citizens advice in West Sussex North South East

Our Impact Report 2024-25

Improving lives for our coastal, rural and urban residents

Community Advice
For the Community - By the Community

Welcome

£83,309,259 value to the public

I am excited to share this year's Impact Report, showcasing the contributions of our volunteers and staff in supporting the needs of our residents across all communities.

While the complexity of residents' needs has increased, our core mission remains unchanged: prioritising those in greatest need, empowering all communities with the skills and confidence to resolve their problems and working to improve social policy.

Key issues such as financial hardship and access to services continue to feature amongst residents who turn to us for help and remain central to our work.

Last year, our efforts resulted in substantial public savings, helping over 40,000 people navigate 138,000 problems. This generated over £26 million in additional financial support for residents, representing a value of £83 million to the public purse due to reduced homelessness and improved health and wellbeing amongst other outcomes.

Our commitment includes engaging with over 350 local volunteers throughout the year who contributed 33,000 hours of support worth £1,783,406 to the charity. Crucially 75% of volunteers say that they are less isolated and 90% have improved skills including digital, with a number moving into paid work and further training.

Advice is only one part of how we make a difference, our social policy work is critical to addressing the root cause and achieving our ambition to end health inequalities so that our community thrives.

This year we fed into national and local activity on welfare reform and undertook funded research with young people and the Chagossian community on service and health needs.

Our insight work is shared directly with Local Authorities, the NHS and our charity partners so that we can work together to improve our systems and services for residents.

Emma Cross, CEO
Citizens Advice in West Sussex (North, South, East)

Our Vision

We believe in a thriving community without health inequalities, where people are empowered and the system works.

100% of our language café attendees said our work made a difference

Our Values

Generous
We are compassionate and collaborative

Responsible
We are informed and honest

Inventive
We are forward thinking and problem solvers

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

We stand up for equity, diversity and inclusion throughout our work, values and people. Whether that's advising on discrimination cases, removing barriers or ensuring our communities voice is heard.

We are rooted in our Communities

Communities are at the heart of who we are, what we do and why we do it, empowering our communities with opportunities and tools to thrive including volunteering.

Our Goals

Advice is all about prevention

Advice focuses on prevention by addressing root causes and empowering individuals to make informed choices. This approach helps prevent homelessness, health issues, hardship, unemployment, and hospital admissions, ultimately improving the system and reducing future problems.

So that...

- Homelessness is reduced
- People have improved income
- Food dependency is removed
- The health and wellbeing of our residents is improved
- People feel empowered to resolve the problems they face

40,000 residents helped with 138,000 problems

People receive early accessible help and tools targeted to their need

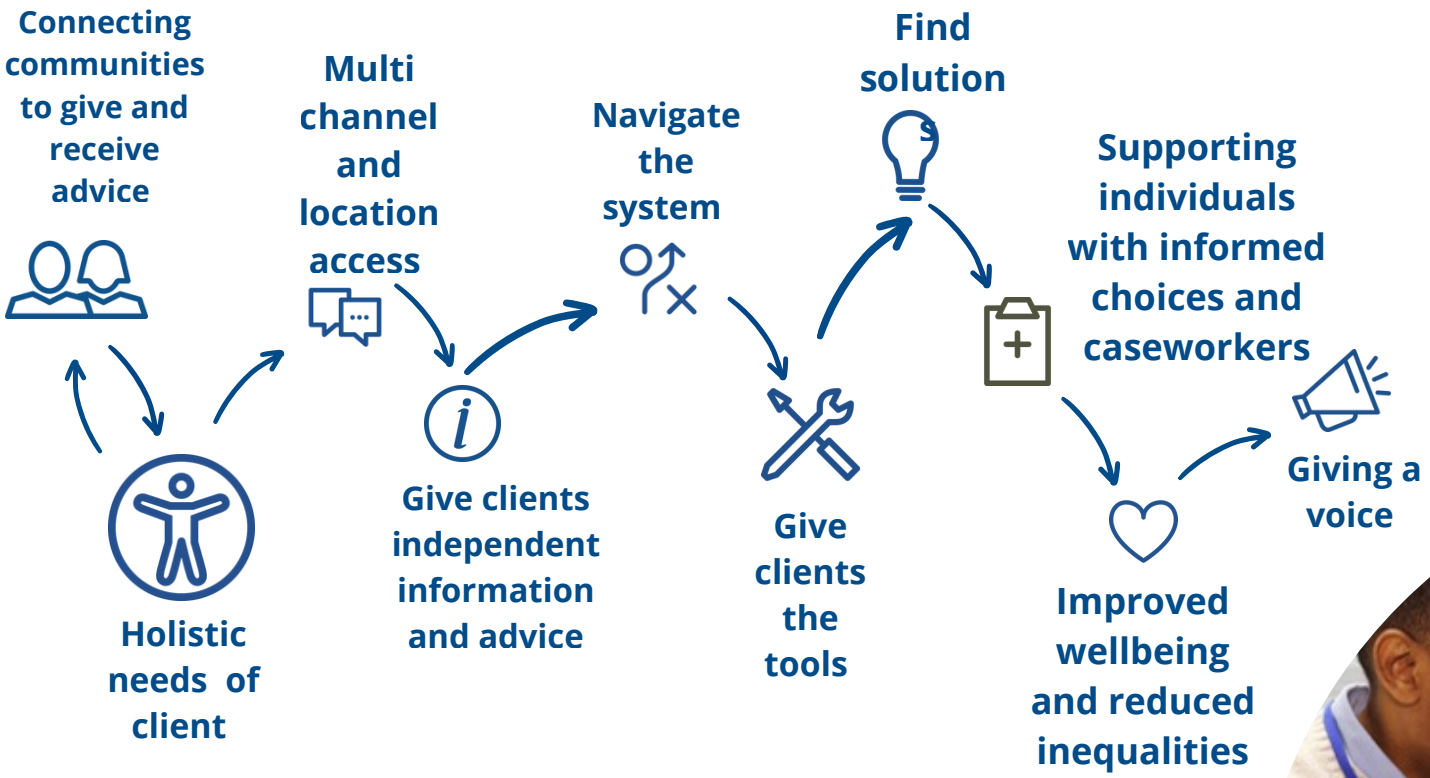
Our communities are empowered through connections and knowledge

Our insights and resident voices improve the systems and prevent problems

Our Approach

90% of users would recommend us

Our values drive us in our decision making, behaviours and the work we do.



Delivered from:

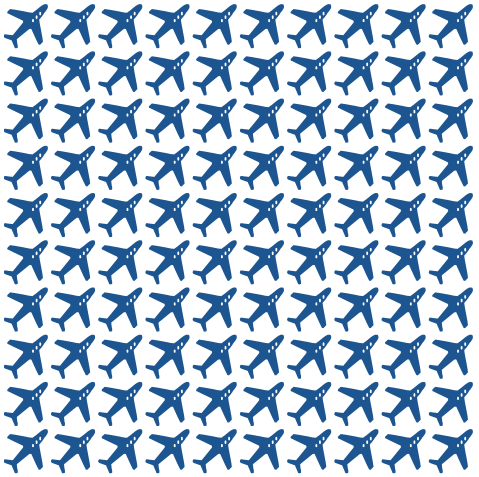
- **6** Advice Hubs
- **20** Outreach Locations
- **6** Channels including webchat and video
- **4** Social Media Channels

By

- **+70** paid staff
- **240** active volunteers
- **100** Community Champions
- **Engagement Team**

Our Impact

40,000 people with 138,000 problems helped last year - that's the equivalent of over **100** planes from Gatwick Airport



30,193 advice calls

244,440 website and social media reach

79,708 advice sessions

8 out of 10 people found a way forward following our advice

£1,139,148 savings to Local Authorities homelessness casework

£3,026,168 savings in homelessness prevention advice

1,068 Gender Based Violence or Hate Crime issues supported

£6,368,174 savings to the DWP by keeping people in work

£500 average client annual energy savings

For every **£1** invested, we generate **£40.17** in public value

£83,309,205 savings to the public purse through reduced homelessness, improved health and jobs

£4,328,752 savings to the NHS

£26 million financial outcomes for clients

£12,674,774 fiscal value of our community advice

£7,837,844 in additional disability benefit payments

90% of people have improved wellbeing

We advised **2,500** people on **housing issues** - that's the equivalent population of Ashington Village

Our Communities

Population - **915,037** people live in West Sussex which has seen a **(10%) increase** of **11,004** between 2023 and 2024.

Housing - Disrepair issues have increased particularly among social landlords. Housing costs are high; the proportion of income spent on rent is often higher than the national average and the South East. In **Adur 72.6% of income is spent on housing.**

Transport - Residents report challenges accessing services and employment. **24%** of the population live in rural areas.

Fuel Poverty - Our insight work suggests **27,400** households in West Sussex are in fuel poverty.

Living costs - costs including transport, housing and utilities without the correlating South East average incomes. The cost of living in Horsham is **11%** more expensive than the national average.

Digital Exclusion - 6% of the population are offline and **13%** do not use the internet (10% comparitive). They are more likely to be elderly, disabled or on a low income. Cost, skills and confidence are drivers.

Over **20,000** children are in income deprived households**

15.8% of the population identify as being from a minority ethnic background

38.2% of the Crawley population identify as being from a minority ethnic background, up from 27.9% in the 2011 census

13% of adults cannot use the internet

94,500 people are digitally excluded

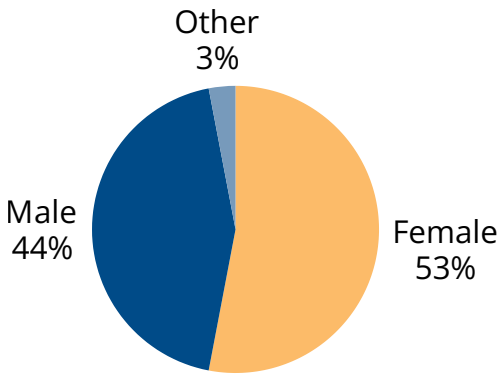
****(WSCC JSNA)**

About our Users

We are a service for all ages and all stages of life, freely available to everyone.

However, most people come to us when there is a life crisis or change, which means more people with health and disability problems and more often they will be on a low income.

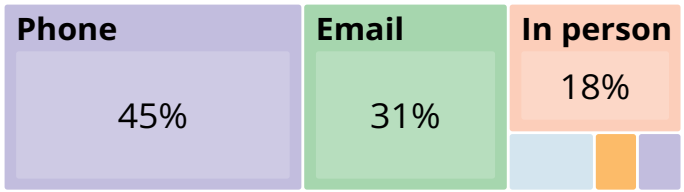
Gender



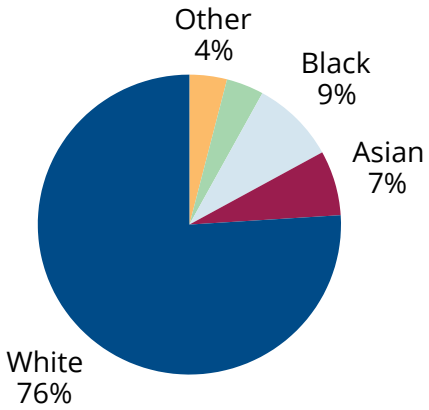
4,746 users were carers for adults or children

51% of users have poor health or a disability

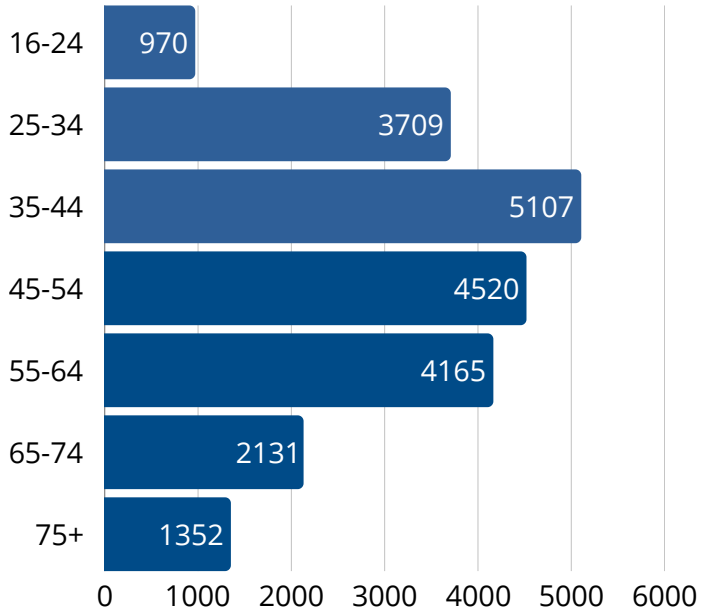
Breakdown of Clients by Channel



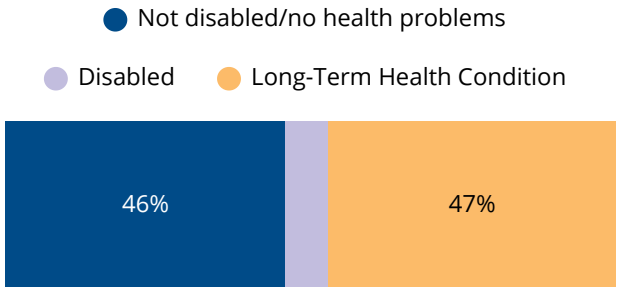
Ethnicity



Age



Disability and Long Term Illness

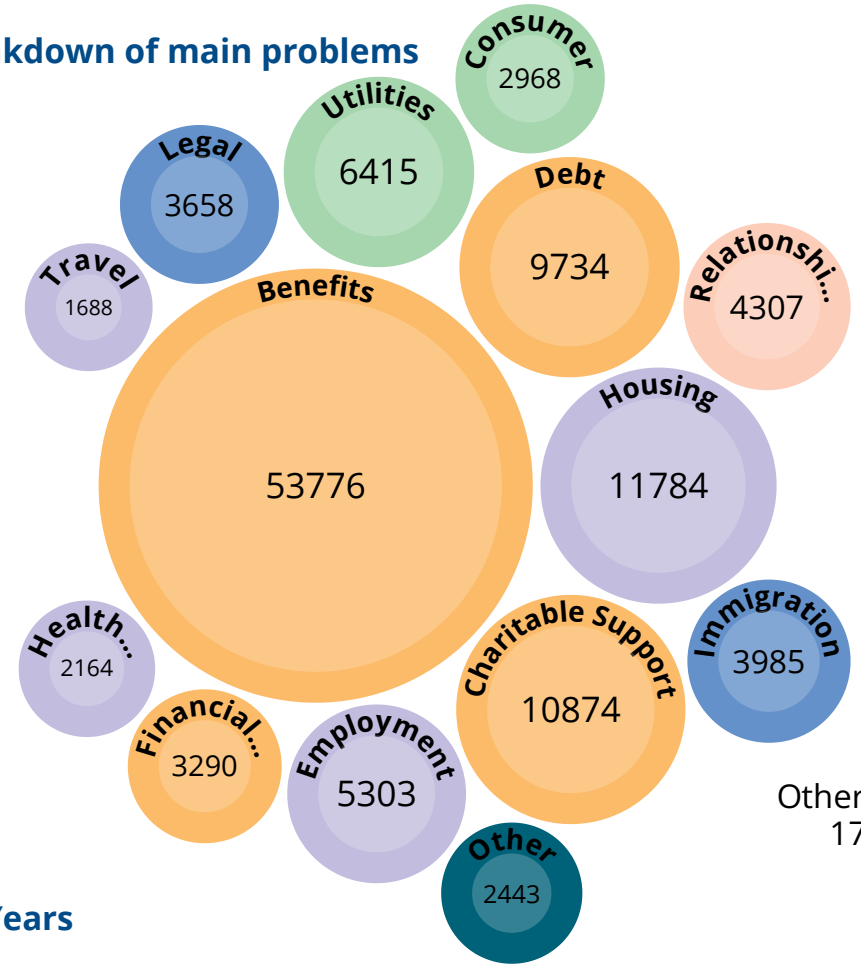


Advice Issues

Advice needs are rising year on year. with financial health and wellbeing the main problem.

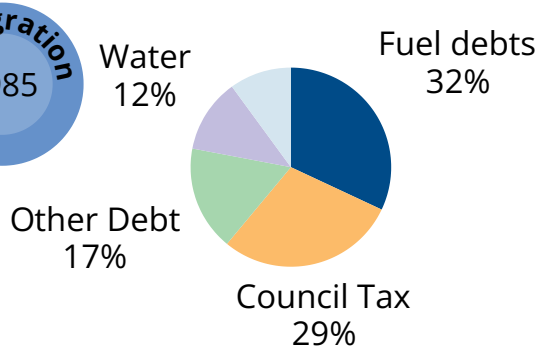
Welfare Benefits dominate as the main enquiry area, with Health and Disability related benefits the main areas being advised. This is followed by Housing and Debt as large areas of advice need. Charitable support is third highest demonstrating issues regarding financial resilience.

Breakdown of main problems

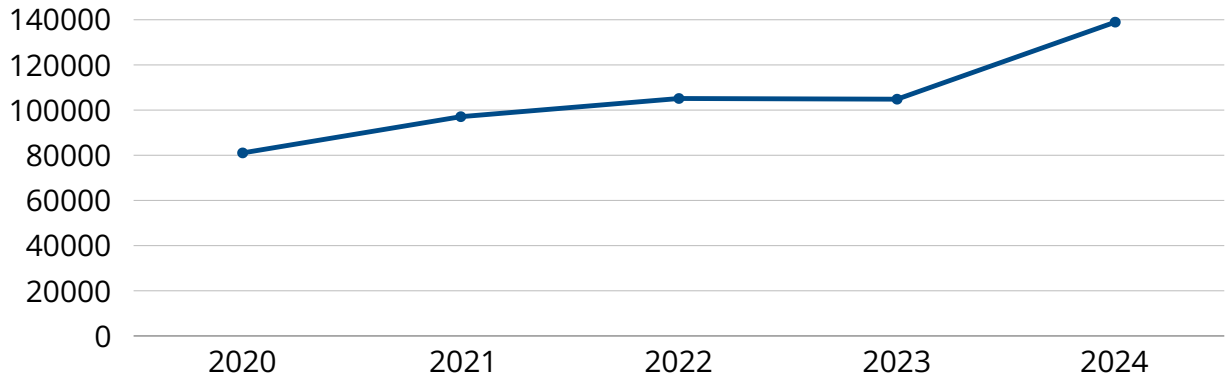


6 - the average number of problems clients present with

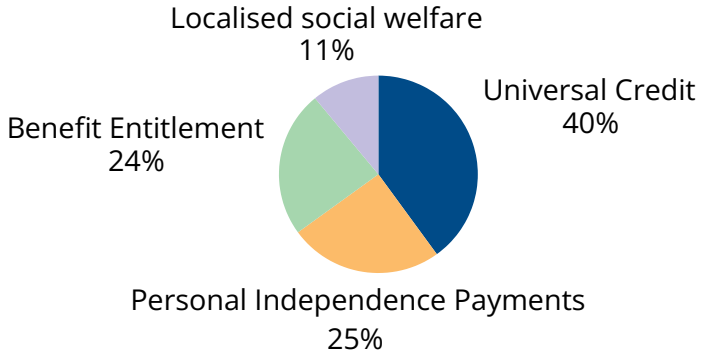
Breakdown of Debt Problems



Total Advice Problems over the past 5 Years



Types of Benefit Problems



Improved Health and Wellbeing

£4,328,752 savings to the NHS

Over 50% of our users have a disability or long term health condition, often with multiple compound needs.

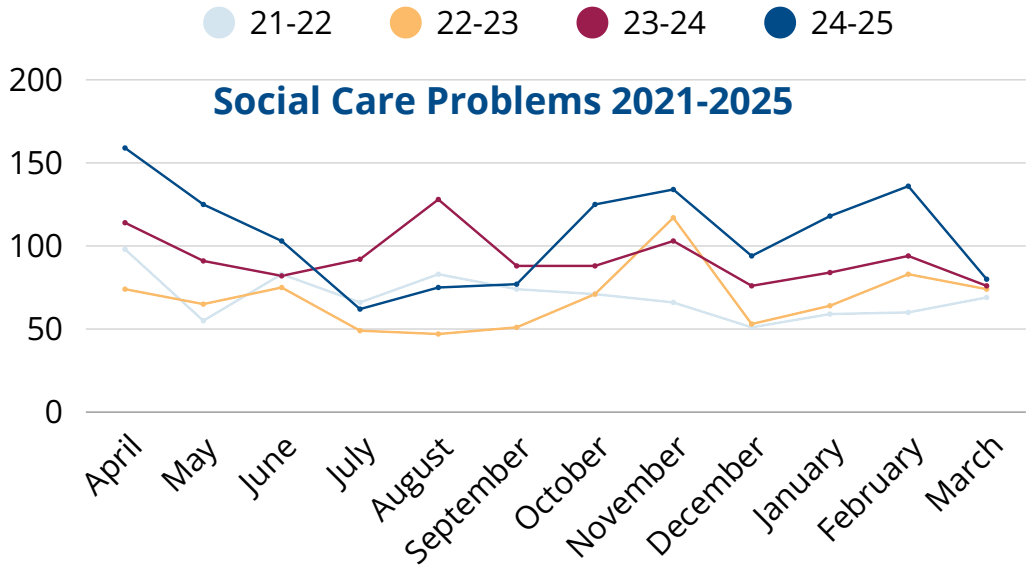
£7,837,844 in additional disability benefit payments we secured for residents which help towards health and social care costs.

Improved Physical and Mental Health - **69%** of debt clients and **90%** of clients report improved health and wellbeing as a result of their advice.

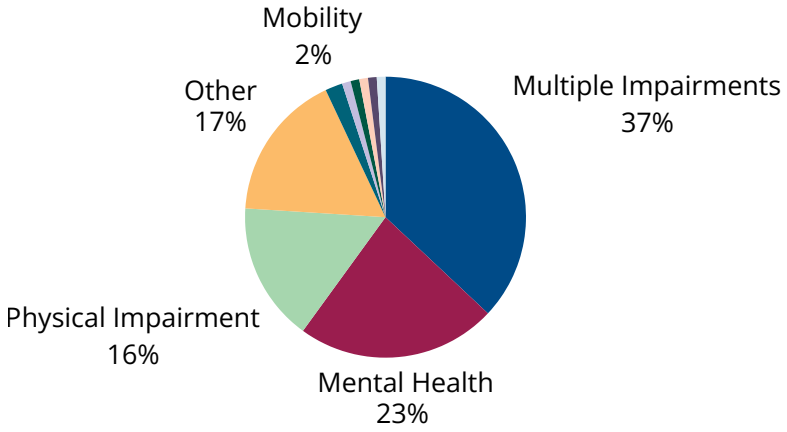
Reduced burden on the NHS - referrals from health care professionals to focus on non-clinical cause and impacts.

Tackling the Social Determinants of Health - our work reduces health inequalities by ending poor housing conditions, financial hardship, health and disability support, isolation and unemployment.

Independent Living - **48%** of our benefits work involves sickness and disability benefits which allow people to stay in their home, contribute towards care costs and keep well so they can stay safe in their home.



Breakdown of Disability Type



Beccy* received £2,600 in backdated Universal Credit payments following a successful Tribunal hearing with our Macmillan Welfare Benefits Caseworker.

Beccy was diagnosed with cancer and underwent extensive surgery and treatment which made her too unwell to work. Her only income was statutory sick pay.

Beccy had no savings and was struggling to make ends meet. She applied for Universal Credit but was refused. Feeling abandoned she contacted the Citizens Advice in West Sussex Macmillan team.

Our expert advisor found that the DWP had made a mistake, despite our representations Beccy had to appeal to the Social Security Tribunal. With our help, she won and received £100 per month of Universal Credit and a backdated payment of £2,600. Beccy was able to pay off the debts she incurred whilst waiting for the appeal.

Beccy said, "This case highlights that without people like you being suspicious that human error can occur, it can easily go unnoticed with the benefit lost forever. One thousand thanks!"

"What an incredible outcome! I cannot begin to thank you enough for everything you've done."

*All names have been changed

Improved Health and Wellbeing

85% people feel less stressed

Our specialist Macmillan Benefits Team helped **1,188** local people with **5,480** financial problems during 2024.

Working with those living with cancer we secured life changing financial outcomes totalling almost **£5.5 million**.

This means residents with cancer could afford to attend hospital appointments, heat their home, and focus on their recovery rather than money concerns.

"What I will always remember is that the Macmillan Staff (at Citizens Advice in West Sussex) worked relentlessly (and I use the word to give maximum praise) kept coming back to ensure ongoing support. I hope these words leave no doubt that in every respect I recognised the value of the help Macmillan staff gave me and how blessed I was to be a recipient of it."

£4,328,752 savings to the NHS

£7,837,844 in additional disability benefit payments

90% of users report improved health and wellbeing

Reducing Homelessness

Preventing homelessness is a key outcome and impact of our work.

£4,167,316 local authority savings on homelessness prevention

A third of housing problems involved homelessness

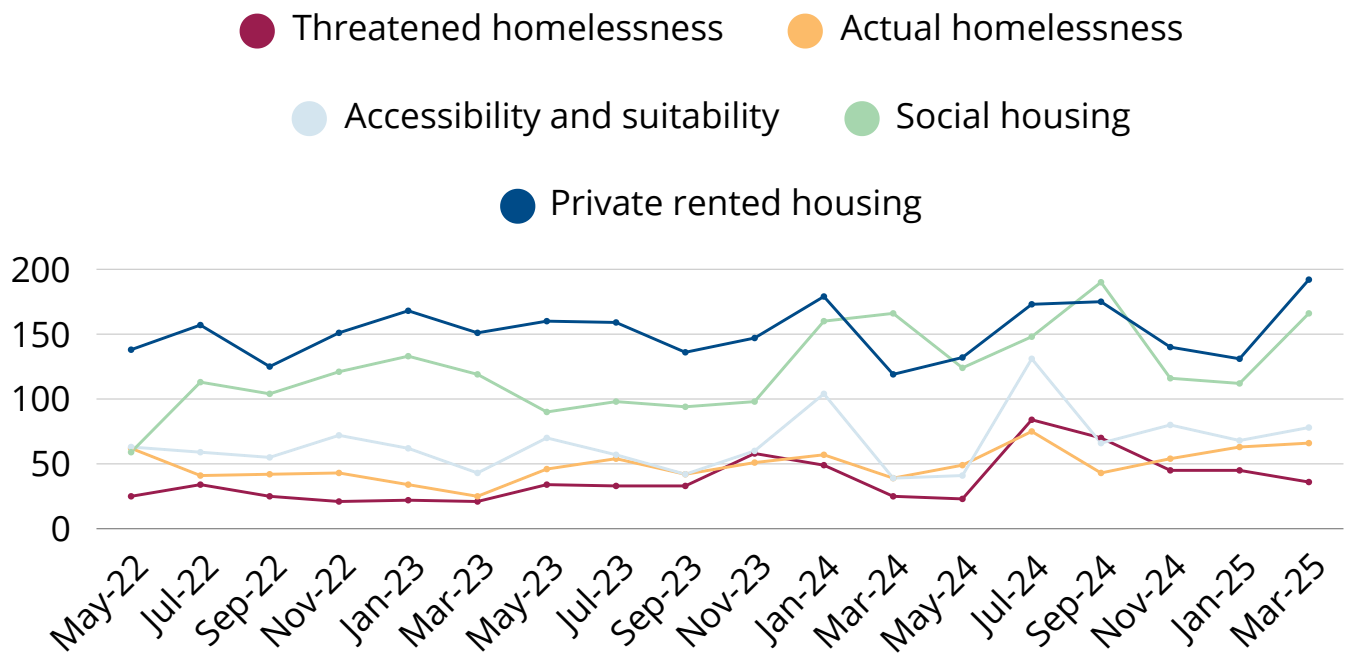
£1,191,121 debts renegotiated

3,928 households and 100 cases per month were supported to prevent homelessness

39% increase in homeless cases and **32%** increase of at risk cases compared with last year

900 households helped with advice on housing access and suitability - often reflecting disability needs within the household

Housing Casework Trends 2022-2025



Reducing Food Insecurity

We work in partnership with National Trussell Trust, local foodbanks and the food networks across the County to ensure residents do not go hungry and are given help to resolve the cause.

We see a disproportionate number of users who are single parents or have a long term health condition or disability.

Our specialist caseworkers based in some of the local foodbanks can work with people to address these issues and build their confidence.

32% of homeless households received food support

35% of foodbank clients had children

34% of foodbank had a mental health condition

60% of foodbank users benefited from energy advice which improved their financial health and wellbeing

+5,000 Individual foodbank users advised on sustainable financial solutions and crisis help

£472,476 Crisis support via fuel vouchers, charitable and Household Support Fund

"Oh my goodness! I received this letter saying that they are going to give me a huge amount. I thought, am I reading this right? I'm going to receive a lot of money. All I can say is, Wow! All there is to do now is receive it."
A foodbank client

94% of foodbank clients received extra income following our advice

£2,894,560 additional income for foodbank users

As a Help to Claim advisor for Citizens Advice in West Sussex, I talk to 25 clients every week to check benefit entitlements and support people making a claim.

Recently, I received an update from a client I helped called Jane*. Jane first rang on behalf of her disabled daughter Claire*. Jane had talked to someone at housing benefits, but she decided to come to us for some independent advice. During the call, I realised that Claire should be receiving the Severe Disability Premium (SDP).

"Jane had never been advised by the authorities about this and no-one had spotted it. I explained to her how to apply and to request a backdate due to an official error.

As a result of our work Claire was awarded the back-dated sum of £40,000.

Despite being pleased, I feel shocked this can happen, [people] do not know what they are entitled to?"

John - Help to claim advisor*

Who knew an hour or two's work could help someone receive £40,000?

*All names have been changed

Prevention- Improving the System

Advice addresses issues by identifying systemic causes and solutions via social policy and legal casework, leveraging extensive data from our case management system alongside local citizen advice and user experiences.

Upstream and Downstream Solutions

1,500 case stories submitted

+200
Interviews took place

+150,000
data lines analysed

Highlights

- **Collective Data** - Combined data and case stories with other Citizens Advice to inform national policy on welfare reform and winter fuel allowance, leading to policy changes.
- **Local Insight** - Provided insights on food bank usage and homelessness to guide local policy and service improvements.
- **Direct Input** - Using our insights, lived experience voices and expertise to respond to consultations on Personal Independence Payments, Welfare Reform and Council Tax debt recovery. Building on our calls for a council tax protocol.
- **Community Research** - Conducted interviews, focus groups and surveys to explore health inequalities and social determinants of health, informing strategies for Integrated Neighbourhood Teams and Local Community Networks.

Empowering Information

180,000 people reached through our campaigns

We remove barriers people face accessing and using information.

Early, timely and quality assured information, when used with the skills and confidence needed, can often prevent problems occurring or worsening.

- **Website -** as a key navigation to local services and national assured information.
- **Information Campaigns** - via social media, newsletters and the press on topics such as energy tips, scam awareness and winter fuel allowance to reach more people.
- **Information Resources** - fact sheets and blogs written to reach more people.
- **Self Administration tools** - Incorporating digital tools on our site including a budget checker, mortgage help and benefit calculator.
- **Pop Ups and Events** - share information and raise awareness of important work.

£6,423,232 identified through our self-help benefit calculator

163,049 visits to our website

81,391 people reached through social media

180,000 people reached on our energy and pro-active campaigns

6,534 people used our benefit calculator to check their eligibility

100 events attended, proactively reaching **2,000** people

Spotlight: Winter Fuel Pro-active Campaign

151% increase in pension age enquiries

In response to the announcement of the end of the Universal Winter Fuel Payment, we launched an information campaign on pension age benefits with Local Authorities and Charities.

This effort included targeted communication and social media outreach, resulting in collaboration with six partners. Key outcomes included:

- Over 30,000 digital reach
- Over 1,000 direct contacts
- 151% increase in pension age inquiries
- Estimated £1.3 million in additional benefits identified
- Over 1,000 data records collected for social policy work.

Edna's Story

Edna* and her husband, both in their 80s and facing health issues, were worried about losing their winter fuel payment, which was essential for heating their home.

After receiving a letter they contacted us for advice, and they discovered they were missing out on over £350 per week of various benefit entitlements. We helped make applications which resulted in over £6,000 in back payments too, and the winter fuel allowance being awarded, allowing them to heat their home and make necessary adaptations. Following a Care Assessment referral, this financial support also contributed to paying for social care costs, helping them maintain safety and independence at home.

Empowering Communities

Alongside our proactive information campaigns, we delivered a number of initiatives to remove barriers and empower our communities through training, creating networks and building confidence in navigating the system and managing language barriers.

Language Cafe's

Weekly Language cafe's in Crawley and Mid Sussex, with over 191 attendees using conversational English on topics such as energy tariffs, contacting services and accessing information on housing and more.

100% of participants said they felt more confident and connected with the communities they lived in as a result of this work.

500 hours of community training provided

98% of cafe participants report improved wellbeing

Training

Our Training Team not only delivered over **1,300** hours of training to our community volunteers and staff, they also provided a further **500 hours** of tailored training to community members.

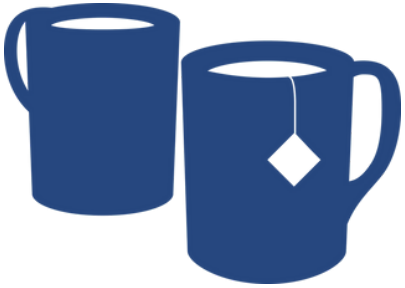
Employment Skills - in person and online CV writing, interview skills and accessing employment support for migrant communities.

Energy Awareness - delivered to charity and community groups and individuals in areas of deprivation reaching over 200 people.

Advice First Aid - to over 250 volunteers in the community to support their users.

SEND Disability Benefits - 20 webinars and 80% of people feel confident following the training

"Before coming here, I didn't talk to anyone for days. Now I have friends and a reason to leave the house."
Language Cafe attendee



Empowering Members

We believe the power in work lies in the people who support us, in particular our volunteers.

£465,930 NHS savings due to improved health and wellbeing of volunteers

Volunteering

Last year over **350 people** volunteered for us with an average of 240 volunteers actively giving up over **33,600** hours of their time in a range of roles.

Over **11,350** hours of training completed by volunteers and champions on digital skills, navigating the system, advice, mental health awareness and more.

Young People supported through **40** course placements, **6** school and 6th form work experience partnerships, **1** Duke of Edinburgh place

Over **350** Community Champions supported reaching **3,000** people through their networks

50 volunteers moved into paid work, training or further education

Champions

Over the past year we trained over 100 community champions on principles of advice first aid, navigating the system with a focus on energy costs. We continued to run our online groups to keep members up to date on important issues.

£1,783,046 the value of volunteering to the charity

75% of volunteers feel more connected and less isolated

48% of Champions are members of Faith Groups

It’s nice that clients know they have a place they can come where they know they are not alone and are not the only one who has issues.”

Lesley has been volunteering as an advisor at Citizens Advice in West Sussex for eight years.

Lesley had just finished working, was familiar with the type of work Citizens Advice did and heard they needed more volunteer helpers.

She knew she would be dealing with people of all ages and backgrounds, and that really appealed to her.

In her eight years of volunteering, the main issues people needed help with related to money.

Lesley said, “I feel that to be touched by somebody’s situation is the only way you can really be helpful. It’s so important to have empathy. It feels like a privilege that people tell you their closest personal problems.”

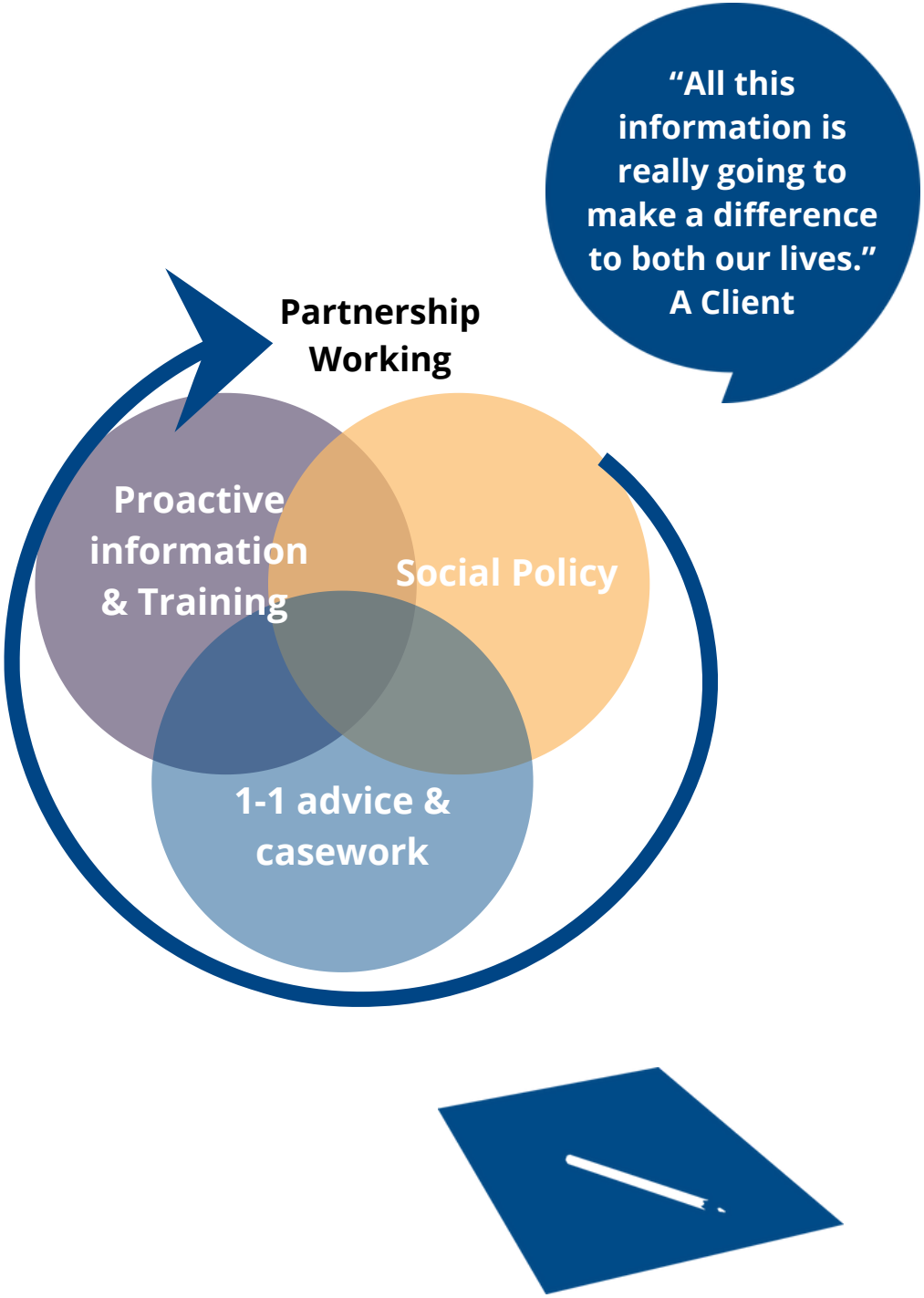
"You can learn a lot by volunteering for Citizens Advice too - it helps me understand how life is today and what people are experiencing. Most of all, it’s nice that clients know they have a place they can come where they know they are not alone and are not the only one who has issues.”

Looking Ahead ....

Our advice trends and insight work shows the need for both whole people and a whole systems approach, so we can continue to make the biggest difference.

Our priorities to ensure a preventative approach is fundamental to this and include focusing on early intervention and tailored support services. By addressing issues before they escalate, we aim to empower individuals and families, helping them to achieve long-term stability and wellbeing.

Collaboration with local organisations and stakeholders is key, as it allows us to create a more cohesive support network. Additionally, we are committed to continuously evaluating and adapting our strategies, ensuring that our services remain responsive to the evolving needs of the community.



Together

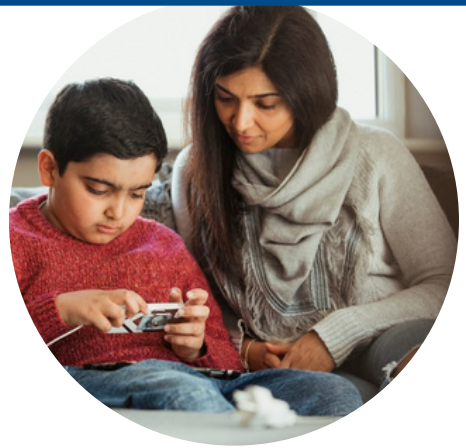
We collaborate to create a greater impact. Over the past year, we established faster referral pathways with **Age UK, Carers Support**, and **foodbanks**, and shared training in mental health and neurodiversity for the charity sector workforce. By sharing data, we better understand resident needs for targeted interventions.

Our partnerships have expanded opportunities for young people, including work placements and the Duke of Edinburgh opportunity. We've also collaborated on funding proposals and received pro bono support from the **RPD Foundation**, and worked closely with the **University of Sussex** for internships and law degree placements.

Thanks to libraries, councils, faith groups, and others for contributing to our success and helping us aim for an even greater impact next year.

citizens advice in West Sussex North South East

Your information has made such a difference. You saved my life!" A client



Haywards Heath Town Council - Burgess Hill Town Council Lindfield Parish Council - Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Parish Council - Upper Beeding Parish Council - North Horsham Parish Council

DMH Stallard - Family Law Partners - Mayo Wynne and Baxter - Morr & Co LLP - Stevensdrake Solicitors

citizens advice in West Sussex North South East

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