

# Supporting people... Building back

**citizens  
advice**

**Broxtowe**

Annual Report  
2020/21

When we wrote last year's annual report most of us would not have imagined that 12 months later our world would continue to be so dramatically affected by the ongoing pandemic. Whilst we have all learned to live with the necessary restrictions to our daily lives, we are also having to learn to live with continued uncertainty about the future as we clearly have a long way to go before we can return to close to normal life. Against this background those who face problems with employment, housing, debt, benefits, relationships and many other areas are more than ever in need of advice so that they can find a way forward, and many have found themselves needing this advice for the first time.

Our role in Citizens Advice Broxtowe is to be here to provide that advice and support to everyone who comes to us, despite the significant challenges in doing so during a pandemic. Last year, during the first lockdown we had to suspend face to face advice, but moved quickly to providing advice by telephone, email and webchat. However, we were very aware that some

of the most vulnerable people found it difficult, or impossible, to contact us through these routes and so in July 2020 we were the first Citizens Advice office in the country to reopen our doors to provide face to face contact for those unable to reach us by any other means. We have had to step back from face to face contact during successive lockdowns, but have always resumed it as soon as we were able. We've also continued to work closely with the Borough Council and other partners to ensure that we identify those in most need of support.

As we move forward there is no doubt that the need for our service will continue and grow, not least as some of the additional state support in the pandemic such as the furlough scheme, debt deferment and the Universal Credit uplift, come to an end. We are working to develop and adapt our service to meet that need, learning from our experience over the past 18 months and recognising what a new normal may be over the coming years.

All of this is only possible because of the unceasing work of our management team, staff and volunteers. They have worked tirelessly over the past year to sustain the best possible service while facing constant challenges and uncertain change. That they have succeeded so well is a huge credit to all of them, and on behalf of the Trustees I thank them for it.

*Simon Lagoe, Chair*

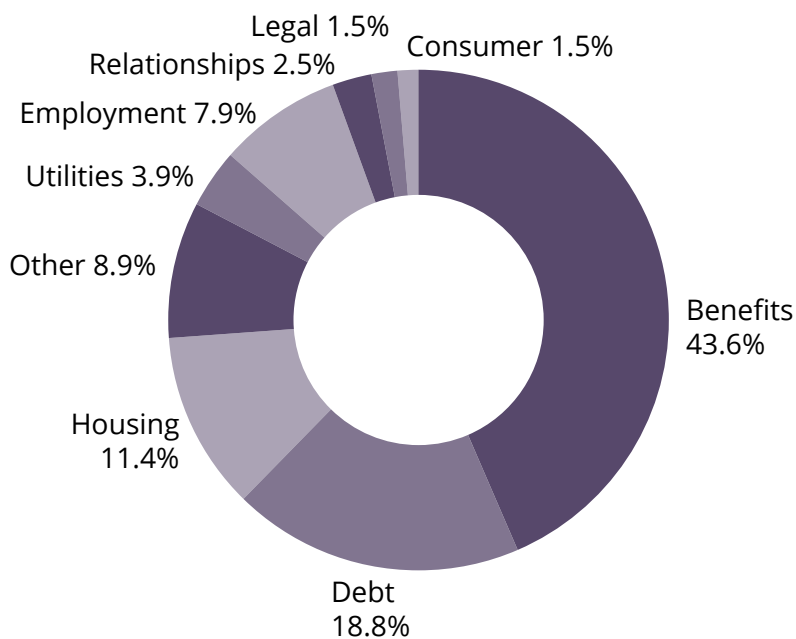


# How Did We Do?



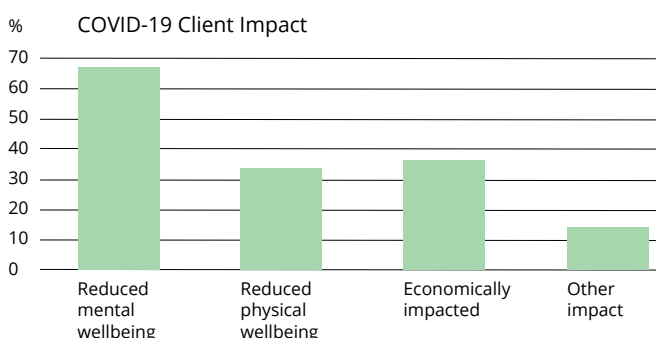
**95%** of clients happy with our service

## And this is why people came to us



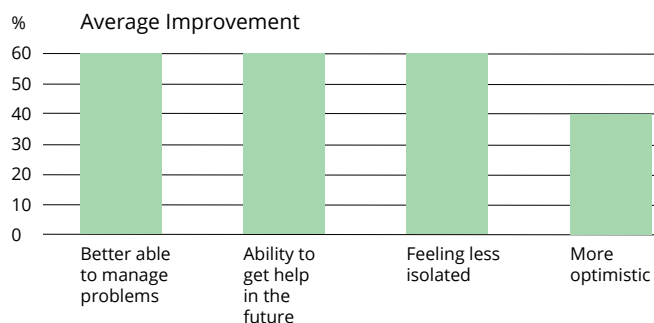
# Helping our clients through a pandemic

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

**The majority of our clients (over 70%) contacted us as a result of being impacted by COVID-19**



The 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 Broxtowe
- Supporting those with insecure housing status
- Helping people with debts built up during the pandemic



# Campaigning for Change

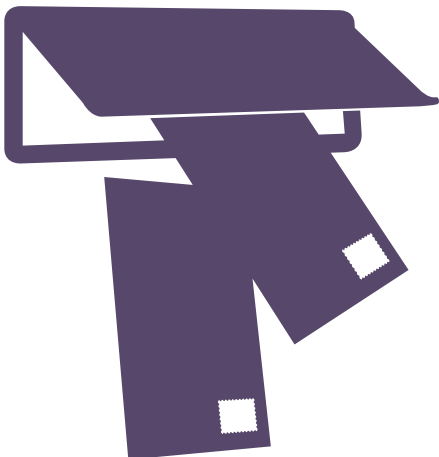
Research and campaigns remain a core part of our work at Citizens Advice Broxtowe. Delivered by our dedicated staff and volunteers, we are committed to improving the policies and principles that affect people's lives. This work helps ensure we can resolve more issues for clients, and then address the 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 Broxtowe

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 Broxtowe 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)

Our 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 Broxtowe and beyond.



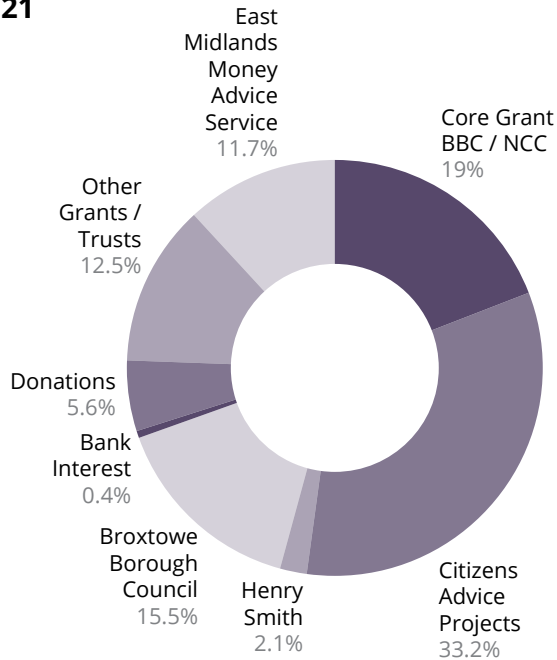
**Through research and campaigns, we can reach more people.**

---

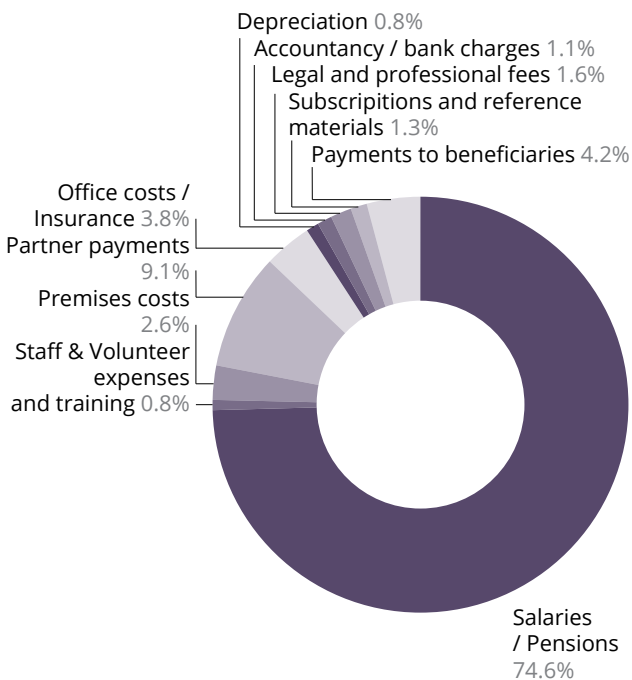
# The cost of running Citizens Advice Broxtowe

# How we aim to continually improve our service

## Income 2020/21



## Expenditure 2020/21



## Annual Staff and Volunteer Surveys

- 97% reported they were clear on their roles and responsibilities
- 81% said they have had the opportunity to develop their skills and knowledge
- 87% would recommend it as a place to work or volunteer

Staff and volunteers asked what is the best thing about volunteering or working for us:

**“Teamwork and helping clients”**

**“Knowing that we have helped people who need it the most and learning new skills”**

**“Everyone works together”**

## Continual client feedback

- 95% of our clients said they had a positive experience
- 91.2% said they would recommend our service

**“I think the service is excellent and they go above and beyond to help you sort out your problem”**

**“I value the support and attention I have been given in a positive manner and without judgement”**

**“I could not be more grateful for the outstanding help I received from Citizens Advice. The help I received was given with patience, understanding, kindness and care. Thank you so much”**

## Stakeholder feedback on how effective we are as partners across Broxtowe and Nottinghamshire

We asked them what they valued most about Citizens Advice Broxtowe:-

**“Their commitment to collaboration, partnership working and offering a diverse range of services”**

**“Shared knowledge and support”**

## Citizens Advice national team carry out an Annual Audit on our whole service

Having continually achieved a good rating we always listen to feedback and improve on any areas which benefit our clients, staff, volunteers and the wider community.

# How we change lives ...

## Case Study 1 Employment Advice

**John\*** worked, part time, for a local small business. He had no written contract and had been employed for just under two months, when the owner said that they had to lay him off due to the pandemic and look at taking him back on when trade picked up.

John approached Citizens Advice Broxtowe because he was unsure if his employer could act in this way. He was also worried about money because his immigration status gave him permission to work but no recourse to public funds.

We advised the client that based on his circumstances, he met the criteria for the furlough scheme. The client was unsure whether his employer was aware of the rules.

Citizens Advice wrote to the employer and explained the qualification criteria for the job retention scheme and how to apply. This meant the employer could furlough the client instead of dismissing him and the client still had income coming in.

## Case Study 2 Benefits Advice

**Sarah\*** had been mother's carer for many years. She had lived with her since the late sixties and herself was increasingly supported by her unemployed son who also lived with them. It is a council rent in mother's name. So when mother died from Covid not only did she lose her Income Support and Carers Allowance, but also the Housing benefit and Council Tax Support. Sarah is not computer literate, so we assisted in making a Universal Credit claim. We also liaised with Beeston Jobcentre to complete verification as Sarah had no form of photo id and to sort out support for housing costs. This also required close working with Broxtowe Council as the tenancy succession process will take time, so interim measures were required to obtain the UC housing Element. We then assisted in completing a Council Tax Support claim. Sarah has various health problems so arranged

with Sarah to help complete a Personal Independence form (PIP). We are now awaiting the outcome of the PIP assessment process.

We will continue to help Sarah however long she needs support and also refer her to our Wellbeing Hub to reduce isolation and build confidence.

## Case Study 3 Universal Credit

**Helen\*** contacted the Help to Claim telephone helpline requesting help with her Universal Credit claim due to having dyslexia and very little understanding of the benefit system. She was living with her mother who was in the clinically extremely vulnerable category for Covid-19. They had just begun self-isolation together to protect Helen's mother. She had no income due to her employer refusing to furlough her.

Having explored the circumstances with the client the adviser completed a full benefit check which showed entitlement to the Universal Credit standard allowance. The adviser checked that it was the right time to make the claim with regard to any outstanding wages due. Helen was helped to understand how universal credit works regarding her assessment period, monthly payments and the 5 week wait. The adviser was able to assist the client to navigate through the online form and submit her Universal Credit application whilst providing support on the call. Helen was then advised how to manage her online account, verify her identity, and apply for an advance payment.

The Help To Claim adviser referred Helen to a generalist adviser for employment advice and welcomed her back to the Help to Claim team should she need any further support before her first correct Universal Credit payment.

*\*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



## Thanks to the following firms of Solicitors who have staffed our regular free legal advice sessions:

Charles Newton & Co  
Robert Barber & Sons  
Hawley & Rodgers Solicitors

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



[www.citizensadvicebroxtowe.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicebroxtowe.org.uk)

Citizens Advice Broxtowe is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity

Registered Charity Number 1077828, Company Number 3618859

Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority FRN 617558

