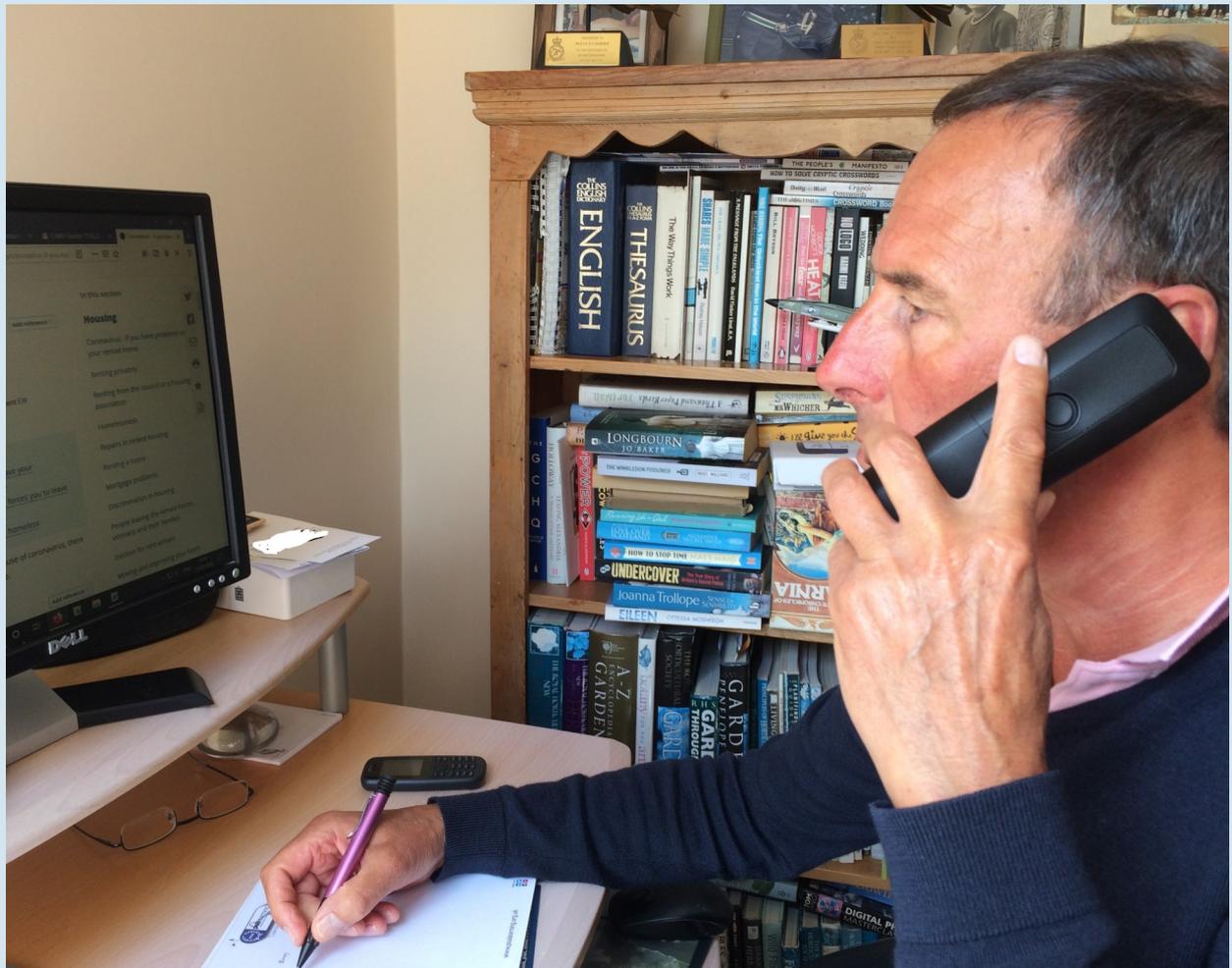


# Citizens Advice Winchester District

## Impact Report 2020/2021

This report gives a summary of our activities between April 2020 and March 2021, detailing how our service adapted and responded to the Covid-19 pandemic, and continued to deliver quality, free advice to our local community



*"Thank you so much for your help with the fuel voucher. I can have my heating on. It was so cold, now I don't feel so worried."*

**citizens  
advice**

**Winchester  
District**

# The impact of Covid-19 on Winchester District

## Free, impartial advice for people in need

Covid-19 has undoubtedly touched the lives of each and every one of us, but for some the impact of the pandemic has been devastating; lost loved ones, isolation, loneliness, unemployment, redundancy, financial uncertainty. Thankfully Citizens Advice Winchester District has been there to support people through these challenging times.



*“They told me how best to deal with my situation clearly and to the point.”*

## Support with employment, housing and benefits

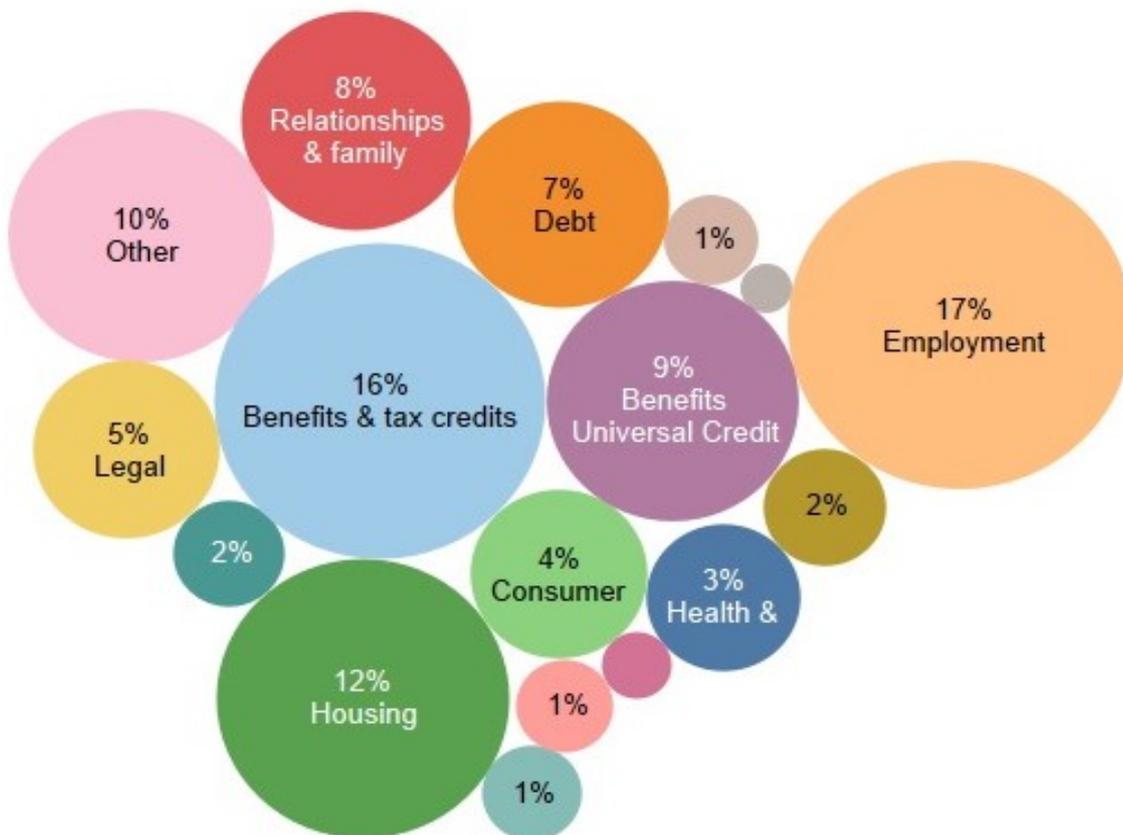
The pandemic has had a huge impact on people locally. Our service has seen a significant increase in demand over the last year particularly as the impact of the pandemic on people’s jobs and finances started to take hold.

We helped thousands of people understand their rights around the furlough scheme, working from home and redundancy and also saw significant increases in advice with benefits (particularly Universal Credit) and housing as a knock-on effect of people’s changing employment situations. Over the year, we supported people with:

- Over **3,000 employment issues** (almost **double** the year before)
- More than **2,000 housing issues** (over 800 more than the year before)
- 1620 **Universal Credit** queries (**double** the number of the previous year)

In contrast, we saw a **reduction** in people seeking help with **debt** over the period. Government initiatives such as restrictions on credit collection and bailiffs has protected people to a certain extent during the crisis, but these debts haven't disappeared and we're preparing for a steep increase in debt advice over the coming months.

**Percentage of different issues our advisers dealt with between April 2020 to March 2021**



### **An inclusive and accessible advice service**

We've helped people of all ages and backgrounds in the twelve months to April 2021. These people have come from all over Winchester District with a relatively equal split between those living in the **city (47%)** compared to those living in the **rural areas (53%)**.

More of our clients have been **women (60%)** and around half of all the people we helped have been from single households, including those with dependant children. Around **one third** of the people we helped revealed that they had a **disability or long-term physical or mental health condition**.

These figures are consistent with the profile of our clients in other years which suggests we've remained accessible despite the restrictions of the pandemic. Our ethnicity monitoring also shows we maintained our reach across a range of groups and communities.

***“Their help and information was very clear, precise and allayed any fears I might have had about my complaint to a large company”***

# How Citizens Advice Winchester District responded to the crisis

## Creating a robust remote advice service

Once we knew we could no longer deliver advice face-to-face or have staff and volunteers in our offices, we quickly set about adapting our phone, email and webchat advice services to be delivered from the homes of our 90 staff and volunteers.

### A rapid response

By 1 April (two weeks into the first national lockdown) our remote services were fully up and running: a huge undertaking as we'd never delivered advice from home before. Over the year **68 of our volunteers have provided more than 10,000 hours of advice** remotely.

### Maintaining high standards

Despite this huge adaptation to our service we've **ensured our high quality of advice** has been maintained. Our supervisors have all worked extra hard to provide the necessary support to our advice teams and training has continued online.

***"Reliable, honest, sincere advice."***



One of our advice volunteers receiving a phone delivery during lockdown.

### Improving our phone response



We made significant improvements to our phone service throughout the year. During the first lockdown we introduced two new local numbers and now have our own free phone number to make us even more accessible.

**In total we dealt with over 8,000 telephone enquiries.**

### Upgraded our email advice service



We adapted and streamlined our email advice to enable us to deal with a high volume of queries quickly and effectively. We also improved accessibility by creating an email advice form on our new website.

**In total we dealt with over 9,000 email advice queries**

## Supporting the most vulnerable

Reaching the most vulnerable within our community has always been a priority for our service, but without our drop-in advice services we knew that some people would find it more challenging to contact us.

### Reaching-out phone calls

In the first eight weeks of the pandemic we made calls to over 100 of our most vulnerable recent clients, giving them details of how best to contact us and checking that they had the support they needed.

*“Wonderful. I had help to complete the forms and my claim was successful. I’m so pleased.”*



### Face-to-Face appointments for the most vulnerable

As soon as government restrictions allowed, we began offering a specialist face-to-face service for the people we knew needed to see us in person. We adapted our offices to deliver this advice in a Covid-safe environment and introduced video calls for clients who couldn't get to us in person.

### Emergency support

Throughout the year we've helped people access emergency support in the form of Covid fuel grants and food bank vouchers. Our offices in Winchester and Bishop's Waltham have also been used as drop-off points for paperwork to enable us to help people who need extra support with paperwork or are digitally excluded.

*“They were very helpful in a situation I didn't think anyone could help [me with].”*

### Working in partnership

To help us reach the people who need us most, we've initiated an innovative partnership with other local organisations in our community (including Hampshire Fire and Rescue and local food banks). Our Advice First Aid programme trains staff and volunteers in other organisations who deal with vulnerable people to deliver basic support and refer into us when needed.

# The difference our local service has made to our community

We have helped more people with more issues than ever before during this challenging time, providing an accessible, free advice service to thousands of people in need. We've done this with kindness, compassion and without judgment.



We've supported people with a whole range of different issues including employment, housing, benefits advice, discrimination, relationship rights, consumer problems, scams, debts and more.

*"I was very satisfied with [the] advice given. The problem is resolved as a result of the information I received."*

Feedback from those we have helped has been extremely positive.

- 100% of people said we responded to their email enquiry in a reasonable time
- 92% of people said the advice they were given was easy to follow
- 100% of people said our phone service has been easy to use

## David's story \*

David, who is 66 and lives in council housing came to us for help in November 2020 when his employer made him redundant as a result of the pandemic. He had been with his employer for five years and had already been furloughed during the first lockdown, but now he had no income and was struggling to buy food.

We helped secure a food voucher for David and talked through what redundancy money he should be entitled to from his employer. We also helped him identify which benefits he should apply for so he could support himself while he looked for work.



\*To maintain confidentiality, we have changed the client's name and the photo is from stock imagery.

Although it's not always possible to put a value on everything that we do, we know that our service is of enormous value to the local community.

Previous research and feedback from clients suggests that our advice can have an extremely positive impact on an individual's emotional health and well-being and we know that our advice can also lead to significant income gain and better financial security for our clients. In 2020/2021 we have achieved the following outcomes:



**£1.3 million**  
generated in  
financial gain for  
the people we  
helped



**£123K of debt**  
written off as a  
result of our free  
advice



**170 food bank**  
related issues  
dealt with over  
the year



**78 Covid Fuel**  
**grants**  
Successfully  
applied for worth  
almost £10,000

*"You've been really helpful and I appreciate it. I'm nearly 80 but it's the first contact I've had with Citizens Advice. Really excellent."*

### **Janet's story\***

Janet is in her 60's and has a mental health condition which has had a significant impact on her life. She had lived with her mum in a one-bedroom council house in rural Winchester for over 6 years, but during the pandemic Janet's mother fell ill and was moved into a nursing home. Janet contacted Citizens Advice for support as she felt very alone and worried about the future.

Sadly a few months after contacting us Janet's mother passed away, and so we guided Janet through the steps she needed to take to remain in her home and be financially independent.

We helped Janet succeed her mother's council tenancy so that she had the right to remain in their home and helped her negotiate rent arrears repayments which had built up after her mother passed away.

We also assisted her in making a claim for Universal Credit and separate applications for disability benefits for which Janet was entitled. As someone who is digitally excluded, applying for benefits is extremely challenging as the process is all online.

Thanks to our support Janet is now managing really well. She is financially independent and is hoping to move within the District to be nearer to friends.

\*For confidentiality, the client's name has been changed.

# What's next for Citizens Advice Winchester District

We will continue to develop our service over the months ahead to ensure we meet the needs of the our local community and reach those who need us most.

- Our innovative new **Advice First Aid partnership** will be expanded to reach the most vulnerable people living in our community
- We will deliver a **comprehensive debt advice** service through our two new debt advisers, thanks to funding secured through the Money and Pensions Service
- Our **community outreach** services will be developed and adapted to make sure they are as effective and as accessible as possible to local people
- We will continue to recruit and **train new advice volunteers** to ensure we can meet the demand for free advice within our local community
- Our **face-to-face services** will be re-introduced safely and thoughtfully whilst maintaining our **phone and email services** alongside



*“My adviser knew what he was talking about. I had confidence in him. He called back when he said he would.”*

## Securing our long-term future

Funding is critical to the long-term future of our service. We are enormously grateful to Winchester City Council and the many Parish Councils who regularly support us but we need additional regular funding to maintain our core service and continue to adapt and develop.

**To make a donation go to [www.citizensadvicewinchester.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicewinchester.org.uk)**