

Impact Report 2023

System change in a cost-of-living crisis

We have always helped people with the problems they face. During the cost-of-living crisis we have sought to maximise our capacity to help those in need.

However, we also have a duty to reduce poverty and inequalities. That's why we have worked to help people during and beyond the crisis so that they have better and secure futures.

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report covers the period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023. It represents a period moving out of pandemic and into a cost-of-living crisis that has led to 50% of our clients being assessed as being in a negative budget situation.
- 1.2. Citizens Advice Ashfield is a local independent charity that delivers a significant impact for the community. Last year it helped 4,396 individuals with 14,160 problems. We are a charity for the community delivering outreach services to the poorest areas of the district. Almost 50% of our clients have a long-term health problem or disability.
- 1.3. The main enquiry areas are income, housing and debt. However, the impact of inflation and reduced spending power has resulted in help to access charitable support moving into the top four for the first time and problems associated with utility providers a close fifth.
- 1.4. Our work on financial resilience is making a big difference to people's lives. We helped our clients increase their income by over £900,000 in total and 57% report improvements in financial resilience and capability.
- 1.5. System change is at the heart of what we do, 108 clients responded to our outcomes survey and told us that they are better able to stay out of crisis after receiving support but also that their well-being has improved in terms of feeling more supported, less isolated and increased optimism for the future.
- 1.6. Feedback from our partners tells us that they trust us and more often than not recognise that our work helps them deliver their important objectives for the community.
- 1.7. Our social return on investment calculation totals £22 for every £1 of unrestricted funding. This includes client financial gains, the value of the work our volunteers carry out and homeless preventions reducing costs to the housing authority. We also attract new investment into Ashfield that pays for additional services and creates jobs. This list is not exhaustive.
- 1.8. We are proud of the difference we make to Ashfield and hope you find our 2023 Impact Report of interest.

Neil Clurow
Evaluation Lead
May 2023



citizens
advice

Ashfield

Evaluating our service

Our report in detail

2. Case study

Miss P (61) is single and lives in a mortgaged property. She receives an occupational pension of £434 per month after being made redundant in 2015. She secured another job in 2018 but deteriorating health caused her to be signed off work in March 2019. Contribution Based Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was paid until a capability for work assessment determined that Miss P is able to work and all benefits stopped.

Miss P has severe health issues limiting her mobility but had also been refused Personal Independence Payment so she was helped by the Citizens Advice Ashfield, Reaching Communities service.

Miss P was not confident about putting her issues into written words so our advisor helped her to submit a request for Mandatory Reconsideration of the decision resulting in a revision that awarded Miss P the standard rate mobility and daily care rate of £86.30/week.

A Mandatory Reconsideration of the ESA decision was appealed at tribunal. Thankfully the decision was overturned before the hearing with an award of £135.35/week indefinitely.

The total income gain for Mrs P was £221.65 per week (£11,525 per year). We also provided help with budgeting meaning Miss P was able to remain secure in her house and budget effectively.

Miss P is very grateful for our help as it has completely changed her life around. This is a common situation in that Miss P was not confident in completing benefits forms that led to poor decisions being made by the DWP. She now knows to seek help from the Citizens Advice service should she require help in the future.

3. Our work in Ashfield

3.1. Information and Advice Services: We are an independent local charity and members of the Citizens Advice service. Our objective is to provide free, independent, impartial and confidential advice, serving the people of Ashfield and providing the help people need when they need it. We work to the Advice Quality Standard and the terms and conditions of the Citizens Advice membership scheme.

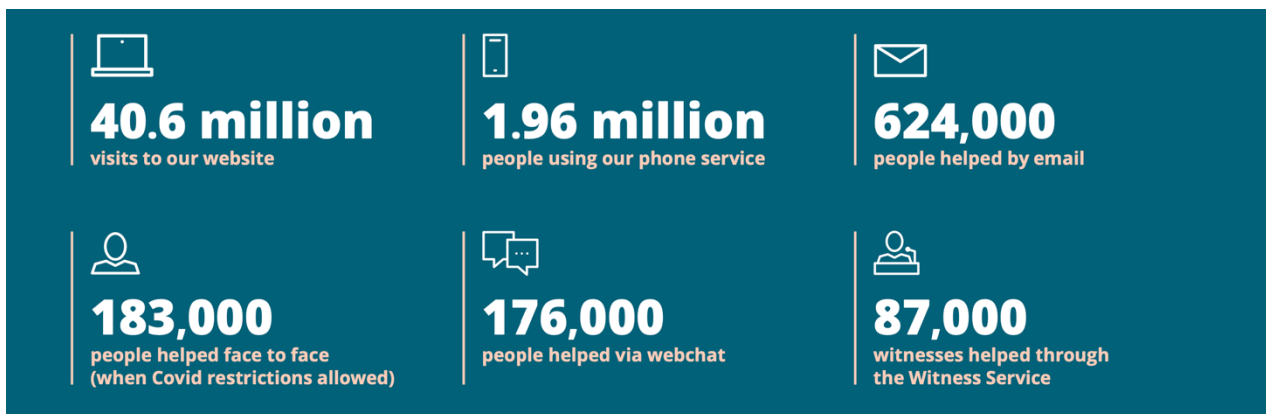
- 3.2. In order to deliver that promise we provide a service by telephone and in person. Face to face advice is delivered from accessible community locations. Our main office is based at the Ashfield Health and Wellbeing Centre.
- 3.3. Our website also provides access to webchat and a national advice line. We aim to provide the residents of Ashfield with as many options as possible to suit how they wish to access and receive advice and support.
- 3.4. Thanks to the grants we receive we are able to provide services at a general help level on any matter and casework in the areas of debt, money advice and housing. Our staff have a detailed knowledge of welfare benefits (including Universal Credit), our largest area of enquiry. We also provide a dedicated service to our most vulnerable clients through the Changing Lives – Managing Futures project.
- 3.5. Whilst we remain an independent advocate for our clients, partnership working is essential if we are to achieve the best outcomes for our beneficiaries. This includes statutory partners, such as Ashfield District Council, Nottinghamshire County Council, Primary Care Networks and of course partners from the VCSE, such as Nottinghamshire Mind, Futures and Nottinghamshire Energy project. We recognise we are stronger working together.
- 3.6. **Community Communications:** As well as providing advice directly to individuals we act as a public information service, providing independent and impartial information to the public through our website, social media, public events, meetings and sometimes through the press. Read more about this in Section 6.
- 3.7. **Research and Campaigns:** Our twin aim is to use the information and data we collect on the problems our clients face to exercise changes in policy and practice that improve the lives of our services users and residents of Ashfield generally. We call this Research and Campaigns work. We carry out the work in a non-political and impartial way.

“We seek to provide advice, information and campaigns that improve the lives of the people of Ashfield and help our most vulnerable citizens.” Kathryn Stacey, Chief Executive.
- 3.8. During 2022/23 we contributed to a number of awareness raising campaigns organised at a national level. These included dangerous goods (product safety), energy scams, enforced pre-payment meters and unused subscription payments.
- 3.9. We also regularly engage with a range of networks locally communicating the problems our clients face. Specifically, we have carried out detailed reports and campaigning on the following issues:
- 3.10. Housing issues faced by people experiencing domestic violence and abuse. We shared a report of our data with a local Women's Project that led to a meeting to discuss the need for improvements in the system.

- 3.11. Cost of living – our Household Support Fund report looked into the clients we have referred to the scheme to explore who within our community needs to access this support. The report was shared with partners such as Nottinghamshire County Council.
- 3.12. We also contacted the local MP to raise the agenda around energy bills and then Prepayment meters.

4. Part of a national network


- 4.1. Citizens Advice Ashfield are proud to be part of a national network that directly helps over 3 million people each year. The national website receives 40.6 million visits each year. The Citizens Advice network is by far the largest advice brand in the UK and having access to the resources of Citizens Advice helps us achieve local outcomes and increases our social value. It is important that Ashfield benefits from the delivery of this service at a local level.
- 4.2. The national picture – key statistics 2021-22



The national service carries out its own impact report. Below is a summary of the findings.



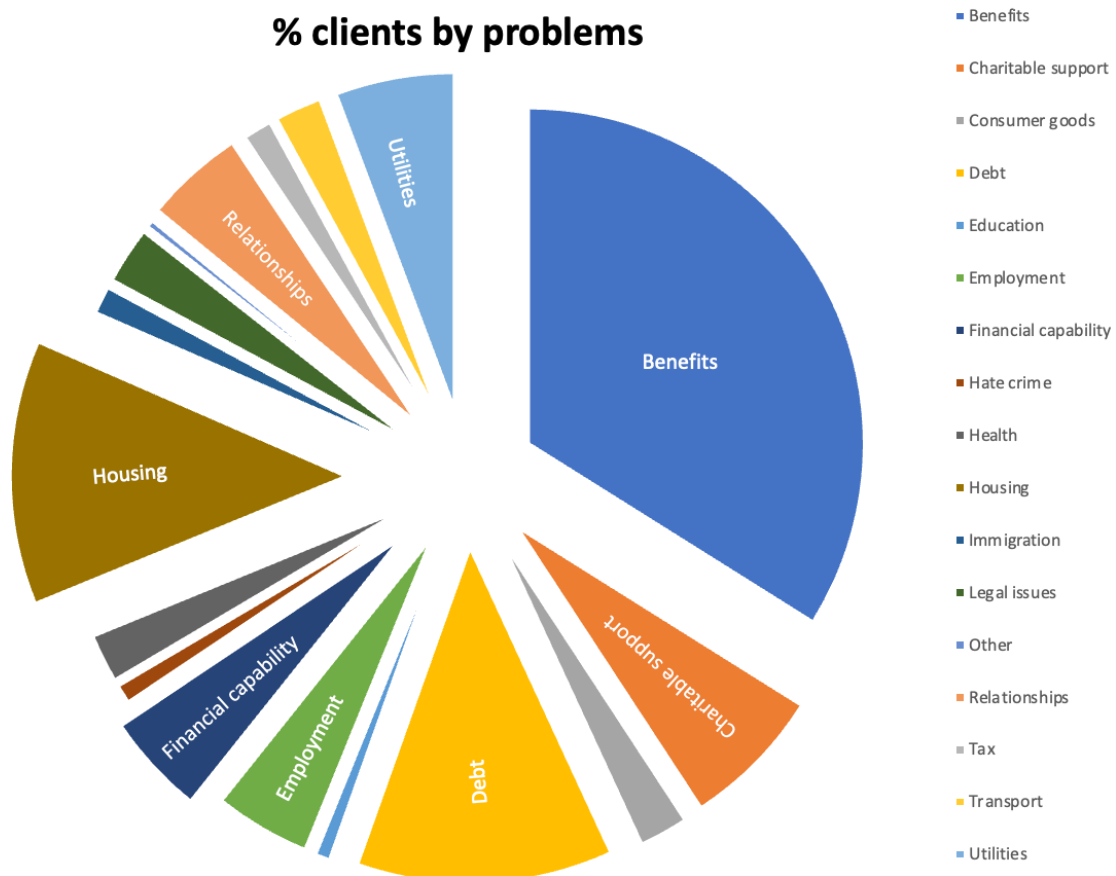
5. Outputs – Ashfield



Outputs at a glance

- 4,396 total individual clients helped
- 14,160 total number of problems presented
- £900k in financial gains for clients

5.1. Last year Citizens Advice Ashfield helped 4,396 clients with over 14,160 problems. It is a reflection of the challenges our clients face that the average number of problems per client has increased to 3.2 so we are carrying out more work per client than ever before. The cost-of-living crisis has dominated demand. Requests of help with welfare benefits, housing and debt remain our biggest areas of enquiry but help accessing charitable support has moved into the top four for the first time, closely followed by problems with utilities.

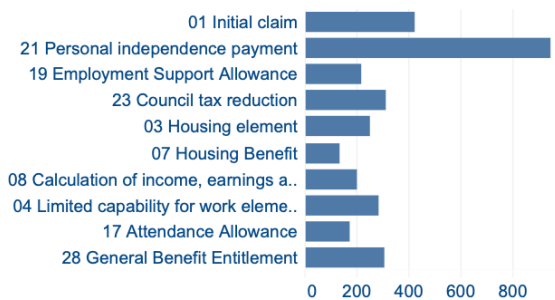


5.2. The largest debt by type was council tax with fuel debts second. This reflects the fact that most of our clients are struggling to pay for essentials rather than

accumulating consumer debts. National data of Citizens Advice clients shows that 50% of all those approaching us for help with financial problems have a negative household budget after taking into account industry recognised levels of expenditure. Our evaluation below demonstrates that when we work with people on low incomes, we are able to increase their financial resilience.

- 5.3. Our client profile gives a strong indication of the demographic groups impacted by events in the economy and how we are reaching those most in need. Women represent 60% of all clients and 49% of clients have a long-term illness or disability.

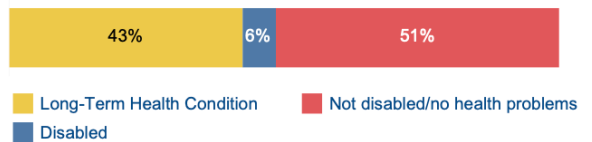
Top benefit issues



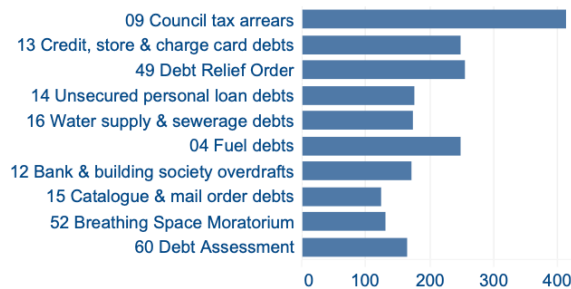
Gender



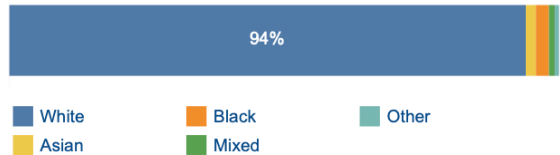
Disability / Long-term health



Top debt issues



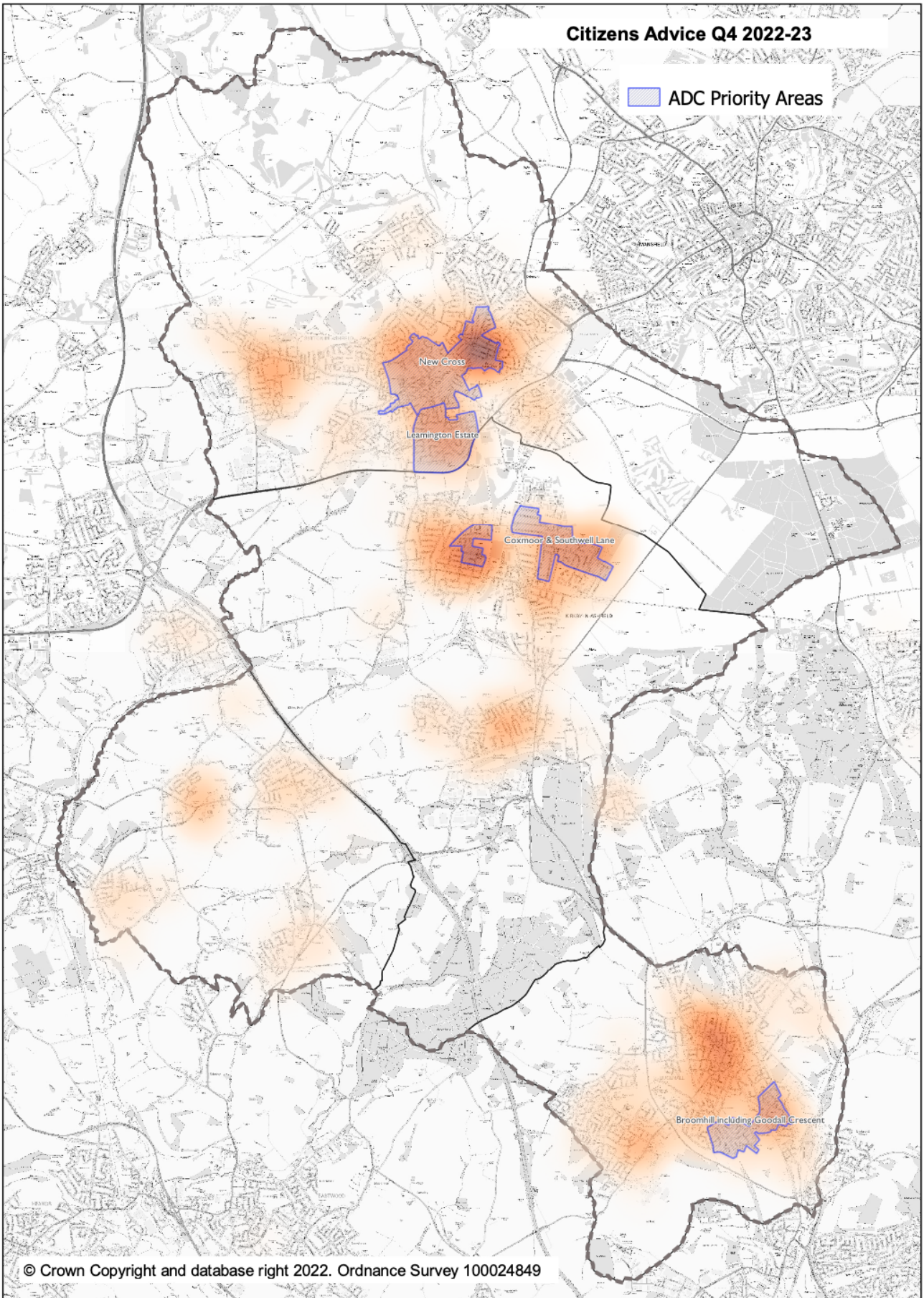
Ethnicity



- 5.4. You will see from our client heat map on the next page that we reach people from the areas of greatest priority in Ashfield.

Citizens Advice Q4 2022-23

ADC Priority Areas



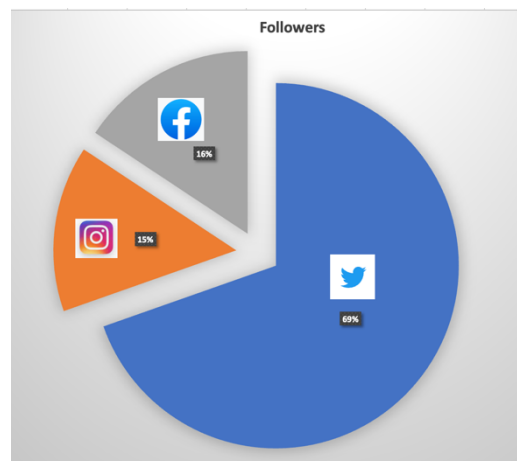
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6. Communications

6.1. Our communications provide independent and impartial information to the public through a website, social media, events, meetings and sometimes through the press. This part of our work has become more important in recent years. Globally there is a problem with fake news, scams and fraud. Citizens Advice is a trusted brand and we seek to direct people to reliable sources of information, such as our national website, GOV.UK and other verifiable sources of information such as those provided by Ashfield District Council. We promote services provided by our partners for the mutual benefit to our clients and the wider community.

6.2. **Website visits** - Last year our website was used by 5,818 unique individuals who visited the site 15,234 times. This is a significant increase on the previous year with 5,324 more visits.

6.3. Social media is now an essential means of communication to service users and stakeholders. We have regularly updated accounts with Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Our Twitter account is followed by 932 people, Facebook 210 followers and Instagram 197.



7. Stakeholders and partnerships

7.1. Developing an outcomes-based approach to advice work has changed the way in which Citizens Advice services locally interact with stakeholders. It has led to a shift in the way new projects are designed and evaluated, providing evidence of how outcomes-based advice work can contribute to shared strategic objectives.

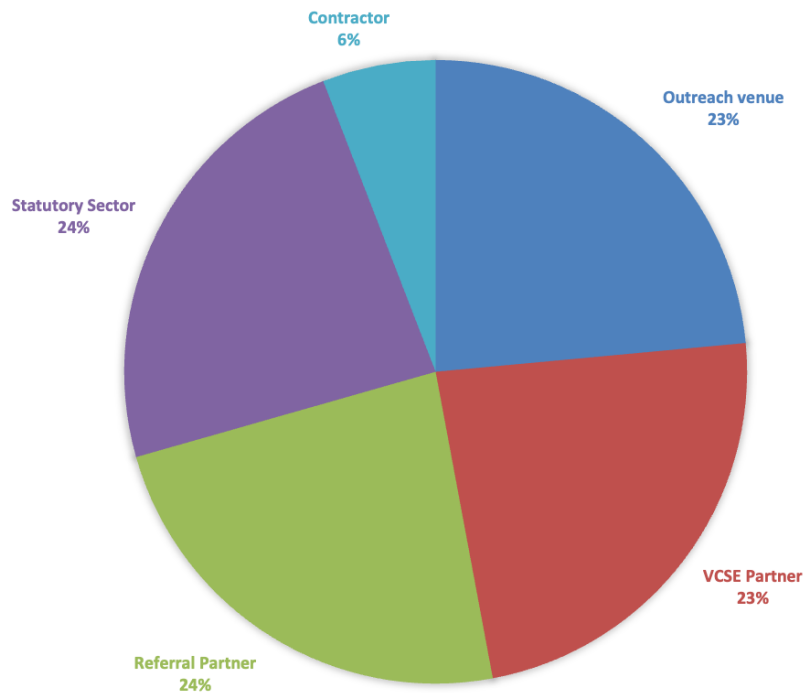
7.2. An example of a closer and more strategic partnerships is our work responding to the cost-of-living crisis and developing longer term financial resilience in the district. Using our outcomes-based approach we have engaged with the local economic and skills partners to work on the shared objectives we hold.

7.3. The Reaching Communities outreach service brings us into contact with a wide range of stakeholders. Our presence in community centres increases footfall and viability for the venue. Advice in NHS settings contributes to the social prescribing objectives of the NHS.

7.4. The service also takes a number of referrals from local government, especially where customers with multiple and complex needs require help resolving cross departmental problems such as tenancy issues, council tax arrears and benefits. These are our mutual clients and therefore keeping people out of repeat crisis is of benefit to the individual and organisations.

7.5. We carry out an annual key stakeholder survey and this year we received 17 responses from a cross section of organisations.

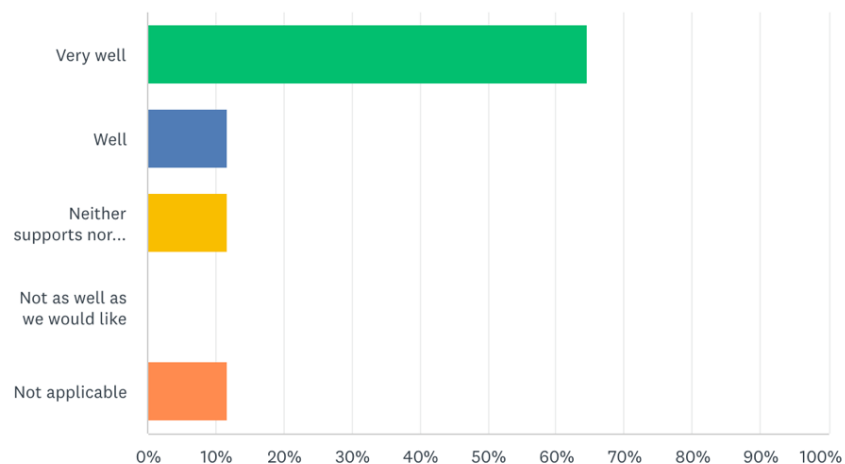
RESPONDENTS BY TYPE



7.6. In order to quantify the impact our services achieve for partners we asked stakeholders how Citizens Advice contribute to their strategic objectives. In total 76% said we supported them with their strategic goals either well or very well. The remainder felt it was not applicable to them. When asked about how effective we are at partnership working 94% rated our partnership working as effective or very effective.

How well do you feel Citizens Advice support you to achieve your organisations strategic goals?

Answered: 17 Skipped: 0



7.7. In terms of the quality of our work there was a 100% positive rating of our advice services and 76% positive rating of our research and campaigns work. The latter is a significant improvement on the previous year. Our research and campaigns work is less understood but equally important because we use information on the problems our clients face to impartially lobby for improvements in services and legislation locally and nationally.

7.8. Asked what stakeholders valued most about working with Citizens Advice they told us:

“The partnership and strategic approach, the honesty and willingness of all levels of staff and volunteers. Their responsiveness and clarity to requests and support.”

“Access to the Manager who is very knowledgeable and helpful. We work in partnership very well.”

“Peer support, expert knowledge and guidance. Actively working in partnership and solutions focused.”

“It is great to carry out work on behalf of Citizens Advice services. I feel that collectively we make a difference to people's lives.”

“Their officers at every level are highly professional, reliable, approachable, knowledgeable. They work very well in partnership.”

There were many more constructive comments that we didn't have space to produce.

7.9. We also asked stakeholders for comments on how we could improve the service. Suggestions included:

- More outreaches
- Increased collaboration
- Countywide approaches

Much of the above is already taking place and we have incorporated development of the above activities into our 2023/24 Funding Strategy.

8. Outcomes



Ashfield client quotes:

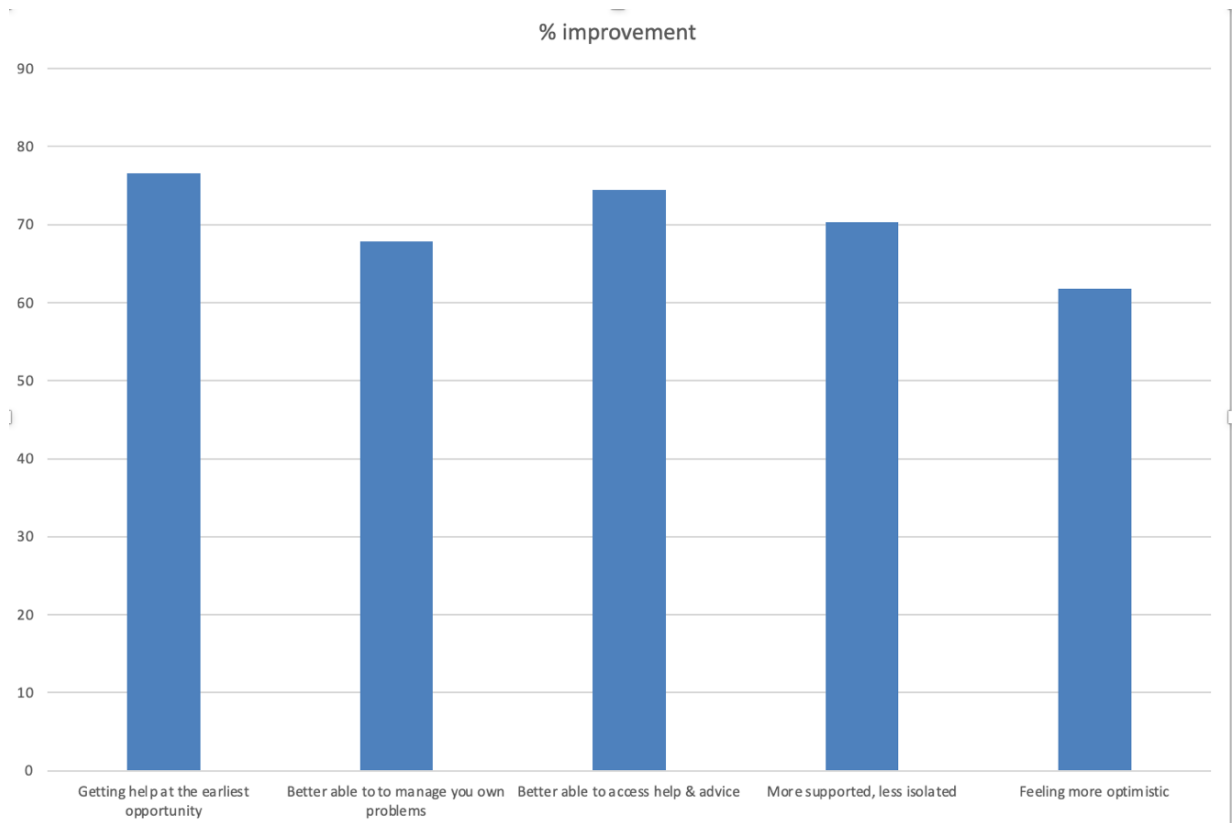
"I had to deal with homelessness with two children. The staff have been supportive and helpful. They made me feel more settled in a very unsettling time."

"The service provided at Hucknall Leisure Centre was excellent."

"They do a brilliant job, sometimes in difficult circumstances."

- 8.1. Each year we carry out an **outcomes survey**, this year 108 clients participated. The evaluation seeks to find out how they felt they had benefited from receiving help from Citizens Advice Ashfield. Not measured by outputs as described in section 5 but how well we help people to better manage the problems they face now and in the future. The survey also seeks to assess the resulting improvements in wellbeing, part of our social value.
- 8.2. We asked five questions based on improved or reduced abilities in the following areas.
- Q1. Knowing when to ask for help before matters become serious (early)
 - Q2. Better able to manage problems themselves
 - Q3. Better able to access help when it is needed
 - Q4. Feeling more supported and less isolated
 - Q5. Feeling more optimistic about the future

Each question asked the participant to score their response on a sliding scale of -5, the advice made them feel much less capable to +5, the help significantly improved their abilities/feelings. The chart below gives a summary of the average scores for all 108 participants converted into a percentage improvement.



8.3. Summary of findings

In all fields of enquiry, we can see an improvement in the capabilities and wellbeing of our beneficiaries. This is particularly true of the belief that, after receiving advice clients know when to ask for help sooner before a crisis emerges and knowing how to get the help they need.

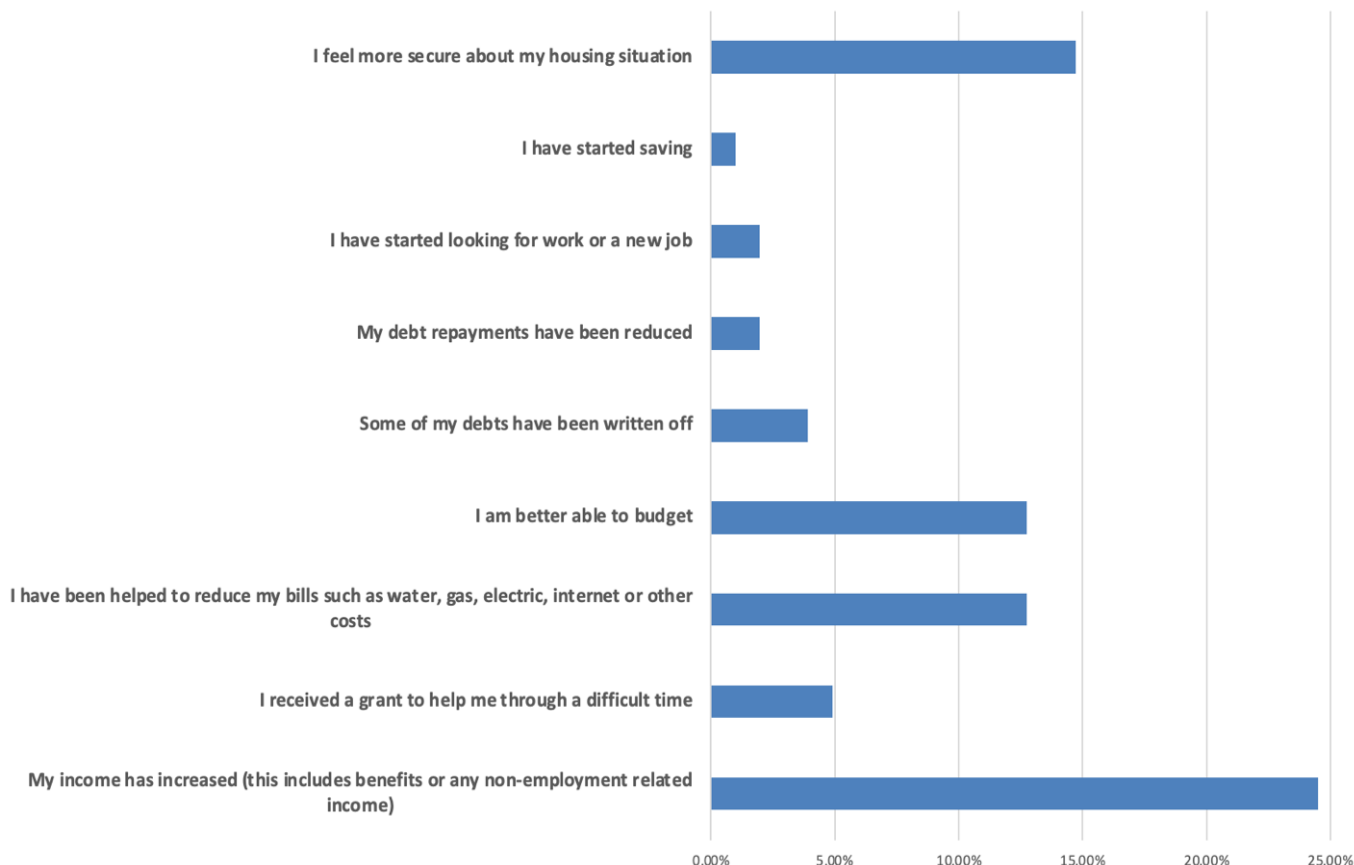
8.4. Over the last two years we have been embedding an outcomes and proactive approach into our new projects. Based on learning from the Changing Lives project we now apply the same principles to our Reaching Communities Ashfield, Family Financial Resilience and Advice on Prescription. The success of this evolution of advice services in Ashfield is having a big impact

8.5. Making a contribution to financial resilience in Ashfield.

Our community and economy are facing a significant challenge. Citizens Advice Ashfield has carried out substantial work to design ways of helping people through the cost-of-living crisis. We now employ a Financial Resilience approach that not only helps people through the current crisis but also helps households plan to improve their financial resilience for the longer term.

8.6. The pilot project provided a focused support package resulting in an action plan for income, spending and assets. Whilst beneficiaries of the core service may not receive a written plan the conceptual approach has become engrained into all our services and is already producing some significant results. This year our survey asked some key questions around improved financial resilience and the findings are impressive with 57% of all clients reporting some measure of increased financial resilience.

Financial Resilience Measures - All Clients



9. Citizens' Panel

9.1. Using the findings and data from our impact reports we have been working for a number of years with a **Citizens Panel** of beneficiaries and volunteers to look at the weaker outcomes of our service. Putting beneficiaries in the lead is providing a driver for change from an outputs-based advice service to what we call an outcome driven service. Improving lives for the longer term and achieving system change.

9.2. The Citizens Panel have helped us to understand what might work for those clients who do not feel they have a significantly positive outcome after seeking advice. We know that some clients find themselves in crisis, repeatedly seeking our emergency help on a regular basis. Our data from 2020 found that 18.1% fit this category. By working in new ways that target and proactively support this vulnerable group we

reduced that figure to 7.7% in 2021 and further to 7.2% in 2022. That means 92.8% of clients report a positive outcome from the advice they received.

- 9.3. It was the Citizens Panel that helped us develop the Changing Lives project, proactively supporting our clients most vulnerable to repeat crisis. The result has been to keep more people out of crisis and take pressure off other local services, including our core advice sessions.
- 9.4. Using learning from the theory of change developed for this initiative we have now applied the same principles to help local residents who find themselves financially excluded. Once again, we have consulted the Citizens Panel to help us understand the barriers our clients face that stop their participation in the local economy. The Financial Resilience Pilot has achieved great success and we are seeking further investment to develop this work over the next few years.

10. Volunteering for Citizens Advice Ashfield

- 10.1. Citizens Advice Ashfield has 11 volunteers and 4 volunteer trustees who come from all walks of life and give their time to the community for free. However, they do require the correct support, training and supervision to be able to perform their tasks to the high standards the service expects. No impact report would be complete without acknowledgement of their contribution



and the benefits of volunteering for Citizens Advice. Volunteer advisers all undertake initial and ongoing training specific to their roles. There are also opportunities to get involved in running the service and no charity could operate without volunteer trustees. In total the work carried out by our volunteers would cost £45,902 per year if we had to pay for that resource.

- 10.2. Like many charities the number of volunteers reduced during the pandemic. We are currently in a period of building back our volunteer team with five new volunteers currently in training.
- 10.3. We are also a victim of our own success. Many of our volunteers use the experience gained to move into employment, both within the service and the wider employment market. The training and experience Citizens Advice Ashfield provide is respected and relevant. Last year **5 volunteers moved into paid employment** as a direct result of the training and experience gained.

10.4. Volunteer case study

One of our volunteers offered to share her experience for the Impact Report.

“Since January 2021, I have been volunteering with Citizens Advice Ashfield because I wanted use my time to help others. I had heard good things from a previous volunteer and decided to apply. My application was successful and I began the training.”

The initial training was very thorough and comprehensive but at the same time flexible enough to fit in with my other commitments. I predominantly volunteer from home so the online training platform has been really useful.

I have developed an understanding of the issues that affect the community. At times volunteering can be a challenge but the most rewarding part of volunteering for me, is feeling that I make a difference and help people. Each case is important and there are so many people in need of help. I feel valued, supported and appreciated by both the service and the clients I support.

The time commitments are working well for me and I feel part of a team. Quality is at the heart of the service and I want to give a big thank you to everyone for making me feel so valued and welcome.”

11. Spotlight on community outreaches.



11.1. Ashfield is a sprawling network of three towns and smaller post-industrial or semi-rural communities, that is why we have run a Reaching Communities Project for a number of years. Last year the project helped 715 people with the problems they face (3,584 problems). This is a significant contribution to our overall capacity. It is essential that we continue to provide services that reach the whole of our district. When asked the majority of survey respondents (70%) told us that they prefer to receive advice in person. Therefore, it is important that we make advice available at accessible venues across Ashfield. This service is provided by our Reaching Communities, Information Officers.

11.2. During 2022/23 we carried out a review of our Reaching Communities Project and identified the venues as covering the following themes:

- Community based centres
- Health venues
- Financial resilience venues

We have set out a plan to attract the resources we need to continue this work for the next three years. From the outputs achieved and what the services users tell us this work must be prioritised.

“The Information Officer (named) at my local centre has been pretty amazing.”

“I received help locally to complete my Attendance Allowance forms.”

“Extremely helpful.”

“The Information Officer (named) helped fill in my PIP forms and explained everything I didn’t understand.”

- 11.3. Not only do the community outreach services improve access to advice for difficult to reach groups often in areas of high deprivation, they also act as a referral point into our specialist services and projects.

12. Measuring Social Return on Investment

	Number	Value	Formula
Research & Campaigns volunteer	1	£3,741.00	Average hours x number of volunteers x GH advice salary
Trustee volunteers	4	£4,750.00	Average hours x number of volunteers x manager salary
Advice/admin volunteers	10	£37,411.00	Average hours x number of volunteers x GH advice salary
Volunteers moving into employment	5	£145,000.00	Average salary pa
New investment 2021/22	12	£49,260.00	New grants 2022/23
Client gained income		£900,000.00	Financial gains for clients
Jobs created	14	£52,497.00	Tax & NI revenue as per P32
Homeless preventions	52	£ 1,248,000.00	Cost of statutory homeless preventions
Total		£2,440,659.00	
Client deadweight calculation		£270,000.00	30% of client gains
Adjusted value		£2,170,659.00	
Difficult to measure values not included: health improvements reduction in cost to NHS/keeping people out of statutory intervention (debts/courts/crime reduction).			
Total unrestricted core investment 2021/22		£98,685.00	
SROI		£22.00	

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Thank you to our funders



The Thomas Farr Charity



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