

Monmouthshire County Citizens Advice - helping people find a way forward

Annual Report 2020

**cyngor ar
bopeth**

**citizens
advice**

**Sir Fynwy
Monmouthshire County**

Chair's Report - This has been a year of change and challenge for Citizens Advice in Monmouthshire although what has not changed is the commitment of staff and volunteers to the service and the help it provides to local people in confronting their own challenges. Nor has the support we depend on from our County, Town and Community Councils wavered. Without these strengths the service could not continue.

As anticipated, we entered a new contract with the Welsh Government to deliver advice services in close co-operation with neighbouring Citizens' Advice Services in Gwent. This provided less funding than enjoyed before and forced on us uncomfortable choices but the difficult decision to reduce staffing to fit the budget stood us in good stead when the greatest challenge of all struck in March. The virus lockdown forced the closure of all our offices to face to face services but thanks to the determination of our staff and volunteers, advice continued to be available. Indeed, the numbers of those helped increased. This has also accelerated our investigation of alternative means of delivering advice and the early signs suggest that this can both be effective and can help us reach some who did not access our services before.

We had also learnt of the decision of our longstanding and valued Chief Officer, Shirley Lightbound, to retire and the Board has initiated a careful process to consider the future and ensure we move forward in a stable and sustainable way having also carefully considered the robustness of our governance arrangements including a further appointment to strengthen the Board.

Roger Chater, Chair, Monmouthshire County Citizens Advice

Key Statistics 2019-2020

Clients helped	4625
Issues	8865

Advice Categories

	Issues	Client
Benefits & Tax Credits	3718	1730
Debt	846	442
Housing	757	471
Employment	733	425
Relationships & Family	709	426
Other	2102	1131

Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority - FRN 617672.

Registered Charity Number 1125068

Registered Company Number 6532431

Value of Volunteering

Volunteering with the Citizens Advice Service has many benefits. We help volunteers to:

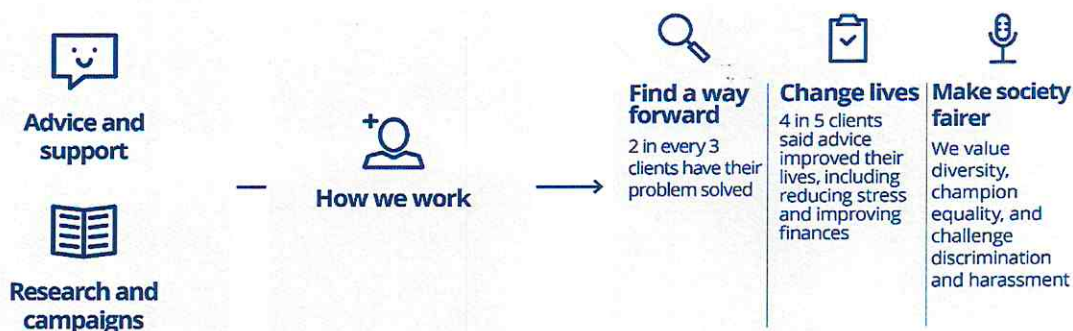
- ❖ Have the experience and confidence to move into work
- ❖ Improve employment prospects through skills development
- ❖ Better manage mental health conditions such as depression
- ❖ Improve their self-esteem, reduce isolation and improve communication skills
- ❖ Experience a sense of belonging through working in their community
- ❖ Over 95 volunteers have supported us in 2019/20

Thank you to our funders

Welsh Government, Monmouthshire County Council, the Town Councils of Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow, Monmouth and Usk. The Community Councils of Caerwent, Llanarth Fawr, Llanfoist Fawr, Llangattock vibon Avel, Llanover, Llantillio Crossenny, Llantrisant Fawr, Magor with Undy, Mitchel Troy, Portskewett and Sudbrook, Raglan, Rogiet, St Arvans, Shirenewton and Trellech. Comic Relief Community Fund, Reaching Justice Wales, Welsh Church Fund and the Friends of Monmouthshire County Citizens Advice.

Thank you.

How we help people find a way forward



What we do - Client initially approached us following a failed revision of her PIP award. She has been disabled for many years suffering with extreme mental health problems. She had tried to do as much as she could to fight the decision, getting as far as a reconsideration, but following this the sheer amount of information the DWP sent her in preparation for an appeal was simply overwhelming. We initially assisted with the PIP appeal. At the same time we checked her other benefits to ensure they were correct and discovered that her UC had still not added anything for her limited capability some months after assessment. It turned out that UC had sent a message in her journal that cl had not seen, despite the DWP being aware they needed to contact her by phone. This led to a second decision that needed to be appealed.

We ran both appeals at the same time, and were fortunate that the PIP appeal was stopped almost straight away due to overwhelming evidence we gathered and highlighted in our submission, leading the DWP to withdraw from the case and award the benefit. We are still awaiting a date for the Universal Credit appeal due to delays caused by Covid-19, but are confident following the PIP appeal that our client should be successful.

Without our support, our client would simply not be able to manage a full appeal. She was awarded the maximum amount, including a back payment and a continued award. In addition, our investigation uncovered an issue with a second benefit that by rights should be back paid over a 6 month period.

Our client is continually grateful for our support, but what she likes best is the fact we take the time to talk to her, ask her how she is, and listen to the other problems she has. She feels fully supported, and knows she will always get a sympathetic ear and support for her problems.

How we spend our money

Income:	£ 204,170
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Expenditure:

Charitable Activities	£ 218,421
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Governance	£ 1,778
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Total Expenditure	£ 220,199
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Balance Sheet as at 31 March 2020

Fixed Assets	£ 0
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Current Assets	£ 118,842
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Net Assets	£ 111,253
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Restricted Funds	£-123,642
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Unrestricted Funds	£ 234,895
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Our auditors are bdhc, Chartered Accountants

Free, confidential advice. Whoever and wherever 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.

How can we help you?

Our staff and volunteers are trained in many areas, including

- ❖ Welfare Benefits
- ❖ Money and debt issues
- ❖ Employment
- ❖ Consumer Rights
- ❖ Housing
- ❖ Neighbourhood disputes
- ❖ Making Complaints
- ❖ Tax issues
- ❖ Family and personal issues
- ❖ Energy switching, fuel saving and grants
- ❖ Pensions

Information Assurance

Monmouthshire County Citizens Advice Trustee Board oversee the information of all personal information of our clients, staff, funders and strategic partners that is processed. The Local Citizens Advice hold joint responsibility for client data that is held in our case management system, with the National Citizens Advice Service. An Information Assurance Management Team exists to ensure that the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal and sensitive data is maintained to a level which is compliant with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018.



Our offices are currently closed for drop-in face to face advice but we are still giving advice over the telephone, by video, web chat and email

Abergavenny & Monmouth Offices-
01873 856466 from 10 am to 2pm on
Mon, Tues, Weds and Fri

Caldicot & Chepstow Offices-
01291 422119 from 10 am to 2pm on
Mon, Tues, Weds and Thurs

At the time of printing this document we are looking into developing the ways in which we can deliver advice over the coming year and we intend to reinstate our “in person” contact in stages, depending on the suitability of each office to comply to government rules and to keep clients, volunteers and staff safe. We have an ambition to return to the opening hours offered before lockdown as soon as it is safe to do so and following communication with our outreach partners. Please call the offices on the numbers above for latest information.

Other means of accessing advice:

There is 24 hour access to the National Citizens Advice website at
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/wales/

Telephone Advice is available Monday to Friday 9 to 5 on 0344 477 20 20 or 0300 3302117

A web chat service can be accessed from the National Citizens Advice website by typing “webchat” in the search bar