

**citizens  
advice**

**Wokingham**



# **MOVING FORWARD FROM COVID-19**

**Helping the people of Wokingham  
Borough recover from the pandemic**

- Prevented someone from becoming homeless
- Supported an 18 year old at risk of forced marriage
- Helped someone get their life back on track during suicidal thoughts
- Negotiated with an employer for a settlement after a wrongful dismissal
- Put a families finances on track after dealing with their debts
- Ensured someone with disabilities and without internet had support with food shopping
- Helped someone get their children back after some difficulties
- Talked a carer through their rights and entitlements for their terminally ill relative
- Housing support for someone who lost their job in May due to the pandemic and is now in debt
- Talked through next steps on going through divorce

**This is just some of the work  
that we do every day.**

**We can only continue meeting this demand  
with your support.**

The challenge in 2021 is that **these issues  
are likely to continue to grow.**





When the COVID-19 pandemic hit we knew that we had a role to play to support our communities through the biggest challenge our country has faced for generations.

In 2020, 5,748 individuals received help from our 72 trained and supportive volunteers and small staff team. **A lifeline for our communities.**

**People rely on us to provide them with up-to date advice and information on their rights and entitlements, to help them find a way forward with their issue.**

We now need to stay as a solid form of support that the people of Wokingham can depend upon for high quality advice and information on the issues they are facing.

**No charity helps people with a wider range of societal issues than the Citizens Advice service. This gives us credible information on the issues facing our communities.**





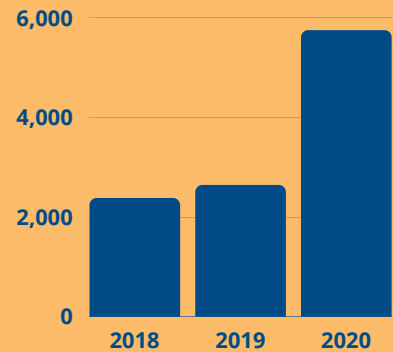
# Citizens Advice Wokingham in 2020

**5,748**

**Individuals helped**

**14,781**

**Issues that we helped with**  
(approx 2.5 issues per client)



**Clients helped each year**



Secured **£1.3million of income gains** (*fair redundancy payments, benefits eligibility, employment settlements & other support*) and **£410,000 of debts written off** for clients

**We supported** clients to access **over 75 other charities** and organisations via our One Front Door to provide other help for clients



**8,089 calls** to our One Front Door since 19th March 2020, **over 96% answered first time, within seconds**

**8 in 10** clients said we helped them find a way forward and resolved their problem and **9 in 10 clients** would recommend our service to others





2020 was an incredibly busy and challenging year for our charity, testing our resilience on a regular basis. Like any other organisation we had to adapt to regular changes. Straight away we knew we had to step-up.

What our communities needed was one access point, that they could rely on, setting up the One Front Door in order to get them the right level of support - to ensure that at a time of need, people were not navigating lots of different services with different eligibility criteria. I was confident that Citizens Advice Wokingham could deliver this efficiently, adapting and innovating to provide the solution needed.

Working with Wokingham Borough Council and the borough community response we have delivered for our communities, together, throughout.

We communicated a very clear message to our community at a time of great distress and confusion - 'there is no wrong reason to call, and we will support you to get help to start dealing with your issues at the earliest possible opportunity'. Providing holistic support to help people move forward. Our skilled team are trained to unpick any deeper issues so that we do not just scratch the surface.

The stats speak for themselves - in 2020 we helped 5,748 unique clients - a huge 122% increase on 2019. In terms of households, there was at least an additional 983 people living with our clients. Meaning our wider impact reached at least 6,731 people across the borough.

We helped to lead the Borough's response to the pandemic, and now we need to help lead the response out of the pandemic. Helping the Borough build resilient communities and provide our high quality support where people continue to be supported whilst we navigate a way forward.

Our challenge now is the challenge we started with - how do we survive and thrive in 2021 and beyond?

We know that the demand will continue, and we need to be here to help our residents pick up the pieces and make informed, supported decisions equipped with high quality advice and information to move forward.



**Jake Morrison**  
Chief Executive

# What is Citizens Advice?

People come to us about a wide range of problems. Our volunteers and staff - who receive thorough and on-going training - then triage their needs to unpick any issues and find appropriate ways forward, by equipping the client with high quality, independent and confidential advice and information. Often this involves follow-up appointments with our trained advisers, who provide more in-depth support.

## Enquiry areas *(the things we help with at Citizens Advice)*

Welfare benefits & tax credits, consumer goods & services, debt, discrimination hate and gender violence and abuse, education, employment law, financial services & capability, health & community care, housing, immigration & asylum, legal, relationships & family, tax, travel & transport and utilities & communications



## High quality - *delivering effective services*

We meet rigorous performance and quality framework requirements to be members of the Citizens Advice service. This includes:

- **Monthly auditing of a selection of cases**, verified by national assessors
- **Yearly leadership audit, scoring 5's (excellent) in all nine areas of leadership** for the last two years running
- **Quarterly client feedback** monitored by Citizens Advice

Our Chief Executive also won the 'excellence in leadership' award at the Citizens Advice annual conference in November 2020.

All advice and information we give is from trusted sources and our team have access to supervisors on a daily basis. We are also awarded the Advice Quality Standard mark, for organisations that are accessible, effectively managed and employ staff with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of clients.

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advice**



## Supporting our clients

“ I was much less confident before I spoke to Citizens Advice Wokingham. I was burying my head in the sand. Thank you for giving me support and pointing me in the right direction. I feel a lot happier now. **I have been helped with claiming Universal Credit for the first time.** This meant I was able to go to the opticians to get glasses. I had been putting it off for a long time, and I was getting headaches. I could have a free sight test, and also free glasses. I will be able to get my chipped tooth looked at next year now. I really appreciate your help. ”

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Debra (*name changed*) contacted us following an issue at work, to discuss getting some immediate support - through the initial interview it was identified that there were concerns around possible discrimination during her employment. One of our volunteer employment advisers took on the case and supported Debra over a number of months, advising on appropriate next steps and being a sounding-board. The case was eventually settled with an agreement of over £14,000 to be paid out. Debra said "Of course, Rob, none of this would have happened without your expert advice, support, and time - over many months."

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“ You helped by enabling me to have prescriptions collected as I can not do this myself. **Really important help. I am a carer for my husband.** Also I could not complete the extremely vulnerable form that I needed to on the GOV.UK website to get help for my husband and **Citizens Advice helped without making me feel silly because I could not do it.** ”



## Mental Health



Every day we help people who are experiencing mental ill health. We know that pre-existing mental health conditions can impact on practical issues, and for some, the impact of dealing with issues such as redundancy, debt, the benefit system or family concerns can have a negative effect on their mental health and wellbeing. In 2017, a Citizens Advice report found that on average, **clients with a mental health problem had an average of 5 problems, compared to 3.5 issues for clients overall.**

**We have a key role to play in helping clients with mental ill health to handle their issues and help them tackle it step by step.**

A pilot in Wokingham in late 2020 found that clients surveyed reported better mental health and wellbeing rates four weeks after their initial contact.

## Mental Health First Aid



In order to provide our communities with the most effective support, we have made mental health training an absolute priority for our charity. Thanks to some small funding grants that we have secured, we are able to deliver Adult Mental Health First Aid training online over two days, through one of our staff who is a qualified instructor.

**In 2021 we will be training 200 people as Mental Health First Aiders:**

- Our Citizens Advice Wokingham staff and volunteers
- 72 other Wokingham Borough charity staff and volunteers for free
- Over 60 Wokingham Borough Council staff and elected members

# The challenge for 2021

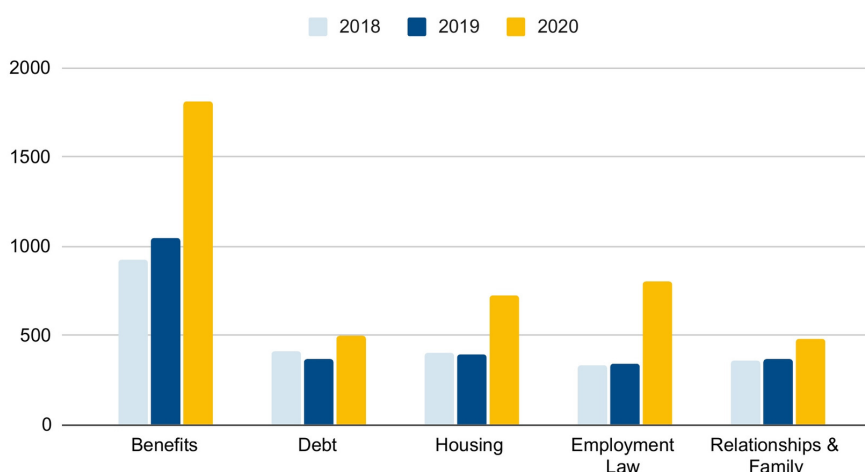
We are heading into 2021/22 with a projected budget a third less than our 2020/21 income. The challenge for us will be in continuing to meet the much larger levels of demand for high quality advice and information, and maintaining our excellent service of being here for people, when they need us - answering 96% of **all calls** first time within just 6 seconds on average since 19th March 2020.

Answering calls swiftly and providing effective early support is important for the people needing our help. It can avoid problems escalating, such as getting into more debt, bailiffs arriving at the door, losing a job and/or relying on a foodbank. It also means we can assess and prioritise support based on need and capacity at the earliest stage.

Whilst we have a number of small but impactful projects, it is important that our foundations - our core service - is appropriately funded. Our core service is the bedrock of what we do - our day-to-day advice and information for anyone in Wokingham who needs it.

We are asking funders to maintain the great relationship we have built up, and help us to continue supporting our communities through these difficult times, as early as possible. The **key funds** we require support with is for our generalist advice and information service and One Front Door. This massively improves our delivery and outcomes and allows us to secure additional funds on top of this to continue on our expertise.

Client issues helped with each year



Whilst we stepped up, with positivity and determination to support people through the consequences of the pandemic, we face even more uncertainty ahead of us.

We've got more lockdowns, tier systems and restrictions in place, economic challenges, unemployment and poverty. They all have consequences on people - our role is to be here for people when they need us.

And in Wokingham we can be proud of our performance, we delivered in days a transformed service working in partnership to benefit our borough. The simplicity of the One Front Door message, and the effectiveness of our triage and advice processes have ensured that holistic support has been provided throughout.

Our job now is to get through this, being a helping hand for people in their time of need - with your help.

In 2020 **we helped 1 in 20 adults** in Wokingham Borough **find a way forward.**

We helped them to apply for benefits, to get food, prescriptions, to manage their finances, to get away from domestic violence, to support their mental health, in getting out of debt, to challenge unfair employment practices and much more.

Help us to continue to respond to these problems, to equip and empower people with the tools they need to overcome their issues in order to live their best lives.



## What do our team say?

"One Front Door has been **a game changer for our community**"

"I am very impressed with our **response** to a big change in circumstances and in some ways has led to improvements that I am sure will be maintained. I worked for Microsoft for 10 years so used to dynamic working and **I have seen a very dynamic and forward thinking environment created to respond.**"

"I have never worked for someone so inspiring but also so open and honest. Thank you for **creating a supportive environment where we are enabled to achieve so much personally and for the clients.**"

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## What's the best thing about working with us?

"The difference we have made to our communities through a national pandemic, **ensuring no-one was left behind**"

"After a very dark period in my life, **CAW supported me, valued me which gave me back my self respect and esteem.** My colleagues at CAW are a very special team."

"The feeling that what **we do makes a positive impact in the lives of others** - help them to solve their problems or move forward with an issue"

"The **opportunity to help people in crisis** as well as with day to day enquiries at a level that **enables them to make decisions, take action etc.** they feel able to do."



**0300 330 1189**



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**Here for our  
community -  
when they  
need us**

Charity number: 1027729