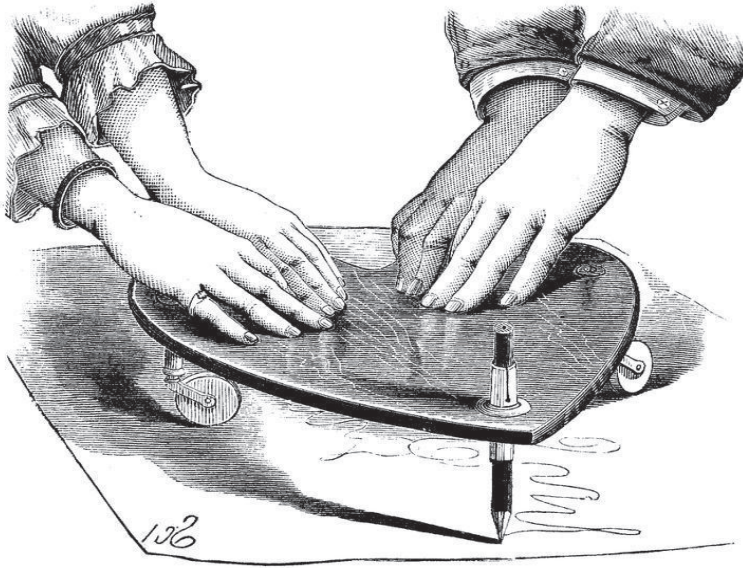
He was extremely well-respected in his field and during his career he was awarded an OBE for his work with deaf children. He also served as a Justice of the Peace at Exeter Magistrates Court.

The first committee of Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau was made up of the following people: Mr W J Elliott, Capt G Evered, Miss D Bradbeer, Mr R L Darch, Mr C A Dare, Mr A Denning, Col H D Drew, Miss N Gough, Miss I M Harkell, Mr A Spencer Howard, Mrs Griffith Morgan, Mrs F P Nicholls, Mrs M Pollard, Mr N S E Pugsley, Mr A H Roberts, Miss O Rudd, Mr G A Saunders, Mrs E E Tinkham, Mr L R West.

The bureau first opened to the public every morning and two afternoons a week, but a pressing need meant it quickly had to increase these opening times, to see people five days a week. In its first year it dealt with 1,770 enquiries. Changes in technology over those 65 years have dramatically altered how we obtain our information, yet some of the enquiries remain strikingly similar to this day.

Some of the questions put to Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau in that first year truly reflected the time, they included:

- *How can I get my German fiancée to England?*
- *Where can I have some Latin documents translated?*
- *Can you arrange for someone to visit my mother and let me know how she is?*
- *Will you help me fill in a pension application form?*
- *I have just returned from Hong Kong: What will my position be under the National Insurance Act?*
- *Can you help me to trace a friend whose address I have lost?*
- *Where can I apply for a permit to build a house?*
- *How can I send clothing to Europe?*



An etching from the early 20th century shows two pairs of hands on a planchette - one of the more unusual methods used to contact Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau - before the days of email

Picture courtesy of the Nordic Spiritual Research Center

In those early days there was even contact from 'the other side'. A Western Morning News article from November 1947 recorded how a family living in Looe in Cornwall used supernatural methods to contact the Exeter bureau.

The article told how Olive Dewsbury from Looe was unable to make contact with her nephew John Bowden, who had been left almost £1,000 by his aunt.

After trying unsuccessfully to locate him she held a séance using a planchette to find out where he was. A planchette was a small flat piece of wood on castors with a pen or pencil attached.

Planchettes had been very popular in Victorian times producing mysterious messages as though communicating with the 'spirit world'.

According to the newspaper article, Mrs Dewsbury had lost touch with her nephew in the 1920s. It said: 'For over 20 years Mrs Dewsbury and Mr Bowden's other aunts had wondered what had happened to him. They last saw him as a baby, just after his father had been drowned in the Looe river'.



In the newspaper article she said the reason she had written to the town clerk, who had told her to contact the CAB, was 'an unusual one'.

She added: 'A neighbour and a friend experimented with a glass used as a planchette and we asked it questions. When we said *'can you help us find the boy, John?'*, it spelt 'write', when we said *'where?'* it replied 'Exeter'.

The article didn't record how the Citizens Advice Bureau was able to find Mr Bowden, but it appears it was successful as it ends with fact that 'the request was answered when Mr Bowden and his wife walked into the bureau'.

In 1947 the people of Exeter were still picking up the pieces after the Second World War. Large areas of the city were bombsites, rationing would be in place until the 1950s and day-to-day life was hard for many.

Thomas Sharp's plans for rebuilding the city were exhibited in this year and temporary shops were established in Sidwell Street.

Exeter resident Maurice Foster recalls the impact of the Second World War on the people of Exeter.

Maurice, who was born in the city in 1924, left school at 14 to work at the Devon and Somerset stores in the city centre - 'Devon's Fortnum and Mason'.

He vividly remembers the night of the Blitz. 'I was in Exeter on the night of the Blitz and I was



Exeter housewives are pictured above queuing for their meat ration at the Cowick Street butchers J Lethbridge and sons.

Picture: Tony Lethbridge/Exeter Memories Maurice Foster, right, remembers the night of the Blitz in Exeter





Women working in a bureau around 1940 and, below, a horse box served as a mobile CAB during the war

living in Whipton. After the all clear I walked into Exeter as far as I could with my friend because we both had grandparents living near the centre of Exeter, fortunately they were alright.

'Exeter was in chaos, the whole place was alight with incendiary bombs. Unless you were part of the rescue teams you could not go any further.

'What I remember particularly is we walked up over Pinhoe Road and one of the houses had been blitzed; there were some casualties and there was no communication to get the emergency services out, and as two young 17-year-olds, they asked us to go to Old Tiverton Road where there was headquarters of the emergency services and ask them to send out the ambulance.'

Maurice added: 'We got very used to air raid sirens, it wasn't just the night of the Blitz, there had been raids and air raids before then.

'We had what was known as a steel table which you put in the liv-



ing room in place of the ordinary table and you crawled underneath and hoped for the best.'

Following the Second World War, work started on rebuilding the city, with many damaged buildings being demolished. Maurice said: 'Unfortunately, immediately after the Blitz a lot of demolition took place which needn't have taken place, but it was the easiest and probably the safest thing to do. Lots of buildings were damaged and they could have been repaired.

'Instead of that the city council employed Thomas Sharp who drew up a complete new plan for Exeter and what we have in Exeter now are the bones of what he suggested. One or two major things the city council couldn't afford in the end, but basically it was what he drew up.'

The winter of 1947-48 was one of the coldest on record - even the River Exe froze. At the Citizens Advice Bureau demand for advice continued to grow and it became apparent that it could no longer operate efficiently from its location in St David's Hill and new premises were needed. So the bureau, alongside its fellow organisations in the Exeter Council of Social Service, began looking for a new home in the city.

The search was a success and in 1950 the CAB moved from St David's Hill to Sun Street, setting up an office in a Nissen hut on a bombsite. This little street, which no longer exists, was an extension of Preston Street, tucked away off South Street. Its houses were destroyed in the air raids of May 1942 and the area rebuilt in the 1950s. Mr Newcombe said: 'Our new premises are spacious and perhaps even more important are centrally situated'. That year the organisation received a substantial donation from the St Thomas Carnival Committee.

Times were hard for many families in those post war years and in 1951 the bureau saw a huge leap in enquiries to 4,183. Mr Kettlewell explored some of the reasons families contacted the bureau.

He said: 'Problems that beset such families are small but if left unsolved, they assume such proportions that the parents begin to develop a feeling of helplessness in the face of mounting difficulties.

'Very often the problem which brings these people to the office is merely a symptom and not the real cause of their troubles.

'A completely misguided allocation of the family income is often found to give rise to difficulties and in a few cases it has been found that rent arrears have accumulated while a disproportionate amount has been spent on food...smoking is accepted in most families and is

an essential part of the family expenditure.'

He said the bureau aimed 'to try and remove the immediate difficulties that lead to their application for advice and to help the husband or wife to see more clearly what the underlying causes of their problems are and try to bring order and method into the family budget'.

Family finances remain high on the agenda today with clients seeking financial advice encouraged to complete a budget planner – much like those of 65 years ago.

In his annual report of that year Mr Newcombe noted they had already outgrown their premises in Sun Street: 'As the work grows, the expenses increase – the question of larger and more central premises, for instance, is becoming really urgent – and we must look more and more to the generosity of our well-wishers'.

In the year leading to March 1953 the bureau saw another increase in enquiries to 5,746.

Families were given help with budgeting, the bureau provided economical and simple recipes and advice was provided on household management.

'We find that when some kind of order and plan emerge in the management of the home, the family relationship, and in particular, the husband-wife relationship improves'.

*Muriel Fol-
land, 93,
was born
on the Isle
of Wight.
She came
to Exeter
with her
husband
in the late
1940s*



when he was looking for work, and visited the bureau when it was based at Sun Street.

She said: "My husband had lost his job in Liverpool, so he thought he would come to Devon to look for work."

The couple had a daughter who was born in 1948. Sadly the marriage broke up when she was just two years old.

Muriel said: 'I needed some help as I was struggling to bring my daughter up alone. I think it would have been around 1951, they gave me support when I needed it.'

Later on Muriel worked at the fire headquarters at Clyst St George and her daughter attended boarding school in Exmouth – thanks to the help and advice she received from the bureau.

'I had so many problems in my life and I used the CAB because I found them very helpful. I think it is a wonderful thing; there are many people who don't know you can go there and get information – they are so knowledgeable.'

Muriel, who worked as a volunteer for Oxfam until she was 90, added: 'If anybody has a problem they would be well advised to go to the Citizens Advice Bureau.'

The organisation went on to develop a sewing machine service, buying sewing machines and providing lessons for mothers who were unable to sew. The women made their own curtains, soft furnishings and clothes and there was soon a waiting list for lessons.

The ethos of the bureau is reflected in that year's annual report, an ethos that is ever present in the work of the bureau today: 'We believe that time spent in helping families to help themselves is very much worthwhile.

'By providing the right type of help at the right time many serious problems can be avoided – in other words we believe this preventative and positive work is an important social service.'

In 1956 a new chairman, William Slader, who had served as mayor of Exeter from 1947-1949, took over at the Exeter Council of Social Service following the death of Mr Newcombe.

A Rent Bill was introduced by the Government in 1957, leaving some tenants at the mercy of more unscrupulous landlords, and the bureau reported that enquiries were beginning to come in about the effect of the new bill.

And, as it continued its pioneering services, the organisation launched its 'boarding-out scheme' which worked to house vulnerable elderly people with local families.

The 1950s saw changes in how we bought our goods with more people using credit. Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau reported an increase in enquiries regarding hire purchase and 'club' accounts, a pattern which was set to increase over the coming years.

Mr Kettlewell reports: 'It is not unusual for some families to have credit accounts with seven or more firms. The greatest temptation comes to this type of family when they are being rehoused by the local authority.

'Their recognition and appreciation of improved housing leads them to try and match their new home with new and usually very shiny furniture.

'Several cases have come to our notice of parents who have purchased on credit, furniture and mats to the cost of well over £100, on an income that was barely sufficient to meet the primary needs of the family.'

In 1958 the CAB, along with the other voluntary groups in the Council of Social Service, secured new premises; these were right in the city centre, at 2 Waterbeer Street.

Although the office would stay there for 13 years, the premises, which were provided by Exeter City Council, were considered



temporary as the site had been earmarked for development into what would later be the Guildhall

Above, the inside of the office at Waterbeer Street and, right, the front entrance

Shopping Centre. The building had previously been used as the British Workman Provident Temperance Hall – an alcohol-free public house for ‘working men’. Maurice Foster remembered it as the location of a ‘social restaurant’ – providing for needy people in the city.



He said: ‘Vi, my late wife, was one of the ladies from Southernhay United Reformed Church who used to help in the project. After the Blitz I believe it was used as a British Restaurant.’ British Restaurants were set up in 1940 to provide a nutritious meal for people who had been bombed or who had run out of ration coupons.

Maurice added: ‘In those days Waterbeer Street had a range of

premises including the rear of High Street shops, the back entrance of the Guildhall with its barred cell window, several commercial premises and the unusual police station building.'

Much of Waterbeer Street was destroyed during the war. Violet Ginger, who worked at the CAB when it was based there recalls the office well.

She said: 'The office was in a house behind what became Woolworths; it was on the first floor and based in two or three rooms. Next door was a bomb-site where we used to park our cars, but later this was developed.'

Violet worked for Exeter CAB during its time at Waterbeer Street and when it first moved to Wynards.

Her young boys were at school and she found it a useful way to get back into the world of work. She joined in 1968 and remembers her training took place at St David's Hill, possibly at Morwenna, the first home of the CAB. 'It was a house which was set back from the road, behind some iron railings – we went there for our training.

'At Waterbeer Street all the information was kept in filing cabinets – of course there were no computers, very different to how it is now, but there was nothing like the bureaucracy that we have now. There wasn't the same amount of benefits available then.'

She added: 'I was based at Waterbeer Street for a number of years and then I made the move to Wynards. It was a fascinating job. I remember a man who lived in the almshouses, I think he was the resident who had been there the longest. He had a very long white beard and used to walk up and down Holloway Street – everyone knew him as Father Christmas.'

Violet went on the work in the sociology department at Exeter University and then later at the Institute of Biometric Medicine. Her final position, before she retired, was as co-ordinator of services for Age Concern, Devon.

She said: 'I look back on those days at the CAB very fondly, I made a lot of friends and gained a lot from my time there.



Violet Ginger joined Exeter CAB as a volunteer in 1968

'There were a lot of worried people around at that time. There wasn't much help available. Housing was quite a problem, people were on housing lists but there just wasn't the properties available. We used to have women coming in with a herd of children, sometimes just sitting them down with a cup of tea and listening to them could be a help. They were glad to have someone to talk to.

'The kind of questions we were asked were wide-ranging, people were very poor at the time and housing of any kind was not available - 40 people applied to rent the flat I lived in when I was first married in 1961. There were very few benefits available and the NHS did its best, but the elderly suffered the most. So housing, debt, drug and drink addiction, illiteracy - and lack of understanding of bureaucratic forms - all went into the mix.'

She added: 'You never really knew what was going to be asked of you when you walked into that room and sat down and said 'can I help?''

In 1958/59 the problems of hire purchase and finance companies became very apparent. The annual report of that year details how some clients did not understand the forms and also some of the unscrupulous sales techniques involved. It examined the role and the responsibilities of the finance companies.

Secretary Helen Slater said: 'With a national hire purchase debt of nearly £700 million and still going up, there is a heavy responsibility on those concerned with trading methods and with the education of young people to study some of the present undesirable trends and do all they can to develop a more reasonable attitude.'

In 1959 the total national hire purchase debt was £700 million

There was some good news financially in 1959 when the Council of Social Service received a grant of £1,800 from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, a Portuguese charitable organisation which is still in existence today. The grant was used to help develop the Family Budgeting Service.

News of the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau was starting to spread widely, thanks to international publicity.

Officials from overseas, including South Africa, what was then Northern Rhodesia and Tanganyika, India, Finland, Kenya and a number of countries in south east Asia visited to find out more about the work of the Citizens Advice Bureau and its partner voluntary organisations.

In 1958, chairman of the bureau Mr Kettlewell, who by now was also a JP at Exeter Magistrates Court, recorded a typical day in the life of Exeter CAB. He said: 'The number of enquiries is about average and the nature of the problems is a fair example of our day-to-day work.'

1. My son, aged 19, has received this County Court summons. He was only 17 when the goods were obtained and the agent who sold them stood as guarantor. I feel that he shouldn't have been allowed to do this - is there anything I can do about it?

2. I saw my landlord last week and he never said anything - now he has sent me this notice to quit - can he turn me out and will the council find me a place?

3. After being at the same place for 15 years I have to move, can you help me find two rooms somewhere? Worrying about it is making me so ill I cannot go to work.

4. I just can't stick it any longer - I'm going to leave her - I can understand now why her last husband left her. This bruise on my face is what she did. I want to find some lodgings where I can have peace and quiet.

5. Can you write to this address and ask the husband to fetch his wife as she is worrying her elderly mother? The husband signed a paper from hospital saying he would look after his wife.

6. I am a teacher and live with my elderly mother who now cannot be left. Do you know anyone who would come and live in - not to do any work - I can do that, but to look after my mother? I can pay her a little. I don't really want to give my job up.

7. I have to pay for some new spectacles in two weeks. I think I shall be 7/6 short. If I am can you lend it to me and I will pay you back in two amounts?

8. Can you give me the names of chemists in the High Street?

9. I have to go into hospital shortly and I'm worried about my family. Do you know a nicely spoken person who may be able to take over for about eight weeks? It would need to be someone who understands children.

10. Young lady, 22, I don't seem able to make my money go round, My husband is unemployed. We are not in debt and that is why I came - we don't want to get into debt.

11. Lady, aged about 30. 'I have just been told I am going to have a council house. We have been in furnished rooms up to now and I don't know how we are going to manage about beds and things. My husband doesn't think we should take the council house but I feel if we miss this we may never get another chance.

12. The housing department have sent me down - do you know anyone who would turn my garden over - my husband is too old to do it and I've got rheumatism but, if it was dug over I could manage to put things in.

13. I have rabbits in my garden - is there any department that will get rid of them for me or advise me what to do?

14. Can you give me information about the new Rent Act?

15. When do you think I shall hear from the Law Society about my application for Legal Aid?

16. How do I apply for an almshouse?

17. I'm no scholar - I wondered if you would help me do a letter?

AW Kettlewell

In 1959 the problems of family budgeting were still high on the agenda. Mr Kettlewell illustrated the problem by showing the figures for income and expenditure of a family with seven children.

He said: 'That this family manage to keep out of debt and maintain a reasonable standard of health is due entirely to the following:

- This mother is a woman of good character with a strong sense of responsibility to her family and the community generally
- She is intelligent, capable and has reasonably good health
- She came from a good home herself and has a helpful mother and mother-in-law
- Her husband, in many ways, is co-operative

These are the figures:—

	£	s.	d.
<i>Weekly Income</i>			
Net Wages	7	16	0
Family Allowance	2	18	0
	<hr/>		
	£10	14	0
<i>Weekly Expenditure</i>			
Rent	1	11	6
Food	4	18	8
Fuel: Gas 16/6. Electricity 7/6, Coal 9/6, and Logs 4/-	1	16	0
Cleaning materials, Soap Powders, etc. Pocket Money, Husband 12/6, Children 6/6		5	0
Clothing Clubs		18	0
Insurance		8	0
Papers		6	
Shoe Repairs		1	7
Bus Fares		7	6
Sundries		1	8
		5	7
	<hr/>		
	£10	14	0

'The difficulty arises when the mother does not have good health or does not possess all these virtues or when the husband is not as helpful as he might be.'

He added: 'Yes, a large family can live on £10 to £12 a week but the conscientious parents who want their children to grow up strong and healthy, and who have a sense of pride in their home, find it a constant and almost overwhelming struggle to keep out of debt.'

The bureau continued to offer and develop its family budgeting course, giving talks to teenage girls and even developing what was known as a 'Bride's Course' sponsored by the electricity board SWEB, to offer housekeeping advice to newly married young women.

'It is apparent from the work done in the Citizens Advice Bureau and through the Family Budgeting Service how quickly people who are in adverse circumstances become emotionally disturbed even to the extent of being on the verge of a breakdown. Personal, housing and financial difficulties can all be contributory causes to the mental disturbance of people who have no confidant.'

The Mental Health Act of 1959 meant significant changes in the treatment of mentally ill people, with a new emphasis placed on caring for those with less serious illnesses in the community.

The Boarding Out Scheme, which was pioneered by Exeter CAB, began to play an even larger part. This scheme saw elderly patients, who lived in or had been in mental institutions, found homes with families in the city.

Between 1953 and 1959 homes had been found for 10 older people, one of whom had been in institutions for 20 years. In fact, the scheme was such a success it was developed and homes were found for younger people who had been suffering mental illness.

The report states: 'Nine people under 50 years of age have been found homes...the understanding and patient help of the people who have offered homes has been very largely responsible for the happy arrangements that have been made'.

The service received national recognition in 1959 when the National Corporation for the Care of Old People, which would later become the Centre for Policy on Ageing, issued a report about this work; *Boarding out old people: a report on the work of the Exeter Council of Social Service and the Plymouth Council of Social Service.*

By the early 1960s much of Exeter had been rebuilt and the city was beginning to flourish. The Government reinstated its funding for the National Citizens Advice Bureaux, which recorded that a quarter of its enquiries during the 1960s related to housing.

In the year leading up to 1960 problems with people taking on unmanageable hire purchase agreements were again highlighted, as the Exeter bureau dealt with 238 instances of problems relating to HP. This was the year that the national hire purchase debt had reached record levels with people taking on unaffordable amounts of personal debt.

That year's report examined in detail some of the techniques door-to-door salesmen used to secure sales of their goods, including leaving a washing machine at a house when the family did not have a plug to use it and seven cases where salesmen had left vacuum

In 1963 the national Citizens Advice Bureau celebrated its 25th anniversary.

From humble beginnings the organisation now boasted 450 offices across the country dealing with more than a million enquiries a year. Its workforce consisted of around 75 per cent volunteers.

By 1965 there were 16 volunteers working at the Exeter CAB and between them they dealt with around 4,000 problems covering an area which included Exeter and a large part of east and north Devon. Today the Exeter bureau has a total of 76 volunteers and in the last year they dealt with more than 20,000 clients.



In the early days of the Citizens Advice Bureau advisers tended to be middle class women as illustrated by this Punch cartoon

cleaners with people and charged them a deposit, despite them having no need for the cleaner.

All through the 1960s Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau was supported by Exeter University; through representation on its board and also fundraising from 'Rag Week'.

In the late 1960s services became more joined up and this was reflected in the work of the bureau which was re-organised. George Simey, who would later chair the bureau and play a large part in its history, was appointed as legal adviser. Training courses were introduced for new volunteers. A public appeal led to four new volunteers bringing the number of staff at the bureau to 21.

Mr Kettlewell said: 'The work in the bureau can be exacting and demands high standards – both of knowledge and various social services and of personal qualities of understanding and (sometimes) patience' – something which can be seen in the work of staff today. Mr Kettlewell became the first chairman of regional CAB committee – the Tamar Region in 1968.

That year Exeter CAB dealt with 3,335 enquiries, this was also the first year that the bureau started to actively link up volunteers with city charities - the early roots of what became the volunteer bureau and is now the Council for Voluntary Service.

There were many different city organisations offering grants to people in need - Mr Kettlewell described them as 'charitable trusts concerned with the relief of poverty and care of the sick'.

There were around 128 such groups ranging from 'marriage portions for poor maidens of the parish who had previously been in domestic service' to a 'nurses fund'. There had even been a fund in existence at one time which had provided 'shrouds for malefactors (criminals) executed at Exeter Prison'.

It was at this time that more serious concerns were voiced about the suitability of the building in Waterbeer Street.

In 1970 Cllr Minnie Nicholls, who was the new chairman of the CAB's parent group, the ECSS, stated: 'The limited expectation of life of the building in Waterbeer Street has caused some anxiety, and a thorough-going search for alternative accommodation, while accompanied by some disappointments may lead to a permanent and satisfactory solution'.

Despite its constraints, staff at Waterbeer Street were fond of the building, developing a sentimental, if not aesthetic, attachment to it. However, the building was reaching the end of its useful life. Simon Bush took part in a five-week work attachment at the CAB and Council of Social Service in 1966. His report recorded the following:

Five weeks practical work at Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau and Council of Social Service.

REPORT

The building which houses the Exeter C.A.B. and C.S.S. is quite centrally situated but suffers slightly from its antiquity. Standing in an old narrow Street behind the main Street shops, it is one of the few survivors as most of the surrounding premises have been demolished to make way for re-development. In the bottom half of the building there is a Rest room for the Over 60's comprising a small canteen and a fair sized commonroom. Upstairs is a large hall divided by screens in which the C.A.B. and C.S.S. operate. There is a small office room for the Secretary, C.A.B. interviewing room, Committee room and three upper rooms in which the Case-worker has an office and a clothes store is maintained. The Committee Room is often loaned to other agencies as a meeting place as well as being used as the Chiropodists surgery on occasions. A Young Persons Consultation Service uses the premises on one evening a week and plans are afoot to allow one room to be used by an Association for Alcoholics.

Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau continued to offer its free, impartial advice to the public. In the days before the internet and computers, staff had access to printed information about social legislation, monthly information circulars and information from local organisations.

Keeping the information up-to-date was a challenge in itself – unlike the bureau of today, where much information is widely available to the public at the touch of a button.

The re-organisation of local government in the early 1970s also had implications for the CAB. The introduction of one authority – Devon County Council – rather than four authorities would have its own impact.

Mr Kettlewell raised concerns that 'services which will be in the interests of efficiency be operated on a large scale will be more remotely and indirectly controlled by the public for whose benefit they are provided, and it is for this reason that community development at neighbourhood level assumes even greater importance'.

In 1972 Exeter CAB's parent organisation, the Exeter Council of Social Service, marked its 25th anniversary. Cllr Nicholls, stated: 'During these 25 years there have been far-reaching changes in the pattern of social provision. The responsibility of the state, acting through central government and local authorities, has been extended and placed on a more comprehensive basis.

'Against this background it has been necessary for voluntary organisations to adapt themselves, organise their work more effectively, to withdraw from services they have pioneered and which can now be more comprehensively provided by authority and to find new fields for pioneering and experimental development.'

This year saw the bureau's staff increase to 23, with staff attending training courses, refresher sessions and study groups.

A branch of the bureau was opened on the first floor of St Thomas Senior Citizens' Centre, offering advice sessions three mornings a week.



The CAB's owl, which had been its emblem since it was established, was instantly recognisable

Chapter 2 - The Wynards years

November 1972 saw the CAB move into perhaps one of its most well-remembered locations - the former almshouses known as Wynards.

The building, which dated back to the 15th century, was restored and leased rent-free to four organisations – the CAB, Exeter and Devon Marriage Guidance Council, Samaritans and the South West Council on Alcoholism.

In her report of 1972, Cllr Nicholls, stated: 'The new premises at Wynards, although less central, will in other respects be far more suitable.'

She added: 'The accommodation of the various organisations in premises around the same courtyard will be an opportunity for that



Wynards Almshouses were chosen as the new location for Exeter CAB



co-operation between voluntary organisations which the council of social service exists to promote.'

CAB gateway advisor Sandra Hogan, remembers the old buildings with mixed feelings.

She said: 'They were medieval almshouses, there were a lot of voluntary organisations around the courtyard.

I did once have a client whose mother or grandmother had lived at Wynards, she lived in a room upstairs.

Above, the cramped office in the Wynards building and left, the leaflets' display in the foyer



'You got to Wynards from Magdalen Street through a courtyard, there was the Volunteer Bureau as you went in, on the right hand side was the CAB and across the courtyard was the Samaritans.

'You went across the cobbled courtyard to this little wooden door. I think previously this had been a stable door to the original almshouses.

'It was very stifling and compact. You went in the door, to the right was the waiting room, and to the left were three interview rooms and a tiny kitchen. You went upstairs and our general office was on the right and on the left was the office of the manager.'

This was in the time before an appointment system was introduced, so people would turn up at the office and simply wait to be seen by an adviser.

Sandra added: 'Every time you went downstairs you could feel the eyes of the people in the waiting room on you. If you went to make a cup of tea you just didn't make eye contact and ran straight upstairs again. They were obviously looking at their watch as there were no timed interviews, they just had to stay there until they were seen and that could be quite a long time – sometimes hours.'

A home full of history

The Wynards buildings have a long history. A hospital was built on the site in 1435 by William Wynard, recorder of the city of Exeter 1418-1442, to provide homes for 12 poor or infirm people.

The buildings, which were constructed from Heavitree stone around a cobbled courtyard, were damaged in the Civil War and were restored in 1675. They went on to be owned by the Kennaway family, who had the house restored and the chapel rebuilt in 1863.

The Kennaways handed the buildings to the care of Exeter Municipal Charities in 1950 when they were modernised, including the addition of indoor toilets, at a cost of £4,000.

By 1969 only two people were living at the almshouses, one of whom was 80-year-old Clarence Elvin, well known in the city for his role as Father Christmas in local stores. The premises were bought by the city council in 1970 thanks to a grant from the Historic Buildings Council which contributed £4,000 towards the total £5,000 cost.

The buildings, which had consisted of 12 two-storey houses and a chapel, were leased to the CAB and other voluntary organisations on the basis that the tenants were responsible for internal repairs, decorations and running costs. After many years of serving as Exeter's one-stop advice centre the grade II* listed buildings were sold in 2001 and converted into homes.



A painting of the Wynards courtyard by Exeter artist Harold Murray and below, the old wooden door





Robert Stoneman was helped by the bureau in 1974. When the council told him he would have to leave his flat, but did not provide him with alternative accommodation, he turned to the CAB for advice.

'Unfortunately we had to be vacated from the flat because the lady next door had foster children. [the council needed the Stonemans' flat].

I was on the council list with Exeter City Council and then I went to Citizens Advice; it was at Wynards at the time.'

'I was nominated a solicitor to act on my behalf. I had several conversations with the solicitor and I went to court, which was very scary. I was 23 at the time and my wife was 21. We went to the main courthouse in Northernhay and there I was told I had to leave the premises by 12pm.' 'I had to be evicted and then, as it turned out, I was offered a property at Glasshouse Lane. It turned out all alright in the end, though it was scary at the time.'

A new Legal Aid scheme was introduced in 1973. In his report of that year Mr Kettlewell said it was 'a development of the utmost importance to social workers and in particular to CAB workers, provision being made for solicitors to undertake a wider range of legally-aided work.

The scheme was launched nationally with a huge publicity campaign. Locally the CAB held discussions with the Devon and Exeter Incorporated Law Society about how it would work with the new scheme and 'ensure the best possible service to the public'.

The outreach branch in St Thomas was closed after a limited response – of 152 sessions the branch received only 221 enquiries.

Concerns that the move to Wynards would affect the number of enquiries were not realised, with an increase of 13 per cent from 2,868 at Waterbeer Street to 3,208 following the change of location.

The national economy was in downturn following the 1973 oil crisis. The three-day working week was introduced and this, coupled with strike action by the trade unions, hit the economy leading to a period of recession – and a change in the nature of enquiries at the bureau.

Demand for advice continued to grow, with the number of enquiries increasing again in 1974 to a high of 5,918.

Mr Kettlewell stated: 'These figures show the continuing need for a free, confidential and independent service of information and advice...we are grateful to the voluntary staff for

equipping themselves to provide so important and so demanding a service.'

In 1975 Gerda Perrott, pictured right, was appointed organiser of the bureau.

She applied for a position at the bureau when she felt she needed something to stimulate and challenge her, and worked there until 1982.

She said: 'I was at home with young children, wondering what on earth I could possibly do which would be stimulating and satisfying

and a friend told me that the CAB was starting a training course and this appealed to me very much.'

'What I liked was we did not reckon to give clients long term support. Of course they could come back, and some did, but essentially it was a case of helping people in a one-off situation. Fairly briefly, not being their case worker.'

Gerda remembers one amusing case when a client who lived in London bought a house in the county, against the advice of his solicitor.

She said: 'His solicitor had advised him not to touch it with a bargepole, there were no documents, it was all very unsatisfactory, but he liked the place – he bought it.

'He had been in it a short while when his next door neighbour pointed out to him that when he looked out of his bathroom window he would see that his bathroom hung over the fence that divided the properties.

'He spent £3,000 having the bathroom moved and then he realised it was the fence that was out of place and came to us to ask if there was anything I could do. Short of sending him to a solicitor there was nothing I could do myself in that situation except listen with sympathy...and amusement.'



WORRALL ON THE WEST

finds that problems arising from unemployment worsen relationships in families — and between neighbours



OBLEMS caused by economic recession... Monday to Friday and they handle inquiries either on the telephone (two lines) or through personal chats in two private interview rooms... 'It is vital that inquirers can have complete trust in our interviewers, and be sure of complete confidentiality,' Mrs Perrott said... 'We would never pass on any information to any other person or any other agency concerning someone seeking our help, without that inquirer's agreement.'

— the bureau is open each morning and afternoon from Monday to Friday and they handle inquiries either on the telephone (two lines) or through personal chats in two private interview rooms... 'It is vital that inquirers can have complete trust in our interviewers, and be sure of complete confidentiality,' Mrs Perrott said... 'We would never pass on any information to any other person or any other agency concerning someone seeking our help, without that inquirer's agreement.'

whom to consult over a noise nuisance — problems easily solved — but other are more complex and time consuming... 'An inquiry about how to start divorce proceedings, for example, might well turn into a discussion with the person seeking advice about the question of whether divorce really is the answer... 'It might also involve sympathetic consideration of the consequences divorce can have for the marriage partners, their children, their home, and their family finances.'

Society for inquirers to come here and see a solicitor from the rota list... 'This latter service, though, is intended only for people who do not already have a solicitor, and who might well be nervous about making an initial approach to one, in what may appear to them the formidable atmosphere of a legal practice... Exeter's bureau, incidentally is one of 48 in Devon and Cornwall. I notice from their area annual report that their workload increased last year by an average of more than 20 per cent, and that there was a greater complexity about many of the problems brought to them... The bureaux including Exeter's are all members of the National Association of Citizens' Advice Bureaux, which provides them with a

at Wynards, 8,45 new inquiries public last year... 'It is likely to go £8,000 the equi- of about 25 every day... economic problems on unemployment... 'The volunteers have all

A recession — but not for all these helpful people



THE organizer of Exeter Citizens' Advice Bureau, Mrs. Gerda Perrott. Her husband, David, is an Exeter University law don.



YOUR STARS

by Patric Walker

☆☆☆☆☆☆

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 20): The planets seem to be stirring things up, and it will not be until after Friday's full moon that you will feel relaxed and confident again. Try to exercise patience with partners tomorrow.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 21-Feb. 19): It will be better for you to remain silent tomorrow, even though you know others are not being honest. What really matters is if you become more aware of your own abilities and set about capitalising on them.

SCORPIO (Oct. 24-Nov. 22): Travel and situations outside your usual sphere are emphasised in a big way. It is almost certain that many of your plans will have to be altered because of circumstances beyond your control.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 23-Dec. 21): As a Sagittarius you are supposed to be generous, but recent setbacks have probably forced you to become more self-protective. Even so, you are not yet out of the wood.

YOUR BIRTHDAY TOMORROW
Certain major problems, both in partnership and at home, must be resolved. With You Cancerian tenacity, though, you are bound to win through.

Gerda Perrott was featured in the Express & Echo when she was the organiser of Exeter CAB

She said the offices at Wynards were cramped and presented challenges to the staff. 'Access wasn't terribly good, which concerned us in view of disabled people, it was a cobbled courtyard. But the offices were very nice, the walls were thick, they were red sandstone walls, the first thing I asked for was an alarm for the interview rooms because I felt the interviewers were entitled to that.'

'We always had a wide range of enquiries from people's life-shattering experiences like death and divorce and all sorts of things, to enquiries about leisure pursuits, like whether there was tennis club in their area and we saw our job just as much to answer those enquiries as well as the more sensational ones.'

'I suppose it was the sense that we had this extremely good information system, produced by the national association and we could make some attempt to answer or give guidance on most problems.'

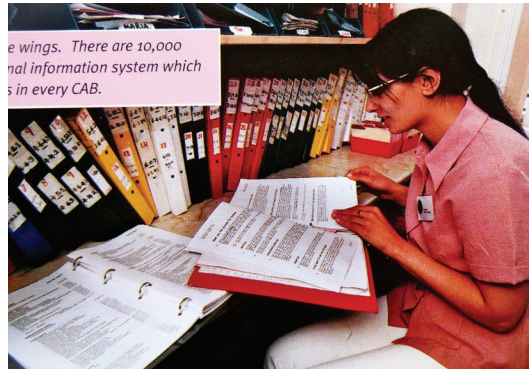
Gerda remembered one of her volunteers who was called on to use a very special skill. She said: 'We had a volunteer who had been the equivalent of a bishop in his own particular denomination. We had a couple who came in who thought their home was haunted by poltergeists.'

'Before going through the channels which are available through the Bishop's office I asked our volunteer if he would be inclined to help

them. It was all terribly discreet, but he told me he did visit them in their home. Quite soon after that the national bureau sent a request asking if the bureau had any particular skills which could be used, he suggested the Exeter branch could list exorcism.'

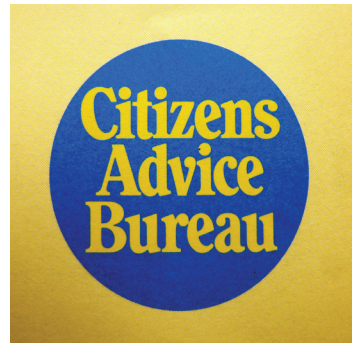
At Exeter CAB all information was still updated by hand. Gerda says: 'There used to be packets which came down from the national association every month, large brown packets which had to put into the system. Where it wasn't necessary to replace them, making extensive handwritten notes. I saw to it I did this myself, for one thing I found it fascinating and for another, among the talented volunteers, it was the only way I could keep an edge.'

A typical envelope from NACAB (National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux) would contain as many as 150 updates in a single month – all of which had to be dealt with by hand.



An adviser updates information from the National Association of Citizen Advice Bureaux.

A new logo was introduced in 1976



In 1976 the country was still suffering from years of high inflation; financial problems were affecting public services and having an impact on people locally. The need for an independent advice service continued to be as vital as ever.

That year the bureau received 6,819 enquiries which were dealt with by its 31 volunteers. It also worked with solicitors from 18 Devon law firms to offer free legal advice for its clients at weekly sessions.

A new corporate identity was launched in 1976; the distinctive yellow wording on a blue circle that we recognise today. The owl, which had served as its emblem for 30 years, was now retired to make way for the new modern branding.

In 1976 the national CAB broke away from its parent organisation, the National Council of Social Service, to operate independently; a



George Simey is pictured, left, at the official opening of the Wynards office

move which had resulted from increased government support and reliance on the service.

This was the long dry summer of 1976 which saw extra work for the Exeter bureau as it assisted elderly and disabled people obtain water from the standpipes which were introduced in that summer.

Having overseen the move to Wynards, Mr Kettlewell resigned as chairman after 30 years of voluntary service to the CAB, although he would continue to serve as a committee member of the ECSS.

The new chairman of Exeter CAB was George Simey, who was already serving as chairman of the Devon and Cornwall CAB area committee.

George's father, William, who was known as Bill, had been involved with the CAB for many years prior to this as a duty solicitor. George recalls his first contact with the bureau was as a newly-qualified solicitor. He said: 'I was asked to give a talk to the bureau in Exeter on the Sale of Goods Act, apart from fairly frequent visits to assist at the bureau, this was my first real contact.'

In 1969 he was appointed as the bureau's honorary legal advisor. George remembers the premises in Waterbeer Street : 'It was in rather an old premises before it moved to Wynards, which was a much better venue. Thereafter I was in much more contact until I was asked to be chairman of the bureau, I felt that this was a great honour and readily accepted.

'The bureau later moved to the current premises in King William Street, along with the Volunteer Bureau, and it seemed a great

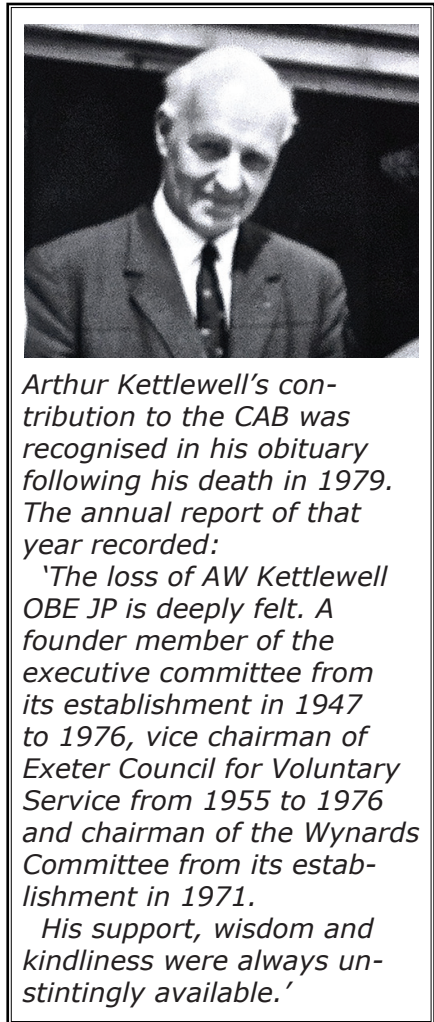
move. I had retired as chairman by then but I still visited as I was clerk to the General Commissioners of Taxes and we held appeal cases in a room there. This meant I still kept an interest in the bureau during this time.'

He added: 'The CAB has undergone much change over the years mainly through becoming very much more professional.

'The importance of the CAB is tremendous as it makes available to any member of the public good, confidential, and free advice and help on any subject. It has come a long distance away from the reason why it was set up during the last war.'

Enquiries continued to grow with 8,555 in the year to 1980. The bureau recorded 166,000 enquiries in its first 33 years a figure which would continue to grow as the period of boom and bust in the 1980s took its toll on the nation. Two

The bureau recorded a total of 166,000 enquiries in its first 33 years



Arthur Kettlewell's contribution to the CAB was recognised in his obituary following his death in 1979. The annual report of that year recorded:

'The loss of AW Kettlewell OBE JP is deeply felt. A founder member of the executive committee from its establishment in 1947 to 1976, vice chairman of Exeter Council for Voluntary Service from 1955 to 1976 and chairman of the Wynards Committee from its establishment in 1971.

His support, wisdom and kindness were always unstintingly available.'

recessions and high unemployment led to growth in poverty and the CAB saw a rise in line with this. Following the resolution passed by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux the Exeter bureau became independent from the Exeter Council for Voluntary Service in 1982 – although it would remain in the premises at Wynards and the organisations would continue to work closely together.

Following the reorganisation and move away from the other groups in the Exeter Council of Voluntary Service Gerda Perrot decided to resign from her position as organiser. The new organiser was Barry Williams who took over in May 1983.



Current committee member Anna Warne, pictured left, remembers being interviewed by Mr Williams when she visited the bureau to consider volunteering in 1982 shortly after having quadruplets.

This was the first year the number of enquiries would reach more than 10,000.

She said: 'I felt the need to get out of the house; because in 1982 I had a son and I thought it would be nice to have another child – and I had four at the same time. I found it absolutely exhausting.'

With a young son and four six month old daughters she said

the CAB was a vital lifeline for her. 'I was very lucky and we were able to have a nanny, so I went to the Volunteer Bureau, which was in Wynards, and said to the woman, 'give me something to do, get me out of the house and away from all this 'domestic bliss'...she said you ought to find out about the CAB, she said I think it would really suit you.'

'I had never really heard about it. I was a typical middle class girl who was born and brought up in Exeter, went to school in Exeter. I didn't know anything about the CAB.'

Training for new recruits took place at the Newton Abbot bureau which was above the train station in the town and she quickly started work seeing clients at the Wynards office.

She added: 'It was really higgledy piggedly. I remember we had a button we could press; what we called the rape button, in all the little rooms underneath the tables, so if someone got heavy or threatening we could press this button and the bell would ring in the courtyard for everybody. I never actually had to use it, but you could imagine all these people would come out.'

Her work at the CAB inspired Anna to retrain in the legal profession and she went on to become a matrimonial family lawyer. But she continued to support the CAB and became a trustee, a position she has held for 31 years.

'My abiding memory of it all is seeing a client come in, often upset, confused, seriously worried and anxious and because I have a very

logical mind I would sit them down and we'd take it one step at a time and we'd compartmentalise things and we'd say these are your options...as they left you would see this completely different expression. They felt they were in control. They felt they knew what they had to deal with and how to go about it. They felt they knew what their options were. It was like a different person.

'There is something about the CAB – it stays with you, you just feel fiercely proud of it. Especially the Exeter bureau...I reckon we're one of the top 10 per cent of bureaux in the country.'

She said the current financial and economic conditions mean the CAB is needed more than at any time in its 65 year history. 'I think it is probably more relevant today because there is a huge community out there who don't have spokespeople. They can't afford solicitors; they don't know where to go when they have a problem.

'We are free, and we are confidential, it's apolitical and, very importantly it doesn't discriminate. So no matter who you are or what you are we will help you.'

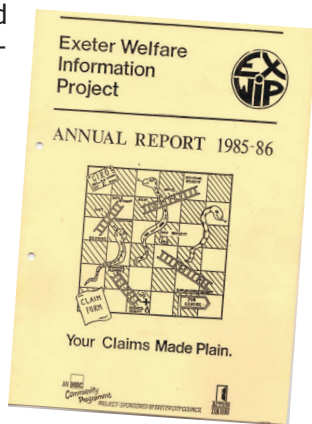
'The welfare system and social welfare system gets more and more complicated and people get themselves in an awful mess. It doesn't matter if it is their own fault or not or if they have been stupid; they get in a mess and they don't know where to go.

'It saved my life. Those first couple of years with those five children. It was really hard. I needed to get out and see there was another world – it really saved my life coming here.

'I think it's true to say over the years when I worked here that almost everybody was here for their own personal reasons, not because they wanted to go out and 'do good'. It was because they were lonely, or they'd retired and they needed to find something to do, or like me they needed to escape a bit. Everybody had their own personal reasons, so the bureau has done a lot of good for us, as well as the community out there.'

In August 1984, in the time of high unemployment, the bureau launched its successful Exeter Welfare Information Project (EXWIP).

It was set up in conjunction with Manpower Services Commission to run over three years



and give people advice about the social security system. Its aims were to help people through the increasingly complicated benefits system.

Barry Williams, Exeter bureau organiser, said: 'EXWIP aimed to inform people in need in Exeter about the entire range of social security benefits to which they may be entitled.'

The project involved advice surgeries out of the CAB office at locations all around the city, including day centres, hospitals, psychiatric units and even people's homes. Mr Williams estimated the project claimed almost £235,000 of benefits for local people in its first year.

The people of Exeter knew the bureau would be able to answer questions on many and varied topics. Here are a few of the questions, and answers, which tested the knowledge of volunteers in 1985:

Q Is there a Santa's grotto in Exeter?

A Santa is appearing at the Pram and Toy Shop – no entrance fee but donations accepted for charity.

Q I sold a pedigree cat which got the runs and had to be taken to the vet. The buyer says they want their money back or will be taking legal action.

A Client advised to consult their own vet as to whether it was due to the move or chronic illness. Under the Sale of Goods Act then the cat should be returned if the money is refunded.

Q Is there a jigsaw puzzle library?

A Yes – place and telephone number given from local file.

Q From a farmer wanting an address of an organisation to whom he could donate logs and firewood.

A Gave the numbers of Age Concern and Social Services.

Q I am going to Australia tomorrow and have a lot of furniture to give away. A man was coming today, but he hasn't turned up.

A Passed on the numbers of local organisations, including the Salvation Army, SOFA and Crediton CAB.

Q Where can I get a pattern made for a knitting design?

A Suggested new small wool shop in South Street.

Q I am trying to find the grave of my Canadian fiancé who was killed in Italy in the War.

A Gave the contact details of the Commonwealth Graves Commission.

Q How do you address a duchess?

A Your Grace.

One member of staff who gave advice during the 1980s was Sandra Hogan, pictured right.

She joined the CAB as an adviser in 1985, and still helps people today in her role as a gateway advisor, which involves meeting clients as they arrive at the bureau and assessing their problems in the first instance.

Sandra had worked as a librarian before having her children and was keen to work in a challenging environment.

She was interviewed for her new role by the manager Cilla Hilton-Jones who had taken over the position of organiser from Barry Williams in 1985.

After training she began seeing clients. 'Certain clients do stay with you for a while, perhaps young women who have been in an abusive relationship and are trying to get away from a partner. I remember one case when a client was in the bureau and her partner was in the courtyard shouting at her and she was absolutely petrified to go out. The manager asked him to leave or said she would call the police.

'Those are the issues which stay with you, people who are having such a bad time in life. I found when I started it made me realise how little I knew of other people's lives, having had a fairly contented middle class upbringing; although having said that when I first started at the CAB my husband had just been made redundant and one of my first clients was someone who had been made redundant so I could empathise with how that person felt.

'Over the years I have realised how much I have gained from the CAB; as much as I have given to other people. It is a two-way thing, you learn an awful lot about life, things like how the benefits system works, it's made me a more rounded person, you meet people, people who you think, 'my goodness how do they cope with their lives, yet they are so uncomplaining', for instance people who take three quarters of an hour to get dressed but it has become a normal way of life for them – it stops you in your tracks a bit.'

Debt training was introduced at the bureau in the late 1980s. The 1990s saw problems increase with housing issues as people faced





negative equity and losing their homes.

Sandra added: 'It's now part of the whole CAB ethos, all sorts of different ways of dealing with debt, then it wasn't like that, it was just another aspect of people's lives.

'When I first started benefits were quite generous in some ways. People could get grants for food, clothing a bit more generously,

things have just tightened up. Now we are back to the 1990s in a way with the housing situation.

'The CAB itself has become much more professional. It was very much a sort of volunteer organisation which grew from the war and people needing information. When I was at university my landlady was a CAB volunteer; a lot of what she dealt with were consumer things, faulty goods and things like that, things which are still part of CAB now, but it's very much more benefits and debt.'

Parrots and snakes were among some of the more unusual enquiries addressed by Sandra during her time as an adviser. She remembers: 'Somebody had bought a couple of snakes and they wanted to breed them so they thought they had bought a female and a male and they turned out to be the same sort - what could they do, what were their rights?

'Similarly, there was an African grey parrot, again the wrong sex - those were always great fun. After Christmas we used to get quite a lot of consumer things.'

Sandra said the serious nature of the job is rewarding when you know you have helped someone. 'I think people are relieved to just have come and spoken to somebody. It's just the fact they have talked things through and in doing that they have been able to see a way through.

'It's giving hope, it's being practical in that you're enabling people to go away and try and do something.

'It's empowering people and helping them to run their own lives, which is what CAB is all about. We're not here to do it all for them or even solve things, it's helping people to know what there is out there that can help and how they can go about it.'

Cilla Hilton-Jones handed over to Cath Hunt in 1986 after seven years as bureau manager. They are pictured outside the bureau in Wynards



In the mid-1980s staff at the bureau were struggling to cope with the number of clients coming through the doors. There were not enough volunteers, the premises at Wynards was causing problems and the ever-increasing numbers of enquiries was adding to the pressure. The bureau had not yet introduced an appointment system and people sometimes had to wait for more than two hours to see an adviser.

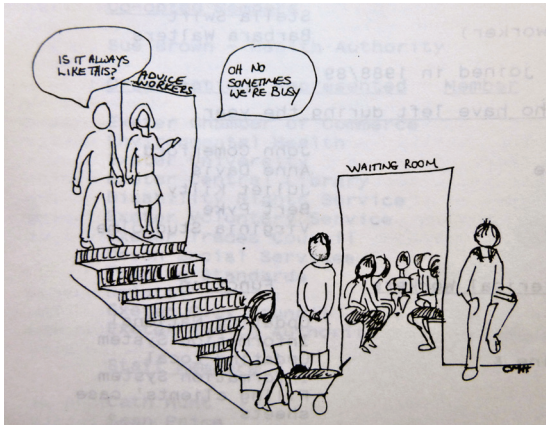
Cilla Hilton Jones said: 'The bureau has had a tremendous increase in enquiries over the past few years and the pressure on bureau staff is now considerable.'

In 1986 the CAB, again supported by Manpower, launched the Exeter Money Advice Team – a debt-counselling service. In its first year it recorded that through its timely advice and intervention it prevented the following:

- 5 evictions
- 2 imprisonments
- 10 repossessions of goods by bailiffs
- 8 water disconnections
- 17 electricity disconnections
- 1 gas disconnection
- 4 house repossessions

Advisers also represented clients at 15 county court hearings. In the year to November 1987 the bureau dealt at 92 debt cases with a combined total of £419,000.

Mark Blacksell took the position of chairman in 1986 and after seven years with the bureau manager Cilla Hilton Jones handed over the reins to Cath Hunt.



An illustration from an annual report takes an ironic look at the bureau's workload

The number of enquiries continued to increase in 1987 with the introduction of the new Social Security Act resulting in benefit cuts for many people.

Bob Imrie of Devon Trading Standards took over the position of chairman in 1989, a year which saw concerns increase over homelessness and the number of enquiries reach nearly 16,000.

Cath Hunt, in her report of that year, stated: 'Like

many other organisations we are becoming increasingly concerned about the problems of homelessness, particularly among the young and those with mental health problems. It is not unknown for an advice worker to spend several fruitless hours trying to find suitable (and sometimes any) accommodation for an individual or family.'

Increasing mortgage interest rates, they stood at 15.4 per cent in March 1990, added to the pressure on homeowners.

Cath Hunt recorded the enquiries which came in on a typical day in the bureau when four advisers dealt with 28 clients at the bureau and 23 telephone calls, ranging from information about adult education classes, legal aid and local solicitors, to complicated cases including help for a woman who was being assaulted by her husband, a case for unfair dismissal and clients with severe health problems.

Lynda Sullivan, who had worked for the bureau for four years, took over as manager in 1992. She is remembered for her striking 'goth' appearance of black clothes and spiky black hair.

The early 1990s saw the effects of the recession of the last few years really take hold with high numbers of redundancies, small businesses collapsing, large numbers of home repossessions and distressing debt problems. Lynda said: 'The service we are called on to provide seems to become ever more essential to life in today's society with increasingly complex problems.'

In 1992 hard-pressed advice workers were put under more pressure after the introduction of new pieces of legislation including Care in the Community, Council Tax and the Child Support Act which would have a knock on effect on the people of Exeter for many years to come.

Chapter 3 - On the move again

Technology began to play its part from 1994, with the introduction of the bureau's first computer system.

'During the year we have brought in new 'hardware'. A new computer system has been purchased and since commissioning it has been functioning extremely well. It is a fact of bureau life that this kind of equipment is essential for processing the increasing mass of information,' recorded the annual report of that year.

This year the bureau entered into a partnership with Exeter solicitors to operate a duty solicitor/CAB service at all county court repossession hearings. It also ran a successful outreach service at St Thomas Health Centre.

A new chairman, John Dobson took the helm in 1997, also the Exeter bureau's 50th anniversary a period which had seen it help almost 200,000 people. It would also prove to be a year of great change; after many years of concern regarding the suitability of the premises at Wynards, the bureau was offered a new location at Wat Tyler House by Exeter City Council.

In its first 50 years Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau helped 200,000 people

The move was completed in 1998 which was also the year manager Lynda Sullivan left the bureau after 11 years, and the country, for a new life in Australia. She was replaced by the bureau's youngest manager Richard Feltham, who took on the new role when he was aged 28.

The chairman at the time John Dobson, recorded in that year's annual report how the new offices were 'a much-improved working environment for staff, greater space and improved reception and interview facilities.'

That year the bureau recorded 6,841 initial client contacts, a 17 per cent increase in the number of issues it dealt with which equated to approximately 100 more clients a month, the rise was attributed to both the new location and an increase in referrals from statutory agencies.

The move to Wat Tyler House made a huge difference to the service, with better facilities and improved access, right in the centre of the city.

Trustee Dave West said the move from Wynards was hugely beneficial for the bureau and the service it could offer its clients.

'We now have better facilities, more interview rooms and it's much more accessible to people. We have been able to promote the service much more and the number of clients has been increasing as a result; and we are still looking at ways of getting into the community.'

In 1998 the bureau took part in a campaign with Devon County Council to examine and increase the benefit take-up by local people - a scheme which would be a great success and maximise the

Dave West has been a member of the board since 1986 when he was working for the then Benefits Agency.

He said his job at the agency helped him in his position. 'It gave me greater understanding of the immense work done by the



bureau and how benefits was a big issue, quite naturally as it still is today. People come to the bureau with so many different problems I don't know how they cope sometimes.'

He said many of the problems facing the clients were essentially the same as 65 years ago. 'I guess there are still the same problems, but they swing a little. One of the big issues at the moment is debt

and money problems, folks losing their jobs and how to pay the mortgage that is certainly noticeable.

'People always have problems and the problems come and go depending on the economy and people's perceptions of what life has to offer. These days life is so complicated...it is very important there is somewhere people can come for a completely unbiased open chat about their problems and how best to resolve them.

'The volunteer staff do a tremendous job and they have taken on all the changes we have seen, including the move into IT and all the systems we use. They do a tremendous job. Without them the bureau wouldn't operate and I think everyone who has used the CAB needs to recognise that.'

income available to those on benefits or low incomes. Records show the bureau helped to gain an extra £140,000 in benefits for those who were entitled to it.

The bureau was also developing its own information technology, Mr Dobson prophetically stated: 'The next few years are likely to see considerable changes in the way in which the CAB service operates.'

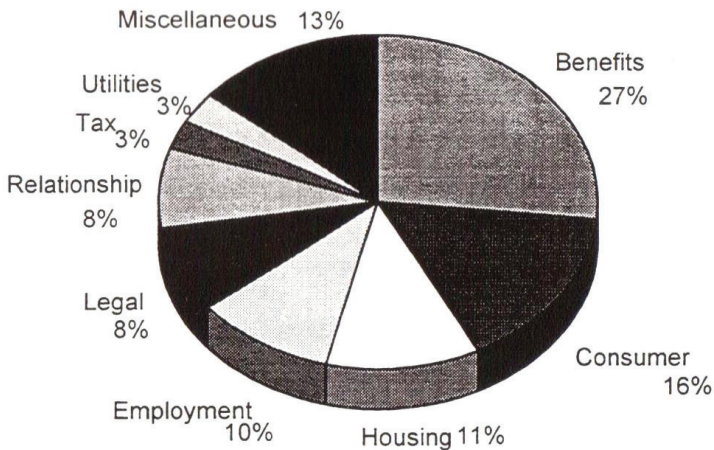
Volunteer advisers worked more than 12,000 hours in the year 1997-1998, the equivalent of more than seven full time posts.

In his report of 1998 Richard Feltham says: 'CAB advisers are skilled researchers, lateral thinkers and team players – and Exeter would literally be a poorer place without them.'

Problems faced by clients in 1997 were wide-ranging, although advice on welfare benefits comprised 27 per cent of the problems handled, consumer-related enquiries accounted for 16 per cent and problems arising from housing, employment, issues in the legal system and from personal relationships each took between 8 per cent and 11 per cent of the workload. A total of 17 per cent of the problems were debt related.

Types of Problem

Main Types of Problem: 1997- 98



This pie chart, from the 1998 annual report, shows the breakdown of enquiries received by the Exeter bureau

Think the CAB knows the answer to everything? These questions from its early years suggest that it probably does.

Do I need a licence to open a fish shop?

Where can I take lessons in lace-making?

Who is the prime Minister of Northern Ireland?

My wife left home this morning leaving our two children under five in by themselves. She has done this before and not returned until 10pm. Will someone give her a good talking to?

I have not seen my husband for 12 years and I want to get a divorce, how do I set about it?

I have been married twice and my second wife is not very kind to my little boy. I feel he would be happier in a nursery but felt I should like to talk it over with someone before trying to make arrangements.

My husband has left me and taken all our money, what can I do?

Where can I obtain a hawk-er's licence?

How can I trace my son who is abroad?

How much will it cost me to have my false teeth repaired?

My daughter of 18 wants to get married. Can I prevent her?

Where can I purchase some garden soil?

Despite the introduction of the first computer system, records and information sources were still updated by hand and there were no facts at people's fingertips thanks to a quick internet search, in the way there is now.

In 1999 the bureau received 9,795 enquiries from clients, raising 13,133 problems.

Richard Feltham attributed the increase to a number of facts, including; that the bureau was becoming more effective in dealing with people's problems; its new premises; increase in staff appointments; increased use of information technology and especially the introduction for the first time of an appointment system. No more waiting for hours to see an adviser.

The year 2000 brought the 'The Change Programme' for all bureaux across the UK.

Increases in technology and methods of working were planned for the coming years. The ways of getting information were improving with the introduction of CABNET and the increased use of the internet, a new money advice system was planned as well as changes to the legal service.

This was the first year that advice was offered by email. That year there were 38 volunteers providing 2,750 half day advice sessions. Funding for the service continued to be received from the city council and Devon County Council.

Richard Feltham said in that year's report: 'We are fortunate that there is a strong volunteering culture in Exeter, if we had to pay our advisers we'd be looking at an additional annual bill in excess of £72,000 per annum.'

Debt problems were still increasing and in the year 2000 Exeter CAB assisted its clients to repay a total of £2,065,000 of multiple debt.

The next few years saw the development of outreach schemes with funding obtained for two advisers to attend a weekly session in Beacon Heath at The Beacon Project and support for a three year project based in Wonford, Burnthouse Lane and St Loyes as part of the The Valley Regeneration Scheme. The scheme provided funding for a full time outreach worker covering that area.

In 2002 the bureau was commissioned to undertake 160 home visits to social service clients to ensure they were receiving their full and appropriate benefits. The scheme was generated a significant increase in benefit uptake; nearly £20,000 for some 15 clients.

Reflecting on his years at the CAB, former manager Richard Feltham says he still feels very proud of the organisation.

He joined the CAB when he was looking to do some voluntary work.

'I started basic training to be a CAB adviser which takes quite a long time. It is a very thorough, very rigorous training.'

He worked as an adviser for two years and was appointed training development officer, before becoming manager, a position he held for six years.

'Becoming manager was a big step up for me, because increasingly being a manager of bureau is a stretching job and requires a range of skills. While I was aware I would have some parts of jigsaw, I would have to learn very fast.

'I was blessed with having a superb chairman called John Dobson and supported by a very capable treasurer, John Copleston, and other wonderful trustees like Anna Warne. I think they fulfilled their duties of governance very well.

'One of the things working for the CAB changed my view about was age. There we were working as a team and within that single team



were people from their early twenties to their eighties, all doing the same job with the same level of commitment and passion and energy. That was just inspiring, my own ageism slipped away very quickly after joining the CAB.'

He said there were some moments which have stayed with him over the years. 'There was a time when someone had just turned up at reception with a £20 donation. The reason they had done this was 15 years earlier the CAB service had helped out that individual and got them five quid, when they really needed it. This fellow returned to the bureau years later to say thank you.'

'You never know what is going to come through the door when you are a CAB adviser. The next enquiry could be something mundane, or it could be something significant and major. There are times when people are making life-changing decisions based on the information we are about to give. You really do feel that weight of responsibility.'

He said the ethos of the CAB from the time he was manager still stands firm today - giving a fair chance to everybody. He added: 'Policies have unintended consequences and our society is very complicated; I think a good society is a fair society and the fact of the matter is some people have got a better chance in life than others. One thing the CAB does is try and even out the odds for everyone.'

'The CAB is there to help anyone who needs the service and ensure they can exercise their stake in society. On quite a deep level it feels like it is needed.'

'One of the things about saying CAB is 65 years old; you might think it is old and tired - that's retirement age - but the opposite is true. When I was manager here I saw continually the service adapt and change. We introduced computer systems, things were becoming electronic and we now have the tech to deal with those things.'

'Social policy work is more important than ever, there are sweeping changes taking place across all of our legislative systems particularly around housing and benefits. So actually one of the strengths of the CAB service is its consistency, it's been here for a long time, but also the fact that it is nimble and it has continued to change.'

Richard left the bureau in 2004, former welfare rights officer Matt Brown took over as director and Dennis Mardon took on the role of chairman of the CAB, a position he holds today.

By November 2006 the CAB had extended its services to open every day to clients with drop-in sessions as well as appointments. An adviser was available at County Court to help people at risk of losing their homes and outreach services were available at Glasshouse Lane and Wonford. Matt Brown handed over to the current chief executive Steve Barriball in 2007.

Chapter 4 - The CAB today

Today Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau is part of a network which delivers advice service from 3,500 locations across England and Wales. The network relies nationally of 21,500 trained volunteers. Visits to the bureau's self-help website www.adviceguide.org.uk have risen to 14.2 million.

More than half a million people have been helped by Exeter CAB since it first opened its doors to the people of Exeter in 1947.

Current chief executive Steve Barriball, pictured right, said although much had changed during that time, some things were still strikingly similar.

He said: 'I believe we are as relevant today as we were the day we started. Although there have been great changes in society and many things are different, there are still fundamental problems.

'For instance in the 1940s and 1950s there was rationing; we still have food vouchers today for people to access foodbanks. There were housing shortages then and affordable housing remains an issue today.

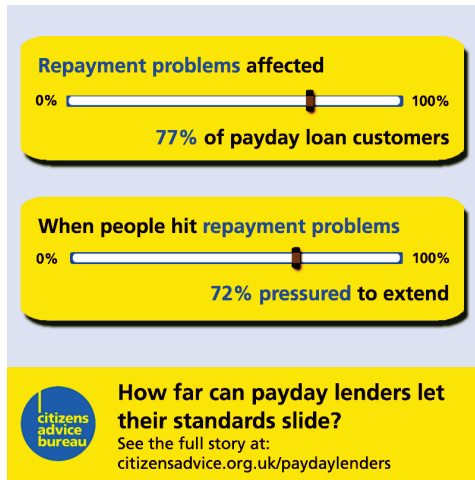
'And through the decades we have seen people having problems with debt, whether it was the door-to-door salesman of the 1950s or the 'payday lenders' of today, this is an issue which remains just as current.'

From its roots as an organisation which helped people in need, the bureau of today has a voice in social change and reform.

Steve said: 'Today we have twin aims, most people when they think of the Citizens Advice Bureau, they think of people in interview



rooms or answering the phone and giving advice; but we have a twin aim which is about social policy and involves campaigning for changes in policy and practice from government, businesses and local government.



The Exeter bureau is involved in lobbying government, both locally and nationally, regarding a wide range of issues, including concerns over pay day lenders, loan companies who lend at very high rates of interest, in some cases without regard as to whether the client is able to repay the loan.

He said: 'We believe that some of the pay day lenders are not acting in the best interests of the clients.

'They are refusing to freeze interest even when people are

having problems paying their loans back. Some local authorities have already banned pay day lender advertising from bus stops and publicly-owned buildings. So that is a real example of social policy in action.'

Advisers also gather evidence from every client they see to assess whether their difficulties are due in any way to failure in government policy or practice.

Steve added: 'Whenever there is a change in national or local policy we are already starting to think about what it is going to mean for people.

'Fundamentally we always have to remind ourselves that we are a charity. We are not an arm of national or local government, despite many people thinking that we are.

'Because we are a charity we have certain values and those values are about targeting the people in most need, looking after the most vulnerable in society.

'At the same time we need to make sure we have got a range of services which are available to the whole of the community. That can be quite a difficult balance, but if we hold true to our core values, and that is about people and people in need, then we won't go far wrong.

'Looking forward to the future I think we are an organisation which looks ahead, trying to understand what the future challenges will be



Some of the people who contribute to the success of Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau, volunteers, paid staff and trustees are pictured in the office at Wat Tyler House in July 2013.

and then coming up with strategies to meet those.

'Our thanks really do need to go to all those people who have given so much to Exeter CAB, from the first chairman Arthur Kettlewell, to the thousands of volunteer workers and paid staff, those seeing clients and those working hard in the background, either in the office or as a member of our trustee board. Basically without the goodwill and positivity of so many people Exeter CAB would not be the respected organisation it is today.'

When the Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau opened its doors 65 years ago it had one member of staff, Audrey Deacon, working in a freezing cold room with layers of clothes to keep warm. There was a committee of 16 people, led by Mr Kettlewell giving their time voluntarily to help the people of Exeter with their many and diverse questions. And in that first year the bureau dealt with 1,770 enquiries.

Today the questions are just as diverse, but now there are 76 volunteers, including 12 trustee members. The financial contribution of those volunteers is estimated at £276,137 or the equivalent of more than 10 full-time staff.

In the last year volunteers provided 18,616 hours of time helping 20,133 clients through various advice and information platforms and they dealt with 32,367 individual client problems.

In those early days the bureau was set up with a £200 grant from Exeter City Council and had to rely on donations from local people and street collections.

citizens advice bureau **Adviceguide**
self help from Citizens Advice

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A to Z index

England home **Benefits** Work Debt and money Consumer Relationships Housing Law and rights Discrimination Tax Healthcare Education

Don't let short term debt lead to long term problems

Letters to help with your consumer problem

Changes you can expect from your energy supplier

Don't let short term debt lead to long term

Today Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau relies on funding from the local authority, contracts and grants to the sum of £531,499.

People can now get advice 24 hours a day to help resolve their legal, financial and other problems, via the Citizens Advice service's Adviceguide website.

Adviceguide received more than 11 million visits during 2011/12 and includes information translated into Welsh, Bengali, Chinese, Gujarati, Punjabi and Urdu.

During 2012/13 Citizens Advice Bureaux all over the country helped more than two million people. It is estimated that nearly half the population has used the CAB service at some point in their lives and 97 per cent know what the service is.

The advice and information provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau is free, independent, confidential and impartial.

CAB advisers can write letters and make phone calls to service providers on their clients' behalf.

They can help people prioritise debts and negotiate with creditors. They can also refer clients to specialist case workers, who are able to represent people at court and tribunals.

citizens advice bureau

People like you volunteer for CAB

- Use your skills and learn new ones
- Free training and support
- Expenses paid

Call our volunteer hotline to find out more:
08451 264 264

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/join-us

Looking back over the last 65 years the current chairman of the board of trustees, Dennis Mardon, said Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau was an essential service for the city.

‘In this constantly changing and demanding society the Exeter bureau has stayed current and relevant and is needed as much today as it was when it was first conceived, back in that meeting in the Guildhall in 1946.

‘I feel extremely proud of the high quality service we offer and the dedication of all our staff, both voluntary and paid and the members of our trustee board.’

He added: ‘Everyone who has been involved with Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau, in whatever capacity since 1947, should feel great pride in what they have achieved.

‘For more than 65 years this organisation has operated, in the words of the first chairman, Mr Newcombe, for ‘the good life of the citizens of Exeter’ and that simple statement is just as true today.

‘Everyday our staff make a difference to people’s lives, whether in a small way or in a major life-changing way. We see people at one of the most distressing times of their lives and in our non-judgemental, impartial way make a real difference to them.

‘Times change and people’s needs change and an organisation such as the CAB grows and evolves to meet those needs – but a demand for a confidential and, most importantly, free service like this continues to this day and into the future.’



Chairman of Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau, Dennis Mardon, said the organisation has an important part to play in today’s society

