

## Citizens Advice Winchester District: Client appointment policy

As a local and independent advice charity, we try to do the best that we can to provide a high-quality service to as many clients as possible. Our service is always in high demand, as many people across the Winchester District need our help.

An important part of our service is to advise clients by appointment, though often face to face support is not necessary, as clients can be guided to help themselves access information they need on our public website or by speaking with an adviser on our adviceline telephone service.

However, some clients need an appointment to discuss their problem in detail. Our service is provided by volunteers who try to do the best that they can to help clients with their problems. We can make telephone or face to face appointments, sometimes with a specialist adviser. We allow an appointment time of 90 minutes to manage room and adviser capacity.

Wait times for in-person appointments can be more than 2 weeks. To make best use of our resources and support clients effectively, we first need to understand their situation before booking an appointment.

In some cases, we may be able to help more quickly over the phone. Due to limited availability, we cannot schedule appointments without this initial assessment.

In most cases we are unable to book appointments on behalf of a third party without speaking directly to the client. Wherever possible the client should contact us themselves so that we can complete this process with us. A third party can contact us with a client for direct support.

When clients miss appointments without giving us notice, it can have a serious impact on the service because that appointment slot is wasted. This reduces the number of clients that we can see and prevents us from helping more people. For that reason, we have the following policy to deal with appointment problems.

### If you are going to be late for your appointment

If you are going to be late, please telephone and speak with an adviser via our adviceline on 0808 2787861 (staffed by volunteers Monday - Thursday 10am - 4pm and Friday 10am - 1pm) or leave a message on 01962 848003 as soon as you can. You can also email us on [advice@cawinchesterdistrict.org.uk](mailto:advice@cawinchesterdistrict.org.uk)

### *1 - 10 minutes late*

Please let us know as soon as you can that you are going to be slightly late – we will try to keep your appointment open so that you are still seen by an adviser.

(If we do not hear from you within ten minutes of your appointment time, we will attempt to contact you by phone in case you have been delayed).

#### *10 - 15 minutes late*

If you arrive more than 10 minutes late it may be that the adviser cannot help you because we may have given your appointment to someone else. It will depend very much on the circumstances of that day.

#### *15 - 45 minutes late*

If you arrive more than 15 minutes late, we will have assumed that you were not going to attend your appointment. Also, because other clients will be scheduled to be seen, it is unlikely that we will be able to advise you, and you will need to return on another day.

#### If you cannot attend your appointment

- If you are not able to attend your appointment, please telephone our advice line 0808 2787861 (staffed by volunteers Monday - Thursday 10am - 4pm and Friday 10am - 1pm) and speak with an adviser or leave a message on 01962 848003 or email us at [advice@cawinchesterdistrict.org.uk](mailto:advice@cawinchesterdistrict.org.uk) as soon as you can. This will allow us to give your appointment slot to someone else.
- If it is your first cancelled appointment, then we will try and give you another appointment as soon as possible.

#### If you miss ONE appointment

We understand that life can be complicated and that unforeseen circumstances do arise.

If you are going to miss an appointment, please let us know and we will try to reschedule another one as soon as we can.

- Please note that when we are particularly busy, it could be up to three weeks before another appointment is available. This is one of the reasons we advise all clients to attend their appointments, especially if their problem is urgent.

If you do not contact us to let us know that you are not going to attend, we will note this on our computer system and may assume that you no longer need our help.

#### If you miss TWO OR MORE appointments

If you have already missed one appointment, we hope that you will make every effort to attend a second appointment. If you fail to attend your second appointment and fail to notify us in advance, we will assume that you no longer need our help.

It is unlikely that we will be able to offer you a third appointment unless there are exceptional circumstances. In any event, you would need to access our phone, email, or drop-in service afresh. Alternatively, you might find it more convenient to seek advice from another organisation.

If you miss THREE OR MORE appointments, or continually refuse our advice

If you consistently fail to attend our appointments, or if you continually ignore the advice that we have given, then we may exclude you from our service. This will only be done in the most serious of circumstances and we will always notify you in writing if we intend to do this.

If Citizens Advice Winchester District needs to reschedule your appointment

Whilst we make every effort to ensure that you are seen when your appointment is scheduled, there *are* occasions when we may need to reschedule your appointment because a volunteer or member of staff is ill, or due to circumstances beyond our control.

If we need to reschedule your appointment we undertake to:

- Contact you as soon as we become aware of the problem. We will always try to telephone or email you to let you know that there is a problem. This is why it is so important to leave us a telephone number, email address or an alternative way of getting a message to you.
- If we cannot speak to you by telephone, we will leave a voicemail and/or email (if we have your permission) explaining that there is a problem. We will ask you to email us at [advice@cawinchesterdistrict.org.uk](mailto:advice@cawinchesterdistrict.org.uk) or speak with an adviser on our adviceline 0808 2787861 (open Monday - Thursday 10am - 4pm and Friday 10am - 1pm) or leave a message on 01962 848003 requesting contact from us to rearrange your appointment.
- If we haven't heard from you by the end of the day, and if there is enough notice, we will notify you by email or in writing of the need to reschedule. However, in some instances this may not be possible, as the problem may have arisen at very short notice for example, if a volunteer has called in sick that morning.
- If we need to reschedule, we will try to offer you another appointment at the same location, or one elsewhere if urgency dictates that this is necessary.
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We apologise for any inconvenience that rescheduling your appointment causes you.

## Drop-in Appointment Policy

We currently offer a drop-in service at both of our offices:

Colebrook Street, Winchester: Monday -Thursday, 10am - 2pm

Wickham Community Centre Hub:

Monday: 10am - 2pm

Tuesday: 10am - 4pm

Wednesday: 10am - 2pm

Our drop-in service is subject to adviser and room availability. If your issue is straightforward, you may receive immediate guidance or be signposted to relevant resources.

While we strive to assist with a wide range of enquiries, some issues are best addressed by other services, including specialist Citizens Advice teams. Where appropriate, we will signpost or refer clients to the most suitable service to ensure they receive the best possible support.

If you need more detailed help, like support with benefit applications, debt advice, or housing issues, you will probably need a follow-up appointment. We will discuss your situation and let you know the next steps to get the right support.

### Comments, suggestions and complaints

If you have any kind of feedback about our service including our appointments policy, we want to hear from you. Sometimes you may be very happy with the service. Sometimes you may not be happy, or you may be very unhappy with our service. However, unless you tell us, it is often difficult for us to know.

If you have any comments, suggestions or complaints, then please write to us. This allows us to consider your feedback in detail and we will respond to you in writing. We will always try to resolve the issue to your satisfaction if we can – if we are able to, we will try to change the aspect of the service that you are unhappy with or try to find another solution for you.

If you have problems writing or communicating any feedback, please attend our drop-in service and we will arrange for someone to take details of your feedback for further action.