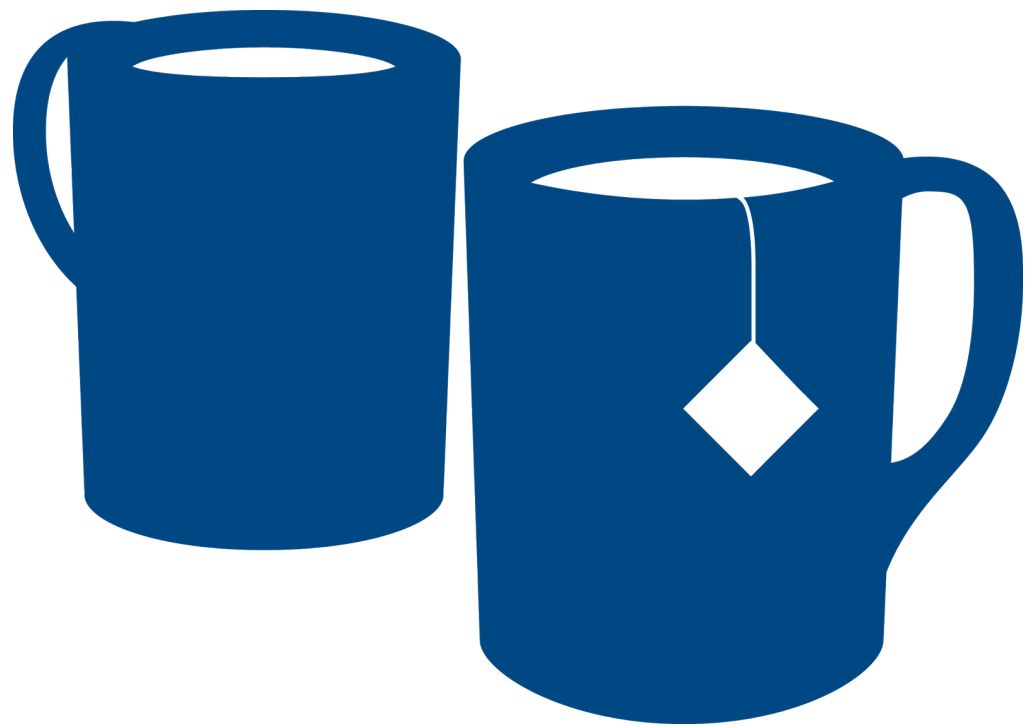


Mental health support in local communities

What role can integrated advice play?



**citizens
advice**

Roberto Merola

Mental health matters to local government

Mental health problems can have a huge impact on people's lives, families and communities. Approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK experience a mental health problem each year,¹ making poor mental health one of the most common illnesses in the UK and worldwide.

At Citizens Advice, we see firsthand how local communities are affected by poor mental health. 45% of people who have recently experienced poor mental health say they have visited Citizens Advice for support at some stage in their lives.²

Mental ill health is the number one health issue affecting our clients, and we work in almost 700 health settings across the country. This provides us with unique insight into the support needs of people with a mental health condition.

We also see how poor mental health can have an impact on local services and local economies. While recent research found that UK workers with mental health issues contributed £226 billion to the national GDP in 2015,³ mental health problems also result in economic costs estimated to be between £70 and £100 billion.⁴ This is a combination of health and social care budgets and funding for other services that support people with a mental health condition.



This briefing explores how **integrating advice into the mental health care package and local services can result in better use of council resources and better support for people with mental health problems.** Among Citizens Advice clients, 2 in every 3 have their problems resolved and 4 in 5 see their mental health improve after receiving practical support. At a time of significant pressure on local government budgets and rising demand on local services, integrated advice can provide a way forward.

¹ AVIVA, [Health check UK report](#), 2015.

² Survey run by ComRes on behalf of Citizens Advice, Jan - Feb 2017, 1,000 people with a mental health problem and 1,000 without, survey was nationally representative. Citizens Advice services include face-to-face, telephone and online advice.

³ Mental Health Foundation, [Added value: mental health as a workplace asset](#), 2016.

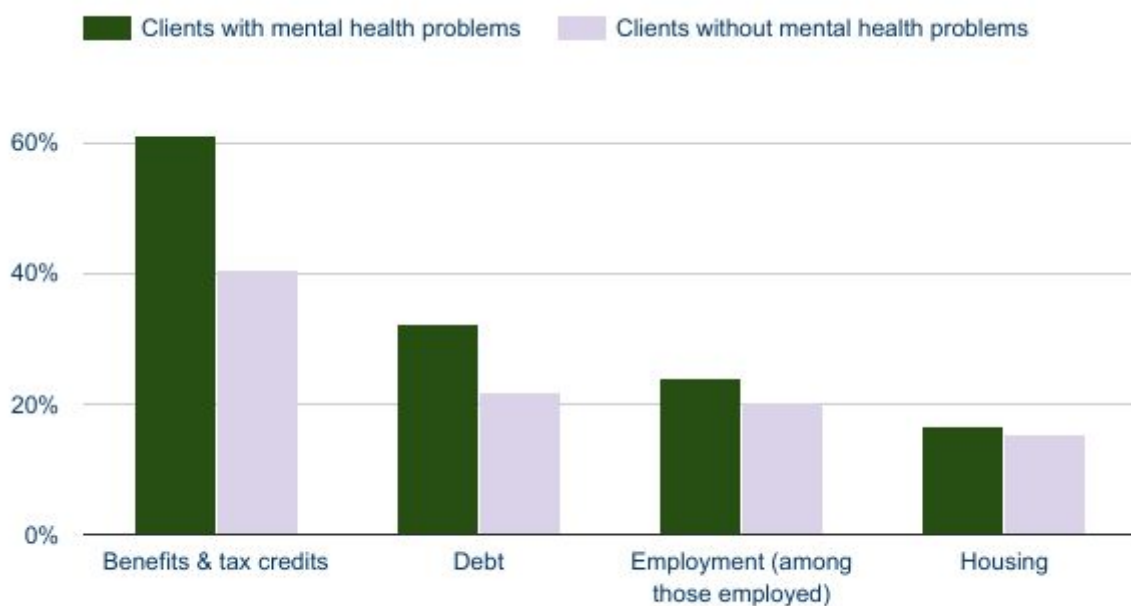
⁴ Department of Health, [Annual report of the Chief Medical Office](#), 2013.

The role of local services in supporting people's mental health

Mental health problems don't exist in isolation. Mental health conditions can lead to other problems in people's daily lives, such as with housing, money, work and benefits. For example, when going through periods of poor mental health, people can find it harder to manage their bills or make decisions.⁵ In turn, these issues can worsen people's mental health, leading to periods of crisis or standing in the way of recovery.

Among our clients, those with mental health problems come to us for advice for an average of 5 issues, compared with the 3.5 advice queries of our average client. As shown in Figure 1 below, our clients with mental health problems are more likely than our average client to seek advice on practical problems.

Figure 1. Clients with mental ill health are more likely to experience practical problems



Source: analysis of Citizens Advice data looking at clients in England and Wales with self-reported mental health conditions.

⁵ Money and Mental Health Policy Institute, [Strength in numbers](#), 2016.

Mental ill health can often contribute to or exacerbate everyday problems, which in turn can lead people to rely on local services. Among Citizens Advice clients, for example, those with mental health problems are twice as likely as our average client to fall into rent arrears with their housing association and to be advised on homelessness. Citizens Advice clients with mental health problems are also almost twice as likely as our average client to be advised on council tax arrears. In 2016, as well as advising 2,000 clients with a mental health condition on mental health community care, we also supported these clients with:

- 3,000 issues with local authority housing
- 10,000 problems with overpayment of benefits
- 10,000 instances of threatened or actual homelessness
- 21,000 housing benefits issues
- 27,000 council tax arrears problems
- 72,000 issues regarding Personal Independence Payments.



These problems mean that people who experience mental ill health often need more support from a range of council services than other users.

Alongside treatment from mental health services, many people can also benefit from getting help from local services with aspects of their daily lives. This is why local authorities have such an important role to play through the delivery of services like social housing, public health, social care and homeless shelters.

If left unmanaged, these practical problems can compromise the effectiveness of mental health support and local services. For example, previous research has highlighted how missed opportunities for cooperation between advice organisations, local councils and mental health service providers can lead to a

failure to identify people who are vulnerable to becoming homeless⁶ or falling behind on council tax payments.⁷

Practical issues left unresolved can also increase pressure on local services and costs to local authorities. Between £24,000 and £30,000 per person is spent by government annually on temporary accommodation and social services for the homeless.⁸ Previous research has also found that more than £800 million are owed to English local authorities in council tax arrears,⁹ and that the average debt to government is £2,078.¹⁰ Faced with continuing budget pressures, greater emphasis on preventative work is needed.



⁶ Mental Health Foundation and MHPF, [Mental health and housing](#), 2016.

⁷ Citizens Advice, [Catching up](#), July 2016.

⁸ Department for Communities and Local Government, [Evidence review of the costs of homelessness](#), 2012.

⁹ The New Policy Institute, [The impacts of Council Tax Support reduction on arrears, collection rates and court and administration costs](#), 2014.

¹⁰ Citizens Advice, [Helping people find a way forward](#), 2016.

Opportunities to work together

Local government, clinical commissioning groups and NHS Trusts play an integral role supporting the wellbeing of the local community. Part of this role involves recognising how mental health touches many aspects of people's lives - from housing, to employment to money - and linking services accordingly. This is essential to ensuring that people with mental health problems receive the comprehensive support they need, regardless of which mental health or non-clinical service they first rely on.

This 'no wrong door' approach is also crucial to reducing pressures on local budgets. In 2015/2016, Citizens Advice generated a total of £361 million in savings to the public purse.¹¹ This note highlights how, by working with Citizens Advice, local authorities can reduce pressure on local services and support people into work.

Integrated advice can reduce pressure on local services

People who experience poor mental health can have complicated support needs. Previous Citizens Advice research highlighted how meeting these support needs through practical advice can benefit healthcare providers. We found that around 19% of GPs' time is spent advising patients on non-clinical issues, costing the health service almost £400 million a year.¹² If non-clinical demands could be met in other ways, this would free up time to focus on patient healthcare.

Integrated advice also has the potential to reduce pressure on local services. Providing better pathways to practical support through a 'no wrong door' approach for people with mental health problems can deliver better outcomes for service users and stop their practical problems from escalating. Integrated referral pathways between council, clinical and advice services can build resilience and help people avoid periods of crisis.



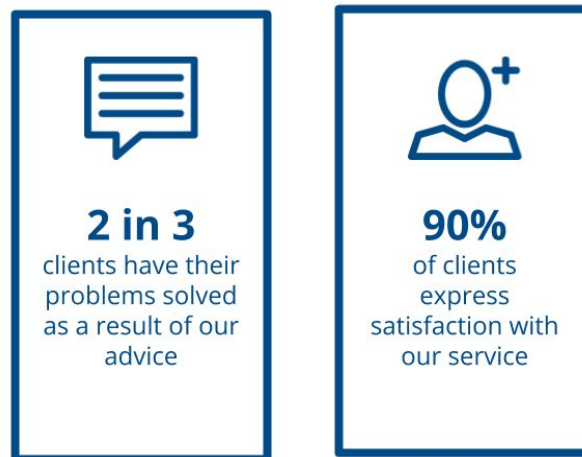
Tom lives in a shared house and suffers from depression. His difficulties finding well-paid work and managing his finances meant he fell behind on his council tax repayments and his debt was

¹¹ Citizens Advice, [Helping people find a way forward](#), 2016.

¹² Citizens Advice, [A very general practice](#), May 2015.

passed on to a debt collection agency. Because he received no support with this issue, Tom agreed to a repayment plan he was not able to afford. He felt his mental health worsen as a result of this. After receiving support from Citizens Advice, he was able to change his repayment plan with the debt collection agency and bring his mental health condition to the local council's attention.

At Citizens Advice, we are able to identify and meet clients' support needs early on. Our impact data shows that 2 in every 3 clients have their problems resolved as a result of our advice, and that 90% of clients are satisfied with the service.¹³ Helping people tackle these problems can have a positive impact on their mental health, with 4 in 5 of our clients saying they felt less stressed, depressed or anxious after receiving support.



Ensuring people with mental health problems have access to this person-centred support can also generate considerable savings for local authorities by reducing demand on local services in the long-run. Our previous research highlighted the fiscal savings Citizens Advice services generates for government departments. In 2015/2016, we saved the Department for Work and Pensions £149 million through reduced out-of-work benefits, local authorities £54 million by reducing cases of homelessness and the Department of Health £30 million by reducing the use of health services.¹⁴ In the same year, **for every £1 invested in Citizens Advice, we generated at least £1.52 in savings to the public purse and £8 in wider economic and social benefits.**¹⁵

¹³ Citizens Advice, [Helping people find a way forward](#), 2016.

¹⁴ Citizens Advice, [Modelling our value to society in 2015/2016](#), 2016.

¹⁵ Citizens Advice, [Helping people find a way forward](#), 2016.

Department for Work and Pensions

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Local authorities

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Department of Health

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saved by reducing the use of health services

NHS Liverpool CCG and Citizens Advice Liverpool

NHS Liverpool CCG commissioned Citizens Advice in Liverpool to work with 400 GPs across the city. GPs and IAPT counsellors make electronic referrals to the advice team which then works with patients to solve a range of practical problems. The GPs prescribe an appointment with us as part of their overall treatment.

The CCG commissioner told us that initially sceptical GPs have discovered that it not only saves time but also reduces repeat appointments. Over the last two years the team has dealt with more than 13,000 referrals and increased income for local people by a total of £12 million through unclaimed benefits and reduction in client debt. 80% of referred clients reported an increase in health and wellbeing.

Integrated advice can support people into work

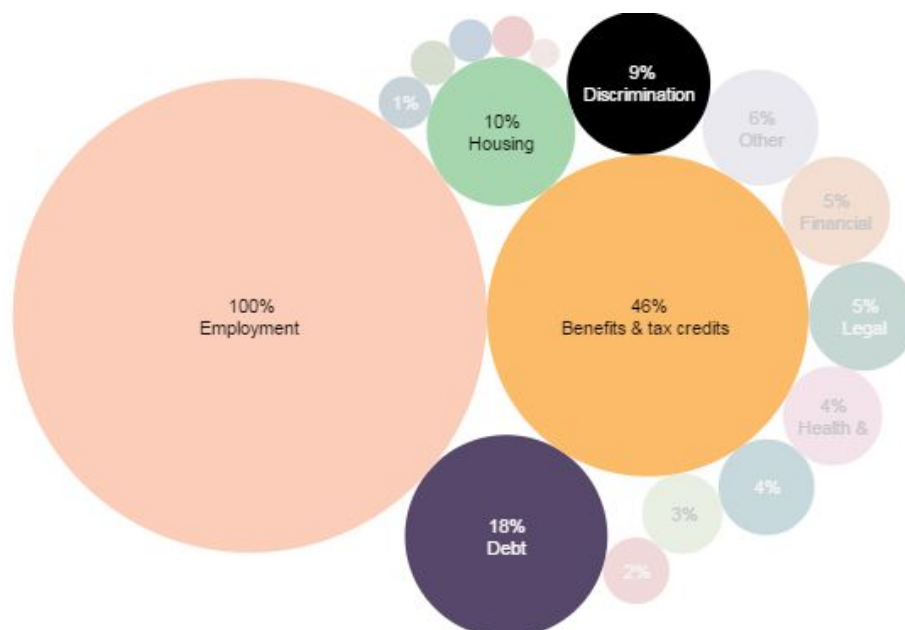
Developing the local economy by encouraging people into employment is now a core local government activity. A healthy local economy is key to raising local revenue and supporting local services.

In the UK, 70 million days are lost from work each year due to mental ill health, making it the leading cause of sickness absence.¹⁶ This cost extends to local economies, where boosting employment is essential for both the well-being and long-term financial health of the community.

Advice can play a key role in removing barriers to employment experienced by people with mental health problems. As shown in Figure 2 below, our clients with mental health problems who are advised on employment issues also seek help on a range of other problems to do with benefits, housing and debt.

¹⁶ Department of Health, [Annual report of the Chief Medical Officer](#), 2014.

Figure 2. Problems to do with work are linked to issues in other areas of people's lives



Source: cluster analysis of advice issues for clients with self-reported mental health conditions in England and Wales.

These problems can make it difficult for clients to meet the extra costs involved in finding work and reduce their confidence in trying to enter the workplace. Among our clients, 1 in 10 struggled to keep their job or find a job as a result of their problem.¹⁷ We also know that these problems are further escalated by issues people with mental health problems are likely to face, such as difficulties in managing money and homelessness. It's more difficult to get a job, or a bank account to have wages paid into, without a permanent address.

Practical advice can help people overcome these problems, reducing the barriers people face to entering employment. 1 in 5 Citizens Advice clients found it easier to do their job or find a job because of our help.¹⁸



Sophie lived at home with her mother and had no income. Learndirect referred her to Citizens Advice because she was suffering from mental health problems as well as dealing with the impact of a serious sexual assault. Sophie wasn't receiving any

¹⁷ Citizens Advice, [Our impact in 2014/2015](#), 2015.

¹⁸ Citizens Advice, [Our impact in 2014/2015](#), 2015.

support, was unemployed and not claiming any benefits. Citizens Advice helped her successfully claim ESA and access help from her GP along with specialist mental health support. Her mental health improved dramatically and she started a work placement. She was subsequently offered full time employment.

Citizens Advice Sheffield

Citizens Advice Sheffield is part of the “Sheffield Working project”, funded by the Sheffield City Council. It’s about engaging and helping economically inactive people back into work, including the harder to reach members of the community. There are 8 partner agencies involved including learndirect, Mencap and Reach as well as employment agencies and those working with ex-offenders. Each organisation helps clients with applications forms, CVs, interview preparation, training and confidence building courses and in-work support.

The role of the worker from Citizens Advice Sheffield was to help with all presenting issues, which can together become barriers to employment. This has included benefits, debt, housing, consumer problems and immigration worries. Since the project started, the Citizens Advice worker has brought in £79,247 in unclaimed benefits and has had debts of £84,030 dealt with.

Practical advice can also help people manage in-work disputes that could lead to someone leaving or losing their job. Our previous research found that people with mental health problems are more likely to experience unfair treatment at work than those without mental ill health. For example, they are 4 times as likely to face discrimination in the workplace.¹⁹ Disputes can also arise from a failure to make reasonable adjustments. Indeed, our research also found that employees sometimes do not receive any such support.²⁰

If left unresolved, these problems can escalate and lead to a deterioration of the employer-employee relationship. In 2015/2016, Citizens Advice helped 208,000 clients with 377,000 employment problems, and 2 in every 3 clients had their problem resolved.²¹

¹⁹ Citizens Advice, [Halving the disability employment gap](#), 2017.

²⁰ Citizens Advice, [Halving the disability employment gap](#), 2017.

²¹ Citizens Advice, [The impact of our employment advice](#), 2016.

Get in touch

Local government has an important role to play in supporting the needs of people with mental health problems and improving the mental wellbeing of local communities. Placed at the heart of the community, they not only provide services directly but also play a leadership role in bringing together other agencies.

Citizens Advice is keen to support the vital role local government plays in supporting local communities' mental health. **If you'd like to find out more, please get in touch at health@citizensadvice.org.uk.**

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.



citizensadvice.org.uk

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