

# Cost Of Living Worries Ramp Up Throughout 2021-2022



Looking back at the year April 2021 to March 2022, its clear that this has been a challenging year for many residents. Many of those difficulties have their origin in changes related to Covid such as job loss, sickness or disability.

These are exacerbated by issues such as low wages or low income, the cost of living rise and its especially important that people seek timely advice.

In recent times, Citizens Advice has for the third month in a row broken a bleak record for providing crisis support. More people than ever are needing support, with emergency financial situations where they are lacking basic food, money or cannot afford energy as well as our long term help.

## Moving Forward

Advice is key to the challenges of managing finances, debts and using income maximisation options whether that is through benefits, grants, or utility social tariffs. By advising people of their rights and how to exercise them, this can be life changing in impact. Independent research has shown that 94% people who have used our service believe the advice has helped them find a way forward. 9/10 also say that advice has a positive impact on their health and wellbeing.

In the forthcoming year, we are hoping to expand advice delivered directly face to face, in most Foodbank settings. In addition, we hope to be able to link with Chesterfield Borough Council, Public Health & Marches Energy Agency to take advice directly out to our most deprived communities.

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# Barometer

## Key Trends in Advice following COVID-19 pandemic



### Top 6 advice enquiries, in numerical order, were:

1. Benefits and Tax Credits 7,140
2. Debt and Money Issues 4,190
3. Universal Credit 3,761
4. Emergency Crisis Support 2,488
5. Energy and Utilities 869
6. Housing 831

£4,739,330 in financial gains for local people

£4,445,760 debt managed for local people

“The energy price rises will be potentially **ruinous** for many people in our town. It comes just as another new, bleak record is set for people needing crisis support from Citizens Advice.

“The support announced so far from the government isn't enough for those who'll be hit hardest. With the long-anticipated price rises now hitting, many more people will face the kind of heart-rending choices that our frontline advisors already see all too often”



We helped **5,976** people with **21,748** issues in the period **April 2021 to March 2022**



UC issues were **3X** more than before the pandemic



Debt Issues were **25%** higher than in the same period in 2020 –21



Energy and Water issues, including debt, were **49%** higher compared to the same time last year



People needing our help to access emergency food, cash or vital essentials was **5X** times higher than normal



**87%** of people using our service have an income below £1500 per month.

Our Service is used by people in all parts of Chesterfield though proportionately they are more likely to live in Dunston, Rother, Loundsley Green, Middlecroft and Poolsbrook, St Helens.

## Susan`s Story- Case Study

### Background:

Susan is single, in her thirties and lives in private rented property. She is currently working part time and is claiming Universal Credit (including help towards housing costs), Council Tax Support.

Things got darker for Susan during the pandemic. After she lost her job, Susan experienced domestic abuse from her husband. She left her previous home in the East Midlands to come to Chesterfield to make a fresh start.

A referral to Citizens Advice was made by a Health Worker as she had a number of pressing urgent financial needs. Susan has a troubling debt problem, she is behind with water charges and has nine non-priority creditors owing £10,075 in total as well as Council Tax outstanding from previous homes. These issues were causing Susan anxiety and she was losing confidence in her ability to manage money. When Susan has tried to pay creditors, this has left her unable to afford to pay on a prepayment meter that allows her access to energy.

### How did we help?

- By checking that Susan was receiving the correct amount of benefit going forward
- By arranging for Susan to receive an energy voucher so she had access to gas and electricity in an emergency.
- By applying for local charitable funding towards cost of fees to apply for a debt management DRO application (see below)
- Advising Susan to apply for a Warm Home discount. This is a one-off discount on your energy bill from your supplier. Susan may qualify under `broader rules eligibility` but this depends on rules set by energy company.
- By referring Susan to a specialist debt caseworker at Citizens Advice to sort out a multiple debt problem. The caseworker helped Susan apply for a debt relief order. A debt relief order (DRO) is a way to have your debts written off if you have a relatively low level of debt and have few assets. A DRO freezes your debt repayments and interest for 12 months. If your financial situation hasn't changed at the end of this period then all of the debts included will be written off
- Negotiating with the Water Company and assisting Susan to apply to the Big Difference Scheme, a social tariff for water, that drastically reduced the amount of water charges
- Advice about how to apply for a divorce

### Outcomes of Advice

- Application for DRO successful, meaning that debts to the value of £12,739 are written off
- Saving of nearly £350 per year in water charges
- Charitable help towards fees of £100
- Reduced stress
- Better knowledge where to get help in the future

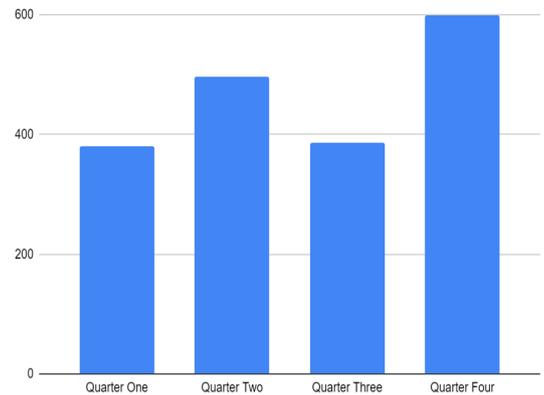


# The Rise in Energy and Utility Costs

The rise in energy prices and utility costs has led more people to have to make critical decisions about whether they can afford to 'eat or heat'. And we know that when people struggle to meet the most basic household costs that often the next step is getting behind with priorities like rent and council tax. There is a huge impact on stress and wellbeing. Research shows more than 1 in 7 people in Chesterfield cannot afford energy right now without cutting essential expenditure. This will get worse later in the year.

We'd like to see more stronger measures to deal with the cost of living crisis but there are key areas where we can assist people. These include:

- Maximising income including benefit entitlement, energy discounts, energy vouchers, energy payments or social tariffs
- Helping people access Energy Supplier Charitable Trusts
- Support people to register as vulnerable on suppliers priority service register
- Negotiating with Energy Suppliers and others about affordable payments and debts



**Increase in Utility and Utility Debt problems during 2021-2022**



## Supporting Young People through Change

From July 2021, we've started a new project supporting young people with funding from Big Lottery. We aim to provide guidance around :

- Planning ahead for big changes such as leaving home, starting a new tenancy or changing your plans
- Knowing your rights at key moments, such as taking on a housing tenancy, what to expect at work and where to get help if you have a problem

Recent work has included linking up with Colleges, Apprenticeship Providers, and others in the community.

Examples include delivering project work to classes of young people with particular focus on students who have overcome barriers, for example, because they have left care.. Future developments planned include a drop-in service for young students .



# Health, Wealth and Wellbeing Partnerships



For many years, we've teamed up with Public Health, Chesterfield Borough Council and other vital local services in taking advice and support to our Community. Recently we were at the Great Chesterfield Get2gether event at the Winding Wheel.

Our next plans include joining up with Chesterfield Borough Council, Public Health, Marches Energy Advice and others to take advice out to 12 communities in a six day period. To be as 'preventative' as possible, we all recognise the need to do things differently in order to help people.

## Partnerships

We recognise that partnerships and collaboration are essential to our operations to get the best possible outcomes for local people

We work in conjunction with a wide range of local services supporting health and wellbeing both before and during the COVID-19 response e.g. Healthcare providers, Public Health, Chesterfield Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council, advice centre colleagues, local Community Food hubs and foodbanks, Community groups, support organisations, including specialist domestic abuse and homelessness services. The strength of these partnerships has served the town well during the pandemic

## Financial Inclusion Group

Locally, we part of a multi-agency financial inclusion group that brings together advice agencies, local authorities, health and other support agencies. Recently, the group has been working together to find ways of how we can mitigate the threats posed by energy prices and the rising cost of living. In the forefront of our minds at this time is also support for people coming to Chesterfield from Ukraine.

## Service Update

Our Advice Services are continually evolving as the community emerges from the pandemic. Check in regularly to find the latest position.

- Telephone Advice line 'drop in' 09.00 until 14.00, Monday to Friday Freephone 0808 278 7843
- Face to Face Advice, Telephone or Video calls by Appointment, Monday to Friday, 09.00 to 17.00
- Home Visits for those most in need
- Face to face advice also available at outreach sessions including GP Surgeries and Foodbanks. Check with us for latest service details.

## Contact us:

- Telephone Advice line 'drop in' 09.00 until 14.00, Monday to Friday Freephone 0808 278 7843
- Service Reception Line 01246 209164
- Request a call back for Advice using an online form via website [www.chesterfieldcab.co.uk](http://www.chesterfieldcab.co.uk)



We were pleased that of our advice in partnership with Derbyshire Community Health Service was recognised when we were a finalist at the recent **Health Justice Awards**