

Moving forward

Impact report 2019/20



**citizens
advice**

**Esher
& District**

Introduction

Against a backdrop of rapid change and uncertainty, Citizens Advice Esher & District has continued to be a stable source of advice and reassurance to people across the Borough of Elmbridge this year.

Our free, independent and impartial service has been there - in person, on the phone and online - to help give local people the knowledge and confidence to find a way forward, whatever problems they face. As ever, the range of issues we tackled during 2019/20 was varied but the most common problems related to benefits, housing, debt and employment. As a result of our determined efforts to achieve the very best outcomes, we secured record income gains for our clients this year.

When coronavirus forced us to stop our face-to-face sessions at the end of March, we moved quickly to offer all advice by phone and email, meaning that we were well placed to help with advice on Universal Credit, employment issues, foodbank vouchers and community referrals. We secured funding to adapt our working practices to deliver face-to-face sessions when government restrictions on social distancing at work allowed.

We've been busy with internal matters, too. Elaine Bissell took up appointment as our new CEO in the New Year following the retirement of our long-serving colleague Linda Wheatley. At the same time we've continued discussions with Elmbridge Borough Council to relocate our office in Esher. We look forward to concluding these discussions soon so that we can plan with greater confidence for improvements to our client service as the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are felt.

There's much to be proud of in this report and our thanks go to everyone who has played a part. Most importantly, we're extremely grateful to our volunteers who have worked tirelessly during these most challenging of times - coping with new ways of working and new technology - to make such a positive difference to their community.

In a crisis, we've demonstrated our value as a community-based, client-led charity, able to respond at speed.

How we help

Whether dealing with a single issue or, more increasingly, a complex set of problems requiring more specialist support, this year we provided advice and information to nearly 2,000 people directly in person, over the phone or by email. Many more viewed our website for advice. Our drop-in service* at our main office in Esher and at outreach centres in Cobham and Molesey has enabled people to receive time-critical advice without having to wait for an appointment. Our disability and sickness benefits specialists have continued to be in high demand, providing expert advice and support to help the most vulnerable people in our community with detailed applications and appeals. Our money advice specialists have helped people better manage their finances and young students in Elmbridge have benefited from our free financial capability training.

*When the COVID-19 pandemic struck at the very end of the financial year, we had to stop all face-to-face advice but were able to transfer to phone and email delivery. Although more limiting than personal interviews, it means we've seamlessly continued to provide help whilst keeping everyone safe.

This is who we helped in 2019/2020:



1,950

people helped in person, by phone or by email



7,117

issues people sought our help with



11,851

activities completed to resolve client issues



146

sick and disabled people provided with expert advice from our specialist team



18

people attended our monthly independent financial advice clinic



350

local young people received financial capability training

Why we're needed

Behind each of our statistics is a story. The financial gains we achieve for our clients are significant, but the emotional impact of our support can be equally valuable to our clients, their families and friends. This is best demonstrated by the case of our client Rachel* who experienced unscrupulous behaviour by bailiffs. Derek, our most senior volunteer money advice specialist, was relentless in his pursuit of compensation for Rachel. Rachel's friend, who had accompanied her when she first contacted our office for advice, wrote a heart-felt letter of appreciation to us:

"This has been my first interaction with Citizens Advice and I've been blown away by the compassion, helpfulness, wisdom and non-judgemental support shown to Rachel. I hold her caseworker, you and all your colleagues at Citizens Advice Esher in high esteem – the work you do is invaluable and, I'm sure, life-changing to many.

Thank you for being there for people like Rachel – and for me too.'

*The client's name has been changed.

At a time when many more people will need guidance and support to help them overcome the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Citizens Advice is needed now more than ever.

"Knowing that her caseworker was dealing with things so capably took a huge load off my shoulders."

The impact of our work

It's no exaggeration to say that our advice can be life-changing for many of those we support. Helping people to resolve their money problems and have better control over their finances can lead to improvements in their mental and physical health too. After our advice, people have more knowledge and confidence to solve similar problems in the future.

Through our daily interaction with clients, we have a unique understanding of the issues that make life harder for everyone. With this knowledge, we can advocate for changes to government policy and industry practices to make things better for people.

This is the difference we made in 2019/2020:



Our wider value

We help people to solve their problems. In doing so, we create financial value. This means that we save the local authority, government and society money by stopping problems that are, or will become, costly to fix. It's impossible to monetise all of the crucial work that we do, but where we have the evidence to do so, it's useful to explain the value we provide.

Using a Treasury-approved model, we can calculate **three kinds of financial value**:

- **Value to the people we help:** We help individual clients to achieve individual financial outcomes like getting back-dated benefits, writing-off debts and gaining refunds for consumer issues.
This year our value to the people we help is calculated to be over £1,500,000.
- **Fiscal value:** Financial savings to local and national Government due to fewer payments for out-of-work benefits, evictions, re-housing evicted tenants and less demand on the NHS.
This year our fiscal value is calculated to be over £820,000. Through reducing cases of homelessness alone, we've saved Elmbridge Borough Council more than £112,000.
- **Public value:** When people have fewer problems they have higher levels of well-being, participation in society and productivity. Our calculation of public value also includes the value of a volunteer run service.
This year our public value is calculated to be over an astonishing £5,000,000.

We saved the local authority over £112,000 just through reducing cases of homelessness.

How we work

Our service is provided by a team of highly-trained volunteers supported by a small paid team who manage the charity. This keeps our costs to a minimum and ensures that we provide exceptional value for money. More than ever, we are immensely proud of the team who kept us going this year, taking up the dual challenges of working remotely from home and getting to grips with new technology.

How we are funded

We are an independent charity. We are grateful that Elmbridge Borough provides core funding for over half of our modest running costs, but we still need to bridge a substantial funding gap each year. In 2019/20 we secured funds from a number of grant-making bodies, local organisations and individual donors to enable us to continue with our vital service offering both generalist and specialist advice. We thank them all for their generous support.



28+

advisers are highly-trained volunteers



17,300

hours given by our volunteers this year



£430,000

estimated worth of volunteer time

Our funders and donors in 2019/20 included:

- Elmbridge Borough Council (our core funder)
- Community Foundation for Surrey
- DWP Help to Claim (via national Citizens Advice)
- The Albert Hunt Trust
- The Henry Smith Charity
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- The Shanly Foundation
- Waitrose - Cobham and Esher stores
- Members of our 200 Club and other individual donors

Contact us

Citizens Advice Esher & District
Harry Fletcher House
High Street
Esher KT10 9RN

Tel. 01372 462100
www.eshercab.org.uk

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