

Appendix B – Service delivery due to Covid-19 Pandemic (February 2021)

Lockdown Lifeline: Ensuring adequate support across Newark & Sherwood during the Covid-19 pandemic

Coronavirus has had a sudden and unprecedented impact on people's jobs and incomes. Nearly 4 out of 10 (38%) households have reported lost income because of this crisis, with nearly 1 in 10 (8%) households reporting losing 80% or more.* (*Poll of 2,000 adults conducted on behalf of Citizens Advice by Opinium (carried out between 2-7 April))

At the start of the Pandemic in March 2020, we have had a 92% reduction in our volunteer numbers and reduced capacity due to people's caring responsibilities or health issues. This had a significant impact on the volume of clients accessing the service.

However In response to the pandemic, Citizens Advice Sherwood & Newark quickly moved to remote working and successfully delivered substantial levels of advice by facilitating staff and volunteers to work remotely from home. Then with the easing of the lockdown it was evident that some beneficiaries were significantly disadvantaged by the closure of face to face advice services. It was therefore crucial that from July 2020, limited appointments in person were made available with appropriate COVID-19 hygiene measures in place.

Alongside paid staff, on average we have had 15 volunteers delivering our local services compared to 29 volunteers pre-COVID 19. Due to the confidential nature of our service personal laptops could not be used leaving us with a shortage of equipment. However we quickly utilised the laptops at Castle House and secured additional funding to buy new laptops which ensured we could get more volunteers remote working where possible.

In addition to our website traffic, people have been coming to us for advice by telephone, email and through webchat. Many people we help were already in very difficult financial situations before this crisis and new groups of people have faced a sudden income shock.

We have also rolled out a remote training programme for new volunteers in readiness for the anticipated increased demand going forward, once all restrictions are lifted. Access to timely advice and acting quickly will reduce the risk of large numbers of people falling into unsustainable debt, facing eviction, or losing access to essential services.

Despite all the barriers we faced from April 2020 and with a much reduced workforce, our team of determined volunteers has helped 2,887 people with 12,235 issues (1 April 2020 - 31st Dec 2020)
Breakdown of some of the issues:

- 20% of calls related to benefits and Universal Credit
- 54% to Debt (top issue council tax arrears)
- 10% employment (we saw a massive increase mostly relating to Covid 19 related issues ie furlough scheme)

Quality of our services - We continue to be monitored and assessed monthly by Citizens Advice on Quality of Advice. As we have shifted to mainly to telephone and email advice, capturing profile data from clients is more difficult as many clients when seeking advice, wish to remain anonymous.