

Impact report

2022/23



**Making a
difference
for 50 years**

We are Citizens Advice Esher & District

We can all face problems that seem complicated or intimidating. At Citizens Advice, we believe no one should have to face these problems without access to good quality, independent advice.

The Citizens Advice service offers free, confidential advice online, over the phone and in person. When we say we're here for everyone, we mean it.

That's why we're here - to give people the knowledge and the confidence they need to find their way forward, whoever they are and whatever their problem.

People rely on us because we're independent and totally impartial. We provide our clients with all the facts and possible outcomes of different options. That way they can make the decision that's right for them.

No one else sees so many people with such a wide range of different problems, and that gives us a unique insight into the challenges people are facing today.

With the right evidence, we can show big organisations - from the government to national companies and institutions - how they can make things better for people.

"I have used Citizens Advice in Esher for many years and, quite frankly, I don't know how I would have coped without them. They have helped my whole family."

- Client in Elmbridge

Making a difference for 50 years

As Citizens Advice Esher & District celebrates 50 years of supporting the people of east Elmbridge, **Chief Executive, Elaine Bissell** reflects on the reasons for the enduring success and growth of the charity.

Looking back on the past 50 years, from how visionary and determined the first volunteers were, to how locations and ways of working have changed since the 1970s, I am struck by one constant factor.

At the core of our charity remains the huge dedication and commitment to supporting local residents through crises be they big, small, lifelong or momentary.

When I think about the work I do day-to-day, I feel both privileged and humbled.

Firstly, there are the people we are here to serve - the residents and workers of Elmbridge. They come to us for many reasons but always with the same purpose of needing to find a way through a problem. It may be very easy and quick to resolve or it can be complex and take months. To walk with them through that time, share in their personal stories and help them see a way forward is a huge privilege. We thank them for putting their trust in us.

Secondly, there is the team I work with - the paid staff, volunteers, trustees and other Citizens Advice colleagues. I am struck by the unique sense of purpose that everyone working for our charity has, particularly one with such a strong volunteer ethos. Thank you to all former colleagues for developing and nurturing that sense of what our charity represents.

Having a strong volunteer core means that we have a breadth of knowledge and experience which is second to none. Colleagues come from all walks of life and we learn from each other every day. I am humbled by the empathy, selflessness, compassion and dedication they demonstrate during every call, interview or email. We could not achieve what we do without them.

Then there is the wider Elmbridge community support. The Borough is extremely fortunate to have a thriving network of organisations and funders, charitable and not-for-profit, working together for the well-being of its community. It has been a privilege to work with them all.

Finally, we would not have reached our 50th anniversary without the incredible support of our funders who have shared our sense of purpose over the years and allowed us to develop and grow.

Thank you.

Elaine Bissell

Elaine Bissell
Chief Executive



Read more about how our charity has evolved since its launch in 1973 on [our website](#)

Helping people right now

Record numbers of people reached out to us for crisis support in 2022/23, proving that we're needed more today than at any time in our first 50 years.

Since 1973, through several recessions and the recent pandemic, our advisers have been on hand to provide free, impartial advice to help people through the most challenging of times. But it's the current cost of living crisis that has led to the most devastating trends in people seeking our support.

As energy and food prices continued to soar, unprecedented numbers of people required food bank referrals or emergency charitable support. Many of these people came to us for the first time as they did not know where else to turn when struggling to make ends meet and cover their essential bills.

The fact that this has been happening in what is considered to be one of the wealthiest boroughs in the country, highlights the level of inequality in the area.

Throughout the year we've worked hard to find ways to increase our capacity and give local people access to the support they need. We started the year afresh in our new office based in Elmbridge Civic Centre. This central location has helped to raise our profile and further develop our close liaison with various council departments.

The end of Covid restrictions meant we could resume our important outreach work. In October 2022 we re-opened our regular outreach service at Cobham Centre for the Community. In February 2023, with funding from the Trussell Trust, we set up a new weekly outreach at East Elmbridge Foodbanks in Thames Ditton and West Molesey.

Elsewhere, we attended several cost of living events organised by Elmbridge Borough Council. Working in partnership in this way helps us reach more of the people who need us most.

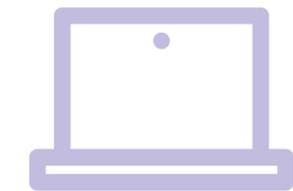
This year we launched a new website to make it easier for people to contact us online and to provide the information needed to answer their queries as fully as possible.

As a result of all this activity, we helped 10% more people than in the previous year and achieved a direct income gain of over £694,000 for our clients. Beyond financial outcomes, many of those we helped reported improvements in their physical health and mental well-being after receiving our support during exceptionally challenging times.



36%

people helped over the phone



50%

people helped online



11%

people helped in person

We are accessible and inclusive

We are committed to developing our service so that anyone who needs our help can access it easily. We recognise the value of diversity, promote equality and fairness and challenge discrimination.

Offering people flexibility and choice in how they can get advice from us is an ongoing focus of our work. We know that some people need access to:

- advice in their local community via outreach work
- clear spoken or written advice, in person or remotely
- advice that does not rely on internet access or digital skills
- advice that can be translated into another language, including BSL.

With each person, we aim to explore what is most appropriate for them.

We continue to monitor and anticipate the diverse advice needs of our community and work with local user-led organisations to promote inclusion. We welcome feedback on how we can keep improving access and inclusivity.

For disabled people or those with a long-term illness, we have a highly-trained team of specialist advisers who can help look at eligibility for disability benefits, including Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance (AA). The team provide invaluable support through the complex and stressful process from claim to appeal. This year we saw a 22% rise in enquiries in this area, indicating the barriers that many can face when navigating the benefit system.

All advisers are trained to identify issues around discrimination and help people resolve their problem where they have been treated unfairly or differently at work because of who they are.



86%

positive client rating for ease of access to our service



22%

increase in number of disability benefit issues handled



40

discrimination issues recorded

Our direct impact in 2022/23

Despite record numbers of people coming to us with urgent and complex problems, this is what we achieved:



1,946

people advised in person, by phone or online



6,147

issues people sought our help with



14,382

activities completed to resolve client issues



£25,599

referrals made to local food banks and for charitable support



569

people with disabilities or health conditions given expert advice



27

households prevented from becoming homeless



£694,427

total direct income gained for our clients



£192,153

worth of client debts written off

Our wider impact in 2022/23

We save the local authority, government and public services thousands of pounds by stopping problems that are costly to fix. We've used a Treasury-approved model to estimate our wider value to society this year:



£750,000

in fiscal savings by helping to reduce payments for out-of-work benefits, evictions, re-housing and less demand on the NHS



£5 million

in public savings by helping to create higher levels of well-being, productivity and participation in society



£2 million

in savings to individuals by helping people to get back-dated benefits, writing-off debts and gaining refunds for consumer issues

Specifically, we've saved Elmbridge Borough Council **£185,000** just through reducing cases of homelessness.

The problems we helped people with

Every year, hundreds of people come to us with a range of different problems, from benefits to housing, employment to debt. In 2022/23, the top five issues we helped people with were:



We support people on any issue that they may face, but our most common enquiry area is always welfare benefits. These enquiries accounted for over a quarter of all issues recorded for the year 2022/23.

The importance of ensuring that individuals claim the benefits they are entitled to was emphasised this year when the Government linked additional financial help to certain benefit recipients.

Most notably, we saw a 22% increase in enquiries about disability benefits. Some of this increase reflected a national trend as people sought to maximise their income during the cost of living crisis, but there were several local factors too. Reduced funding and capacity at other local organisations meant that they could no longer offer to help with disability benefit applications.

Our second most requested area of advice was housing. Queries included access to housing, poor conditions in rental properties and rent increases. The pressure on the availability and affordability of local housing was a theme throughout.

Demand for debt advice increased steadily throughout the year. Recovery action for council tax arrears continued to be the main trigger for people coming to us for help in this area. Worryingly, we saw an increase in the number of clients presenting with negative budgets as incomes failed to keep up with housing, food and energy costs.

Reflecting the unprecedented challenges of this time, we saw a record number of clients seeking emergency crisis support, including foodbank vouchers, energy vouchers and funding for essential household items.

Speaking out for change

As well as providing advice, we use our insight into the challenges that people face to campaign for changes to industry practices and government policies to make things better for everyone. In other wider work, we educate young people to help prevent future problems.

Our Research and Campaigns team collect and collate evidence based on facts and real-life examples provided by our advisers. This evidence enables us to identify systemic problems in society and suggest policy solutions.

Some of the key issues our Research and Campaigns team focused on during 2022/23 included:

- **the cost of living crisis and increases in energy bills**
- **pushing for change to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) as rental prices continued to climb**
- **awareness of scams - particularly online scams and those sent via email and social media**
- **legal protection for allotment plot holders.**

To highlight our efforts to bring about change in these areas, we have continued to post widely on social media and, where appropriate, raise issues directly with local elected representatives including councillors and MPs.

Additionally, we've been pro-active in delivering money management workshops to the community - continuing our financial capability sessions to Year 12 students at two local schools and working in partnership with the Mary Frances Trust to deliver workshops as part of their pilot Independent Living Skills programme.

Through this work we hope to equip people with skills that will help them to avoid financial problems in the future.



199

issues raised as evidence of unfair policy or practice



480

posts on social media to publicise our vital work



150

young people trained in money management skills

How we helped Anne & Colin*

What began as a simple request for help with an application for a free TV licence developed into a more complex case, requiring comprehensive, expert support from our advisers.

Anne and Colin are both retired. Colin is receiving out-patient treatment for a life-threatening illness and Anne has a long-term health condition. When the couple came to us for help with their TV licence, we learnt that they were struggling to manage on their state pensions with the increase in food and energy prices.

We quickly helped them to apply for a free licence and then offered to take a look at their income and expenditure. Whilst they gathered information about their finances, we supported them with a referral to the local foodbank and vouchers from local charity Walsingham Care.

After reviewing their financial situation, we suggested areas where they could get extra help, notably from their utility companies and by applying for Attendance Allowance to help with the cost of their care needs.

We also identified an error in the calculation of their Council Tax Support payment and helped them challenge it with the council. It transpired that their Council Tax account had been set up incorrectly and they were subsequently awarded almost £11,000 in backdated payments. They now receive full Council Tax Support, saving them £200 a month.

The couple's son wrote to thank us for all the help we had given his parents and explained that the outcome was having a positive affect on the wider family, demonstrating the far-reaching impact of our work.

*Clients' names and some details changed/omitted to preserve anonymity



"It was an absolutely brilliant experience...so much taken on board to assist me. I'm confident that all will be sorted. Thank you!"

- Client in Elmbridge

Volunteers are at the heart of our charity

Throughout our charity's 50 year history, we have depended on our many wonderful volunteers. From the first volunteers in 1973 to our current cohort of advisers, support staff and trustees who give their time freely, we are indebted to them for the commitment they have shown to their local community.

Supported by a small number of paid staff who ensure that the charity is well-run, each of our wonderful volunteers works for us at least one day every week - and often much more. In total, our volunteers gave over 13,900 hours of their time during 2022/23, worth the equivalent of an amazing £335,450 to the Borough of Elmbridge.

With exceptional demands placed on the team this year, we have been astounded by their continued compassion and determination to achieve the very best for clients.



We were delighted to welcome many volunteers, past and present, to our **50th anniversary celebration in June 2023**.

The occasion provided us with an opportunity to express our immense gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the success of our charity and made a positive impact on the lives of thousands of Elmbridge residents.

We were honoured to have Dame Clare Moriarty, Chief Executive of Citizens Advice for England and Wales, as our special guest for the evening. We were also delighted that the Mayor of Elmbridge, Councillor Richard Williams, attended the event, cut our 50th anniversary cake with Clare Moriarty, and had the chance to meet some of our dedicated volunteers.



40+

highly skilled
volunteers working as
advisers, support staff
and trustees



13,900

volunteer hours
given by our team,
worth an estimated
£335,450

Our funders make our work possible

Many people do not realise we are a small, independent charity which relies on grants and donations raised locally so that we can continue to deliver our free advice service in east Elmbridge.

We would like to acknowledge and give our thanks for the vital contribution of local funders, individuals and community groups to support our work. In 2022/23 they included:

- **Elmbridge Borough Council (our core funder)**
- **Bridgepoint**
- **Community Foundation for Surrey**
- **Co-op members - as part of the Co-op Local Community Fund promoted at the Thames Ditton store**
- **Mary Frances Trust**
- **The Albert Hunt Trust**
- **The National Lottery Community Fund**
- **Shanly Foundation**
- **Surrey County Council**
- **The Trussell Trust**
- **Waitrose Esher store**
- **Walton Charity**
- **Members of our 200 Club and other individual donors**



For our 50th anniversary year, we've launched a new appeal to raise £50,000 to help us reach those most in need.

Right now we're needed more than ever. We're seeing first-hand the devastating impact that the cost of living crisis is having on our community. Many of those we see have multiple, complex issues.

We're working really hard to meet this demand for our expert help, but our budgets are stretched to the limit and we can't do more without additional funding.

Please donate if you can, to help us help others in crisis. You can donate via our appeal's [Give As You Live Donate webpage](#), or scan this QR code:



50 years of serving the Elmbridge community

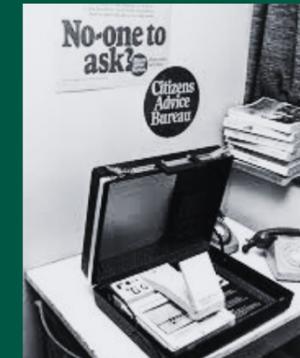


4 September 1939

The day after World War II begins, Citizens Advice opens in 200 locations across the UK. The nearest branch to Esher is in Leatherhead.

1973

The Esher & District Citizens' Advice Bureau officially opens on 7 May 1973 in the Council offices in Esher Lodge (now demolished). All 28 staff, including the manager are unpaid volunteers.



1976

A sub-office (outreach) is opened operating from two rooms above Molesey Library. Initially planned to run for a year, it continues to operate in Molesey until the COVID-19 pandemic.

1992

A new national Citizens Advice Bureau training scheme is introduced with comprehensive training packs for all advisers.



1972

Esher Urban District Council, in negotiation with the National Association, sets up a committee to look into the feasibility of opening an Esher Citizens Advice Bureau.

1975

Having originally been accommodated in the Council offices, the Bureau moves to the adjacent Esher Lodge Annexe.



1987

The Bureau purchases its first computer - an Amstrad.

1990

An outreach service is set up at Cobham Day Centre.

50 years of serving the Elmbridge community

1995

Esher Citizens Advice moves into Harry Fletcher House which had previously housed the Youth Centre. The Bureau shares the building with Relate.



2000

The Bureau launches its own website www.eshercab.org.uk

2015

The Bureau is rebranded as Citizens Advice Esher & District.



2022

The expiry of the lease on Harry Fletcher House prompts another change of premises and Citizens Advice moves into the Elmbridge Civic Centre in Esher.



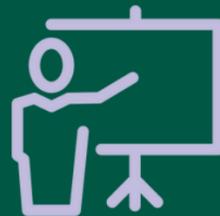
2023

On 7 May 2023 Citizens Advice Esher & District celebrates 50 years of providing an essential service to the residents of Elmbridge



1995

A guidance tutor is appointed to run the Bureau's training programme and specialist training in debt and benefits is established.

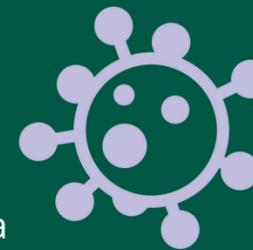


2008

The Bureau starts providing Financial Capability training in local schools.

2020

In March the COVID-19 pandemic and associated national lockdowns trigger a move to remote delivery of advice. Advisers work from home, using telephone and email for client contact.



2023

New weekly outreaches are established at Elmbridge Foodbank and bi-weekly sessions in Cobham.

Citizens Advice Esher & District helps people find a way forward.

We provide free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems. We are a voice for our clients on the issues that matter to them.

We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment.

We're here for everyone.

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