

Citizens Advice West Berkshire

Annual Report 2020-2021



West
Berkshire



Chair Report

2020/21 has been a very difficult year for the world, for this charity, for our clients, and for our staff and volunteers. I am proud and delighted that, despite many obstacles, Citizens Advice West Berkshire has risen to the challenge. We are here to provide the best advice to those who need it and to support campaigns for fairer rules for all. You will see in this report some highlights of what we have achieved in terms of the service delivered and the impact we have had.

The quality of the work done by this office was recognised in our annual Citizens Advice Performance and Quality audit, which awarded us the highest possible score in almost every category assessed.

As a charity, we rely entirely on external funding. We are grateful to our primary funders, West Berkshire Council and Greenham Trust for their support. We also thank our other funders, including Newbury Town Council, Thatcham Town Council, Hungerford Town Council, Greenham Parish Council, Gerald Palmer and Englefield trusts, Newbury and Crookham Golf Club, other parish councils and personal donors.

Finally, and most importantly of all, I want to recognise the resilience, perseverance and commitment of all our staff and volunteers throughout this year. They have been resilient and they have adapted to unprecedented circumstances. They have persevered in the face of logistical barriers and new modes of operation. They have remained committed despite the strain of working away from their peers, having to deal with ever complex problems and being faced with heightened anxiety from our clients. Our staff and volunteers deserve the deepest gratitude.

Phil Cowhig

Chief Executive Report

Despite the changes to all of our lives during the last year, I am pleased to report that we have continued to provide a full advice service to clients throughout Covid-19 and the Government lockdowns. As we were unable to carry on with our face-to-face service, staff and advisers have responded to the challenges of advising clients remotely from home. We were also able to extend the number of hours that we were available to clients. This ensured that we were still able to help not only with advice and information but also with applications and ongoing support with more complex issues.

During this financial year, we have seen an increase in enquiries about benefits and employment, especially from people who have been put on furlough or made redundant. There have been many who have never had a need to access the benefit system before.

We know from feedback that receiving trusted, confidential and independent advice impacts and improves clients' health and general wellbeing. Looking forward, we hope to be able to return to face-to-face advice or use video platforms to help clients whose preferred method of contact is in person.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff and volunteers for their support, their willingness to overcome the difficulties posed by the pandemic and for their commitment to everyone who contacts us for help.

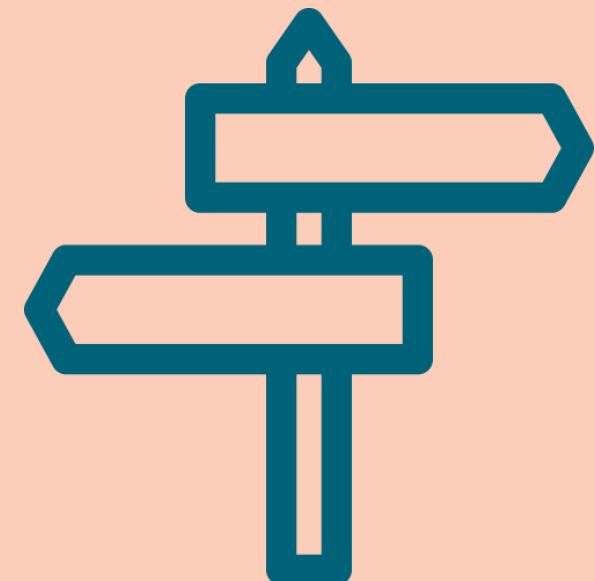
Sue Mackie

Citizens Advice

Citizens Advice was founded in 1939.

We give free, independent, impartial, confidential advice.

We give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem.

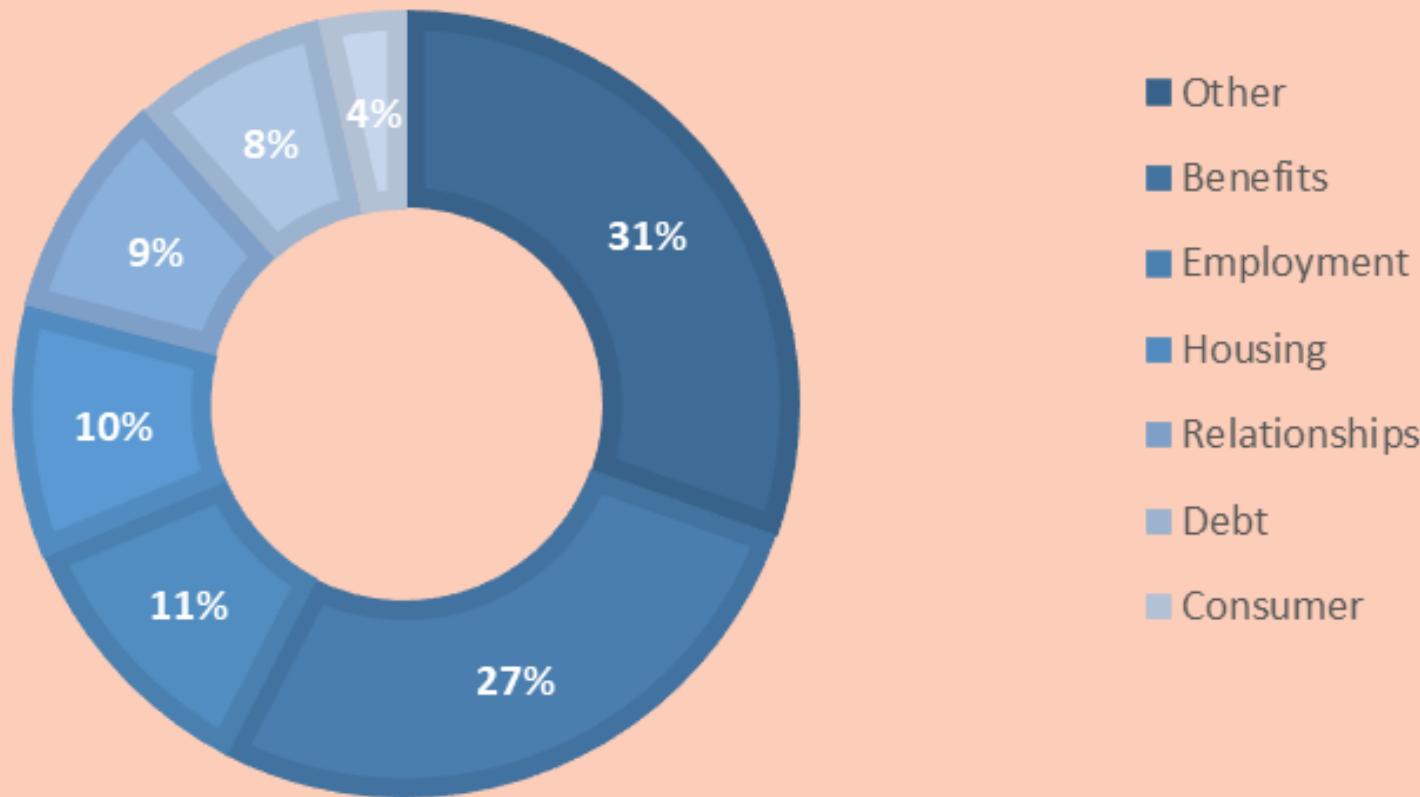


Our Service

Citizens Advice West Berkshire provides the following services to the people of West Berkshire:

- **General advice** During the pandemic, we responded to clients by telephone and by email. Under normal times, we also see clients face to face in Newbury and in our outreach services in Thatcham and Hungerford
- Specialist advice to **people with disabilities and long-term health conditions** and their **carers**
- **Money Advice** including specialist support for complex debt problems
- **Help to Claim Service** for people wanting to claim **Universal Credit**
- **Consumer education**

Our Clients



Other includes categories such as: Financial Capability, Health, Legal and Discrimination

Our Clients

“I cannot thank you all enough for how much you’ve done for us”

“...so much confidence to have a back up”

“I was feeling very ‘down’ but on speaking to you, with all your knowledge, there was a ‘shining light at the end of the tunnel’...”

“I would not have been able to see the whole process through without your support”

“I just wanted to let you know the great news from the outcome of my PIP review assessment...thanks to your help”

“Thank you again for all your help and support during a difficult time”

Case Studies

- Client A has mental health and physical disabilities. DWP refused to renew her Personal Independent Payment which meant that not only did her other benefits stop but her Motability vehicle would have to be returned which in turn meant she would not be able to continue working. We successfully challenged the decision and her payments were reinstated for six years. Client told us that she felt empowered to act following our support and had a financial gain of £38,040.
- Client B was subjected to domestic violence and we enabled her to secure accommodation following a move from another area, which included negotiating with her previous Housing Association. The client had mental health problems and was supporting two disabled children. We helped the client claim all of the relevant benefits and worked closely with her and other local agencies who could provide the appropriate support. We also helped the client when she faced discrimination in the housing sector. The client reported that she felt that her health and capacity to manage had been improved following our assistance.
- Many of the clients that came to us for help during the pandemic were struggling to access the services they needed due to lockdown and needed assistance with digital skills. We were able to contact agencies on their behalf and complete paperwork for them.



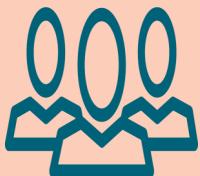
Our Impact

We had over 7,000 contacts with and on behalf of our clients and helped them to deal with 8,194 issues



£871,431 in savings to government

Reducing pressures on public service, eg. health, local authority housing and homelessness services and out-of-work benefits



£4,667,878 in public value

Clients participating in the community so providing wider economic and social benefits



£2,992,355 in public value of improving clients' wellbeing

Including emotional wellbeing, family relationships and positive functioning



£2,432,666 in benefits to individuals

Value to our clients, eg. income gained through benefits, debts written off and consumer problems solved

Research and Campaigns

Citizens Advice does more than provide advice to clients. Our twin aim is to conduct research and campaigns to tackle the root cause of the issues that bring clients to us.

Evidence-based policy - During the Coronavirus epidemic, our evidence-based, agile advocacy has been crucial in influencing a fast-changing policy landscape. We supplied evidence to national Citizens Advice and local decision-makers, including Laura Farris MP, on the impact of the Coronavirus on our clients' lives. Our evidence and campaigns helped secure a £20 uplift in Universal Credit and Tax Credits, changes to the furlough scheme and a ban on evictions in the private rented sector.

Local campaigns - We continued our successful collaboration with West Berkshire Council's Public Protection Partnership and its Trading Standards Service. In June 2020 for Scams Awareness Month, our scams education campaign was focused online and through local media. We distributed campaign materials through a local Meals on Wheels service, ensuring that older people who were shielding received advice on scams.



General helpline: 01635 516605 or 0808 2787994

Carers Advice Service (welfare benefits): 01635 516609

Help to Claim, Universal Credit helpline: 0800 1448444

**Online advice: <https://online.citizensadvicewestberkshire.org.uk/>
www.citizensadvicewestberkshire.org.uk**

Twitter @WestBerksCAB

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

We are a local independent charity and rely on donations from individuals and organisations to continue helping the residents of West Berkshire. If you want to support our work please see: www.citizensadvicewestberkshire.org.uk or send a cheque to the address below.

Citizens Advice West Berkshire is an operating name of West Berkshire Citizens Advice Bureau, which is a Charity and Limited Company registered in England and Wales. Registered Office: 2nd Floor, Broadway House, 4-8 The Broadway, Northbrook Street, Newbury RG14 1BA. Registered Charity No 1115036, Registered Company No 05821486 www.citizensadvicewestberkshire.org.uk Authorised and regulated by the FCA, FRN: 617791

The CAWB Trustee Board oversee the information security of all personal information of our clients, staff, funders and strategic partners that is processed. CAWB hold joint responsibility for client data that is held in our case management system, with the national Citizens Advice Service. An information assurance management team exists to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal and sensitive data is maintained to a level which is compliant with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.