

# Impact Report

April 2023-March 2024



**citizens  
advice**

**Winchester  
District**

Solving problems,  
transforming lives

# CITIZENS ADVICE WINCHESTER DISTRICT

Citizens Advice Winchester District is a trusted charity that delivers free, accredited advice to local people, helping improve the lives of thousands of individuals each year.

Our dedicated and passionate team of staff and volunteers provide a lifeline to people when they're at their most vulnerable and help people fight for social justice.

## OUR VISION

We believe in a fair society with good quality of life for all.

## OUR MISSION

We improve the lives of local people through our free advice, support and campaigning. We help people to overcome their problems, uphold their rights and create a fairer society.



*"I am very grateful for the kind and professional help I received at the Winchester branch of Citizens Advice. I definitely couldn't have done it on my own."*

# CHAIRS REPORT



**As ever, 2023-24 has been incredibly busy for our service. Demand for our advice continued to grow with more people and more issues dealt with by our advice team this year compared to last.**

Sadly, we have continued to see a steep increase in the number of cost-of-living related issues such as support with benefit entitlements, debt and access to crisis support such as food banks.

Whilst it's clear the cost-of-living crisis is far from over, here in Winchester District we've seen a much higher increase in cost-of-living related issues (143%) compared to the national average (86%) suggesting that our local population has been hit particularly hard.

With more people needing help to access benefits and manage debt, our advice team have secured a record amount of financial gain for our service-users this year - a total of almost £2.5 million.

Other significant achievements include the expansion of our outreach work which has enabled us to engage with over 1,200 individuals - opening up our services to those who may otherwise have been unable to access our help.

We've also increased our volunteer capacity to its highest ever level (worth an estimated £200,000) and successfully migrated over to a new cloud-based IT system.

Finally, we successfully opened a new advice hub at Wickham Community Centre embedding our service in a vibrant community space and providing us with great opportunities to collaborate with local groups.

*Sarah Gooding*

# OUR IMPACT

We've helped **improve the lives** of **5,948** people by enabling them to find solutions to their problems



We've **improved people's finances** by helping our service users access **£1.9 million** in unclaimed benefits

We've assisted over **700 people to manage their debt** - helping to write off and manage debts of almost **£600,000**



We've **reached over 1,200 local people** through our community **outreach** programme

We've supported over **500 people with a disability** or long-term health condition to **access the benefits they need**



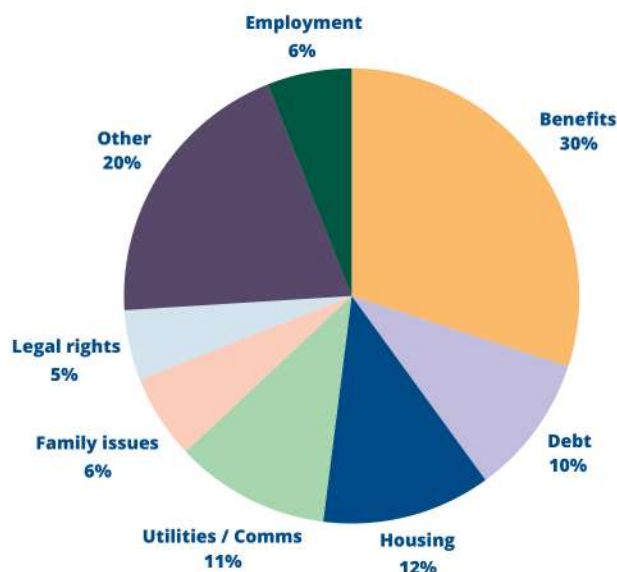
We've given housing advice to at least **two people each week** who are threatened with, or experiencing **homelessness**

*"It is great to know that if you have a serious problem then Citizens Advice is definitely the go to first stop."*

# ADVICE NEEDS

The variety of issues we help people with gives us a unique insight into the challenges faced by people in our local community

**The pie chart below shows the breakdown of issues that we've helped people with during 2023-24**



The most common advice issues that we help people with are:

- Benefits
- Housing
- Utilities/Comms
- Debt
- Employment
- Family issues
- Legal rights

## More disabled people having problems accessing PIP

The biggest demand for benefits advice this year has been support with Personal Independence Payments - a disability benefit that too many claimants are facing problems with.

The next biggest benefits related advice is helping people to work out which benefits they might be entitled to as they struggle to manage the rise in living costs.

## More people needing help with debt

This year we've supported 728 people with a debt issue which represents a 7% increase from last year and a 43% increase in debt clients compared to 2020/21.



Debt clients in 2020/21



Debt clients in 2023/24

*Rent arrears, council tax arrears and fuel debts are the most common debts that Winchester District residents need help with*



## More referrals for crisis support

With more households struggling with debt and negative budgets, we're still seeing large numbers of people who can't afford food or energy and need emergency support.

As well as providing the emergency support people need, we also look at their wider situation and see where they can maximise income and minimise spend.

**281**

**Food bank referrals**

(up from 204 last year)



**439**

**Energy vouchers**

(up from 400 last year)



## More people at risk of homelessness

Issues related to housing remain one of our top advice issues and sadly this year we've seen a small, but worrying increase (7%) in the number of people we help who are experiencing threatened or actual homelessness. On average we've helped two people every week who are facing homelessness.

*No fault evictions  
(section 21 notices) are at  
an all time high for  
private renters.*

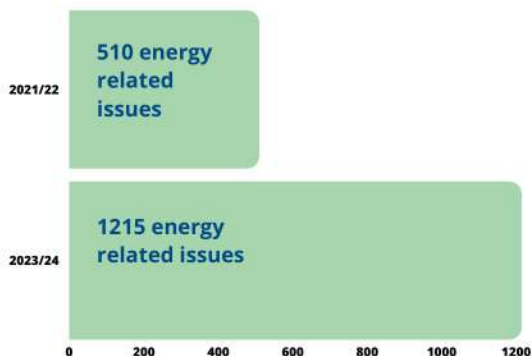


We've helped an average of two people a week who are facing homelessness

## Energy issues twice that of 2021/22 levels

This year we've helped deal with 1215 issues or queries related to energy and fuel. This is a drop from the 1438 issues we dealt with last year but still over double the levels we saw in 2021/22 (510) meaning that problems around energy supply and payments are still a significant issue for people who are coming to us for help.

### Energy issues this year compared to two years ago



# HELPING PEOPLE AVOID CRISIS

## Supporting people on low incomes

People on low incomes are much more likely to be in a negative budget and at risk of getting into debt. **Whenever we give advice to people who are on a low income we always run a benefits check to make sure they are accessing everything that's available to them** and also look at where they could make savings on their monthly budget.



## Improving people's finances

Helping people access the right benefits is a significant part of what we do to help people maximise the income that is available to them.

As a result of this advice, **this year we've generated over £1.9 million in income gain for our service users** - an average of £350 per person.





## Providing a holistic approach

Often, the issue that people come to us for advice about is only part of the picture and we need to help that person resolve multiple, often interconnected issues to help the individual move forward.

## Supporting vulnerable groups

Some people are more vulnerable to reaching a crisis than others and **we want to do all we can to offer early intervention to these groups**. This means offering a variety of opportunities for people to access us, reaching out to people through local support groups and networks and adapting and developing our service to meet the changing need.

This year, on average, each person we helped had 3 different issues they needed help with. **By providing a holistic advice service that aims to resolve all of someone's issues, we can help prevent a crisis situation in the future.**



## Dedicated cost-of-living support

Thanks to funding from Winchester City Council **we were able to recruit three part-time cost-of-living advisers to support those most affected by the crisis**. Over the year these advisers have helped hundreds of people with multiple advice needs find options to improve their situation and the extra capacity has meant we've been able to offer more in-depth support to our most vulnerable clients.



# CHANGING LIVES

## **We helped Mike get the disability support that he needed.**

Mike is in his thirties and suffers with a chronic pain condition and debilitating anxiety. Despite managing to work part-time from home, rising costs have meant that he'd been struggling to make ends meet.

Given the difficulties Mike faces in completing everyday tasks, as a result of his pain and anxiety, Mike decided to apply for a Personal Independence Payment but his application was refused by the Department for Work and Pensions.

We supported Mike to appeal this decision, helping him gather the right evidence, complete the necessary paperwork and prepare for the stressful process of attending an appeal hearing.

As a result of our advice Mike has now been awarded a Personal Independence Payment at the highest level and will receive almost two years of back payment (from when he first applied for PIP).

## **Personal Independence**

**Payments** provide a lifeline for people living with a long-term health condition or disability but the way the benefit is delivered creates unnecessary problems.

## **We're gathering evidence on how this benefit is failing people locally and helping people complete their claims**



*"Help with the PIP forms is invaluable as they are so confusing, and one small comment can mean your claim is denied. By having someone go through the forms who knows the system helps with both understanding and the anxiety factor."*



## **We helped Mel understand her rights after receiving an eviction notice from her landlord**

Mel was renting a property from a private landlord in Winchester. She's had ongoing problems with the property including a leaking roof, a collapsed ceiling, no hot water and rat infestations.

Despite paying over £1800 in rent each month and making several requests for maintenance work to be carried out, no repairs had been made to the property. When Mel contacted the landlord again to chase up the repairs, she was served an eviction notice by her landlord the next day giving her less than a month to vacate the property.

Our adviser helped Mel understand her rights with regards to a Section 21 Eviction Notice and the steps she should take if she wanted to challenge her eviction in court given that it appeared the eviction was made in retaliation to her asking for repairs to be made.

## **We helped Betty stop her energy company from forcibly installing a prepayment meter**

Betty came to us because she was in debt to her energy company and had received threatening letters from them about forcibly installing a prepayment meter.

Betty's a pensioner and on a low income, and isn't confident using a computer so had been paying her bills by cheque.

Our adviser helped Betty to contact her energy company to explain the situation, set up a reasonable repayment plan and agree that they would not install a prepayment meter.

Our adviser also helped Betty to set up an online Direct Debt so she'd no longer have to pay her bills by cheque and showed her how to send in her meter readings.



# SPECIALIST ADVICE SERVICES

We have several specialist projects that allow us to support people in our local community who have complex needs and require more in-depth, longer-term support.

## Mental Health and Advice

Ling is a specialist Caseworker who works with patients and staff at Melbury Lodge (an NHS led in-patient acute mental health facility in Winchester) to help them with their advice needs and finances.

Helping people in mental health crisis with their issues has been shown to aid their recovery and helps reduce future re-admission.

The project that we have been trialling here in Winchester is now being replicated at other mental health units across Hampshire



Between April 2023 and March 2024, our Mental Health Caseworker helped 71 people in mental health crisis with 459 issues.

This included helping individuals to understand and access the right benefits, manage debt and support them with housing issues.

*"Poor mental health can make managing money or dealing with an issue harder. In turn, the stress of those issues can make a person's mental health worse. It's a vicious cycle"*

**Ling, Mental Health and  
Advice Caseworker**

## Welfare Rights Casework

Our Welfare Rights Caseworker gives specialist support to people with complex benefits claims.

This involves supporting people whose application for benefits has been rejected or wrongly reduced and they are now facing an appeal or court tribunal to change this decision.

The majority of these individuals have a disability or long-term health condition and can be extremely vulnerable.



Our Welfare Rights Caseworker has worked in-depth with **35 individuals** this year **to help them overturn an unfair benefits decision**

*"Fantastic service. Understanding, empathetic very informative and thorough. Thank you to all the team at Winchester."*

## Home and Well Project

Home and Well is a Hampshire-wide project that aims to address the detrimental impact that cold homes, reduced water usage and anxiety due to utility bills can have on vulnerable people.

Our Caseworker helps these individuals to access the best utility tariffs, resolve any issues related to billing or supply, and helps them to apply for welfare support.

Our Home and Well Adviser has enabled 374 vulnerable people to live at home with adequate heat, power and water



## Money Advice Project (Winchester City Council)

Our Money Advice Project is funded by Winchester City Council to enable us to support WCC housing tenants who are in financial difficulty and behind in their rent payments. **Our dedicated Money Advice Caseworker works one-on-one with tenants who are in rent arrears to help them manage their debts, improve their budgeting and money management skills, and look at ways they can maximise their income and reduce their outgoings.**

## Income Maximisation Adviser

This year we also received funding from WCC to recruit an Income Maximisation Adviser, who helped WCC housing tenants at risk of rent arrears to improve their financial situation.

Thanks to our Income Maximisation Adviser, we helped 80 WCC housing tenants to better manage their finances and avoid getting into rent arrears



## HM Prison Winchester Advice Service

HM Prison Winchester houses around 600 men. **Going into prison (and leaving prison) can create a whole range of issues for an individual around their housing, bank accounts, debts and family.** We offer a confidential advice service to prisoners in Winchester via email. This year we've helped around 80 prisoners.



## Macmillan Advice Service

Our dedicated Macmillan Caseworker provides specialist advice to people who are living with cancer. **Applying for benefits or understanding your rights when you've been given a cancer diagnosis can be incredibly challenging.** Our Caseworker helps people to access the right support and guides them through their options.

# PARTNERSHIPS & OUTREACH

We're passionate about ensuring that anyone who needs our help can access it quickly and easily. For some people that might mean accessing our advice via a local support group, club or charity, rather than coming to us directly.

## Raising awareness

We've worked with over 100 local groups and organisations over the past year to raise awareness of our charity - sharing information about the service we offer and how people can contact us. This has included presenting to local support groups and attending community events.

## Community advice sessions

We know that offering face-to-face advice is extremely important to our service-users. But not everyone can travel to Wickham or Winchester to see us, so we've been running community advice sessions in local libraries, at lunch clubs, in community cafes and at local food banks.



## Targeted support

As well as raising awareness and delivering advice in the community, our outreach work also involves offering targeted support to local groups and organisations. For instance we've delivered talks on scam awareness to residents (and their families) of local care homes and talks on Power of Attorney to local carers.

*"Thank you so much for your help. The situation was getting me down. Your ability to listen and ask the right questions enabled me to 'see' the situation rolled out instead of in a muddle."*



This year, we've attended **115 community outreach sessions** where we've engaged with **1,200 individuals**.

## Advice First Aid

Our Advice First Aid initiative delivers free training to frontline workers in local partner groups and organisations to become Advice First Aiders giving them the skills they need to triage for advice, deliver initial support and refer directly into our service when needed.

To date, we've delivered training to staff and volunteers from over 50 organisations. We also facilitate online monthly coffee break meetings to all our partners to share news about local services, discuss emerging issues and build connections.



# RESEARCH AND CAMPAIGNS

As a local charity that is part of a wider network of other Citizens Advice services across the country, we are uniquely positioned to see where policies and practices are failing people.

## Collecting evidence of unfair systems

Each time our advisers deal with a new case, they'll flag up when a policy or procedure has created an unfair outcome. This data is then used as evidence to campaign for change and protect other people from similar situations.

## Unfair PIP decisions

In recent months more people have come to Citizens Advice for help with a Personal Independence Payment (a disability benefit) than any other benefit issue. Sadly the application process and evidence required to secure PIP is resulting in huge numbers of people being denied the benefit who genuinely need it. As a result, thousands of people are having to appeal their decisions which can be incredibly stressful and time consuming.

## Substandard housing

We've also supported huge numbers of people who are living in substandard housing as a result of unfair policies and lack of support from their housing association. For example, families moving into a housing association property with all the flooring removed and no provision of any white goods. Or families who are living with severe damp and mould without any support from their landlord.



# FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Our free advice service would not exist were it not for our local funders and our fantastic team of volunteers who help us deliver our advice and support us behind the scenes.



## Our volunteer teams

We have over 80 volunteers who help deliver our free advice service. This includes our trained advice volunteers, admin and reception support, research volunteers and our trustees. Most of our volunteers work out of our offices in Wickham or Winchester, but some are home-based and others help us deliver our work in the community.



**72**

**Advice  
Volunteers**

**5**

**Reception & Admin  
Volunteers**

**8**

**Volunteer  
Trustees**

## Our funders

As an independent charity we are totally reliant on securing our own funding to deliver our local, free advice service. We are eternally grateful to Winchester City Council who have been a long-term funder of our organisation as well as many of the local Parish Councils who support us with a donation each year.

## Thank you to everyone who has supported us this year

Winchester City Council  
CA Hampshire (Household Support Fund)  
Tim Gibbons Solicitors  
Mayor of Winchester Community Fund  
Meon Valley Food Bank  
Simplyhealth  
Winchester Probus  
Winchester Round Table  
National Lottery Awards for All  
National CA Energy Advice Partnership  
National CA Cost of Living  
Martin Wheeler Fund  
Badger Farm Parish Council  
Bighton Parish Council  
Bishop's Sutton Parish Council  
Boarhunt Parish Council  
Cheriton Parish Council  
Colden Common Parish Council  
Corhampton Parish Council  
Crawley Parish Council  
Curdrige Parish Council  
Denmead Parish Council  
Droxford Parish Council  
Durley Parish Council

Headbourne Parish Council  
Itchen Stoke Parish Council  
Itchen Valley Parish Council  
Kilmeston Parish Council  
Kings Worthy Parish Council  
Littleton & Harestock Parish Council  
Micheldever Parish Council  
New Alresford Parish Council  
Old Alresford Parish Council  
Oliver's Battery Parish Council  
Otterbourne Parish Council  
Owslebury Parish Council  
Soberton Parish Council  
South Wonston Parish Council  
Sparsholt Parish Council  
Swanmore Parish Council  
Tichborne Parish Council  
Twyford Parish Council  
Upham Parish Council  
West Meon Parish Council  
Whiteley Parish Council  
Wonston Parish Council

Plus our generous individual donors

**For every £1 invested in us, we deliver an estimated £23 in public value.**

When people have fewer problems they have higher levels of wellbeing,  
participation in society and productivity.

*Thank you!*



**Citizens Advice Winchester District**

City Offices  
Colebrook Street  
Winchester  
SO23 9LJ

[www.citizensadvicewinchester.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicewinchester.org.uk)

Tel: 0808 278 7861

**citizens  
advice**

**Winchester  
District**

