



Annual Report 2019-20

**Citizens Advice
Runnymede &
Spelthorne**

www.randscab.org.uk

Introduction from the Chair

Last year, Citizens Advice published internally The Future of Advice strategic framework which sets out how we can stay true to our core purpose while radically transforming the way we do things. This has fortuitously provided us a vision and a direction in the face of the current COVID-19 pandemic. The framework allows us to move forward in an environment where uncertainty seems to be the only certainty and it is the responsibility of our leadership team to communicate and implement this vision and direction.

I would like to take this opportunity to provide a heartfelt thanks to all our staff and volunteers who had to quickly adapt to working from home. In particular, I would like to give special thanks and recognition to our Chief Officer, Becky Whale, for her leadership during this challenging transition. It is truly remarkable how our staff and volunteers were able to adapt to this sudden new way of working so that we could continue to help the people in our community solve their problems.

There will be many challenges ahead including the safe return to the office and establishing innovative ways of working. We need to secure more funding for our services and ensure that we have the appropriate capacity to meet the demands of our community. The framework provides us with a structure to do this and I have complete confidence that our leadership team will be able to drive this.

Of course, it should always be reiterated that we can only provide our services because of our volunteers so I would like to take this opportunity again to provide grateful thanks for all your hard work and your resilience during this time. As the country has fallen back into recession, your efforts are needed more than ever.

Andrew Fraser

Overview from our Chief Officer

It has been an exciting year, full of change since I took over as Chief Officer in June 2019. Ensuring our systems and processes were fit for purpose was swiftly followed by a full review of how our service is operating. It has been a real pleasure to have been able to get out and meet so many of our key funders and partners and to share our new vision for the way forward. Our key priorities remain the modernisation of the service, ensuring its sustainability, and continuing to strengthen our partnerships as we embrace new ways of working together.

It is no surprise that welfare benefits remained our biggest area of work in 2019-20, followed by debt, housing and unemployment, along with family and relationship issues. I am particularly pleased to see the increase we have achieved in financial outcomes which have increased by 44% from 2018/19 to over a million pounds.

I would like to echo Andrew's thanks to all our volunteers and staff who work tirelessly to provide our service to the residents of Runnymede and Spelthorne, and to all our funders for their continued support as we all respond to the challenging times ahead.

Becky Whale

The Year at a Glance

The people we helped:



3,177 people were helped through our service
with **11,273** issues.

How people get in touch with us:

42% Face to Face



45% Telephone



13% Email / Letter



Our Value to the local community:

£1,129,379

Total value to our clients.

£1,107,808 Income gain

£9,147 Re-imbursments, services, loans

£3,516 Debts written off

£317 Repayments rescheduled

£8,591 Other

Top issues we helped people with:

47%
Benefits



12%
Debt



10%
Housing



6%
Employment



Our People:

30+ Volunteers



10 Employees



7 Trustees



How We Helped Local People

We dealt with 11,273 Issues



You can see what people are searching for and trending topics over at the Citizens Advice website:

Advicetracker.devops.citizensadvice.org.uk

Top Benefit Issues

1. Personal Independence Payments
2. Employment Support Allowance
3. Council Tax Reduction
4. Housing Benefit

Top Debt Issues

1. Council Tax Arrears
2. Rent Arrears
3. Credit, store and charge card debt
4. Fuel Debt

Top Housing Issues

1. Private sector rented property
2. Access to and provision of accommodation
3. Threatened Homelessness
4. Housing Association Property

Top Employment Issues

1. Dismissal
2. Pay and Entitlements
3. Dispute Resolution
4. Employment Tribunals

Despite 75% of the issues being connected with benefits, debt, housing and employment, we see a wide variety of issues, including:

- Small Claims processes
- Applications for charitable support
- What to do after a death
- Liabilities following separation
- Child contact and maintenance
- Blue badge applications
- Power of attorney
- Application to the EU settlement scheme
- Access to and the costs of social care

Our Impact 2019-2020

What We Do:

We change lives by giving people the advice and information they need to find a way forward. This advice and information is free, independent and confidential.

Our Value to Society:

Beyond the value we offer to clients, our work has a wider impact that benefits society at large.

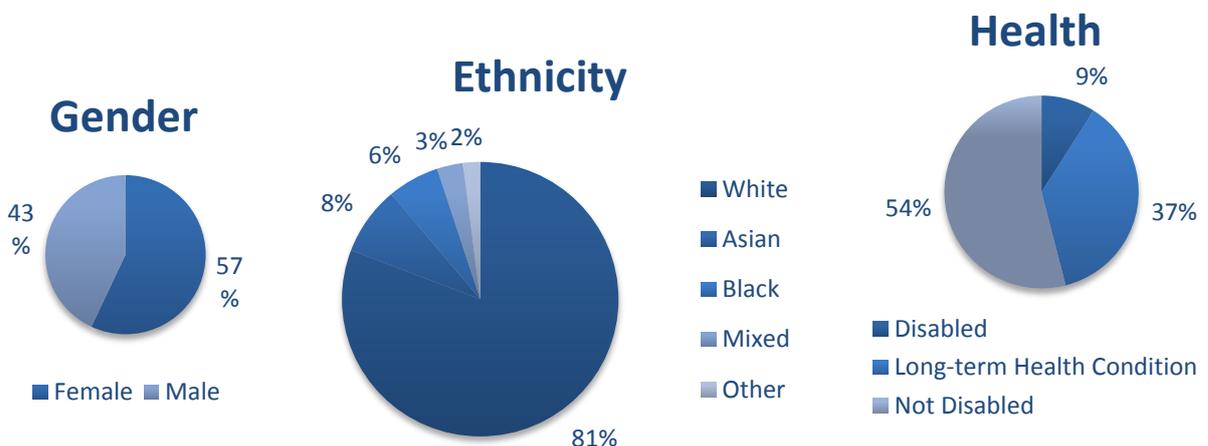
In Fiscal Benefits	In Public Value
Through savings for local authorities (£217,303) , the NHS (£174,707) , the DWP (£574,466) and Housing Providers (£439,382) . £1,405,883 in total.	Through wider economic and social benefits by improving client wellbeing and positive functioning. £8,624,754 in total.
We save them a total of £6.47 , for every £1 invested.	We contribute £39.16 to society, for every £1 invested.

Figures calculated using an external Treasury-approved model.

Benefiting Everyone:

At Citizens Advice we challenge discrimination and work to ensure that everyone can access and benefit from our service.

- Supporting working people - 350 clients helped with employment related issues including redundancy, pay and discrimination.
- Keeping people in their homes by supporting 284 clients threatened with homelessness and 76 homeless clients with access to accommodation.
- Giving people peace of mind by assisting 404 clients with priority debts such as rent and council tax.
- Assisting those in vulnerable circumstances by helping 80 clients find support in the face of discrimination and domestic abuse.



Our Impact 2019-2020 – Case Studies



A client had been living in temporary accommodation following an escape from domestic violence. The client was suffering from multiple physical and neurological ailments that made engaging with the benefits system very difficult for them. They were looking to challenge their initial benefit decision but were unable to do it themselves.

We supported them to appeal, drafting an appeal letter with grounds and gathering medical evidence in support of the tribunal hearing.

Outcome: As a result the client was awarded a higher rate of benefit than they had been awarded initially and was subsequently paid backdated benefits of over £5,000.

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An elderly client was living in unaffordable accommodation. They had a recurrence of cancer and were living on a very low income. They were also living with their son but he had to move out due to work and so the client was threatened with homelessness as they were unable to afford the rent. The client approached us for help in finding somewhere suitable to live.

We were able to assess the client's housing options and to assist the client in making a homelessness application to the local council who agreed that he was eligible for homelessness assistance. We spoke with the client and council to ensure progress was made and that he would be receiving housing assistance.

Outcome: As a result the client was able to move into a 1 bedroom sheltered housing property.

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A client came to us for assistance in moving closer to family. The client was unable to work and had multiple complex health issues. As such they needed financial help in not only moving but in furnishing any new property. To further complicate matters they had debts to manage and were living off subsistence benefits alone.

We were successful in intervening and were able to identify various applicable benefits that might assist the client. We were then successful in helping the client to make those claims and were able to obtain, in a matter of days, thousands of pounds to which the client was entitled.

Outcome: As a result of our support the client was able to transform their circumstances. They cleared their debts and were able to move to a new property.

Mental Health Outreach at Abraham Cowley Unit (ACU)

Our outreach project based at the ACU continues to offer support and advice for both inpatients and community patients who suffer with severe mental health issues. We have focused this year on increasing awareness of the help our service offers. We have worked closely with other support agencies, based in the ACU and other mental health agencies in the community, to try to reach more people who need our help. The end of the year saw a big increase in the number of in-patient referrals from the wards. The main issues continue to be help with benefits, in particular problems with Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit claims and we also see lots of clients who are struggling with debt.

This year we helped 302 clients with 1008 issues. We helped a client with a bank loan and debts for several mobile phone contracts taken out when he was unwell. These debts had been passed on to various collection agencies and were causing a considerable amount of stress each time they caught up with him. We managed to get all of his debts written off and as a result our client will no longer be contacted by debt collectors. The end of the financial year saw the start of Coronavirus and lockdown. We were able to continue offering our service to the ward patients and to community patients by telephone.

Clare Liddiard – ACU Co-ordinator

Healthwatch

Citizens Advice Runnymede and Spelthorne is one of five Local Citizens Advice commissioned to gather peoples' experience of health and social services care on behalf of Healthwatch Surrey, a programme that reports to Surrey County Council and the NHS. Between August 2019 and July 2020 we forwarded 330 experiences from 116 clients. GP care continues to be rated highly although the time it takes to get a routine appointment is a continuing problem. Hospital care is also good but again, clients often mention delayed and deferred appointments. In the next few months we will gather evidence of how Covid-19 is affecting local health and social service care.

"A client in his 30s with no long term health problems told his Citizens Advice adviser that the doctors at Chertsey Health Centre are "good" and sometimes you can get a same-day appointment there. Recently, his three year old daughter had an injury which required minor surgery and an overnight stay at St. Peter's Hospital. The operation was successful and he was "happy" with the care his daughter received".

"A client in her 40s with long term health problems told her Citizens Advice adviser that if she needs an appointment at Stanwell Road Surgery, Ashford, she is happy to wait in reception and she is usually seen on the same day and sometimes is seen promptly. She said the doctors there are "very helpful". She said she has been an inpatient on a number of occasions at St. Peter's Hospital, Chertsey where she said the nurses are "nice and helpful". However on one occasion she said she was discharged at 2am and was left to "find her own way home".

Maurice Long – Healthwatch Liaison

Help-to-Claim Universal Credit

There is much in the news about the DWP's new benefit called Universal Credit. Universal Credit is a bold attempt to rationalise a cumbersome, confusing old benefits system, to make it simpler for claimants as well as for the DWP.

The government has funded a programme, delivered by all Citizens Advice offices, called Help to Claim Universal Credit. This project supports people to claim Universal Credit, ensuring that people can navigate the process and successfully register for help.

The programme works like everything else done by Citizens Advice, the charity whose stated aims are

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives

We help people directly to make their first claim and we flag up what is not working. In 2019-2020 we helped 205 people with 277 issues.

The people we help come from all directions, including job centres, referrals by GPs and other partner organisations. They reach us by phone, through the door of our offices (pre-Covid), drop-in centres and through email and webchat.

People turn to benefits because they are facing change and struggle in their lives. Redundancy, a partner becomes sick and unable to work, they need to work less to care for a family member, break-up of a relationship are all overwhelming problems which have a serious financial impact.

Help to Claim enables clients to get on a secure footing with Universal Credit which supports working people on low incomes and people who are out of work. At the same time we signpost them to support for the other difficulties they are facing.

Teresa Pim – Help To Claim Universal Credit Advisor

Need help making a Universal Credit claim?

Our free Help to Claim service
can support you through the
application process

Freephone
England: 0800 144 8 444
Wales: 08000 241 220

**citizens
advice**

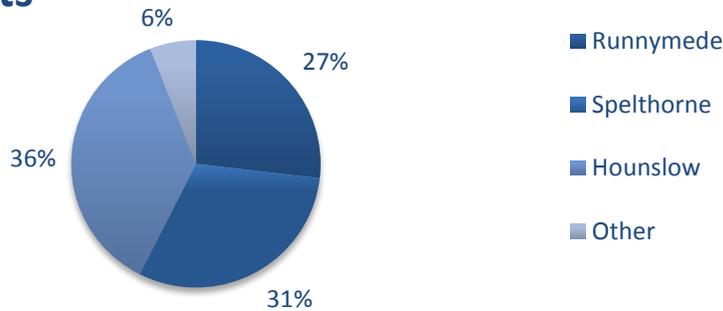
Court Desk Report

Our Court Desk team attended fourteen fortnightly hearings at Staines County Court and advised and represented 56 clients before Covid 19 put an end to all civil cases in March 2020 and subsequently a moratorium on new possession claims until 23 August 2020. During the operational period we saw a brief surge in possession claims by social housing providers and more mortgage cases from second charge lenders and from the termination of interest only mortgages.

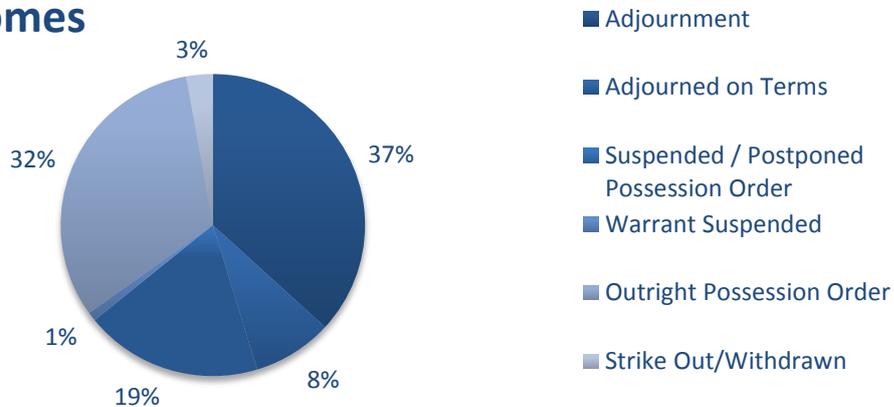
Since lockdown Shelter has reported evidence of a substantial increase in tenants with rent arrears with many in the mandatory category of more than two months but not home owners with mortgage arrears, although this might change at the termination of the employment support schemes. At the time of writing the government had adjusted the Civil Procedure Rules to deal with possession cases already in the system and following pressure from Shelter and others extended the moratorium on new cases from August 23rd until September 20th. There will undoubtedly be a backlog of cases, from the beginning of lockdown, when legal processes return to normal whatever normal turns out to be for the courts and our advisory service. In the meantime, we continue to provide a telephone advisory service to clients who contact us with housing issues.

David Chatterton - Court Desk Adviser

Clients



Outcomes



Volunteer with us as a Citizens Advice Adviser

Why Volunteer?

- Make a positive impact on people's lives
- Gain new skills and knowledge and build experience for employment
- Use and develop existing skills in varied and rewarding roles
- Meet new people from a range of backgrounds and make friends
- Get to know the local community and give something back
- Feel part of a team

The Role:

- Interviewing clients by telephone to understand their problems and identify advice needs
- Find information relevant to the client's problem then interpret and communicate the relevant information
- Research and explore options and implications so that clients can make informed decisions
- Act for the client where necessary by calculating, negotiating, drafting or writing letters
- Help client identify the next step whether this is through information, making an appointment, or signposting/referral to another agency
- Complete a written record of the client interview on the computer using the Citizens Advice database

Do I need qualifications?

This role does not require experience or qualification as full training is provided. The training comprises shadowing experienced Advisers as well as self-study in the form of background reading and end of unit assessments. When volunteers go on the rota they receive ongoing support from the Advice Session Supervisor with whom they can discuss the client's problem, the next best step and review case recording.

Person Specification:

- Effective written and oral communication skills
- Ability to interview clients using sensitive listening and questioning skills to get to the root of the issues and empower clients
- A commitment to continuous professional development, including a willingness to develop knowledge and skills in advice topics
- Computing skills (Microsoft Word, searching websites)
- Open-minded and non-judgmental, with the ability to relate to people from a diverse range of backgrounds
- Ability to monitor and maintain own standards
- A commitment to the aims and principles of the Citizens Advice service

We would love to hear from you! To set up an informal discussion about this opportunity please contact Citizens Advice Runnymede and Spelthorne at volunteer@randscab.org.uk

Treasurer's Report

As can be seen from the summary financials shown below, income for the year ended 31st March 2020 was in line with income for the previous year with most of our donors providing the same level of support. Funding for the Rentstart project along with a one-off contribution to the refurbishment of the Addlestone property in the prior year were replaced with the Help to Claim initiative, leaving income levels virtually flat at £346,130 for the year.

However, costs for the year increased by 14% to £333,281 reducing last year's surplus of £51,743 to £12,849 for the year ended 31st March 2020. The key drivers for the increase in costs were salaries, where for part of the previous year we had been operating with open headcount in key roles and premises, where costs have increased partly as a result of the increased office space of the Addlestone property.

Whilst Reserves remain at a level higher than the minimum set by our Reserves Policy, we continue to seek funding opportunities and cost efficiencies as we look to enhance and expand our service offering during these challenging times.

	Year Ended 31st March 2020	Year Ended 31st March 2019
Incoming Resources	346,130	342,624
Outgoing Costs	333,281	290,881
Surplus	12,849	51,743
Unrestricted Reserves	246,234	202,663
Restricted Reserves	153,722	184,443
Total Reserves	399,956	387,106

As is always the case when publishing financials at this time of year, the above numbers for the year ended 31st March 2020, whilst they have been agreed by the Board of Trustees, are yet to be finalised with our external reviewer and as such are subject to change.

Wendy Brierley - Treasurer

**A big thank
you to all our
partners and
supporters**



Funded by



Along with our partners at: Chertsey Combined Charities, Douglas Martin Trust, Manna Food Bank, St Saviours Community Food Bank, Volunteer Support North West Surrey, Spelthorne Rentstart, A2 Dominion, St Vincent De Paul, The Salvation Army, Age UK Surrey, Look Ahead, Egham United Charity, Woking Lions, Stanwell Foodbank, Christians Against Poverty, Debtscape, Runnymede Foodbank, Hounslow London Borough Council, John Beane, StepChange, Shepperton & Sunbury Rotary Club.

Statement of Internal Control Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens Advice trustee board oversee the information security of all personal information of our clients, staff, funders and strategic partners that is processed. Runnymede and Spelthorne 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 the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal and sensitive data is maintained to a level which is compliant with the requirements the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.

Charity Number 1128180 Company Number 06754766
Registered office: The Old Library, Church Road, Addlestone KT15 1RW