

Annual Review 2021/22

Citizens Advice Basingstoke



Working for the Community

Inspire 2021 Business awards - 'Local Employer of the Year'



What are our Service aims?



We are here for everyone

Our service aims:

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.
- To help people resolve their legal, money and other problems by providing free, independent, impartial and confidential advice, and by influencing policymakers.

Helping you to find your way forward

Basingstoke Citizens Advice, founded in 1961, is a local independent charity and a member of a national association – Citizens Advice.

Quality Marks:

Advice Quality Standard -the only sector-owned, independently audited standard that focuses on advice.

In addition to the AQS requirements, Citizens Advice nationally monitors the advice we give on a rolling basis, which includes monthly random checks.

January 2021 audit: in the nine areas of leadership awarded Green Rating (Good to excellent). Advice Quality Standard (April 2020, Version 3).

Advice with Casework in Housing (level D5.1) and Telephone services (National, regional and local telephone helplines).



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2020-21 – Community Support

Graham Hatcher: Chief Executive Officer



People and the community are at the heart of what we do.

From the start volunteering has always been part of our service. It also benefits our community: volunteering improves skills, people's resilience, health and wellbeing, while strengthening community engagement. Our paid staff provide essential support and ensure that together we meet the high standards required for, and expected by, our community.

Throughout the year our in-house training and recruitment has continued. As illustrated in Di Lewis's training report, it has been a tough year and we desperately need more volunteers to meet the demand for our service.

Our team work incredibly hard to help people resolve their problems and move forward. The way we work and how people access our service is constantly evolving. Our work is complicated and at times can be stressful so it is important that we look after our team. This isn't anything new but the past year was particularly challenging. We were surprised and very grateful to receive recognition of this by being awarded 'Employer of the Year' in the local Inspire 2021 Business awards.

Volunteers and staff were also flattered and honoured to be invited to a reception with the Mayor, The Worshipful the Mayor of Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council, Cllr Onnalee Cubitt. She shared generous words of support, recognising the importance of our service, which were well received and very much appreciated by the team.

We are very fortunate to have such a great team of people who really care and work so hard to help the whole community. Thanks to their dedication our clients, including families, the elderly and disabled, have received much needed help and support during the year.

2022 brings new worries for people, particularly for the most vulnerable members of our community. At a time when finding additional resources, people and funds, is increasingly difficult, demand is growing as are people's problems. We are not fully meeting demand, but know that with additional resources we can improve and that we will continue to make a difference.

**demand is growing, as
are people's problems**

Plans for the future

Ian Green: Chair of the Trustees



When we entered 2021, after such a traumatic pandemic year, we knew it would be a year of transition, and that we had to focus on maintaining a strong and stable client service in times of great change. Like many other organisations we had to learn to cope with uncertainty, a hybrid workplace and the rapidly changing demands from our clients.

Our team did an outstanding job, especially as we recruited and trained many new volunteers, replacing those that found jobs or moved away. We moved back into our offices in Festival Place whilst retaining our new online hybrid structure, with on-site interviews again available for those most in need.

Into the future

2022 has brought its own challenges though, as we seek to implement new services, such as our NHS Hospital housing project, to replace outgoing activities, an essential task to allow us to balance our finances and support our core service for clients. Although we have new volunteers this year, as Graham says, we are not meeting the growing demand, and we have to continue reaching out and find new members for our team.

This year we have strengthened our Trustee Board, bringing in new skills and experience, as we seek to reach out further into the local community, and to build a more sustainable finance structure. As always though, our main function never changes, always being here to provide a safe, confidential and responsive service to our clients. We will be trialling new ways respond to clients more quickly and completely, whilst reaching directly to those most in need across the community. As we strive to grow our service we will need to reach out to the community, to attract more volunteers into our already busy team.

2023 will, like all years, bring many problems to solve, as well as new opportunities, but as long as we can help others with a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment, then it will be, I am sure, another successful year.

Helping others brings a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment

A National Service . . .

Pensionwise:

- Free and impartial government guidance about your defined contribution pension options

Consumer Helpline:

- Solve an ongoing consumer problem with a business seller
- Report to Trading Standards

Witness Service:

- The Citizens Advice Witness Service provides free and independent support for both prosecution
- and defense witnesses in every criminal court in England and Wales.

Help to Claim:

- Free confidential and impartial support to help make a Universal Credit claim

Research and Campaigns:

- Informing and influencing policy decisions

. . . with a local heart

Local Citizens Advice Offices:

- Delivering advice services from over 3,400 community locations in England and Wales.

Our Local Service

Citizens Advice Basingstoke is a local independent charity and a member of the National Association Citizens Advice.

We have given advice on a wide range of issues, with 76% of all enquiries relating to:

- Benefits, Universal Credit and Tax Credit 36% (2021:42%)
- Employment 10% (2021:15%)
- Housing 15% (2021:12%)
- Debt 9% (2021:6%), and
- Relationships and family 6% (2021:6%).



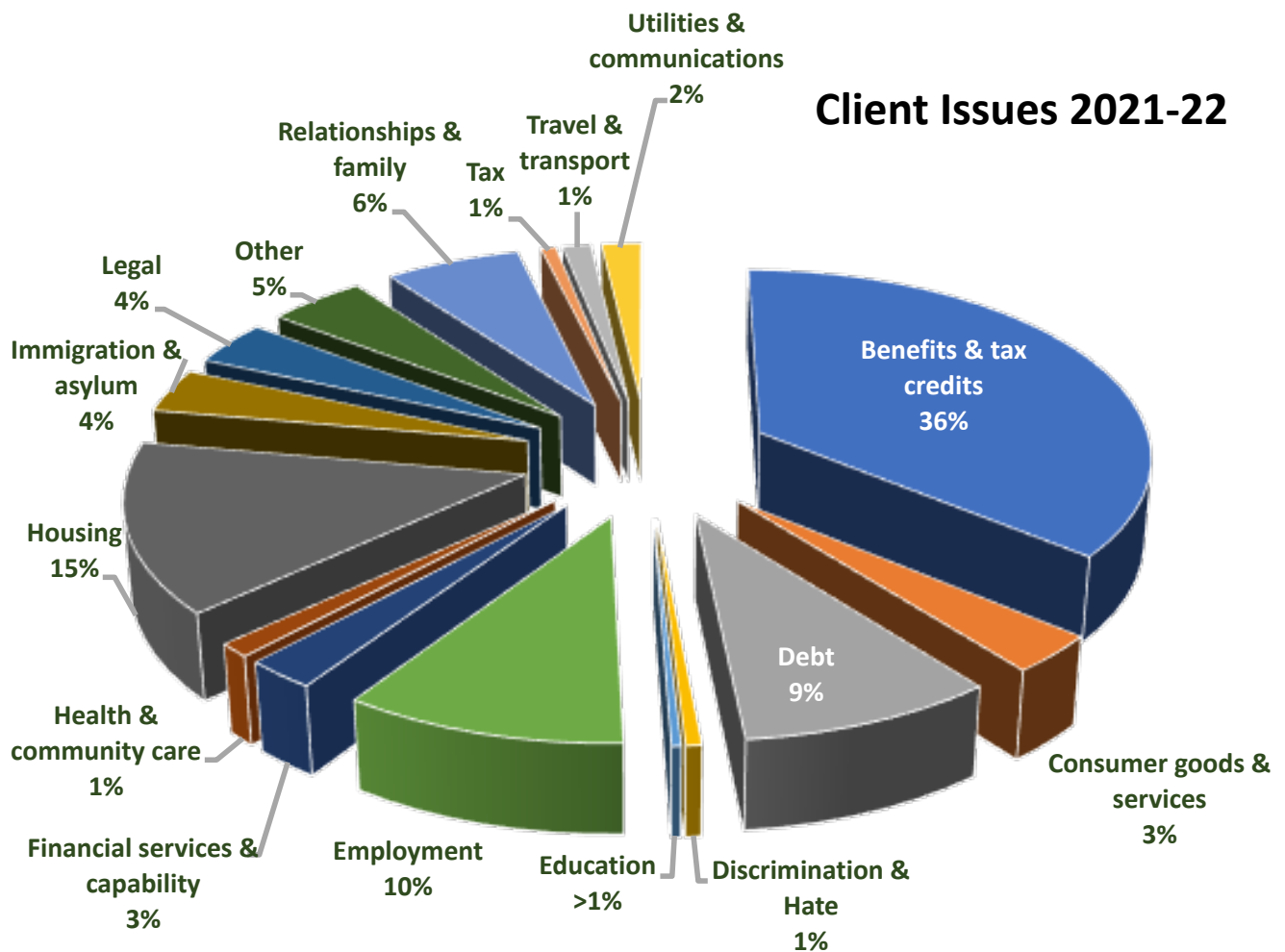
The people we helped last year

- **12,492 people** helped face-to-face, by phone, email or webchat
- **30,214 interactions** with or on behalf of our clients
- **£1,657,181 income gained** for our clients this financial year
- **£4,543,575 saved** by government and public services
- **£10,807,200 in financial** benefits to our clients from problems solved
- **£27,735,443** in estimated wider social and economic value to society

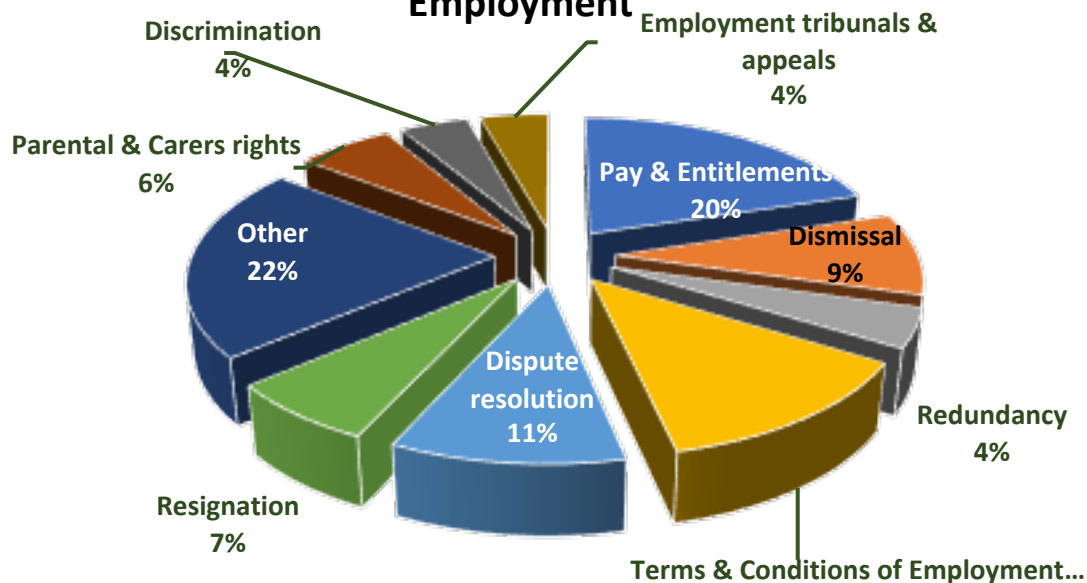
These figures are based on the value of advice delivered by our office. Using a Treasury approved model developed by New Economy using the latest values, we only put a value on what we can firmly evidence. Income gained for clients uses their individual financial gain for a 12-month period as a result of our help.

What did our community need help with?

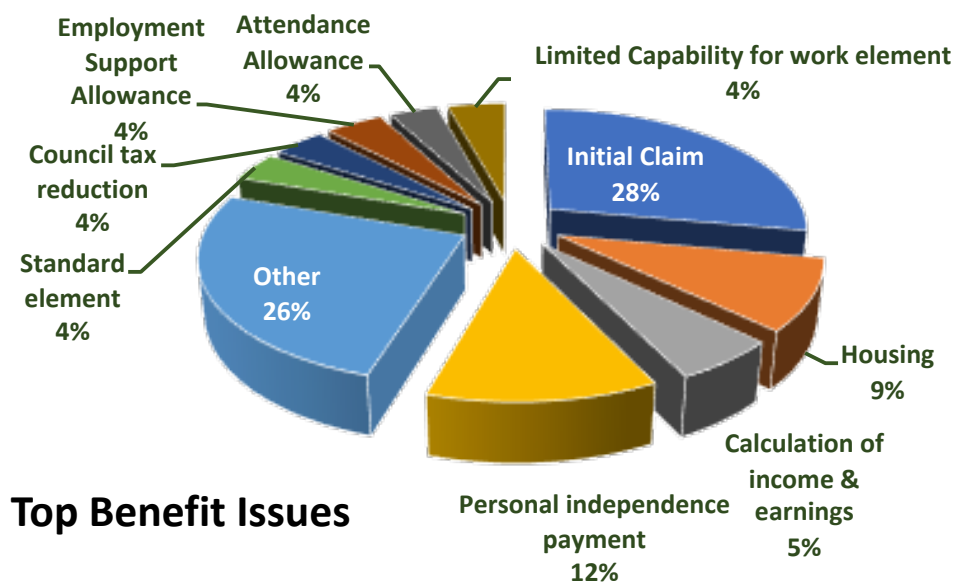
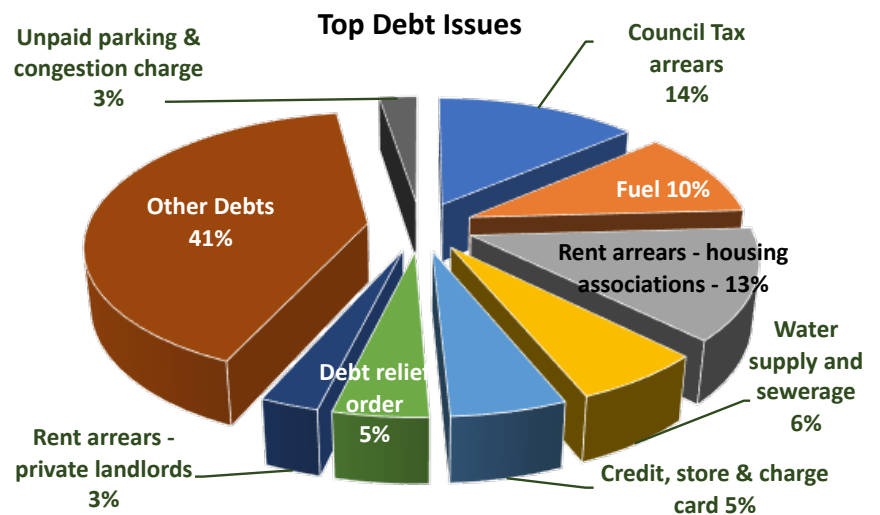
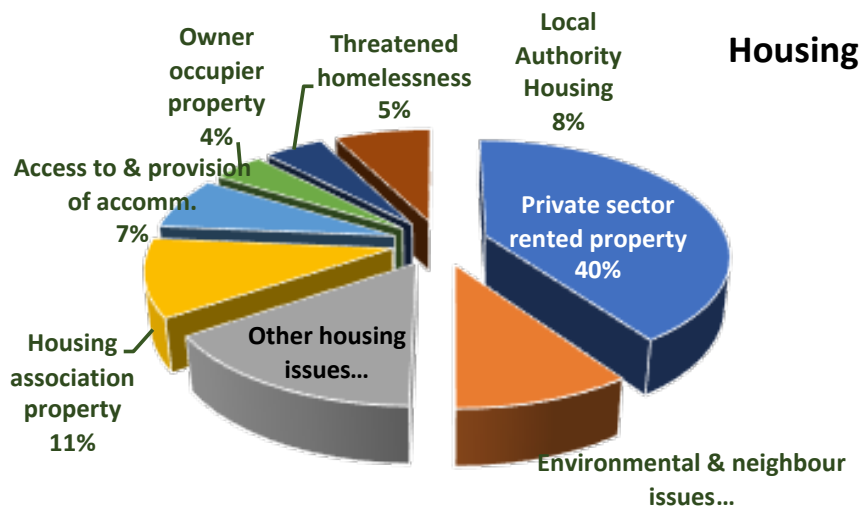
Client Issues 2021-22



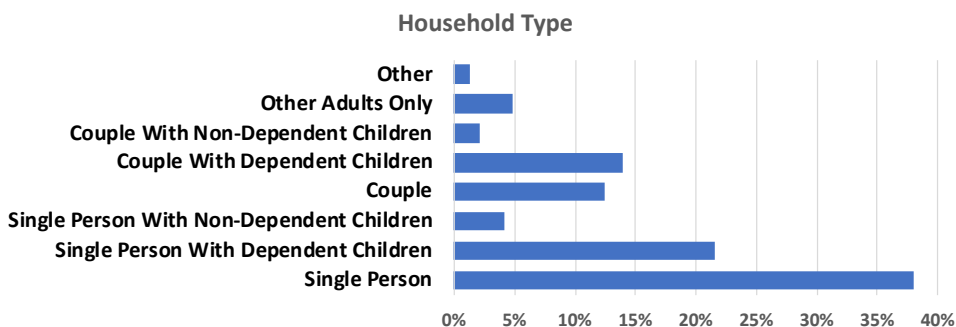
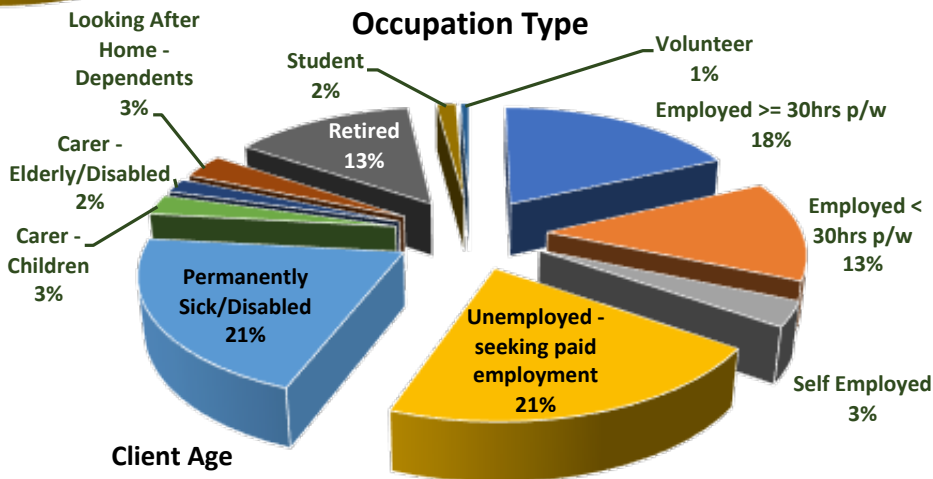
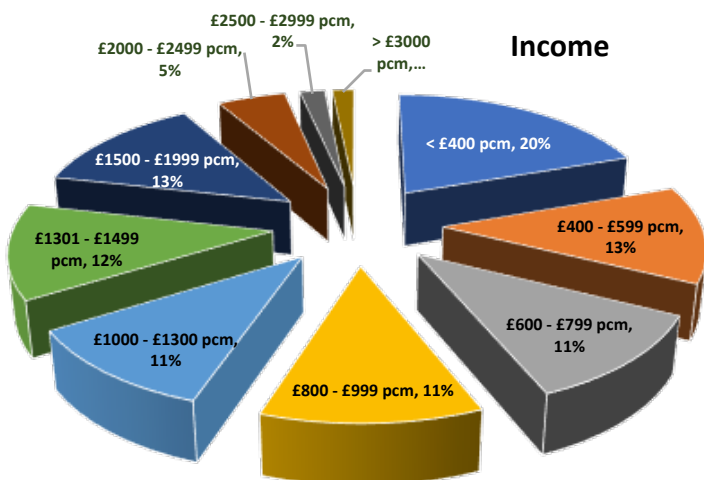
Employment



What did our community need help with?



Who are our clients



Why we are here!

**I found speaking to you
exceptionally easy**

I'm not good at
scrounging, I
know I should
have been on
benefits years ago
... thanks for all
your kindness

Laise,
Thank you for
all your advice and help on the free
grant to help with utilities, any help is a
huge relief, I'm not good at 'scranging'
as my dad would say when he was alive,
I know I should of been on benefits / sickness
years ago but just can't get pass Re →

Stigma of it and how people judge others
on bumps as lazy, I found speaking with
you extremely easy and maybe thats the
reason I'll come back + go through forms.
We now live in a crazy world, with cost
of living soaring the hell at of me, surviving
in Thage for 14yrs has been a struggle at
the best of times but going forward we'll not
care at all. Thank you for your kindness
customer care, and being very pleasant!

National Research and Campaigns

How the wider community benefits

All of our interactions with clients and their concerns are recorded on a national database. Nationally Citizens Advice has the most comprehensive database of social issues in the country. Local evidence files illustrate how an individual has been affected. This information is used to identify issues we believe are unfair and campaign for changes; where we're successful we can bring about improvements that benefit the whole community, not just those who seek our help. This is the essence of Research and Campaigns.

In this way, people who never visit Citizens Advice or who may not even know we exist, can benefit from our work.

Cost of Living, Debt and Charitable Support

In September 2021 Citizens Advice was one of the first organisations to warn of the upcoming cost-of-living crisis. Debt Enquiries had started to rise, the temporary £20 uplift to Universal Credit was about to be terminated and the energy price cap had risen. We saw requests for charitable support (such as food banks or fuel vouchers) roughly double between July and December.

In the early part of 2022, the Government introduced measures to support household energy bills and Citizens Advice carried out research to determine the likely impact on debt levels. This research was extrapolated down to Constituency level and the following was the assessment for Basingstoke.



In common with Citizens Advice around England we have provided our data to our MP and proposed avenues to alleviate these problems. Early on in the crisis we campaigned for the £20 uplift to be retained. We were unsuccessful; however, our data was instrumental in seeing an improved Universal Credit taper rate which benefitted hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers.

Citizens Advice national research down to Basingstoke constituency level.

"84% of people in Basingstoke would not think the October energy loan scheme will make a difference to pay their bills. Moreover, new data for Basingstoke using MRP polling shows:

More than 1/8 people in Basingstoke are unable to pay their energy bills right now without cutting back on essential spending.

4% are unable to pay their bills even after cutting back on essential spending.

Personal Independence Payments



Most "legacy" benefits have been gradually incorporated into Universal Credit (UC) and inevitably our client queries concerning UC are consistently high. This benefit is complex and teething troubles emerge as new circumstances arise. This is perhaps to be expected. However, PIP is a stand-alone benefit – not part of UC – and is intended to help people with disabilities receive extra funds to combat their inevitable increased expenditure. For many years the process of applying for this benefit has been fraught with delays and frustrations. If an application is turned down the client can appeal.

A majority of appeals are successful – eventually. Delays of up to a year are not uncommon. Clients claiming PIP are amongst the most vulnerable and many experience a decline in their mental health. This process isn't working as it should.

Citizens Advice nationally is using case studies in order to get the PIP process improved. We anticipate that one of the case studies will be a client from Basingstoke.

Private Sector rentals

Having a safe, secure and comfortable home is important for many reasons, so unsurprisingly clients will seek our advice concerning their Housing issues. In comparing queries for 2021 versus 2019 we noted a doubling in the numbers of Private Sector Rental clients seeking our advice.

Private rents are high and protections rather limited. Whilst many private landlords treat their tenants fairly, we see many instances where this isn't the case. We have campaigned for better Renters Rights; although a renter's reform bill was proposed in 2019 it has not yet been enacted.

Client is in receipt of PIP and in July 2021 was asked to complete a review assessment. This was done with our help and duly sent off. CI has heard nothing from the DWP since - 8 months!! - client is worried and scared that they payment she receives will be lessened or even stopped, even though her condition has worsened. She suffers from severe depression and this situation is not helping her deal with day-to-day life. She has tried to contact the DWP (as have her local office) to find out what is happening but has to hold for hours and has never actually got through to them yet. *Stop Press update – DWP have now confirmed they'll respond in September 2022. 14 months!!*

Basingstoke Adviser's Evidence File



Citizens Advice campaigns and successes

Nationally Citizens Advice continues to campaign on disability benefits, in particular PIP and on the cost-of-living crisis. These campaigns can last for years but where they are successful, they can benefit many millions of people. This is the case with the so-called loyalty penalty.

From 1st January 2022 new rules brought in by the Financial Conduct Authority mean that loyal customers for home and motor insurance should pay no more than new customers. The new rules have been brought in by the FCA following a super-complaint from Citizens Advice. Around 10 million policies across home and motor insurance are held by people who have been with their provider for five years or more.

.



CI has received a S21 notice to leave home where she and 2 children have lived for the last 4 years. CI's son is due to start studying for his GCSE's in Sept and younger child due to start reception in Sept. If client cannot find accommodation in the same area son will have to change schools at a crucial time as CI does not drive. CI is worried about his attendance after moving schools.

Basingstoke Adviser's Evidence File

People's Health and Wellbeing

Our work also seeks to improve people's health and wellbeing.

Clients experiencing health problems have more complex advice needs on average five practical problems each, compared to an average of 3.5 advice issues for clients overall.

2020 Citizens Advice National Impact & Outcomes Research study:

97% said their problem affected their lives causing anxiety and financial difficulty.

Over 60% with an existing health condition said our help improved their mental health and 40% their physical health.

We never forget that we are dealing with real people and each individual is important.

Our case studies illustrate the difficulties that people face on a daily basis and the level of work involved to help people resolve their issues and move forward.

The evidence forms in our Research & Campaigns highlight the barriers and difficulties people face and how collectively we can bring about improvements that benefit the whole community.

The client comments show how much our work means to them.



Below are brief examples of the complexity and breadth of our work, their full case studies are at the end of this report:

PIP Review and unacceptable 14-month delay

Suzanne made contact in June 2021 requesting help with a PIP (Personal Independence Payment) review form. She has a number of health conditions including acute anxiety when dealing with official agencies and agoraphobia.

Suzanne had been sent a PIP review form by DWP after being in receipt of the benefit for about 3 years.

Suzanne said her conditions had worsened considerably since her original application and that she did not feel capable of completing the form herself.

Resolution and reassurance for elderly couple, shutting the heating off to prevent high bills.

Both Reg and his wife were disabled. Reg initially explained that he had received a number of conflicting and confusing demands for payment ending with one for £358 and a default notice. He added that to reduce his costs he was shutting the heating off to prevent high bills.

Our advisor worked with the couple over a number of months. we received the following note from Reg:

'Please may I, on behalf of my wife and I pass on to yourselves our personal THANKS for our having had your employee handling our dealings with Scottish Power. Finally, with grateful thanks, we have been able to make a

final settlement payment to Scottish Power, hopefully ending our 'frustrating dealings with them! We would like to mention, that thanks to her professionalism, her warmth, kind heartedness and willingness to listen and help us during these dealing, was very much appreciated. Truly words cannot fully convey our grateful Thanks'.

**Sometimes
we all need
that extra
support!**

Support given to rough sleeper

David was referred to our adviser at the Foodbank. He sleeping rough, was in poor health and had an addiction. He was being supported by Julian House; they had managed to get him a space at May Place, but due to the waiting list, this was not yet available. Communication was difficult as David didn't have sufficient credit on his phone.

We raised a Foodbank Voucher, made a referral for assistance under SWEP (severe weather emergency protocol) and David was put on the Street Link system. Our LEWS (Local Emergency Welfare Scheme) adviser sourced a batch of donated Tesco Mobile SIM card packages with three months of free credit. David was very grateful to receive one of these packages. It also meant Julian House and BDBC Homeless Prevention Officers could contact David.

An email was received from Street Link confirming that they had successfully made contact with David and had been informed that he was no longer sleeping rough on the streets.

Help to avoid eviction, put payment plans in place, assistance to reduce bills and spending, resolve gambling issue.

Lisa was referred to us by the local housing association as she was facing an eviction review and hearing. Lisa was in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) and worked 12.5 hours a week part time, was single in a one bed property. Our adviser worked with Lisa over three months to help her address her problems. Lisa was worried about the review hearing and about the possibility of losing her home. Lisa also told our adviser that she had a gambling problem and that her initial gambling arose out of lockdown last year and when she was made redundant from her job.

Our advisor worked through the multiple issues with Lisa and empowered her to make changes, put payment plans in place, stop gambling and avoid eviction. Our adviser also called the housing association to discuss the case. The housing association were very happy with the progress of the case, and agreed that the aims had been fulfilled and case could be closed.

Help for young mother and her 2 children

Megan is a single parent with two children aged 11 and 4, and had to move out from her family home having recently separated. She is moving into a 2-bedroom private rental property. We worked out a budget sheet with Megan Universal Credit and found that she didn't have the funds to buy furniture or white goods. Our adviser submitted a request for a LEWS grant to cover bunk beds, washing machine and fridge/freezer. Our request for a fuel voucher was also approved. The LEWS grant was approved for all items. Megan was very thankful for this and all the help provided. Our help meant that they no longer had to sleep on the floor, had clean clothes and fresh food.

Community Work

Partnership Projects and other outreach services.

To ensure that our services are as accessible to those who need our help, we also undertake funded partnership projects and are involved in voluntary partnerships.

- **Local Emergency Welfare Scheme:** to provide residents in the borough with emergency welfare relating to financial and personal assistance due to the impact of COVID-19. A central hub working in partnership to provide initial mental health support to financial and debt advice. We are also managing an emergency fund to provide one off items
- **Social Inclusion Partnership:** to reduce rough sleeping and increase social inclusion
- **BASP Mental Health Alliance:** mental wellbeing
- **Universal Support Help to Claim service** - helping new Universal Credit claimants to receiving their first full payment
- **Sovereign Housing Association** - to engage with and provide help to their most vulnerable clients who are at risk of eviction
- **Foodbank Outreach service** - a dedicated on-site face to face advice service at 5 outreach locations
- **HiWCF Penton Trust** – Alleviating Poverty for the Over 65's
- **Healthwatch Hampshire** - making sure people's views about NHS services are listened to and valued, so that our health services improve in the way they should
- **Money and Pension Services (MAPS)** – short term debt trainee funding to meet the expected increase in personal debts
- **Surviving Winter Fund/Household Support Fund** - to provide funding individuals who are struggling to pay their fuel bills
- **Hate Crime – Third-party Hate Crime Reporting Centre.** CEO independent chair, Basingstoke Hate Crime Working Group recent campaign to educate young people and raise awareness
- **Covid** - working with the local networks, BVA, BDBC and Deane and HCC, to help people who need additional support during the Covid-19 lockdown
- **Collaboration** - we have continued to work on a collaborative basis with other Citizens Advice organisations, both on a local basis with Citizens Advice Tadley, and through the Hampshire Consortium Citizens Advice Hampshire. We have a formal agreement with the Tadley office whereby our Chief Executive Officer provides strategic advice and support and a shared Training Manager.



Enquiry by Local Ward

Many of our clients have multiple issues. This table only shows the primary enquiry and only includes clients who have provided information on their ward. Due to the majority of our clients contacting us by e-mail or phone, the ward information is often not supplied, which means the figures below are considerably understated.

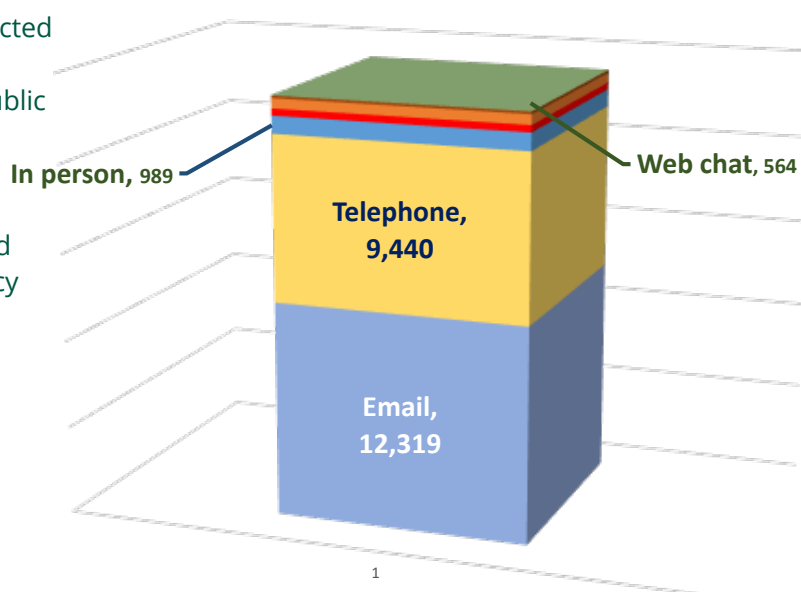
Enquiry by Local Ward 2021-22	Benefits & tax credits	Debt	Employment	Financial services & capability	Housing	Legal	Relationships & family	Utilities & communications	Other	Total
Basing & Upton Grey	64	28	8	9	13	8	19	6	26	181
Bramley	41	31	21	4	8	7	6	10	43	140
Brighton Hill	219	148	25	25	29	11	41	16	236	602
Brookvale & Kings Furlong	171	137	41	24	67	26	30	8	242	609
Chineham	59	46	26	9	10	8	12	6	75	205
Eastrop & Grove	134	63	22	14	43	13	22	6	148	402
Evingar	5	4	1	2	2				10	20
Hatch Warren & Beggarwood	44	38	6	4	8	11	12	3	68	156
Kempshott & Buckskin	190	108	25	14	23	6	14	12	154	438
Norden	133	117	47	18	42	11	31	21	218	521
Oakley & The Candovers	63	30	7	7	13	9	5	4	72	180
Popley	117	46	29	21	37	18	28	17	128	395
Sherborne St John & Rooksdown	90	74	12	18	41	11	25	13	134	344
South Ham	286	233	57	49	59	25	35	36	378	925
Tadley & Pamber	19	7	3	1	4	2	7		17	53
Tadley North, Kingsclere & Baughurst	42	11		2	7	4	3		23	81
Whitchurch, Overton & Laverstoke	72	59	5	11	12	10	7	7	89	213
Winklebury & Manydown	81	41	5	13	35	7	13	12	103	269

Service Delivery

During Covid the majority of clients contacted us using telephone and email. Now the pandemic is subsiding we find that the public demand for a multi-channel service continues, both nationally and locally.

We are now opening our office for booked face-to-face appointments and emergency support for those who need it most.

Service Delivery



Our Team

Who are our volunteers/staff? Our team is aged from 19 - 80 and come from all walks of life:

The Trustees are incredibly grateful to our staff and volunteers at Citizens Advice Basingstoke, without whom it would not be possible to deliver our service.

Our team, mainly volunteers, provide advice and help to people from all backgrounds and abilities to tackle a wide range of issues.

Throughout the year our in-house training and recruitment has continued. We have also run on-line well-being sessions and enjoyed afternoon teas and other virtual get-togethers as well as our regular morning briefings via Zoom, which continue this year.

We were very honoured to be recognised for the support provided to our team by being awarded 'Employer of the Year' in the local Inspire 2021 Business awards.

Our volunteers provided on average 320 hours (2021: 583 hours) per week with an estimated annual economic value of £428,015 (2021: £540,190) (based on Government average earnings).

Paid staff include our management team and supervisors are employed to work a total of 164 hours a week, and project staff 256 hours. As is the case with many organisations providing help to the public, they often work more than these hours.



"Some charities help sections of society but Citizens Advice helps everyone. Our work is varied and very rewarding. I get just as much satisfaction from helping clients as they seem to get from me helping them."

John has been a volunteer for nearly 14 years

Training report 2021-22

Di Lewis: Training Manager

As reported in my last training report, one of the unexpected side effects of Covid, for us at Citizens Advice Basingstoke, was the large number of new volunteers.

Unfortunately for us, now that life is returning to “normal” all of our student volunteers have found employment. Whilst we are really glad that volunteering with us enhanced their CV’s and, hopefully, increased their employability, it has been sad to lose them. Not only because of the decrease in volunteer numbers, but also on a personal level. Fortunately, we were able to retain 3 of our students due to new paid projects within our office.

Volunteer adviser recruitment is now at an all-time low. Between Sept 20 and March 21, we had 71 expressions of interest in the volunteer adviser role of whom only 15 actually made it to the trainee adviser stage And only 2 are still volunteering with us And demand for our service is increasing

The reasons for the lack of uptake and/or dropout are varied, but incorporate the following:

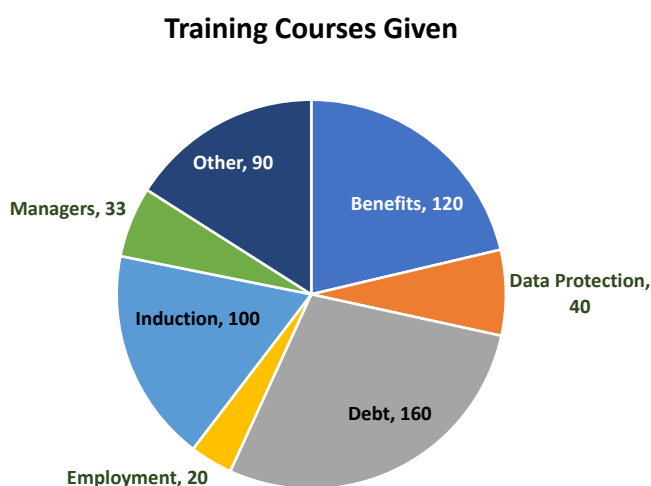
- Not realizing the scope of the adviser role
- Unable to commit to regular volunteering
- Not understanding the depth of the training commitment
- Change in personal circumstances
- Not having the required personal skills to perform the adviser role

This is not a new problem, but it is an increasing one. We are looking at various ways of addressing the issue - more advertising, closer contacts with universities and the possibility of working with local businesses using an intern process.

In 2021, as part of the Kickstart initiative 2 young people joined us for 6 months, they completed our training to help clients on the telephone and by email, to help them for the future further training was given on Job searches CV's and interviews

Above all, many, many thanks to all of our volunteers. I hope you realize how much you are appreciated!

Other includes
Consumer
Discrimination
Technical
Energy
Equality
Immigration
Legal
Research & Campaigns
Trustees



560 Training courses delivered in 2021/22

Client comments

My whole experience was perfect. I am thankful that we have a service like Citizen where citizens can ask questions, problems, how to do paperwork, etc... and that they answer them and above all help us. an exemplary and wonderful service.

My recent experience from the citizens advice was A+Plus, thank you so much

Chat line is great when you can get on, I am disabled and have to use a wheelchair so being able to talk to a person (not a computer) is great and saved a journey to your office

I use them as I find they have a vast knowledge and they always help out when needed.

Thank God for citizens advice, they helped me hugely. I was on the edge with my problems, after they helped me I don't have no more problems, I am over the worst.

The Basingstoke Team are fantastic and helped me with things that I find hard to deal with having bipolar disorder.

Amazing help. Calm and collected when I was in a panic. Spoke through all options and helped me every step of the way. Much appreciated and really helpful.

Our Funders

The greatest challenge for Citizens Advice Basingstoke continues to be to maintain and diversify our funding streams, to finance both existing and new projects. We are grateful to the Borough Council for its decision to continue to fund us as one of its very few “Strategic Partners”.

This was an extremely welcome decision, and provides a stable base for us to ‘add value’ to our service, to reach out to the community and diversify our funding. In return, our contribution in financial benefits for the Public Sector and local community is enormous, amounting to millions of pounds.

Our work in providing advice, volunteering opportunities, and as a contributor to the national research and campaign work greatly improves the wellbeing of our community and benefits the local economy. Thanks to all our funders:



supported by
**Basingstoke
and Deane**



Hampshire
County Council



Hampshire



HIWCF
Hampshire and Isle of Wight Community Foundation
Local giving for local needs

SOVEREIGN



**KICKSTART
SCHEME**



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy



Greenham
Trust

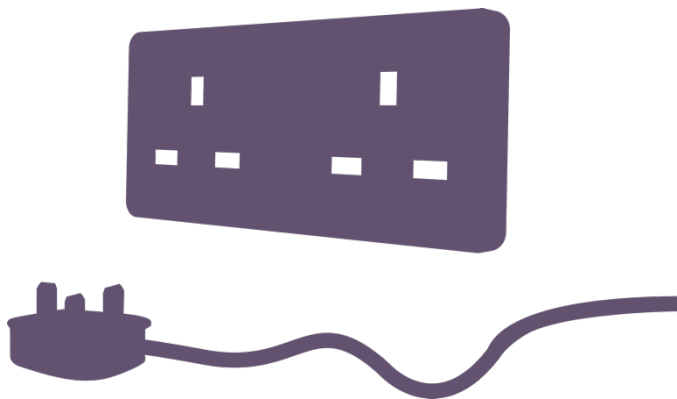


Full Case Studies

Resolution and reassurance for elderly couple, shutting the heating off to prevent high bills

Reg and his wife had been with the same energy supplier for three years. They had received a number of conflicting and confusing demands for payment ending with one for £358 and a default notice. He had emailed Scottish Power copies of the different correspondence he had received from them but had not received a response.

Reg was in receipt of state pension, guaranteed pension credit and Disability Living Allowance (DLA), his DLA payments were used to maintain his mobility car. A smart meter had been installed because both Reg and his wife were disabled and neither of them could bend down to check the existing meters to take readings. He added that to reduce his costs he was shutting the heating off to prevent high bills.



Reg had been paying £120pcm by direct debit, he had an online account with Scottish Power and had been checking that his payments were going through. However, as Reg was not happy with the different amounts he was being asked to pay, the direct debits had been stopped while he tried to sort the problem out with Scottish Power.

Our adviser advised Reg that he should continue to pay something towards his energy bill as it was a priority bill. She advised him that he could pay his bill whilst also making a complaint about the amounts he disagreed with. Our adviser worked with Reg over a number of months, she suggested that he should make a formal complaint that he was not contacted about the communication failure of the smart meter and the use of estimated readings, the estimates being so much more than usual, the default notices being issued amid the confusion and the long delay in fixing the problem despite Reg being on the priority register. If he was still not satisfied with the result, he could take the complaint to energy ombudsman.

After many phone calls, emails and letters to Scottish Power, it became clear that the smart meter was no longer communicating with the company, so they had been estimating the bills. The company could not schedule in a repair to the smart meter until July. Until then they proposed using estimated bills unless Reg could get someone to read the meter.

Reg had found the whole experience very stressful.

In November we received the following note from Reg:

‘Please may I, on behalf of my wife and I pass on to yourselves our personal THANKS for our having had your employee handling our dealings with Scottish Power. Finally, with grateful thanks, we have been able to make a final settlement payment to Scottish Power, hopefully ending our frustrating dealings with them! We would like to mention, that thanks to her professionalism, her warmth, kind heartedness and willingness to listen and help us during these dealing, was very much appreciated. Truly words cannot fully convey our grateful Thanks’.

Help for young other and her 2 children

Megan is a single adult with two children aged 11 and 4. She receives Universal Credit (UC), Child Benefit and ns-ESA (New Style Employment Support Allowance). Megan is having to move out of their joint tenancy property after splitting with her partner into a 2-bedroom private rental property. She is not receiving Child Maintenance, but will be once sorted/things have settled. She had attempted to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) to help with moving costs but was declined.

Megan was referred to the Local Emergency Welfare Scheme (LEWS). Our LEWS adviser contacted Megan to discuss and explain possible grants that she could apply for:

LEWS Grant: for essentials to help resolve a crisis or welfare issue. Fuel Vouchers: £147 directly to Energy Supplier from the Household Support Fund (HSF).

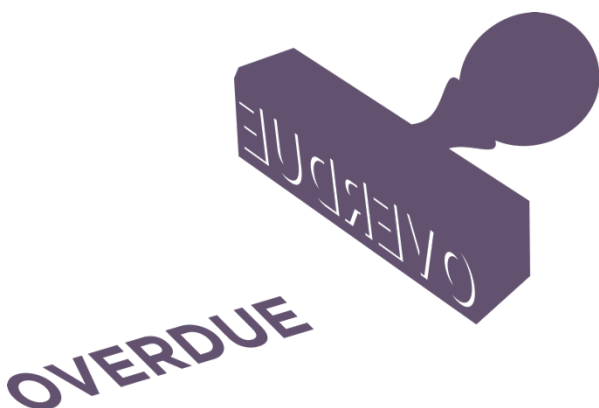
Over a number of phone appointments, our adviser worked through a budget sheet with Megan. Once all supporting documentation had been received from her, our adviser called Megan to discuss LEWS grant and her moving costs. Megan said that she has already had to pay for the moving costs on her credit card out of her food money, but that she had enough food at the moment and would be getting a payment of ESA the next day so was not in any immediate need. We advised Megan that we could not make a payment directly to her for the costs she had incurred on her credit card, but that we could offer support in other areas to help her. Megan asked for help with purchasing bunk beds for the children, a washing machine and fridge/freezer. Our adviser made Megan aware that usually grants were capped at £500, and therefore to go over this we would be required to ask for special consideration, and this was not guaranteed.

Our adviser submitted a HSF request for fuel which was approved. However, this required some extra follow up work as the fuel vouchers received were for PAYG meter rather than credit a meter. Our adviser worked with SSE and HSF to ensure the £147 was credited to the correct SSE account for Megan.

The request for a LEWS grant to cover bunk beds, washing machine and fridge/freezer was approved. Megan was very thankful for this and all the help provided. Our help meant that they no longer had to sleep on the floor, had clean clothes and fresh food.



Help to avoid eviction, put payment plans in place, assistance to reduce bills and spending, resolve gambling issue.



Lisa was referred to us by the local housing association as she was facing an eviction review and hearing. Lisa was in receipt of Universal Credit (UC) and worked 12.5 hours a week part time, was single in a one bed property. Our adviser worked with Lisa over three months to help her address her problems. Lisa was worried about the review hearing and about the possibility of losing her home.

He explained to Lisa that a review hearing was where the judge would look at the 'bundle' of documents given to them by the housing association and decide whether to move the case forward to a possession hearing. She would not have to attend in person, but that if the hearing proceeded to a possession hearing after that, it would be held in court and decided if a possession order would be granted.

Our Adviser and Lisa discussed making payments towards her rent arrears, noting that even if she could not afford the previously agreed payment, it would be better to offer something rather than nothing as it would show that she was working towards clearing the arrears and to improving the situation. Lisa felt she could make payments of £40 on top of her rent each month towards her arrears.

Lisa explained that she had two other debts on top of her rent arrears, she had a debt to a water company and was paying £20 a month on top of her water bill towards this. She also had a debt to the local council for council tax and had a payment plan for £10 a week towards this, but had not been keeping up with the repayments. Our adviser discussed budgeting and money management with Lisa. He also asked Lisa whether she was on the water social tariff or on council tax reduction. Lisa was unsure, but indicated that she did not believe she was on either. Lisa also told our adviser that she had a gambling problem and that her initial gambling arose out of lockdown last year and when she was made redundant from her job. Our adviser talked to Lisa about gambling charities, and suggested that with her consent, he would refer her. Together Lisa and our adviser set the following actions:

Lisa would:

- Contact the council to update them on her situation following her not being able to keep up with her repayments. Also, to discuss applying for council tax support.
- Contact water company to discuss situation, and to discuss and apply for social tariff to limit charge.
- Contact GamCare when referral made for her.

Our Adviser would:

- Email the housing association to update on case and ask for direct debit form to be sent to client for her start making payments of £40 a month extra.
- Make referral to GamCare.
- Offer his continued support and to contact Lisa to book a further appointment to discuss next steps once the outcome of the review hearing was known.

The outcome of the review hearing was that Lisa's case would not go forward to court. This was on the basis of Lisa's engagement with Citizens Advice and payments being made. Once this had been resolved in Lisa's favour, our adviser could focus fully on support to plan a sustainable approach and budget going forward.

Support given to rough sleeper

David was referred to our adviser at the Foodbank. He was in poor health and had an addiction. David had recently relocated to Basingstoke for a fresh start and was sleeping rough. He was being supported by Julian House; they had managed to get him a space at May Place, but due to the waiting list, this was not yet available.

David had also been offered a room within a privately-owned house. However, as David had no local connection or lived within the borough, BDBC had advised that they could not help with the deposit. David told our adviser that he had reached an agreement with the landlord that he could do some jobs within the house instead of paying a deposit.



David was on the liaison programme at Jobcentre Plus (JC+) to get him back into work. He had completed a UC50 form (Universal Credit capability for work questionnaire) and was awaiting an assessment date. He had a debt payment to his previous Council for Council Tax arrears, which he was trying to clear.

Our adviser raised a Foodbank voucher for David and gave him the telephone number for the DWP debt line to review his advance payments. He also reminded him that he would need to complete a change of circumstances for the housing costs when it happened and that UC may want to see his tenancy agreement.

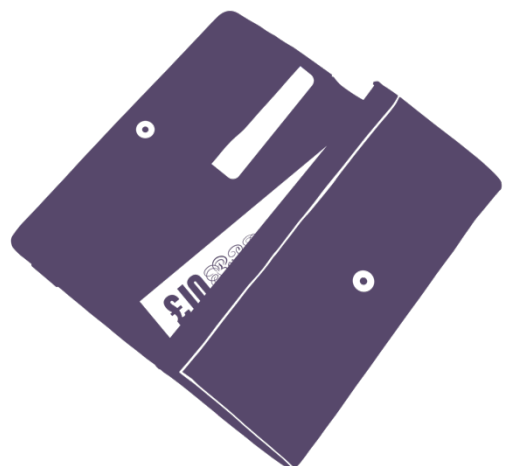
With David's consent we made a referral for assistance under SWEP (severe weather emergency protocol) and David was put on the Street Link system. BDBC confirmed that they had received the referral and David was now being supported by one of their Homeless Prevention Officers, as well as the outreach team at Julian House. However, the team had struggled to keep in contact with David as he didn't have sufficient credit on his phone.

An internal referral was made to the Local Emergency Welfare Scheme (LEWS) with regard to a mobile phone data grant for David. Our LEWS adviser sourced a batch of donated Tesco Mobile SIM card packages with three months of free credit. David was very grateful to receive one of these packages.

An email was received from Street Link confirming that they had successfully made contact with David and had been informed that he was no longer sleeping rough on the streets.

PIP Review and unacceptable 14-month delay

Suzanne made contact in June 2021 requesting help with a PIP (Personal Independence Payment) review form. She has a number of health conditions including acute anxiety when dealing with official agencies and agoraphobia. A telephone appointment was made for her to speak to one of our advisers.



Suzanne had been sent a PIP review form by DWP after being in receipt of the benefit for about 3 years. Suzanne said her conditions had worsened considerably since her original application and that she did not feel capable of completing the form herself. She had

intended to get the PIP form to us in time for the appointment, but had not managed to do so as she struggled to get out of the house on her own even to get to a post box. A PIP review template form for actual use was not available for download from gov.uk and Suzanne did not want to complete the form, with her actually writing. It was agreed that Suzanne would post the form to us in time for a revised appointment the following week. She would complete the 7 PIP diary forms our adviser would send to her.

During the telephone appointment the following week, our adviser completed the PIP form using information supplied by Suzanne and posted it back to her for signature, attachment of supporting information and onward posting to DWP. During the conversation it emerged that despite Suzanne's care needs she has never had an Assessment of Need by HCC. Our adviser sent her the relevant contact details by email. Suzanne agreed to contact us again should the outcome of her PIP review not be in line with her expectations.

Suzanne contacted us in November 2021 as she was very concerned that her completed PIP review form, submitted in July, had still not been processed by DWP. Her anxiety had also been made worse by an error in her ESA (Employment and Support Allowance) payments in September. The DWP had admitted an error and corrected her ESA immediately so she was not owed anything by them. But it just added to her frustration. We explained to Suzanne that the current delays being experienced was as explained to her by DWP when she had contacted them. DWP had confirmed that they had all that they needed to process her review.

We then received an email from Suzanne in March 2022 as she had still heard nothing about her PIP review. She had been very unwell and unable to chase this up herself and asked for our help. Our adviser called DWP and after a 45-minute wait on the phone, we were given confirmation that Suzanne's PIP review had been received, it was in their queue and they would expect it to be reviewed in September 22 which would be 14 (fourteen) months from submission.

Additionally, our adviser called DWP (55-minute wait) to ask if Suzanne would get her current claim extended beyond the May 2022 end date. A PIP Manager stated, "as far as she knew" if reviews looked as if they were going beyond the award end date, then a letter would go out to the client to extend their award. Our adviser also asked whether they would reclaim any monies paid if the award was reduced. The Manager confirmed that DWP could reclaim any over payment, but it was unlikely that they would, and that they try to get reviews done before an award ends. Our adviser emailed Suzanne to inform her to look out for a letter from the DWP extending her award - if this was not received by early May, then she should come back to us.

Our adviser has written to Suzanne's MP outlining that we find a 14 month wait unacceptable and a real strain on our client, who suffers from depression as well as other health issues, and the stress and uncertainty was aggravating her health issues.

Our adviser has also raised an Evidence Form (for our Research & Campaigns).

The Charity for our Community



Opening times

Monday:	9.00am – 5.00pm
Tuesday:	9.00am – 5.00pm
Wednesday:	9.00am – 5.00pm
Thursday:	9.00am – 5.00pm
Friday:	9.00am – 5.00pm

These are the times the service is open for Telephone, e-mail and webchat consultations. Our office is also open for face-to-face appointments and emergency support for those who need it.

Sundays, Bank Holidays, Christmas Eve to New Year's Day CLOSED

The Discovery Centre
19 – 20 Westminster House
Basingstoke
RG21 7LS

Social Media:



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