

## Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

**Petition Number:** [PE01834](#)

**Main Petitioner:** Alastair Stephen

**Subject:** Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to: provide urgent funding to Citizens Advice Scotland, to ensure that Citizens Advice Bureaux continue to provide services for local people across Scotland.

### Background

The petitioner refers to Citizen Advice Bureaux (CABx) facing closure due to funding cuts, including five bureaux in Glasgow.

Each [citizens advice bureau across Scotland is a separate, registered charity that is responsible for securing the funds they need](#) to deliver a service to the people that live in their community.

The Glasgow CABx initially failed in their funding bid to the Glasgow Communities Fund, administered by Glasgow City Council. The CABx were among many voluntary organisations that applied to the £58m fund established in September 2019. The [Herald reported](#) that “Last year the CABs were supported with funding of between £100,000 and £215,000.”

On 17 September 2020, the [Evening Times reported](#) that five Glasgow CABx were ‘saved from closure’ but still faced significant funding cuts. Then on 23 September, Susan Aitken, City of Glasgow council leader, wrote in the Evening Times:

“When it emerged that some city organisations in that category had not met the criteria for grant funding the SNP administration moved quickly to find an additional £4m to keep as many as possible going and give them breathing space to find a more sustainable funding model. We certainly don’t want to see organisations providing valuable services in communities, such as some Citizens Advice Bureaux, close down and we’ll work with them and with the Scottish Government to find better ways of ensuring those services continue.”

In 2016 [the Improvement Service reported on funding advice services](#), indicating that funding has been an issue for a number of years across the service. The report stated:

“despite their impressive track record of delivering significant benefits, many money advice services are extremely vulnerable to further cuts. Given the comparatively small and precarious position of many services, even relatively small cuts to these marginal services, could have a major negative impact.”

The complex nature of funding for advice services is set out in a 2018 Scottish Government report [Publicly-funded advice services in Scotland: review report](#).

### **Scottish Government action**

The Scottish Government is one of a number of funders of Citizens Advice Scotland. Some of this funding is passed on to local CABx. Some local bureaux have also been awarded funding through COVID-19 communities funding.

In response to COVID-19, the [Scottish Government established](#) a number of funding streams available to the third sector. Recipients of the ‘Third Sector Resilience Fund’ included Dundee CAB and East Kilbride CAB. Recipients of the ‘Supporting Communities Fund’ included Argyll and Bute CAB. A number of CABx received £2,000 each via the ‘Wellbeing Fund.’ [A list of recipients is available from the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations \(SCVO\)](#).

Some examples of Scottish Government funding for advice, available to CABx and other advice agencies, includes:

- Benefit Take-up and Income Maximisation Funds worth £600,000 were announced to help voluntary organisations deliver advice on Scottish Social Security. These sit alongside the [benefit take-up strategy](#), published in October 2019. The next strategy will be published in October 2021.
- Scottish Legal Aid Board ‘[Debt Advice Journey Programme](#)’ has £650,000 available in 2020 and up to £1.3m in the next two years. This is part of the Financial Services Levy for debt advice allocated to the Scottish Government.

### **Scottish Parliament action**

The Parliament’s Social Security Committee held a roundtable on funding welfare rights advice on [16 May 2019](#). Subsequently, the Committee highlighted the importance of welfare rights advice in its 2019/20 [inquiry on Benefit Take-up](#). One recommendation included:

“It is clear that a lot of good work is taking place in Scotland by welfare advice services. However, some initiatives and projects struggle from a lack of funding or a lack of continuity of funding. We recommend that the UK and Scottish Governments acknowledge the positive impact that these services have by providing increased and sustained funding to meet current and future needs. The Committee believes this should

be done in partnership with third sector and local authorities and should be kept under review.”

[In reply, the Scottish Government referred to its funding of CAS](#), and other national welfare rights organisations and stated that:

“It is right and proper that local authorities have the discretion to put appropriate welfare rights services in place, to meet local needs.”

[Motion S5M-21624](#) by Jeremy Balfour MSP commended the work of CABx during COVID-19, as did [Motion S5M-21384](#) by Maurice Golden, MSP.

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**18 November 2020**

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