

Citizens Advice Oxted & District

1st Floor Library Building
14 Gresham Road, OXTED RH8 0BQ

Opening Times

Monday—Friday 10.00—16.00

Except Weds 10.00—13.00

Appointments Available

Adviceline: 03444 111444

(Mon-Fri 10.00—16.00)

Phone: 01883 730259

(Leave a message)

Online: citizensadvice.org.uk

Text: 07746 946029

We wish to thank all our supporters who make our service possible, in particular:

The staff and volunteers
The Management Committee
Tandridge District Council
The Parish Councils of Bletchingley,
Godstone, Oxted and Tatsfield
Grateful clients

**citizens
advice**

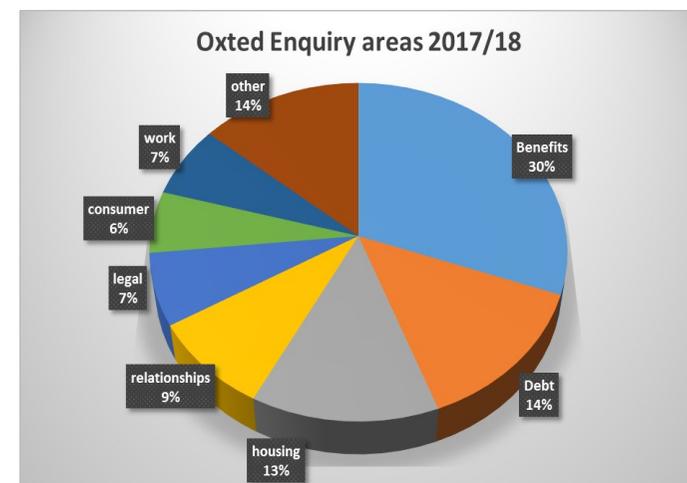
The charity for your community
Oxted & District

Annual Report 2017-2018

About Citizens Advice Oxted & District

There has been a dedicated service in Oxted & District since 1942, providing the advice people need for the problems they face and improving the policies and practices that affect people's lives. In our work we value diversity, promote equality, and challenge discrimination.

We are part of the Citizens Advice network located at 2,700 sites across England and Wales. We are an independent charity and could not do our work without the generous support we receive from our sponsors as well as donations from the public. We provide free, independent, confidential and impartial information and advice to people in Tandridge about their rights and responsibilities, in person, by phone and by email.

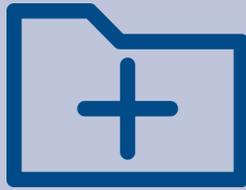


2017/18 at a Glance

Everyone experiences problems



1,064
People we
helped



2,018
Issues we
handled

What people came to see us about (top 4 categories)



30%
Benefits



14%
Debt



13%
Housing

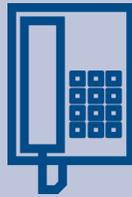


7%
Employment

How people contacted us



76%
Face to face



24%
Called by telephone

The people who make it happen



26
Volunteers



3
Paid Employees



9
Trustee Board
Members

Income Support benefit

A client asked for help after her Income Support benefit was suspended due to her not attending an interview with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This was incorrect as evidence from the client was not taken into account. We obtained help and advice for the client who was eventually successful in getting her benefit reinstated after a mandatory reconsideration by the DWP.

Debt

A client wanted to 'gain control of credit card debts' by coming to an arrangement with his creditors. A financial statement was prepared for him, which he used to contact creditors to agree a monthly repayment plan and all interest put on hold.



Some of our volunteers: Front row: Lynda, Fiona, Sue, Dave, Rosie
Back row: Roger, Cecilia, Fiona, Catherine (Deputy Manager), Simon, Gerry, David (Manager), Peter, Steve

How we can help:

Benefit claims and appeals for disabled people

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) provide vital financial support to disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

Claimants of PIP and ESA should be able to rely on assessments for those benefits being efficient, fair and consistent. During the year, we have advised on cases, from assisting clients in making the application, asking for the decision to be looked at again, to guiding the client through the appeal process.

The aim is to ensure that the client's condition is properly explained against the 'descriptors' provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and this can involve many hours of painstaking work.

Last year, we worked on many cases involving appeals. Around 90% of these cases were successful in overturning the DWP's decision.

'Thank you so much for your help and on-going support. I could not do it on my own.' (Benefits appeal)

Note from the Chair

We have enjoyed another successful and very busy year and it was pleasing to have passed the Leadership Self Assessment audit conducted by Citizens Advice centrally.

We have also achieved once again the Advice Quality Standard which is the quality mark for organisations that provide advice to the public on social welfare issues. To qualify we had to demonstrate that we were easily accessible, effectively managed and that we had the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of clients.

Citizens Advice Oxted is fortunate to have a highly qualified team of almost 40 volunteers and staff who are advisers, administrators, managers and trustees. Their contribution to the success of our organisation is really outstanding.

We have played an active role as a member of Citizens Advice Surrey.

A big thank you to Ian Andrews for his sterling work as Treasurer as he hands the purse strings over to Paul Green who has been gradually getting into the role in preparation for his new task. I am very pleased that Ian will continue as a Trustee and Chair of Governance.

A big thank you also to Tandridge District Council and our Parish Councils for their unwavering and generous support.

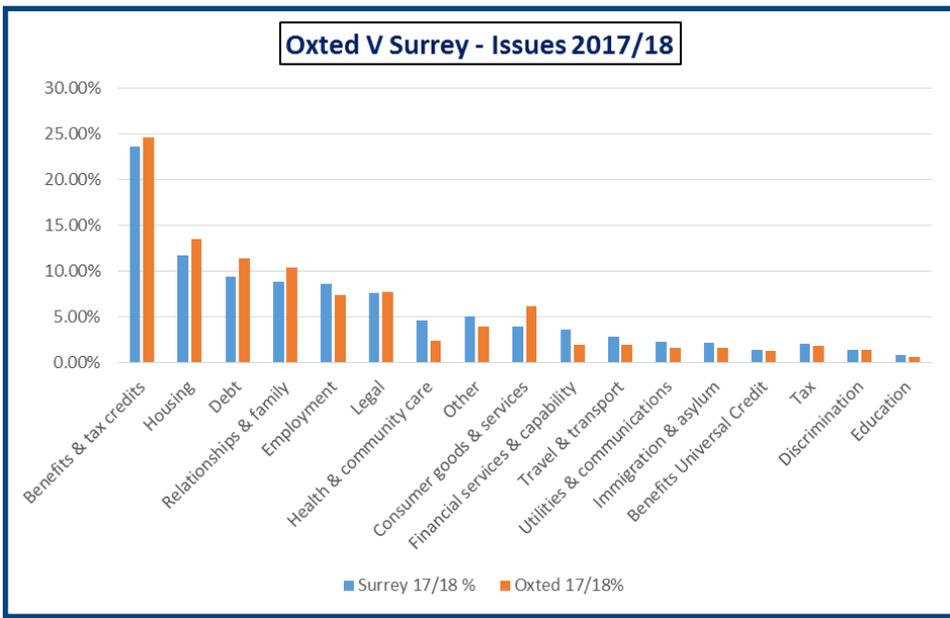
The biggest thank you must be to our volunteers and for the excellent service that they give to the citizens of Oxted and District. Very well done.

John Bowers

Manager's Report

During the last year ending 31 March 2018, we have continued to provide the service without disruption. In the year we have dealt with 2,018 separate issues for 1,064 people seeking advice including 780 new clients. This is similar to previous years and the rest of Surrey.

The main issue continues to be benefits and tax credits which comprise the majority of the workload and the single most common issue relates to Employment Support Allowance (ESA). This benefit is paid to people who are unable to work due to disability or sickness. The benefits system is changing with the introduction of Universal Credit which is being implemented in stages across the country. This may result in more clients requiring advice about benefit issues. The proportion of benefit issues is likely to increase once Universal Credit is introduced in Surrey from October 2018. To ensure a smooth transition we shall be working with the Job Centre Plus at Redhill on the changes impacting on our clients.



I'm very pleased to report that we have maintained an excellent team of staff and volunteers and have recruited more adviser trainees making a total of 26, an increase of 4 over the previous year. We shall continue to recruit a small number of volunteers each year in order to maintain continuity of our resources.

In the year we received 35 specific 'thank you' letters and scored 96% satisfaction rating in the anonymous client feedback survey. There were no recorded complaints from clients. In addition, we experienced scrutiny checks by the national Citizens Advice organisation and achieved a satisfactory report for our quality of advice and customer service.

One significant change in the year was the introduction of a new client recording system. This is provided nationally as an on-line system and confidentially records all our client case records with their consent in line with the new Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). This system has also enabled statistics to be readily extracted from the data base. Confidentiality of our client records is paramount at all times.

Finally, I give thanks to all our supporters, staff, volunteers, funders, helpers and Trustees who make it all possible. Also, to the other local charities who we work with in order to give the best outcome for our clients.

David Tucker

We need more Volunteers

We wish to recruit more volunteers to train as advisers, receptionists/administrators. If interested, please contact us using the details on page 8.