

Advice in Accessible Settings

Midlothian's Citizens Advice Service

In February 2023 the Improvement Service published their report on how local authority funded services in Scotland are delivering advice in accessible settings. The report sought to demonstrate the diversity of approaches taken to make advice services more engaging and easier for individuals to use. A survey was distributed to Scotland's 32 councils and received a 50% response rate.

Although Midlothian wasn't one of the authorities that responded it is worthwhile comparing access to advice services provided by the Citizen Advice Service in Midlothian to the approaches taken by the authorities that responded to the survey.

In 2021/22 local authorities in Scotland funded 25 internally delivered money and welfare rights advice services and externally commissioned a further 63 services.¹

The Improvement Service reported on the multiple benefits delivered by offering access to advice in locations that individuals already frequent and in which they feel safe and connected. Such locations or "touch points" are non-stigmatising and access to advice services can often be signposted or referred to by a trusted intermediary.

The Improvement Service report focused solely on services directly funded by Local Authorities and did not include other advice services within each Local Authority.

Midlothian Council funds the two Midlothian Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) mainly to deliver income maximisation and debt advice. However, Midlothian Council also recognises the importance of funding holistic advice as issues around employment, utilities and housing are frequently interconnected with, and impacted by, benefit and debt advice. The funding provided by Midlothian Council is augmented by project funding obtained by the two Midlothian CABx.

Advice on a range of issues including benefits and debt is available from the two CAB offices (bureaux) located in the centres of Dalkeith and Penicuik. Advice at the two CABx is available via face to face appointments, telephone and electronically delivered by paid staff and trained volunteers from our Midlothian communities. The Midlothian CAB service is committed to designing services to meet the needs of our citizens and to enhance access to holistic advice. Therefore, the two bureaux have also increased access to advice through the development of community-based outreach clinics at a variety of settings across Midlothian.

Although the outreach clinics are not directly funded by Midlothian Council's grant, the core grant is vital to enable the bureaux to identify areas of additional need and apply for funding to provide the required services to meet those needs.

The Midlothian CAB service remained available throughout the pandemic via telephone, letter and electronic means. Post-pandemic, demand for holistic advice continues to rise with an increase of

[Advice in Accessible Settings \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk)

¹ [Common Advice Performance Management Reporting Framework: Annual Report 2019/20 \(improvementservice.org.uk\)](https://www.improvementservice.org.uk)

48% over pre-pandemic levels. Face to face advice provision is much in demand and for many vulnerable individuals it is the only suitable option.

The need for the bureau hubs will continue as they are able to deal with large numbers of complex enquiries and are essential centres where local volunteer advisers can be trained and supported to deliver advice to their local communities. The two CABx are also able to each receive considerable individual project funding via Citizens Advice Scotland and work together to provide the oversight, quality control and administrative hubs for all the Midlothian CAB services, without unnecessary duplication.

Whilst demand for advice at the CAB offices remains at its increased level, the network of community-based outreach provision located at local “touch points” has also increased. The development of the network of outreach clinics enhances the services provided by the Midlothian CABx and together they are able to deliver a cost-effective holistic service to meet the needs of our Midlothian communities.

Midlothian CABx community-based advice service provision	
Delivered by Dalkeith CAB	Delivered by Penicuik CAB
Bonnyrigg Rose FC	Food, Fact, Friends Foodbank/ Food pantry/Community Hub
Gorebridge Library	Hawthorn Children and Family Centre, Mayfield
Gorebridge Hive	Highbank Intermediate Care Facility, Bonnyrigg
Horizons Café	Lasswade Library/High School
Mayfield Pavilion	Loanhead GP practice
Midlothian Foodbank	Loanhead Library
Newtongrange Development Trust	Loanhead Miners' Welfare
St Johns Church	Loganlea Centre
Woodburn Pantry	Midlothian Community Hospital
VOCAL	Midlothian Sure Start Family Learning Centres: Bonnyrigg, Gorebridge, Mayfield, Penicuik, Woodburn,
	Royal Edinburgh Hospital (Midlothian residents)

The provision of community-based outreach advice clinics by the Midlothian CAB Service brings these advantages

- they are in familiar, non-threatening local settings
- they can be targeted at particular groups
- they are located along with other services to encourage referral
- they increase knowledge and raise awareness of issues with professionals
- advisers become known and trusted in that community
- they become part of the fabric of that community
- they reduce the cost and carbon impact of travel to a CAB office
- they replicate all the benefits and ethos of the main bureaux within a small community- such as increased wellbeing and promoting opportunities
- networks are improved and co-operative working opportunities increased.

The Improvement Service asked each Local Authority about the community-based advice service provision they provided under various location headings. Midlothian is well served as the Midlothian CABx are currently providing a service in each of the types community location headings identified by the Improvement Service.

Midlothian CAB's Community-based Advice Service Provision

