

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 *(for deaf people)*

Help to Claim: 0800 144 8444
(Universal Credit)

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 2018-2019

Note from the Chair

It has been a year of change!

Having guided our office for six years, David decided to retire as Manager and spend more time travelling in Australia and with his family. He kindly agreed to stay in post until the end of October, but sadly passed away in June. Under David's leadership we received high "audit ratings" putting our office in the top quartile nationally. Thank you, David.

'You are a fantastic organisation, I would recommend you to anyone! I am speechless with the amazing work you do!'

I am delighted to confirm the appointment of Catherine Wyncoll as Manager. Catherine enjoys the full support of the Trustees, staff and volunteers and we have every confidence that she will lead us to continued success.

Barry Compton, David Weightman and Victor Fenton have stepped down from our Management Committee and I would like to thank them for their invaluable contribution over many years. Ian Andrews has retired as a Trustee but left the Governance Committee in the safe hands of Kevin Alexander.

Two of our senior advisers, Roger and Cecilia, moved away from Tandridge District to pastures new. We wish them well and can look back on their marvellous service to the local community.

Note from the Chair (con't)

I am delighted to welcome Althea Davis to the Trustee Board and to extend a warm hand also to Liz Parker of Tandridge District Council and Stephen Mittins from Tatsfield Parish Council.

Universal Credit has been much in the news and we are now offering a new Help to Claim service.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of our service and I am pleased to report that four new volunteers have recently completed or are about to complete their training and two more are about to join us.

'The community is very fortunate to have you.'

We are extremely fortunate to have so many wonderful volunteers who provide an outstanding service to our community and have contributed so much to future planning.

Citizens Advice nationally is 80 years old in 2019, having been formed in 1939. This longevity has only been possible with the dedication and hard work of volunteers over the years. According to our information, Oxted started in 1942, 78 years ago.

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

John Bowers

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.

How we can help:

Mary's story: Disability Benefit Appeal

During the year we helped a number of clients with their disability benefit appeals with great success. Mary, one of such clients, is a typical example. She had applied for the Personal Independence Payment or 'PIP', and had been turned down.

We established that whilst she had no physical disabilities, Mary, a working-age Mum, had been suffering from severe anxiety and memory impairment for some time, since being subjected to domestic abuse at the hands of a former partner. She was unable to go out unless a family member was with her and able to drive her.

"I am over the moon and would like to extend my gratitude to all those who helped." Help with Disability benefit appeal.

Mary needed help ahead of the Tribunal hearing. Our adviser helped her prepare a statement of further information, with examples of the difficulties she was experiencing, and an outline of the help that Mary needed day to day. We adapted our service to meet Mary's needs and the work was done mostly by phone and email, as she was not easily able to attend our offices.

Mary was both relieved and delighted when the decision not to award her PIP was overturned at Tribunal. This represented about 4 month's work.

How we can help:

John's story: Homelessness

John phoned us initially as his Landlord had served a Section 21 Notice and he was soon to be evicted. He had already spoken to Tandridge District Council (TDC) who were processing his homelessness application. John wanted to know what his options for housing were as he feared becoming street homeless. John told us that he earns a good income.

John was found not to be in priority need, and therefore not owed a duty to be housed by TDC under Homelessness legislation. John was given help by the Local Authority initially under a duty to prevent homelessness and also to relieve it, which included referrals to agencies who can help with private rented accommodation.

Our adviser provided support to John in explaining what TDC's duties were to him. We also encouraged him to not give up looking for housing in the private rented sector, as with the shortage of council housing in the area, this would give him the best chance of getting a roof over his head.

John was ultimately evicted by a Court and became homeless. He was charged £200 by a letting agent to do a credit check on him for a private-rented property that he did not get. (The law has recently changed so that prospective tenants should not now be charged unreturnable fees in these circumstances).

John carried on working and lived in his van for several months whilst looking for accommodation. Ultimately he secured new private-rented accommodation. We worked with John over a 5 month period.

2018/19 at a Glance

Everyone experiences problems



People we helped
837



Issues we handled
2,191

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



Benefits
35%



Debt
14%



Housing
11%



Employment
9%

How people contacted us



Face to face
1,108



Called by telephone
985

The people who make it happen



Volunteers
22



Paid Staff
1.4 FTE



Trustees
9

Manager's Report

Activity

During the past year we have seen 837 new clients which is almost the same number as the previous year. We have handled 838 separate cases, 2,191 client issues.

Of the issues addressed, the most common topic was benefits at 35%, this was slightly higher than last year (32%). The office prepared for the launch of the Help to Claim Service which started on 1st April 2019. Funded nationally by the Department for Work and Pensions, the project helps people navigate the Universal Credit benefit application process. This may involve assistance with the online application or help with providing evidence such as childcare costs.

Apart from benefits, the other more common issues include debt, employment, housing, family and legal matters.

There are examples included in this Annual report of how we have helped our clients in the past year.

Resources

We totally rely on volunteers to operate the service and we presently have 22 people comprising advisers, trainees, receptionists and administrators. We are most grateful for their continued support. To ensure continuity and flexibility we continue to recruit advisers, the training of whom can take 18 months or so to complete.

In addition to volunteers we have 4 part time staff.

Scrutiny

As a member of the National Citizens Advice organisation we are held accountable for compliance with the laid down proce-

dures and quality standards. To this end a quarterly check is made of our advice given and an annual audit is conducted. As with previous years, we have been awarded a fully compliant score. Client feedback is very positive and we have received no complaints. We have received many 'thank you' letters and an anonymous survey showed 93% client satisfaction.

Development

Future development of the service will continue to cater for changing needs, for example the political decision to offer EU residents in the UK the opportunity to apply for settled status has been introduced and could result in higher demand for advice on this matter.

The late David Tucker

