

Life goes on...

**We're here
to help**

**citizens
advice**

**Sherwood
& Newark**

Annual Report
2019/20

A View from the Chair

Life goes on

Positive Thoughts and Actions

Since March this year we have been living in unprecedented times, that are unpredictable as well as extremely stressful emotionally and financially, not only for us all in the service but to all our clients, facing loss of income, loss of jobs but also the loss of their friends and family.

I want to start by sharing not only mine, but on behalf of the rest of the Trustee Board our real heartfelt appreciation, admiration and gratitude for the commitment, in meeting the challenges faced daily. To all our team involved from our employees and our volunteers, who have and are going above and beyond in such trying times, we thank you all. I must also mention and thank our Citizens Advice partners especially Broxtowe and Ashfield for all their cooperation in partnership and trust.

We have all heard the term the 'New Normal', I am pleased to say that due to foresight and vision from our Chief Officer and Trustees, along with willing partners in other local Citizens Advice, we were ahead of the game. The creation of

the shared service model was underway before COVID-19 and since COVID-19 it has picked up real momentum, and I must say without the cooperation and leverage of a shared service model it would have been difficult to achieve the level of services we have done to date. We have adopted new technologies Video, Chat with more to come that have changed the way we engage and support our clients, as they say necessity is the mother of all invention, this for us has been proven true. We will still need our face to face model, but will complement this with Phone, chat and video enabling our reach to support our clients in a much broader manner.

Finally, the ongoing demands on us as a service will continue to increase for the foreseeable future as our clients will require our skills and services to help and support them and their families through some tough times financially and emotionally. To achieve meeting these increasing demands we all need to pull together, support and watch each other through the hard times ahead, after all the quality of service is down to our employees and volunteers, it has now more than ever emphasised the real contribution to society and individuals we all make, through dedication and commitment.

It has been a wonderful year for us as a service in uncharted challenging times, and I expect that the teams will continue to rise to the further challenges ahead in the years to come.

Neil Buckley, Chair

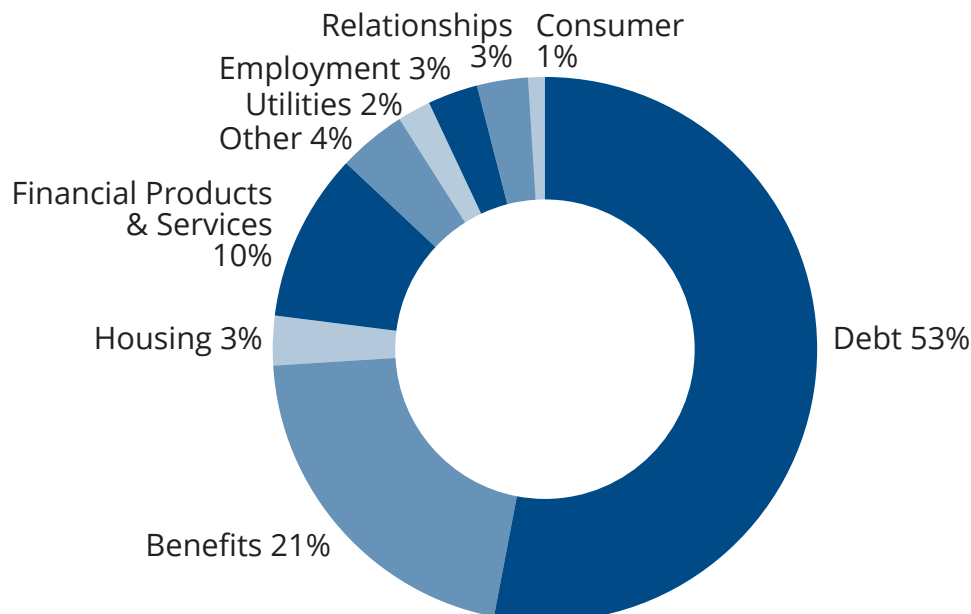


How Did We Do?



93% of clients happy with our service

And this is why people came to us



Our Homelessness Prevention Work

As part of this year's report we wanted to inform on our work in partnership with Newark & Sherwood District Council which prevents homelessness across Newark & Sherwood. We employ a specialist debt caseworker who represents tenants of private sector landlords, social housing, and Newark & Sherwood District Council tenants along with people with mortgages.

The level of advice provided by our Debt Caseworker is for cases that require specialist intervention, representation and advocacy. We work in close cooperation with Newark & Sherwood housing officers and Housing Options service to deliver the following objectives:-

- Maximise the homeless prevention resources in the District and increase the number of homeless preventions.
- Create greater cooperation aimed at delivering the Authorities obligations under the Homeless Prevention Act.
- Provide an additional source of reported prevention through Citizens Advice's money advice caseworkers.
- Provide a housing safety net to Universal Credit claimants.

Demand for debt & housing advice has increased over the last 12 months and we achieved the following outputs during the year:

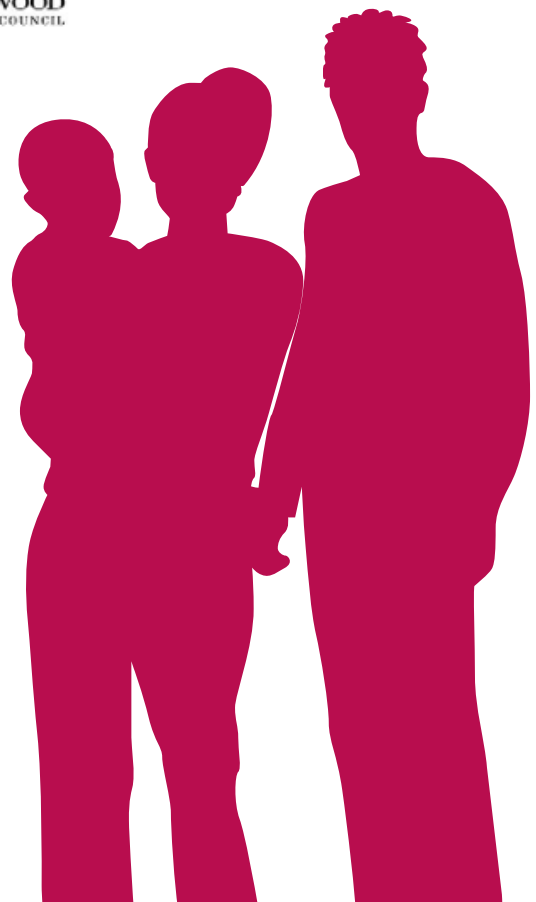
- 223 Individuals Assisted with budgeting advice and debt casework
- 104 households received specialist advice preventing homelessness
 - 48 evictions prevented
 - 56 households threatened homeless that we resolved

104 households received specialist advice preventing homelessness

- £59,796 in additional benefits gained for Newark & Sherwood residents lifting people out of poverty and putting money back into the Newark & Sherwood economy.

We helped people to complete housing related forms, navigate home search help and advice and discussed housing options with them. Our initial focus of importance is building relationships with clients, which helps an individual engage with the intervention on offer. This project enabled us to work in partnership and build strong links with organisations that provide services that meet a range of needs, including: mental health, physical health, housing, Local Authorities and other statutory services.

This in turn has helped us create a 'wrap-around' and holistic approach to homeless prevention. Clients were often assessed for more than their housing needs, with support provided to meet non-housing needs through this network of support.



Campaigning for Change

Our Research and Campaigns Team seek to improve policies and practices that impact on people's lives. We use our client insight to:

- help us research issues further
- influence decision makers to change policies and practices.

Our work is influential both locally and nationally. It has contributed to changes in the way Universal Credit is administered, proposed legislation to improve the security of housing tenure and the introduction of energy price caps.

This year we set the following local campaign priorities:

Homelessness

Changes to the legal framework around homelessness from April 2018 include a wider duty on local authorities. Along with our colleagues in Nottinghamshire we set out to see how this was working in the county.

The resulting report found:

- Local authorities in Nottinghamshire appear to be striving to work to the new challenges
- Housing stock is clearly an ongoing barrier to dealing with homelessness. Agencies need to work together to achieve the best outcomes for people.

In Newark & Sherwood, we have taken this information and developed a partnership with the Local authority to reduce instances of homelessness in the District.

Mental Wellbeing in Newark & Sherwood

We made significant progress creating the case for additional support for those who experience mental health conditions. People struggling with their mental health are more likely to achieve poor outcomes as



consumers and service users. By testing new ways of working with this vulnerable group based on early intervention and partnering with Nottinghamshire Mind we were able to significantly improve outcomes and wellbeing for those struggling with their mental health. We have contributed to national campaigns that lobby for changes in the way service providers treat those with poor mental health.

Universal Support Help to Claim Project

This project gives people the support they need to make a claim for Universal Credit, from starting an application to receiving their first full payment. The service is available face-to-face, over the phone and online through web chat. Clients can self-refer, be signposted into the service or be referred by DWP staff through a national referral route or by other partners through locally agreed routes. Everyone going through the service will be triaged to assess their individual level of support needs.

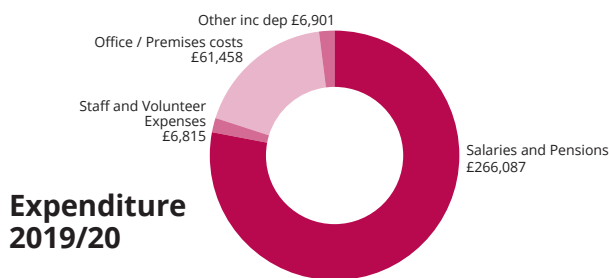
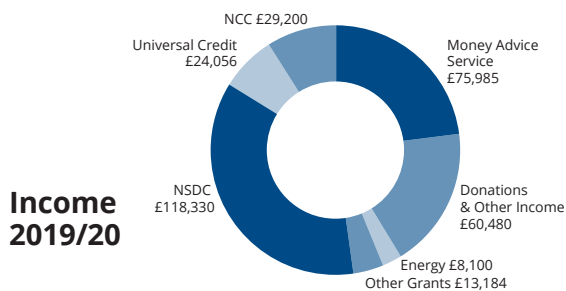
Those who can support themselves with some reassurance are helped to do so. More intense support will go to those who need it most. The service has received one year's funding from April 2019 to March 2020 with a further year's funding agreed from April 2020 to March 2021.



More intense support will go to those who need it most



The cost of running Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark



- Our main funders for our generalist service include Newark & Sherwood District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council. These run on 3 year cycles and we provide detailed reports and case studies to our funders to demonstrate the impact and value we add. We work in partnership with both Local Authorities to ensure we react to change such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Other funders for specialist work (debt, outreach and benefits advice) include the Money and Pension Service, and the Department for Work and Pensions.
- Newark & Sherwood District Council and Newark & Sherwood Homes also provide funds for our Community Debt and Homeless Prevention Project.
- We employ 11 staff and have around 36 volunteers.
- We are an independent local charity who rely on funders and donations to continue to provide a high quality advice service. None of our funding is ever guaranteed or taken for granted and we achieve high outputs and outcomes for our clients.
- In order for us to provide this specialist service it costs between £250 and £300k per year. The majority is salaries and pensions. It also consists of premises, office costs and the training of our volunteers to ensure the advice we give is accurate and quality assured.

Looking forward

In March 2020 we had to make the transition to home working due to the Coronavirus. We worked swiftly to ensure residents in Newark & Sherwood could still access our service during the pandemic by switching to give advice remotely.

We continue to offer telephone, email and web chat advice. At the time of writing this report we are slowly phasing back to our face to face advice to help the most vulnerable and those that cannot access us any other way.

In partnership with Newark & Sherwood District Council, our Newark premises was one of the first Citizens Advice offices across England and Wales to re-open to limited face to face advice.

During the lockdown all of our projects continued including our money advice, homelessness prevention and universal credit advisers working remotely. We also continued our valuable work delivering our Energy Advice Programme and working in partnership with Collingham Rural Advice Centre to remotely support Collingham & District residents.

We dealt with hundreds of enquiries around housing, benefits, employment and debt. We are preparing ourselves for high demand once we return to normal as we anticipate people will be hit with economic hardships and multiple problems due to the economic downturn.

This makes survival of our service in Newark & Sherwood absolutely crucial and we need to ensure our Charity has enough funds to meet the high demand.

It is also a worrying time for us as many funders have appropriately prioritised Covid-19 responses so in the next couple of years access to charitable funds may be hard to secure.

Thank you to our dedicated staff and volunteer teams who with the support of our Trustee Board made the return to the office possible.

How we change lives ...

Benefits

Janet* lived alone in her own home having retired some years ago. For many years Janet had worked in a physical job, unfortunately developing a number of health conditions which affected her mobility and caused her daily pain, therefore we assisted her to apply for a blue badge.

We assessed that Janet was also eligible for Attendance Allowance and successfully helped her apply. Janet was awarded the highest rate of Attendance Allowance and also got her blue badge.

The extra money Janet receives through Attendance Allowance enables her to employ a gardener and cleaner. This has made a massive difference to Janet's quality of life and at the same time created additional work for 2 other individuals...

Consumer, Benefits and Energy...

Adrian* came to our service distressed about a consumer issue and needed help with a refund for faulty goods. The company had closed down, only to discover that it had reopened under another name. Fortunately Adrian had paid by credit card and we helped him to successfully claim a refund under Consumer Credit Act.

During the visit Adrian mentioned that his outgoings exceeded his income and he'd been using savings to survive, causing sleepless nights. We identified that Adrian had an entitlement to Guarantee Pension Credit and Council Tax benefit backdated for 3 months.

Our energy adviser spotted that his latest bill was estimated, so we gave actual meter readings to his supplier resulting in refunding him over £400 and a reduced Direct Debit, alongside making a successful Warm Home Discount application for £140 per year.

Adrian's stress has been relieved by taking back control and no longer having to rely on savings to meet monthly outgoings.

Money Advice

Emily's* was afraid she would lose her family home having received a possession hearing notice for rent arrears, Council Tax arrears and non-priority debts. She became distressed in the interview, sharing that she had no personal income or financial support from her partner who was mentally abusing her and the children.

Emily agreed for Social Services to support her family while we offered practical help to deal with her debts. Due to her depression, Emily felt unable to attend court, so we completed the court forms, successfully achieving a suspended possession order on her behalf.

Following a request from Emily, we referred her to the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub and provided her with the contact details for Women's Aid. Social Services and the children's school continue to work with Emily and her family, working towards a positive outcome.

Universal Credit - Help to Claim Service

Derek's* legacy claim was ending due to receiving his state pension. To get help with his rent, the local authority said he would need to claim UC to continue. Derek, who lived with his wife, received disability benefits and had limited digital skills. We explained how UC would work for them and what their entitlement would be, helping them gather the required information and submit a digital claim. Derek advised us that the verification process had failed so we helped them resolve the issues to ensure the claim was correct for payment.

Derek and his wife were reassured to know what income they would have going forward and we were able to provide additional help with an application to Severn Trent's Big Difference scheme resulting in the maximum award.

Free, confidential advice. Whoever you are.



We help people overcome their problems and campaign on big issues when their voices need to be heard.

We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment. We're here for everyone.

With thanks to our main funders



And thanks to our dedicated staff and wonderful volunteers without whom none of this would be possible.



www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity.

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