Citizens Advice Test Valley

Impact Report 24/25

We are .... **here to help anyone who needs it.**

We are the people's champion.

citizens advice Test Valley

WHO ARE WE?

We have operated as a charity since 2014 and cover the whole of the Test Valley area offering free, confidential, impartial advice to the community. Our support and advice helps find a way forward to thousands of people each year.

Our dedicated volunteers and staff are the lifeblood of our service offering support to our most vulnerable people looking for help and we also campaign to influence change.

Our Vision

Whoever you are ...

Whatever the problem ...

We help people find a way forward

Our Mission

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

"I would just like to say a massive thank you for all the help the Citizens Advice have given me over the years, I am not sure what I would have done without your help"

OUR IMPACT

"Everyone there is very helpful and understanding and are not judgemental"

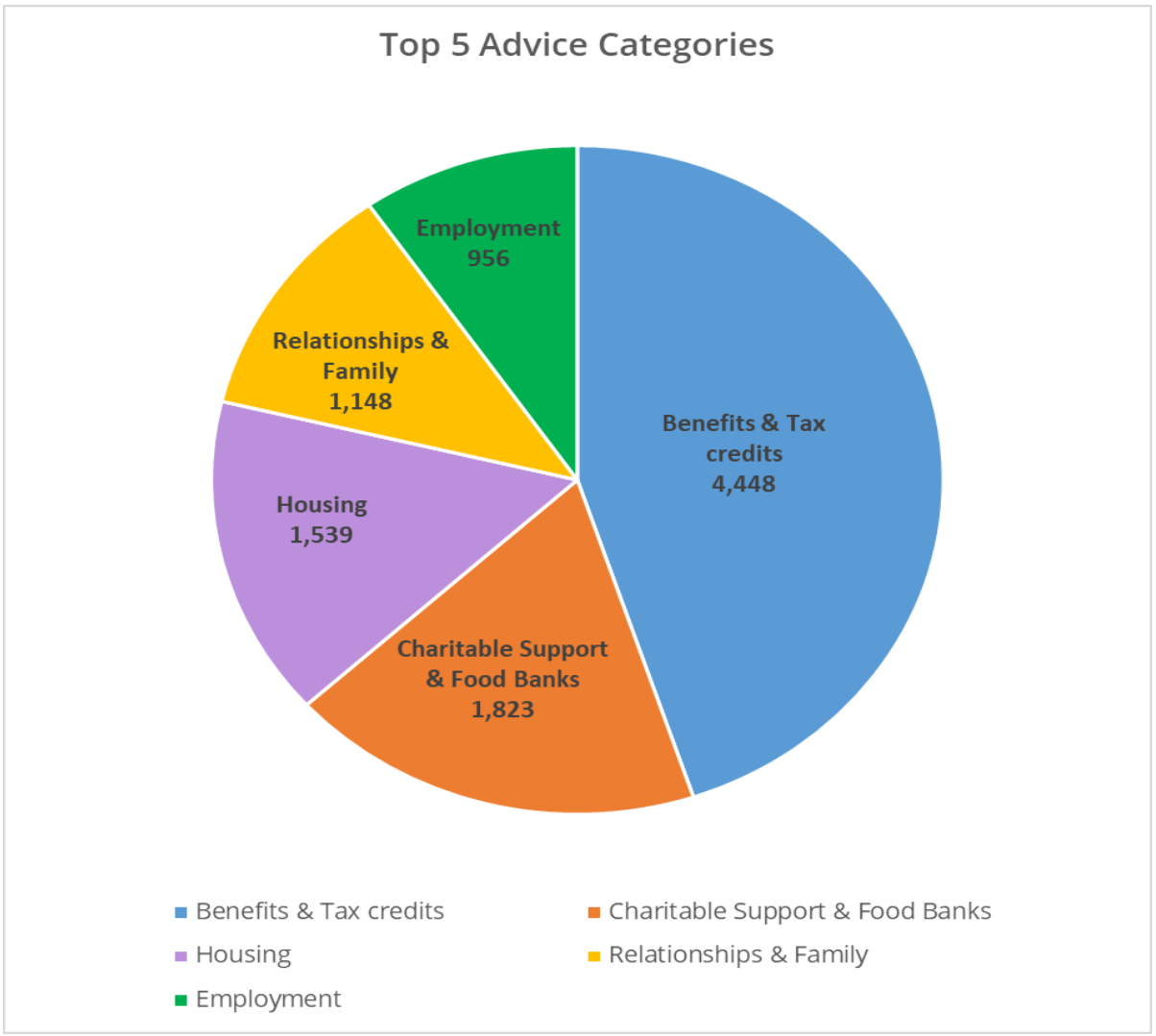
We have supported **5,332** clients through often tricky, stressful and difficult times helping them to find solutions to their issues

We have improved people's financial situation by helping our clients access **£1.1 million** in unclaimed benefits, debt write-offs and reimbursements

We helped clients deal with over **14,000 issues,** covering all areas of advice, but in particular nearly **4,500** in Benefits and Universal Credit

WHAT WERE THE MOST COMMON ISSUES?

We help on a variety of issues. It allows us an insight into what the biggest challenges are that people in our community face on a daily basis.



EFFECT OF THE COST-OF-LIVING CRISIS

Over the last 3 years we have seen the impact the Cost-of-Living Crisis has had on our clients

Charitable support & Foodbanks

22/23

1280 issues

23/24

1782 issues

24/25

1823 issues

Housing

22/23

1499 issues

23/24

2104 issues

24/25

1539 issues

Benefits

22/23

3265 issues

23/24

4054 issues

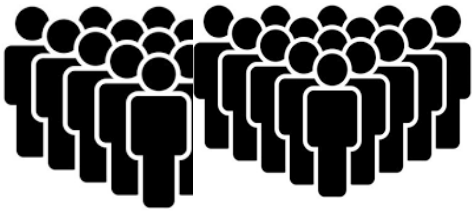
24/25

4448 issues

"I had something to deal with that was totally over my head and I didn't have a clue what or where I needed to go but thankfully the CAB helped guide me on what my next steps were and who I needed to contact, and I am grateful for the help and advice I was given."

We have seen an increase in the number of people claiming Personal Independence payments with a 48.3% increase from 2022/23 – 2024/25

740 issues in 2022



1044 issues in 2024

The complexity of the issues we are now seeing means we are spending more time with each client. Our holistic approach means we also find our clients returning multiple times, as one issue is resolved more issues arise.

We have been fortunate to receive money from Hampshire County Council through the Household Support Fund which has enabled us to issue energy vouchers to help our clients to better afford their utility bills.

In 24/25 we issued 651 Energy Vouchers amounting to a value of £191,394

WE OFFER THE HELP THAT CHANGES PEOPLE'S LIVES

Phil

Phil came to us following surgery to remove a tumour. He required time off work to fully recover. Phil was the only financial provider in the family; he had a wife and two children to support. The income loss impacted them hugely and their debts grew. Phil had an IVA which was suspended due to his ill health. Following our checks we discovered the IVA had not been processed legally. We looked at other options and Phil opted for a Debt Relief Order (DRO) which would allow him to go back to work part time with a fresh start from his debts.

Once the DRO application went through we asked Phil to call the IVA company for a certificate of termination. Phil was told this could not be done for 3 months. We helped him argue that as the IVA was not legal, they should terminate immediately. With our intervention and support the termination from the IVA company came through in 5 days. The DRO has now been approved and £26k was written off. Phil is very grateful for all the support he has had from Citizens Advice.

By way of follow up we got in touch with the Financial Conduct Authority about the bad practice of the Insolvency company. Phil is now back at work and in a less stressful position financially.

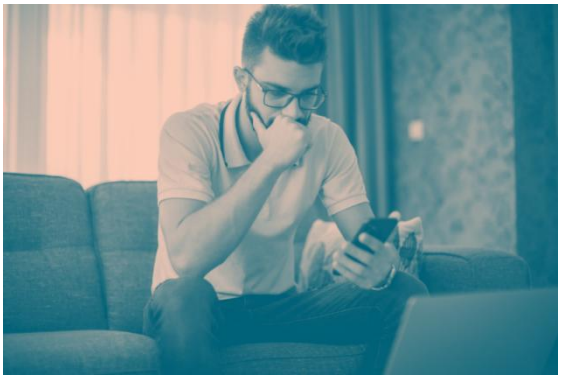
Dave

Dave came to Citizens Advice after being sanctioned by Universal Credit because he had been unable to attend face to face appointments due to a bad back. Dave had been in the situation for 5 months, only being awarded £6 per month. This meant he had to claim advances each month to buy food and pay his bills. Dave had been living on an average income of just £200 a month. With our help he contacted the DWP Universal Credit department, and his GP and was issued with a fit note meaning he was not required to attend appointments.

Dave has struggled to deal with Universal Credit on his phone. He comes the Citizens Advice or uses the library to look at any email or messages from Universal Credit. We have now asked for all correspondence to go to him through the post.

To help find a way forward we referred Dave for a Debt Relief Order as he owed advances from Universal Credit due to being sanctioned so much and had run up a debt of £4K. He had also got behind on other bills during this period.

We were able to get £11,000 written off for Dave. He now receives a regular amount of Universal Credit and is back on his feet with a fresh start from his debt relief order and better communication put into place from universal credit.



OUTREACH SERVICES

We operate 3 Outreaches throughout the area

Andover Foodbank

Helen and Abbie attend the Andover Foodbank every morning offering support and information between 10 and 12 noon. This project is funded by the Trussell Trust and began in 2023 initially covering 3 days; we have now been able to extend this to cover the whole week. This service is very popular helping deal with the emergencies as they happen.

In 24/25 they helped 272 clients with over 1200 issues. Their work has also helped manage almost £100,000 of debt and seen income gains of £194,500

Romsey Foodbank

Manders attends the Romsey Foodbank 3 times a week Tues -Thur and once a month pops down to North Baddesley to see clients and offer support. This project is also funded by the Trussell Trust and started in 2020 during the difficult days of COVID. It continues to be a busy service and Manders loves the interaction with clients feeling she can make a difference for many.

In 24/25 she helped 205 clients and helped clients gain nearly £200,000 in debt write offs and income gains.

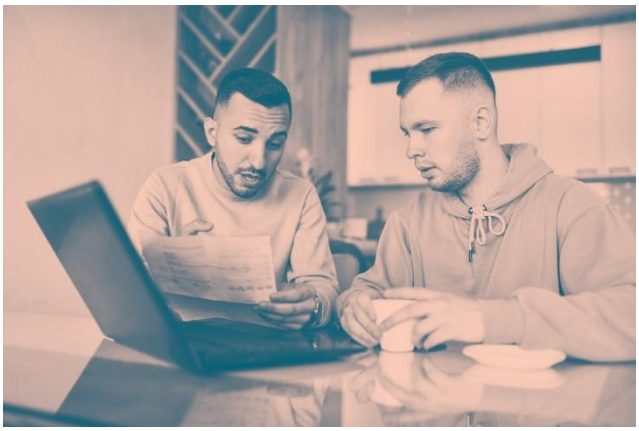
Case Study

"Client came to the foodbank, self-referral, for a food parcel. Client agreed to complete a budget sheet. By doing so she and her husband realised just how much they were spending & where they could make savings, spending less generally, switching utility companies & getting a better deal for their phones & broadband has helped so much.
They have not needed any further support"

Whitchurch Outreach

Basingstoke and Deane

The Whitchurch Outreach is very well established having started in the early 2000's and continues to run once a week to help the community of Whitchurch. We are fortunate that Basingstoke and Deane continue to provide funding for this important service to continue. Caroline has been maintaining this service for many years. The community of Whitchurch are also regular contributors to the cost of this service, and we are grateful to the Town Hall for their support.



PROJECTS

New Forest Debt Project

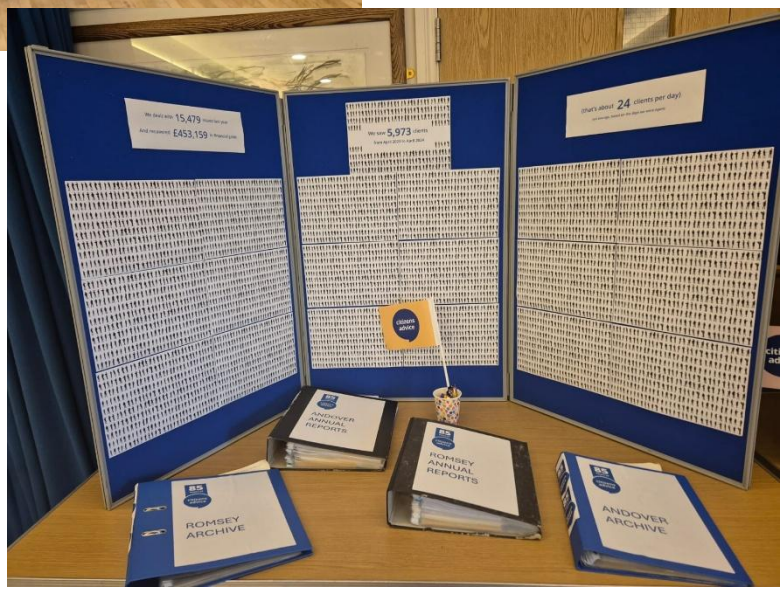
We began to host the New Forest debt Project in 2023 and in September Vic joined our team as a caseworker on the project. Vic takes referrals from both Test Valley and Winchester offices helping clients with limited capability resolve often complex and difficult debt situations. She spends several hours with her clients helping them find a way forward. In 24/25 Vic helped 37 clients and managed £200,544 of debt but also helped get £257,423 of debt written off

Advice First Aid

Advice First Aid is a proactive initiative aimed at training frontline workers and volunteers from other charities and organisations to become 'advice first aiders'. These trusted people within our communities are then better able to identify and support those most in need of advice services. They will learn how to ask the right questions so they can identify the relevant information, signpost to appropriate organisations, and know when to refer more urgent or complex advice cases to our qualified advisers and caseworkers. This free face-to-face training gives the skills to triage for advice, deliver initial guidance and refer back to us when needed. We have already delivered this to the Andover Foodbank and hope to spread this out to more organisations this year.

RAISING AWARENESS OF OUR SERVICE

We celebrated 85 years of the Citizens Advice Service



A team of us walked part of the Test Way

We attended various events throughout the Borough including the library in Andover, the Wellbeing Fair and the Big Band event in Stockbridge

WHAT OUR VOLUNTEERS SAY

H said "helping other people with their problems keeps me grounded. Helps keep my brain ticking over and is great for meeting new people"

R has been volunteering with us for about 12 years. He said "For me, it's all about giving back to the community I live in. It's the best unpaid job I have ever had. Seeing despair on a client's face turn to a smile after seeing us is the greatest moment ever."

J says "its always interesting to see how changes in government affects people's lives; Citizens Advice is a good organisation, takes pressure off government / local council / other services; when you retire and you don't know what to do with all your free time think about a volunteering role with Citizens Advice Test Valley"

P said "I have been a volunteer adviser with Citizens Advice for 11 years. Originally in the Wokingham office before moving to Romsey in 2020. I was puzzled and wanted to understand why people living in a wealthy town, were using foodbanks and claiming benefits in such numbers. Furthermore, I have been fortunate in working for a good employer all my life and on retiring I wanted to give something back to the community. Another key reason for volunteering was to keep my grey matter in good health. The challenges faced by volunteers certainly achieves that objective."

RESEARCH AND CAMPAIGNS

Research & Campaigns is one of the *two main aims* of the Citizens Advice service. Alongside delivering advice, we try to use what we learn from client cases to push for change in policies, practices, regulations. A small team of us meet periodically to review issues seen in advice cases locally, consider what can be done (e.g. raising awareness, contacting relevant organisations), and possibly pursue changes. Case evidence is collected (anonymously) and fed up to central Citizens Advice. This helps identify broader trends that can support policy campaigns or reforms.

Digital Exclusion

We have been recording evidence forms for clients that we see who are having difficulty using the internet, smart phones or computers – more and more the use of digital tools is required in our society, and this excludes many clients to do things on their own either through lack of confidence, limited access or capability. We can help but also campaign for other ways to be made available to our clients.

FUNDING AND SUPPORT

Our service which is free, confidential, independent and impartial would not exist were it not for the support and funding we receive locally. We are grateful to TVBC our Local Authority for their very generous funding. As well as this funding we receive various other grants and sources of funding to help us keep the doors open for our clients and meet the demand for our service.

The team

We have 50 volunteers working across both our offices in Andover and Romsey and some work from home. This includes trained advice volunteers, admin and reception support volunteers and trustees. Supporting them, we have 16 paid staff offering project work, admin support and help and guidance to the volunteers

50	8	16
Volunteers	Trustees	Paid Staff

- Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
- Citizens Advice Hampshire
- Hampshire County Council
- Trussell Trust
- Various donations from clients
- Test Valley Borough Council
- Andover Charities
- Abbots Ann Shop
- Clothworkers Foundation
- Citizens Advice
- Big Lottery
- Vivid
- Whitchurch Welfare Trust
- Individual donations

CITIZENS ADVICE TEST VALLEY

ANDOVER OFFICE
1st Floor
Chantry House
Chantry Way
Andover
SP10 2LZ

ROMSEY OFFICE
The Former Magistrates Court
Church Street
Romsey
SO51 8AQ

Email: www.testvalleycab.org.uk

Adviceline: 0808 812 6681

Admin line: 0808 178 6882



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Citizens Advice Test Valley is a registered charity (1156829) and a company limited by guarantee in England and Wales (08933947) Authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, FRN: 618853

Our registered office is 1st Floor, Chantry House, Chantry Way, Andover SP10 2LZ