

Supporting people... Building back



**Sherwood
& Newark**

Annual Report
2020/21

Another Challenging Year of Change

Another challenging year for the service, for our clients and for all of us individually. This has been the second year of constant changes, restrictions, and uncertainty. The Trustee Board have been taken aback and impressed how both Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark, along with our Neighbouring Citizens Advice Partners in Nottinghamshire, have embraced the challenges and changes being forced upon us, taking them in their stride. We have not only met our clients' needs but exceeded them. It gives me and my fellow trustees a huge sense of pride in what we stand for at Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark and in what our teams, employees, volunteers, and leadership can do in difficult circumstances.

This year we have seen brilliant staff and volunteers retire or move to pastures new. In early 2022 our long standing and dedicated session supervisors, Sue and Bill, will retire and we thank them for their unselfish commitment to the service and the community, wishing them all the best for their future. Finally, a significant impact on us all, is the passing of a long-term volunteer, supporter and colleague, who is sorely missed and leaves long lasting, happy memories for those who had the pleasure of serving alongside her.

Jackie and her colleagues have continued to drive the 'shared collaborative services' opportunity across Nottinghamshire, leveraging everything we do in common. The benefits

of this journey have become noticeably clear not only on costs, but through shared policies, processes, funding opportunities and knowledge enabling a dramatic reduction in replication of work. It has been a great initiative and one that has given massive benefit during these uncertain times.

We have all embraced new ways of engaging with clients and each other over the last two years delivering our support both digitally and in person. We are proud to say we were one of the first Citizens Advice nationally to reopen some face to face services for clients in July 2020. At the time of writing this, lockdown is being eased; at some point soon full services to clients will return. The trustees and Jackie are looking at what the 'New Normal' will be, this of course will evolve over time as things change positively or negatively.

I would like to mention that the trustees regularly strategically review our service capacity and offer to clients. We are operating in a very different advice landscape and to meet clients' needs moving forward, as a Board, we endeavour to implement a new organisational structure that will allow development including capacity for fundraising and engagement.

It is hard to exactly predict what is ahead, but we can look at the big headings as we come out of the pandemic; we can foresee debt, repossessions, evictions, mental illness, family breakdowns and abuse as some of the key areas we will have to deal with. This of course will affect our staff and volunteers in different ways, so through our wellbeing policies, we will support staff and volunteers in the months ahead.

Finally, I must reiterate how well everyone has handled the last year, we the trustees thank the team for all their efforts and commitment. Another outstanding year for Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark and partners, let's keep it going as a team, any concerns or questions feel free to contact Jackie or any of the Trustees, who will listen and act as needed.

Neil Buckley, Chair

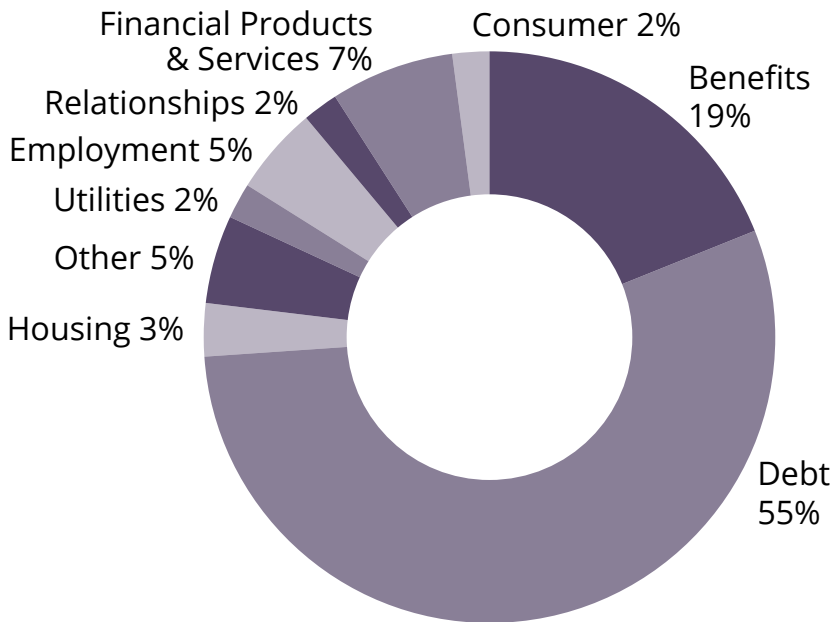


How Did We Do?



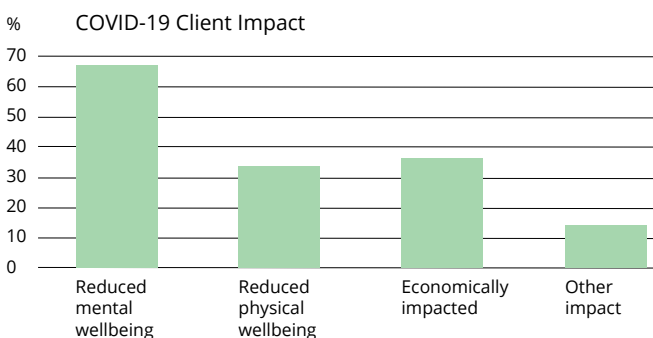
96% of clients happy with our service **4,008** clients accessed our advice service

And this is why people came to us



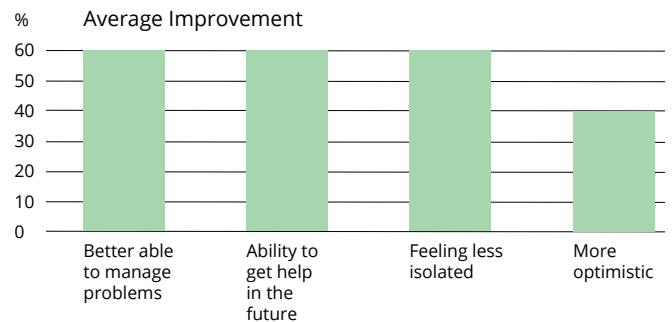
Helping our clients through a pandemic

Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark saw an increase in requests for specific types of advice during the pandemic. This included help claiming benefits for the first time, housing and employment problems. The majority of our clients (over 70%) contacted us as a result of being impacted by COVID-19. Our service proved agile and remained open to help people with the problems they faced. In a survey of clients we asked them how they had been impacted by the pandemic and they told us:



The good news is that our advice made a difference. We also asked clients about the outcomes they had experienced after seeking help from Citizens Advice.

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Our charity is using the knowledge gained during the pandemic to put together a plan to help our clients move forward and rebuild their lives. The plan includes:

- Supporting people back into employment, reducing the barriers they face
- Expanding our offer to social prescribers to improve health in Newark & Sherwood
- Supporting those with insecure housing status
- Helping people with debts built up during the pandemic



Campaigning for Change

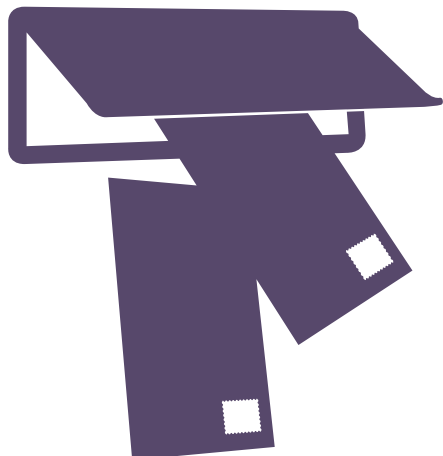
Research and campaigns remain a core part of our work at Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark. Delivered by our dedicated staff and volunteers, we are committed to improving the policies and principles that affect people's lives. This work helps ensure we can resolve more issues for clients, and then address the underlying long-term causes so that the same issues do not repeatedly affect clients.

We use the experiences of our clients to help us research issues further and influence the development and implementation of local and national policies and procedures; campaigning for positive changes to help not only clients but also the wider population. Through research and campaigns, we can reach more people.

Our work has contributed at a national level, to include influencing the government to adopt an employment single enforcement body and the extension of the £20 Universal Credit uplift. Locally we have been active in raising awareness about a number of issues, including energy, debt, mental health and wellbeing. We had a number of priority areas for the year, such as:

Impact of COVID in Newark & Sherwood

It is clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our community. We have been carrying out a project to identify how we can make a significant contribution to supporting our community recover from the impact of COVID. In addition to our own data and client stories, we have been engaging with partner agencies and towards the end of 2020/21 with our clients through an outcomes survey.



Scams

Working with a number of partner agencies, including taking part in the annual Citizens Advice Scams Awareness campaign 2020, we have been raising awareness with the people of Newark & Sherwood about potential scams, what to do if they have been the target of a scam and information about what they can do to protect themselves from a scam.

Universal Credit (UC)

The Best Practice Lead for the UC Help to Claim service continued to carry out research using our client experiences, our data and networking. Through this we were able to provide support and guidance to the UC Help to Claim project, significantly improving the customer experience in Newark & Sherwood and beyond.

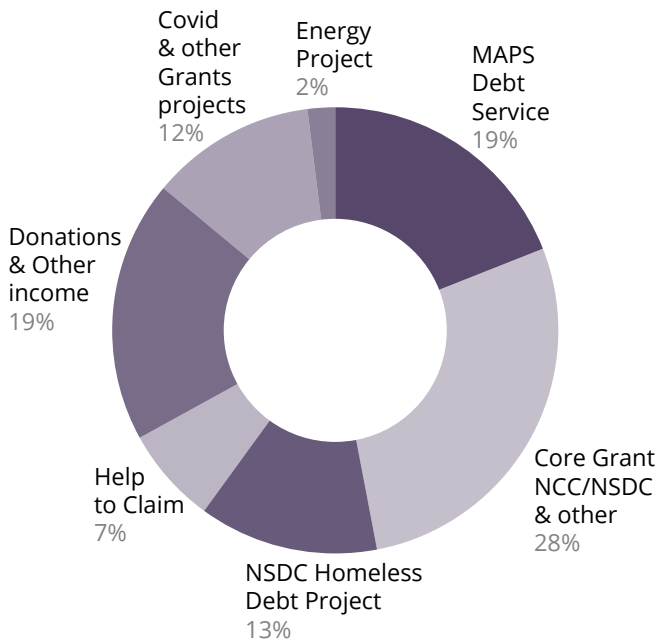


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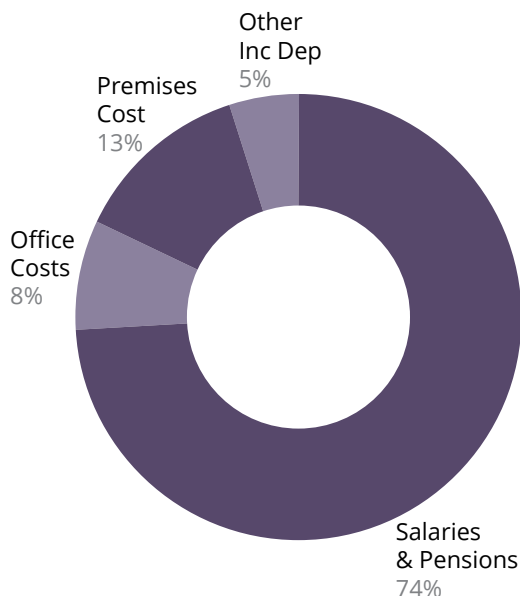


We make every penny count

Income 2020/21



Expenditure 2020/21



When we say we're here for everyone, we mean it

People rely on us because we're independent and totally impartial.

- Each year, Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark continues to ensure that resources are secured so that we can continue to meet the needs of clients.
- In Newark & Sherwood, people can access much needed debt advice funded by the continuation of the MAPS (Money Advice Pension Service) Debt Advice Project and Newark & Sherwood District Council funded Community Debt and Homeless Prevention Project.
- Ongoing funding was also obtained for the Energy Advice Programme, a Citizens Advice initiative, funded by the energy companies as part of their obligations and the DWP funded Universal Support Help to Claim Project which is available face-to-face, over the phone and online through web chat.
- This year we have been successful in obtaining additional funds to implement new working practices and to recruit and train remote volunteers to increase capacity and to deliver additional advice under the Covid-19 Service Restructure Project.
- Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark continued to play a key role in the partnership and collaboration work with the neighbouring five Citizen Advice services across Nottinghamshire.
- We now offer clients multi-channel options to get advice through face to face or digital channels, webchat, telephone and email.
- The Generalist Service saw an increase of six volunteer advisers in the service, however five volunteers left either to go into paid employment or for other reasons including the pandemic.

How we change lives ...

Energy

Jane* was struggling with her energy bills. She had agreed to switch from her current energy supplier to a new supplier following a cold call visit stating her new energy would be cheaper. Unfortunately her monthly direct debit increased by £20 a month.

We investigated and found that her new deal was more expensive than her old supplier and Jane had tied in for 2 years (£100 exit fee). It had also cost her £60 to leave her previous supplier. We challenged the new supplier and they agreed to refund the exit fees Jane had paid, plus £30 compensation for distress caused, but they were unable to move her to a cheaper tariff or waive the exit fee.

We advised Jane to refuse the offer on the basis that we believe she had been a victim of mis-selling and advised the new supplier that we would refer the complaint to the Ombudsman (Ofgem). The supplier agreed to review their initial decision and as a result agreed to all our requests. Jane was so relieved that she was no worse off financially.

Help to Claim

Joe* was worried about how he and his partner would make ends meet. He had started sick leave pending surgery and, until he could return to work, their only income would be his statutory sick pay and the employment and support allowance received by his partner.

They were referred to our Help to Claim Adviser who helped them to set up a joint claim for Universal Credit. Our support helped them to understand what to expect, how to manage the account, how what they receive would be calculated, and what steps they could take to maximise their entitlement going forward. We are helping Joe's partner with a claim for disability benefit and, if successful, they would receive an additional UC element in acknowledgement of the care Joe provides. We also assisted with a claim for council tax support.

Joe said he would have struggled to have navigated the benefits system without help.

Benefits

Bill* and Mary* are both retired. Mary is disabled and Bill is her main carer. They are both in receipt of a State Retirement Pension, with Mary qualifying for disability benefits to help with care and mobility. Mary was being asked to make a new application for Personal Independence Payments (PIP), she was anxious about losing her award. We advised on the criteria for PIP and helped to complete the application form.

As part of our holistic service, our income maximisation check found that they qualified for Pension Credits. Following a successful application for Pension credit and council tax support (including a backdate request) this gave Bill & Mary a refund of over £400. Their PIP application was also successful and Mary was awarded the Enhanced rate of both the Daily Living and Mobility component. The couple's weekly income increased by over £50 a week.

We also advised them on their Energy bills and as a result of their Pension Credit Award they qualified for the Warm Home Discount of £140 credited to their Electricity bill. The extra money each week has made a massive difference to Bill & Mary's quality of life.

Debt

Peter* had debts in excess of £35k that he had built over a period, many as a result of living on a low benefit income after losing his job 20 years ago. Peter had been struggling to make payments for a long time. Following numerous unsuccessful attempts to secure employment this had left him feeling suicidal with no solution. Peter assessed all his options, based on his mental health bankruptcy became an option. We were successful in helping Peter secure a charitable grant to cover the bankruptcy fees.

With our help, Peter submitted a successful bankruptcy application, making him debt free for the first time in 30 years. Peter's words were, "you saved my life".

**names changed to maintain confidentiality*

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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