

# Working Together

## Annual Report 2019/20



**citizens  
advice**

**Central  
Dorset**



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Citizens Advice provides free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems. We are a voice for our clients and consumers on the issues that matter to them. We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

We aim to:

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

[We are here for everyone.](#)

Established in 1939 as an emergency war service, the Citizens Advice service has developed into the UK's largest independent advice provider.

# Chairman's Report

I am pleased to report that Citizens Advice Central Dorset has had another successful year despite the challenges caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. The staff and volunteers have done their best to maintain an excellent service under difficult circumstances, and they are to be congratulated. We know that the majority of our clients prefer face-to-face contact with advisers and wherever possible we have re-established this. Screen to screen meetings within the offices have proved to be a successful alternative, and electronic and telephone contact has substantially increased. Regrettably, with the economic consequences of COVID-19, we anticipate more clients requesting help with debt, employment, housing and benefits, including Universal Credit. With the adaptations we have already made we believe we will be able to cope with this increased workload and help resolve the many problems that people are having to face in these challenging times.

April 2020 marked the end of the first year of merger with Weymouth and Portland Citizens Advice. This has been very successful. Our larger combined organisation has advantages of scale which in turn has enabled us to establish a number of new services including for Littlemoor and Portland - both areas of deprivation and in need of local support. Our offices in Gillingham, Sherborne and Dorchester and associated outreach offices enable clients to access our service even if they have difficulty travelling.

Citizens Advice Central Dorset is an independent charity. We liaise closely with the other Citizens Advice offices in the Dorset County area (Bridport, Purbeck and East Dorset) and have developed combined projects to help clients. As members of National Citizens Advice (NCA), we have access to an extensive information system and NCA's rigorous annual audits ensure all offices are objectively quality assured. Through a continuous programme of Research and Campaigns, offices collect local data on a large range of issues, eg Universal Credit. In addition to our local campaign work, central collation of this data allows Citizens Advice to identify national problems to inform Government, and this frequently influences national Government policy.

Our core funding comes from Local Government grants, without which we could not function, and for which we are most grateful. Thanks also to the many other organisations and individuals who provide grants and donations to fund our service. The support we can provide is shown in the personal feedback stories and the statistics defining the benefits accrued to clients. On behalf of the Trust Board we thank all the staff and volunteers whose professional and dedicated work makes our service so effective and successful.

**Dr David Cove**  
**Chair of Trustees**

I was finding it difficult to manage around my sheltered bungalow as I have chronic arthritis. You filled out the **Attendance Allowance** form with me and I was pleased to be given the highest rate of **£89.15** a week. Because I receive Pension Credit, I was also able to claim **Severe Disability Premium** of **£65.85** a week. I can now afford to pay someone to help me in my home and to keep my garden tidy.

# Chief Officer's Report

We continue to change people's lives for the better by the dedicated work of our staff and volunteers who help clients move on in their lives. This happens through the giving of reliable and timely advice and support which is needed now more than ever before. On behalf of our clients and myself I would like to thank everybody in our team, whatever their role.

The statistics' section on pages 9 and 10 demonstrates the sheer volume of work that has been delivered over the year. However, those statistics all relate to individuals and families and the case studies which are highlighted throughout this report bring those numbers to life. They illustrate the challenging and complex issues faced by our clients and they go on to show what can be done to solve problems. I believe that they are a source of inspiration to our wider audience and those who are currently experiencing challenges in their lives.

This is the first full year when we have been known as Citizens Advice Central Dorset. The work we carry out needs a strong foundation and the merger, which formally took place in April 2019, provides just such a base. We brought together the successful Weymouth and Portland team with our well-established Dorchester, Sherborne and North Dorset organisation. By doing so, we further increased backroom efficiencies and, most importantly, we are now in a position to withstand and rise to the challenges which have developed throughout 2020 and look set to continue for some time to come. Our Weymouth office consolidated its move into the wider space of the main library building, working alongside our partners in the Library Service, Skills and Learning and the Mental Health Team. By opening up into a Hub model partnership, we have been able to give better access for clients in this area and to forge new links. These links mean that clients can gain access to support by attending one office rather than being signposted across the town and losing valuable time.

Our work to support Dorset residents faced with the COVID-19 crisis began in March 2020. We quickly adapted our delivery model by moving across to remote working and our volunteers and staff typically rolled up their sleeves and delivered. From June this year we re-opened our offices for a limited face to face service, which is vital for those clients who are particularly vulnerable and need support with their basic needs such as food and shelter. Our partnership with Dorset Council and the rest of the Voluntary Sector has centred around the Community Response model. This model has meant close working to understand and respond where there is need. An example of this is where we have referred clients to the Food Banks and those food parcels were delivered by our colleagues at the Volunteer Centre Dorset. Although there are difficult times ahead, Dorset residents can place their trust in Citizens Advice who will be there for them, whatever the challenge.

**Daniel Cadisch**  
Chief Officer

I had been **mis-sold PPI** and received two repayments. I was surprised that **tax** at the basic rate had been deducted from the repayments as I do not pay income tax. HMRC sent me a claim form but the form was very complicated. I brought the form to you and you helped me fill it in. As a result, I received a tax refund of **£316**.

# Treasurer's Report

Our financial position strengthened during the year, despite demands on the service and the continuing pressure on public funds. 2019-20 was the first year after the merger with Weymouth and Portland, so comparison with previous years is difficult. We report a headline surplus of £145,000 for the year, but this is misleading since it includes reserves built up over many years by Weymouth and Portland and transferred across on merger. Accounting standards require this transfer to be treated as current year income so, excluding this, the surplus was £47,000.

The inclusion of the Weymouth and Portland reserves took our income for the year to £1,022,000, underlining the fact that we are now a large charity and requiring the 2019-20 accounts to be audited for the first time. We have two main types of income:

- Dorset Council plus a number of Town and Parish Councils make grants which together make up 36% of our income. This money is unrestricted and funds our core service, allowing us to pay staff, run offices and maintain outreaches. Dorset Council began operating on 1 April 2019 and maintained the previous District Council grant regime, pending a voluntary sector review during 2021. We are hopeful that this will lead to multi-year funding rather than the current annual renewal system.
- The remainder of our income comes from more than a dozen sources who contract with us to provide advice and support. Major partners include Macmillan, Money Advice Service, NHS for the GP Surgery Service and GambleAware. All of this money is ring-fenced and can only be used for specific restricted activities. In 2019-20, the amount of restricted income exceeded expenditure by £25,000 (more than half of our reported surplus). Over time, by definition, the surplus on restricted activities will be spent on these projects, so this surplus is temporary and will be utilised in the current year

Total expenditure during the year was £876,000 with payroll accounting for 75% of this. Although we are a volunteer led service, the Citizens Advice model works because volunteers are supported by experienced supervisors and project officers with particular specialisms. The pandemic has forced us to adopt new ways of working and highlighted the cost of the current office configuration, which will be reviewed as we move forward.

At the end of March 2020, we held £376,000 in cash and unrestricted reserves were £310,000, representing around four months of operating costs. With the impact of COVID-19 likely to be felt for some time, we are in a strong position to meet the challenges ahead.

**David Collins**  
**Hon Treasurer**

I have a neurological disorder which affects my mobility and I regularly use a wheelchair. I also suffer from extreme fatigue. I had been getting Disability Living Allowance care and mobility at the highest rate for 15 years but when I applied for **Personal Independence Payment**, I was only awarded lower rate daily living and no mobility. You helped me appeal against the decision and I was awarded **enhanced rate for both daily living and mobility - £148.85** a week. I can now apply for **Council Tax Reduction** and **Vehicle Tax Exemption**.

# Research and Campaigns

Research and Campaigns (R&C) work is about making a difference: using our clients' evidence to influence policy, improve services and bring about longer-term change, nationally and locally.

I took on the R&C Lead role in May 2020 and want to pay tribute to the effort that has been made across the four Central Dorset offices to ensure a strong track record of high-quality R&C work. Ann Evans led on R&C for many years, supported by volunteers: Ann Purvis (who completed 29 years as a Citizens Advice volunteer), Rita Oxby and Diana Churchill. Rachel Rogers continues to co-ordinate and encourage a huge amount of work in our Weymouth office and leads on media work, which means Citizens Advice is seldom out of the local news.

The work over 2019-20 falls under several strands:

**Keeping our teams up-to-date:** R&C work starts with our frontline teams; they are the ones who hear clients' stories and get that gut feeling that someone has been adversely affected by a policy and/or an organisation. Reports are written as 'Evidence Forms'. These, combined with other data, enable us to see what is going on. As part of the Dorset R&C Cluster group we work with colleagues across Dorset, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. James Plunkett, national Citizens Advice Director of Advice and Advocacy, attended our June 2019 meeting to discuss national and local priorities.

**Engagement:** Press releases and tweets keep the public informed. We provide regular updates to colleagues in public services, including attending meetings to discuss issues such as benefit delivery or rural access to services. We regularly communicate with elected representatives, at times joining forces to move a case forward. Sir Oliver Letwin wrote a warming tribute in October 2019: *"The bureaux play much more of a part in the life of our community than is often realised. Their combination of expertise, incisiveness and dogged persistence has helped and continues to help many of our fellow citizens to negotiate with bureaucracies and big businesses that would otherwise prove too daunting"*.

**Projects and Campaigns** included a local project on the impact of the closure of bank branches and national campaigns on:

- Bailiffs
- The 'Benefit Cap'
- Disability Benefits
- Big Energy Savings Week and Network
- Scams Awareness Fortnight

## Caroline Buxton - Research & Campaigns Lead

A client with mental health issues had to go through the Work Capability Assessment (WCA). He was found fit for work, so came off the sickness benefit that he had been claiming, and had to make a new claim for Universal Credit. This caused his income to drop and meant he lost his Council Tax exemption. He fell into Council Tax arrears, leading to a court hearing. His mental health deteriorated further, and his GP signed him off again as unfit for work. He then had to wait several months for another WCA, which he was concerned about attending as it required a 40 mile round trip. This case illustrates the complexity of navigating the benefit system, the knock-on effects of changes – particularly falling into debt - and the impact on a vulnerable person.

## Diversity within our Projects

We are committed to meeting the diverse needs of our clients and aim to ensure that the services we provide are accessible to all. We take into account, in particular, the needs of disabled clients, including those with poor mental health, and clients who are unable to communicate effectively in English, including those who are Deaf, who use BSL and who are hard of hearing. We consider whether particular groups are predominant within our client base and devise appropriate policies and procedures to meet their needs. Such groups include: men and women; those who identify as non-binary or who do not identify to binary genders; carers; older people; members of religious groups; ethnic groups or nationalities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual and transgender people.

### Extract from Citizens Advice Central Dorset Equality & Diversity Policy

The **Dorset Access to Justice Project**, funded by the Access to Justice Foundation, is a partnership between Dorset Citizens Advice and Dorset Race Equality Council (DREC), led by Citizens Advice Central Dorset. By focusing on the subject areas of employment and discrimination, the project will carry out a Dorset wide evaluation of the service provision, access to existing services and the quality of partnership working in the county. The one-year project aims to identify the best way to help an individual get help for a social legal issue, to upskill volunteer advisers in the subject areas of discrimination and employment and to gauge the impact of early intervention in a legal issue. The project has a dedicated Discrimination Caseworker at DREC who is able to help those most in need.

The flexibility of the project funder and our partnership approach has meant that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been minimised and we have been able to maintain the aims of the project. We have been able to deliver training with good success, provide briefings to Dorset Council on how the project can benefit local people and communicate via an online platform. We have enhanced the partnerships between local organisations by coming together to work on the project. We have also updated the Advice Dorset website. We are bidding for future funding from the Foundation to help fill the gaps in advice services in the county. We believe the project will leave a positive legacy in Dorset.

**Sian McGonigle**  
Project Development Officer

In April 2020, Citizens Advice Central Dorset became a partner in the multi-agency **Rough Sleepers Initiative**. The aim of the Citizens Advice partnership is to provide advice and support to address the financial problems arising from and contributing to rough sleeping, predominantly benefit issues and debt.

The COVID-19 lockdown has been especially difficult for rough sleepers and has been a challenging atmosphere in which to establish this partnership and build relationships with the client group. The inability to access the internet at public spaces has left many rough sleepers without access to their online benefit accounts to report changes or to internet banking facilities to get basic information about their finances. We have endeavoured to provide as much advice and support as possible by telephone. However, some clients struggled with accessing the service this way. We are excited to be able to start offering face-to-face advice and casework support from September 2020.



This project has allowed us to work closely with Dorset Council and the other partners, including the Lantern Trust and Julian House. It has enabled us to reach out to a vulnerable client group who have not traditionally engaged with Citizens Advice to a great extent. We are very grateful to Dorset Council and to the outreach partners for giving us this opportunity and for working so well with us.

**Philippa Dowdeswell**  
**Rough Sleepers Initiative Caseworker**

The **Dorset Macmillan Citizens Advice Service** is funded by Macmillan Cancer Care to deliver advice to people and their families living with cancer within Dorset. The service also provides an outreach service in Dorset County Hospital on a weekly basis. Our five specialist caseworkers are based in Dorchester, Sherborne, Weymouth and Wimborne. They advise on statutory benefits, housing, employment and NHS costs and assist clients with their benefit applications and appeals and Macmillan grants. We also provide support and representation at benefit tribunals.

**A local cancer care nurse said ‘I have been lucky to be able to refer my patients to the Service. I cannot praise them enough. The difference in a patient’s mental wellbeing when they have met a caseworker is remarkable. They will come back to receive treatment with a clear mind. This obviously impacts on how well they tolerate side effects and ultimately how well they will recover. It also impacts on their relationships with their family making them feel less like a financial burden.’**

**Christine Land**  
**Macmillan Project Manager**

I have continued to provide support to Dorset Council’s **Syrian Resettlement Programme**, and am currently working with eight families located in the southern part of Dorset. Enquiry areas included benefit applications, issues resulting from loss of employment and assistance with housing and utilities. With five of the families based in Weymouth, I have moved away from making home visits to more routine appointments in Weymouth Library. A number of the families attend the Library for English language lessons, so this works very well. It has also been satisfying to need to use a telephone interpreter less and less, as the families grow in confidence with their English and become more self-reliant.

Due to the COVID-19 epidemic I have yet to meet two of the families in person as they arrived in the UK just prior to the lockdown restrictions. However, advice has been provided by telephone and messaging including support in appealing benefit decisions and accessing school meal vouchers. This demonstrates that advice can be given remotely to families who are far from fluent in English. Anything is possible!

**Kate Pryce**  
**Syrian Resettlement Programme Caseworker**

## Our Impact in the Local Community

**Jeff** was unable to work and his poor mental health made him very vulnerable. He owned his own home and was struggling to cover his outgoings. Jeff agreed to rent a room to an associate and both parties signed an assured shorthold tenancy agreement. He felt intimidated by the tenant who often became aggressive and failed to pay rent after the first month. Jeff had been told the tenancy agreement was binding and he could not evict the tenant. Our research showed that for an assured shorthold tenancy to be valid, the tenant required sole possession of the property. Therefore, the tenant was an excluded occupier and the agreement invalid. The tenant left Jeff's home but continued with threatening behaviour. We advised Jeff to report this to the police. We also offered to help Jeff apply for further benefits.

Recent medical treatment had left **Zuri's son** with ongoing physical difficulties. Zuri was working full time but needed to reduce her hours to care for her son. We assisted with an application for **Disability Living Allowance** anticipating an award of middle rate care and lower rate mobility. However, the lower rate was awarded for both components. We helped with the appeal process and attended the tribunal with Zuri where she was awarded **middle rate care and lower rate mobility**. She received a backdated payment of **£1,068** and weekly payments of **£81.90**. The award of the middle rate care component would allow Zuri to apply for **Carer's Allowance** and reduce the number of hours she worked.

**Simon** is in his late 50s and had worked for a local company for many years. The company had reviewed its staffing and asked Simon if he would take early retirement, to reduce the number of proposed redundancies. While Simon felt pressurised to agree to this, he did not wish to leave his job and he refused to take early retirement. He was then informed he would be made redundant and given details of the redundancy offer. The company had no written redundancy procedure and Simon sought advice from our Employment Caseworker. The grounds for redundancy appeared to be discriminatory due to Simon's age and his financial situation. Following a period of negotiation, ACAS was informed of the dispute and both parties agreed to the conciliation process. A settlement agreement was signed by Simon and the employer and Simon received a redundancy payment **almost twice the amount originally offered**.

**Ella** has severe multiple health conditions including MS and depression. She was in receipt of Universal Credit and had applied for **Personal Independence Payment**. Ella did not agree with the award decision and we requested a Mandatory Reconsideration on her behalf. She was awarded standard rate for the Daily Living component and no Mobility component. We supported Ella in her appeal against this decision and she was awarded **enhanced rate Daily Living** of **£87.65** per week and **enhanced rate Mobility** of **£59.75** per week. She also received a backdated payment of **£5,317**.

# The South West Gambling Support Service (GSS)

The Citizens Advice report 'Out of Luck' of January 2018 provided an exploration of the causes and impacts of problem gambling. The observations in the report recorded the far-reaching impacts of gambling-related harm (GRH) eg financial losses, debt, housing problems, relationship breakdowns and decreased mental health reported by gamblers, their families, friends, employers etc. Research by Citizens Advice evidenced that this problem had not been effectively tackled and as a result four key recommendations were made, one of which was to ensure adequate provision of funding for research, education and treatment for problem gamblers by introducing a compulsory levy on all gambling industry members.

In 2019 GambleAware, an independent charity tasked with funding research, education and treatment services to help reduce gambling-related harm in Great Britain, commissioned Citizens Advice to deliver the national Gambling Support Service (GSS). Citizens Advice Newport was funded to develop and deliver a pilot project to test the effectiveness of raising awareness of GRH. Following the successful outcome of the pilot, the project was rolled out nationally through Citizens Advice and a number of regional GSS Project Workers. I was recruited to deliver GSS for the South West region.

**South West GSS aims to raise awareness of GRH, and to provide information and advice to the public about the risks of gambling and what support is available.** The GRH awareness and training sessions in the South West are currently being delivered remotely/virtually, and focus on:

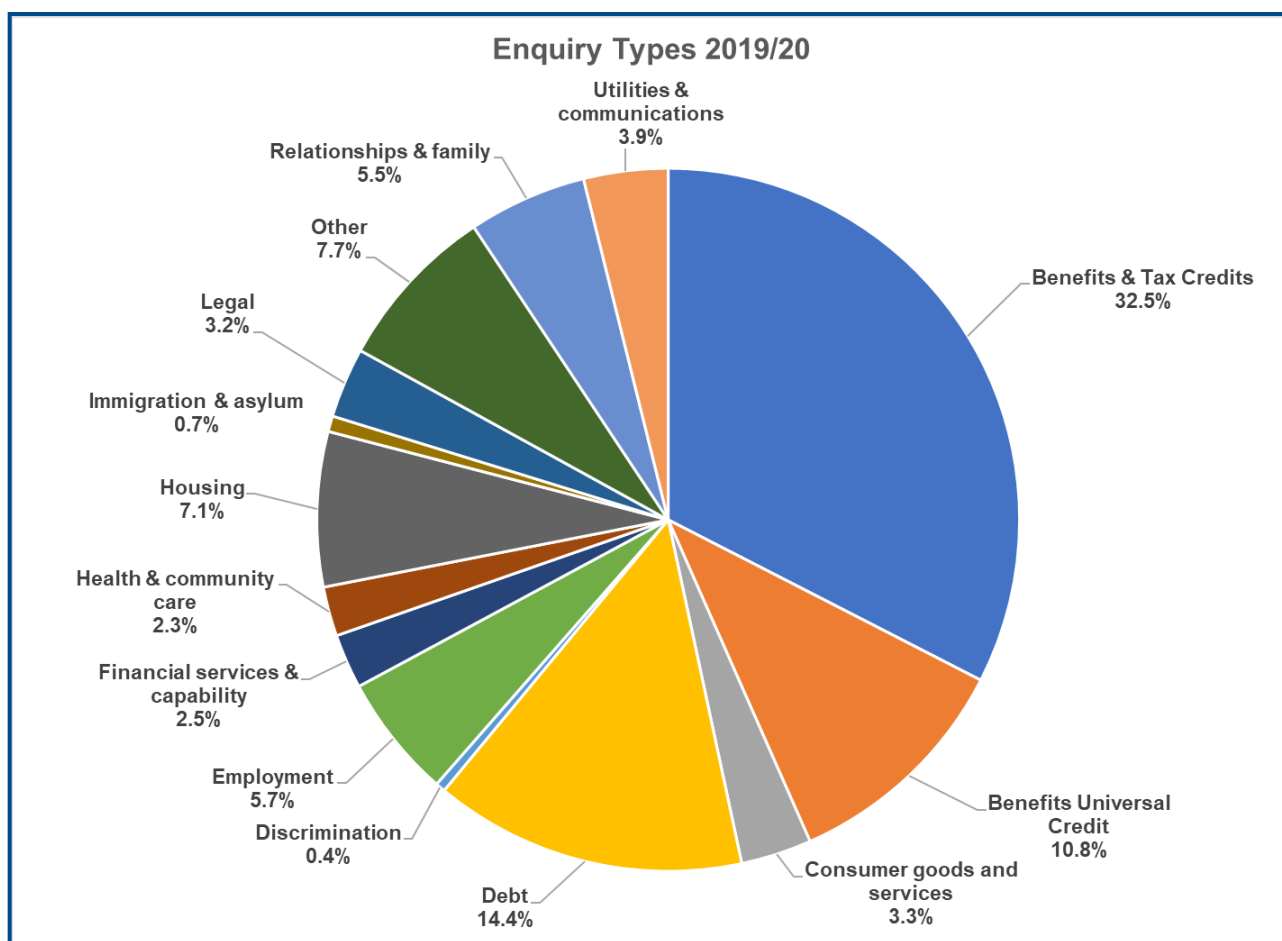
1. Promoting a public health approach to the identification and treatment of gambling-related harm, in which a broader range of public services play a greater role in this support.
2. Raising awareness of GRH and prevention services amongst frontline service providers as well as vulnerable individuals.
3. Developing a stronger evidence base to understand GRH prevalence through improved screening.

In working to promote a public-health approach, [PHE National Strategy](#), South West GSS has provided training and support sessions to regional Citizens Advice offices, as well as Local Government authorities, Public Health teams, Emergency Services, HM Forces, Housing Associations, regional Shelter, MIND and Victim Support organisations and higher learning establishments. The primary aim of this work, is to improve and heighten awareness of GRH amongst lead and frontline staff.

In Central Dorset, the four local Citizens Advice offices have been screening every client accessing support services in the local office using the GambleAware Screening Tool since August 2019. It is used primarily as an efficient indicator of identifying those at risk of gambling or those clients who are seriously affected by GRH. I have been sharing this tool with regional mental health teams, family organisations and Housing Associations, who tell me how difficult it is to begin a conversation around this 'hidden' addiction. It is my belief that the use of these screening questions provides front-line staff with the confidence to talk to clients/tenants who may be affected by GRH. I remain in contact with lead organisations in the South West who have engaged with the GSS and provide them with updates on advice and information for gambling treatment, advice and support together with news of developments in the gambling industry.

**Lizzie Kingsbury**  
**Project Worker Gambling Support Service (South West)**

## 2019/20 Statistics



In 2019/20 we gained **£5.96 million** on behalf of our clients

**£23.24** gain for clients per **£1** invested by **Dorset Council**

**10,885** people asked us for advice with **33,105** issues

**£1.3 million** debts were written off

**£43,780** repayments were rescheduled

**£99,320** reimbursements, services and loans

- ❖ **£3.07 million** income gain on behalf of our **Dorchester** clients
- ❖ **40%** of **North Dorset** client issues related to **benefits**
- ❖ **£12,024** repayments rescheduled for our **Sherborne** clients
- ❖ **£559,305** debts written off for our **Weymouth & Portland** clients
- ❖ **54%** of our clients said they have a **disability** or **long-term health condition**, **29%** of whom experience **poor mental health**.

## Our Projects

Our **GP Project** caseworkers provide advice to patients at nine surgeries and health centres.

- ❖ Our caseworkers helped **405 clients** with **1,769 issues**
- ❖ Income gain for clients was **£381,109**
- ❖ Reimbursements, services and loans totalled **£5,543**
- ❖ Debts of **£327** were written off and **£240** of repayments rescheduled.

Our **Income Maximisation Project** helps clients with their initial Universal Credit claim.

- ❖ We helped **322 clients** with **1,005 issues**
- ❖ Income gain for clients was **£128,292**
- ❖ Reimbursements, services and loans totalled **£1,100**.

Our **Macmillan Citizens Advice** caseworkers provide an outreach service to people and their families living with cancer.

- ❖ Our caseworkers helped **663 clients** with **3,786 issues**
- ❖ Income gain for clients was **£3,268,066**
- ❖ Reimbursements, services and loans totalled **£86,179**
- ❖ Debts of **£53,510** were written off.

Our **Mental Health Outreach Project** caseworker provides advice to clients with poor mental health at two inpatient units and a GP surgery.

- ❖ Our caseworker helped **52 clients** with **125 issues**
- ❖ Income gain for clients was **£554,576**.

Our **Money & Pension Service Project** provides debt advice to clients.

- ❖ We helped **445 clients** with **2,156 issues**
- ❖ Income gain for clients was **£554,576**
- ❖ Debts of **£806,702** were written off
- ❖ **£26,759** of repayments were rescheduled.

Our **Syrian Resettlement Programme** caseworkers work with Syrian families living in the North and South Dorset areas.

- ❖ Our caseworkers helped **21 clients** with **213 issues**
- ❖ Income gain for clients was **£15,168**.

## Client Case Studies

**Molly** sought our help in dealing with her debts which amounted to **£11,300**. She already had a Debt Relief Order and could not apply again as the application would be just within the six year time limit. Molly said she had been 'burying my head in the sand' and wanted to make a fresh start. Deductions were being made from Molly's Universal Credit to cover overpayments of Tax Credits and Housing Benefit and after payment of essential bills, she was left with £7 per month disposable income. After exploring Molly's options with her, it was decided that an application for bankruptcy would allow her to clear her debts more quickly and to manage her finances more effectively in the future. We found a small charity that makes grants to individuals in Molly's local area and they agreed to cover the £680 bankruptcy fee. While dealing with the bankruptcy application, we arranged for payment of council tax arrears to be put on hold and also applied to Wessex Water for Molly to be considered for the Assist Scheme for those in extreme financial difficulty. Molly's bankruptcy application was successful and at her next appointment we provided budgeting advice.

**Jon** was already experiencing poor mental health and had given up work when he was diagnosed with cancer. He had exhausted his savings and was not receiving any benefits. He was struggling to cover his travel costs to hospital for treatment and his living costs and was worried about getting into debt. We helped Jon with his application for **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)** and suggested that he ask his GP whether it was appropriate for a DS1500 to be issued which would allow us to fast-track the PIP application under special rules; the GP agreed. Jon was awarded **Enhanced Daily Living** and **Mobility** payments totalling **£148.85** per week plus a backdated payment of **£893**. We helped Jon apply for **Universal Credit (UC)**. He was awarded **£150.93** a week comprising the **standard allowance** and the **Limited Capability for Work-related Activity component** and received a backdated payment of **£905**. Jon's **total annual PIP and UC income is £15,588**. We advised Jon that the DS1500 could allow him to claim his occupational pension before his retirement date. His employer agreed to this and Jon opted to receive a lump sum payment of £25,000. Our application for a **Macmillan grant** of **£250** on Jon's behalf was also successful.

**Sofia** had lived in the UK for just over four years. She had separated from her partner and was living with her three school-aged children. Sofia was working in two low paid jobs. Her income did not cover her outgoings and she was in arrears with her rent and council tax (CT). Sofia applied for **Universal Credit** but was told she was not eligible as she had no right to reside and there was insufficient evidence to show her employment was genuine. Sofia spoke very little English and we arranged for a telephone interpreter during her appointments with us. We helped Sofia apply for a mandatory reconsideration of the UC decision which went to the Habitual Residence Test team. Sofia was required to take a further test. **Six months** elapsed and Sofia had still not received a decision. During that time, we made several phone calls to the UC helpline and finally helped Sofia to write a letter of complaint. She described the serious financial hardship she and her children were experiencing, the threat of eviction, the liability order for CT arrears and the impact on her mental health. Sofia also enlisted the help of her MP. **Ten months** after her initial UC claim, Sofia's right to reside was accepted and she was awarded UC. She received a backdated payment of **£2,514** for the period from her initial claim and an ongoing monthly payment of **£339.40**.



Follow us on Twitter  
@westdorsetCAB @wpcab

# Digital and Social Media

We currently run two twitter accounts, one for West and North Dorset @westdorsetcab and one for Weymouth and Portland @wpcab. Accounts are run by volunteers, with managerial oversight. At 31 March, the West Dorset and Weymouth and Portland accounts had 1,384 and 864 followers respectively. We use twitter to promote campaigns, such as Big Energy Saving Week, to celebrate the work of volunteers and also to give an insight into the day-to-day work of local Citizens Advice through online events such as #CABLIVE.

The COVID-19 lockdown, which brought a temporary end to face-to-face advice, simultaneously gave video conferencing a kick-start. We began by using it as a tool to enable managers to discuss how best to keep the service running. It then became a means of training, supervising and appraising volunteers and of running team meetings and, once people became more confident, of working with the public. While most clients can be helped via telephone or email, caseworkers have been using video calls for complex cases or with vulnerable clients in their own homes. These clients often have mental health issues and benefit from being able to see the person to whom they are talking. In our offices, where interview rooms are too small to allow a client and an adviser to be in the same space while observing social distancing, rooms have been connected via a video link, enabling a client who has no access to a phone or email to have safe 'face-to-face' contact with an adviser. This has enabled advisers to help clients with issues such as benefit claims or threatened eviction, where paperwork is key to satisfactory resolution.

**Rachel Rogers & Kirsty Rose**  
Digital & Social Media Co-ordinators

Citizens Advice Central Dorset @WestDorsetCAB · 11/06/2019

Could it be a scam? Listen to your gut feeling and stay #scamaware. Check possible scams with the @CitizensAdvice Consumer Service on 03454 04 05 06 (or 03454 04 05 05 for Welsh language) bit.ly/2WdHg5p



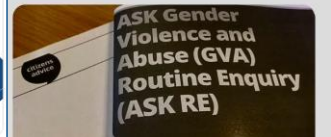
Citizens Advice Central Dorset @WestDorsetCAB · 05/06/2019

"Volunteers Week 2019 & a chance to say a huge thank you, to all of you, for everything you do. You are part of the 21,300 amazing Citizens Advice volunteers who help millions of people every year to find their way forward, whoever they are & whatever their problem. THANK YOU!"



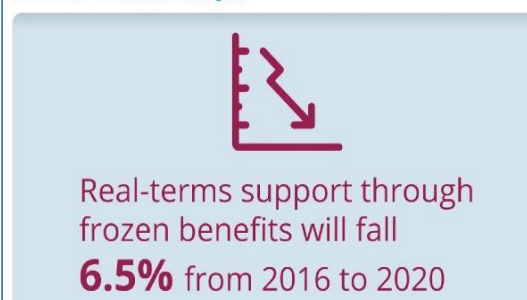
Citizens Advice Central Dorset... @WPCAB

Several of our advisers are learning how better we can support clients who may be or have been the victims of gender violence and abuse. #Ask



Citizens Advice Central Dorset @WestDorsetCAB · 10/09/2019

New @CitizensAdvice research shows almost half of people hit by the benefits freeze have struggled to meet essential costs such as rent, bills and food. If you're struggling and would like some help, please contact us westdorsetca.org.uk



Citizens Advice Central Dorset @WestDorsetCAB · 13/01/2020

It's Big Energy Saving Week next week! We'll have advice, tips and support to help you use your power to make a BIG difference! Follow the hashtag #BESW20



## What Our Clients Say

During the year we seek feedback from our clients. From the replies received, this is what our clients said:

Very impressed with the service myself and my friend received on a work-related issue. We were kept informed all the way through the process as it took them a while to sort out our problem. We didn't mind this as it was a difficult issue and thank you for all your hard work.

Very nice people work in CAB. Helped me many times and always so kind and very helpful.

Wonderful service. I was treated really well. My disability was taken into consideration. Thank you.

I was very happy with the time and help given to me regarding my Universal Credit claim and the long task of going through the online housing register form. Altogether very patient and helpful.

I found your website very helpful but appreciated speaking to a staff member on the phone to explain the issue and receive reassurance and ideas on how to proceed.

Very understanding – knowledgeable and not judgmental.

The advice given gave me empowerment to contact MIND and other organisations.

You helped me feel a lot clearer about the way forward.

I really do not know what I would do without you. You have helped me so much over the years and I thank you.

The advice given was very objective which gave me a good idea about what I could do to solve the issue. I really appreciated this and the adviser's friendly manner.

The service and advice given has been extremely helpful and has eased my worries and concerns.

It looks as though I have ticked all the **very happy** boxes and why not? This is how I feel!

The adviser I spoke to was very understanding and knowledgeable. He was able to sort out my problem very quickly and cut through most of the 'red tape' that I find intimidating. Very good service.

Of those who responded to our client satisfaction survey:

- ❖ **93%** said they found it very easy or easy to access our service
- ❖ **80%** said the adviser understood their problem very well
- ❖ **98%** said they would use our service again
- ❖ **99%** said they would recommend our service to others.



## Our Volunteers

Our volunteers are essential to the delivery of the Citizens Advice service. The economic value of our volunteers is enormous. Without their skills, commitment and enthusiasm, we would not be able to provide the quality of advice and support to so many clients.

Volunteers contribute approximately  
**50,400 hours** per year.

The financial value of our volunteers is  
**£878,122**

Volunteers fill a variety of roles: advice session supervisors, advisers, assessors, reception administration, research and campaigns and trustee board members. They also gain much from their involvement with the Citizens Advice service. Here are some of their comments.

It gives me the opportunity to help others who are struggling or who need assistance. That has been particularly relevant during the current COVID-19 crisis. It also helps me to keep mentally active - I find I am always learning new things as I work with clients and the team to provide the best advice.

We do what we can and, with enthusiasm, innovation, determination and in some cases pure stubbornness, we hope to give real help where it is most needed.

I have never met a more generous, patient and understanding group of people before and helping out has been a privilege.

I started training to be an adviser this year. Despite the difficulties with COVID-19 I have found the whole process very interesting and worthwhile. I feel really valued as a volunteer and feel I am truly helping people.

My experience has been excellent. As a result of volunteering with Citizens Advice, I have a broader and deeper view of society and a new insight into the lives of people I would not usually interact with. I also have more confidence in dealing with people.

One of the best aspects of being on reception is when a client leaves saying the advice, help and support they have received has given them the confidence and knowledge to be able to sort out the situation themselves.

Volunteers have adapted with enthusiasm to the challenges presented this year. The Weymouth team embraced the new triage system. Since the Coronavirus outbreak, volunteers have enthusiastically adapted to delivering our service, working from home with the support of our managers and supervisors. Despite not seeing our colleagues in the offices we have maintained regular contact via email and have encouraged their comments and issues to raise with the trustee board. Board members attendance at our Zoom team meetings is appreciated by volunteers.

**Diana, Lin & Liz - Volunteers' Representatives**

# Training and Development

Training for Generalist Advisers takes about 18 months and requires a great deal of hard work and commitment from those who are training. For approximately five months there are weekly tutorial sessions covering a number of subject areas including benefits, housing, employment and debt.

Usually during the initial training period trainees sit in on one advice session, observing interviews. Unfortunately, this has not been possible due to COVID-19 restrictions. Trainees are asked to complete a significant amount of homework, such as study packs, e-learning and online assessments. After the initial training the trainees start advising for two sessions per week, gaining experience, and there is further assessment after a year or so to ensure trainees are competent before receiving their certificate.

Our most recent training group was due to start in March this year but due to lockdown this was not possible. A decision was made to train the group via Zoom with the Training Supervisor working from home. The training started in April and ran for 19 consecutive weeks, ending in August. Training via Zoom was challenging but overall, very successful. Being unable to observe interviews in the office and learn “on the job” has made it much more difficult and challenging for trainees as this is an important and valuable part of the training. However, now the trainees are on the rota and starting to advise, we hope they will quickly gain the confidence and experience to reach competence and become part of the team.

**Helen Bowyer & Rachel Rogers**  
Training Supervisors

Training for the new volunteer advisers was originally scheduled to start on 24 March in Sherborne. However due to the COVID-19 lockdown in early March, it was decided to adapt the training to online tutorials using the Zoom video conferencing system. For Training Supervisor Helen, this totally new method of training was a challenge she undertook with great enthusiasm and which was greatly appreciated by the six trainees.

The course involved trainees completing a set homework topic each week which Helen would then go through in detail at the next online session, including exercises and case studies. Due to lockdown, trainees were unable to attend local offices to gain practical experience of working on reception, answering telephones or observing adviser appointments with clients, which we considered would be beneficial during the training period. Notwithstanding the challenges of the current situation, all trainees successfully completed the course which is testimony to Helen’s leadership skills.

**Neil**  
Trainee Generalist Adviser

## Citizens Advice in Dorset

Citizens Advice in Dorset (CAiD) is a consortium of the local Citizens Advice Offices based in the catchment area of Dorset Council. The aim of CAiD is to ensure that people have access to the best possible advice services by promoting the work of Citizens Advice, and by supporting service developments. CAiD continues to liaise with partners at Citizens Advice Poole, Christchurch and Bournemouth.

In 2019-2020 the Citizens Advice Service across the new Dorset area helped **12,975** people who had **56,593** issues; we gained **£8,652,585** for our clients, mainly in benefits awarded.

A significant focus for CAiD in 2019-2020 was to provide support and co-ordination to the local offices as the process of Local Government reorganisation proceeds. Although we were preparing for major changes it is likely these will come in 2021-2022. We are optimistic that Local Government recognises the importance of the advice and support Citizens Advice provides and will wish to maintain the funding for this service. The grants are paid to CAiD and are then passed on to all four local Citizens Advice offices. These grants are an indispensable support for the Local Citizens Advice Offices - without them the service could not be maintained.

CAiD promotes and supports joint working across the four Local Citizens Advice offices. Co-ordinated developments and initiatives across the patch have the advantages of size and flexibility and of efficiency by avoiding duplication. Recent examples include:

- ❖ Dorset Employment Support Unit
- ❖ Research and Campaigns County-wide work
- ❖ Income Maximisation Project
- ❖ Access to Justice - a new service.

At the request of Dorset Council, CAiD set up a local support service for people coming to live in Dorset under the Syrian Resettlement Programme. This started last year and is continuing successfully this year.

CAiD has continued to write and distribute the fortnightly 'Advice Dorset Partnership E-News' to keep everyone involved in the advice sector fully informed about developments and services across Dorset.

**Dr David Cove**  
**Chair of Citizens Advice Central Dorset**

## Our Supporters

Our special thanks go to the following for their continued support:

- ❖ Dorset Council
- ❖ Blandford Forum Town Council
- ❖ Gillingham Town Council
- ❖ Shaftesbury Town Council
- ❖ Sherborne Town Council
- ❖ Weymouth Town Council
- ❖ Parish Councils
- ❖ Access to Justice Foundation
- ❖ Alice Ellen Cooper Dean Charitable Foundation
- ❖ Battens Solicitors
- ❖ Big Energy Savings Network
- ❖ Big 4 Littlemoor
- ❖ Dorchester Hospital Outreach
- ❖ Graham Burrough Fund for Mental Health
- ❖ Macmillan Cancer Care
- ❖ Mediation Dorset
- ❖ Money Advice Service
- ❖ National Lottery
- ❖ NHS
- ❖ Pengilly Solicitors
- ❖ Poundbury Community Trust
- ❖ Roberts Charitable Trust
- ❖ Simon Digby Trust
- ❖ South & West Dorset Multiple Sclerosis Society
- ❖ Sovereign Housing
- ❖ The Elizabeth & Prince Zaiger Trust
- ❖ Valentine Trust
- ❖ Wessex Water

Many thanks also to our smaller but no less important individual supporters and donors whether clients or friends of our local Citizen Advice service.

Every Citizens Advice office is an independent registered charity. Without funding and volunteers, we could not continue to provide our services in the Central Dorset area.

# Trustee Board Members

The role of the Board of Trustees is to maintain and develop the Citizens Advice service to meet the needs of the local community.

Its efforts are concentrated on a strategic oversight of the well-functioning service. Trustees are drawn from the local community and are elected at the Annual General Meetings.

Staff members attend board meetings by invitation of the Board as observers. They advise the Board on operational matters but do not vote and do not take part in decision-making.

**On 31 March 2020**

## **OFFICERS**

### **Chair**

David Cove

### **Vice Chairs**

Roger Edgington

Jennie Vaughan-Jackson

### **Treasurer**

David Collins

### **Company Secretary**

Richard Baker

### **Elected Trustees**

Stephen Beare

Charles Campion-Smith

Fatma Carter

Heather Cooke

Adrian Goldsack

Peter Green

Susan Hunt

Judith Maconochie

David Pinder

Martin Thursby

Elaine Walker

## **STAFF REPRESENTATIVES**

### **Chief Officer**

Daniel Cadisch

### **Research & Campaigns**

Ann Evans

### **Advice Services Managers**

Richard Bristow (Weymouth & Portland)

Diana Hensher (Dorchester & Sherborne)

Elaine Morley (North Dorset)

### **Volunteers' Representatives**

Juliet Bichard (North Dorset)

Diana Churchill (Sherborne)

Niki Duckworth (Dorchester)

Lin Gillibrand (Weymouth & Portland)

# How to get help

## Opening Hours

	<b>Dorchester</b>	<b>Gillingham</b>
Monday	10.00am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 3.00pm
Tuesday	10.00am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 1.00pm
Wednesday	10.00am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 3.00pm
Thursday	10.00am – 1.00pm	10.00am – 1.00pm
Friday	10.00am - 4.00pm	Appointments only
<b>Address</b>	1 Acland Road Dorchester Dorset DT1 1JW	The Courtyard Newbury Court Gillingham Dorset SP8 4QX
	<b>Sherborne</b>	<b>Weymouth</b>
<b>Monday</b>	10.00am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 12.30pm
<b>Tuesday</b>	10.00am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 12.30pm
<b>Wednesday</b>	10.00am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 12.30pm
<b>Thursday</b>	10.00am – 4.00pm	10.00am – 12.30pm
<b>Friday</b>	Closed	Closed
<b>Address</b>	Manor House Newland Sherborne Dorset DT9 3JL	Weymouth Library Great George Street Weymouth Dorset DT4 8NN

<b>Telephone Existing enquiries</b>	<b>Telephone New enquiries</b>	<b>Dorset Macmillan Citizens Advice Service</b>
Dorchester 01305 751514 Gillingham 01747 835016 Sherborne 01935 816218 Weymouth 01305 770325	Dorset Adviceline (all offices) 0800 1448 848	Dorchester & Sherborne 0845 4900 042

<b>Websites</b>	
For online information	<a href="http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk">www.citizensadvice.org.uk</a>
For email advice	<a href="http://www.centraldorsetca.org.uk">www.centraldorsetca.org.uk</a>

The local Citizens Advice trustee board oversees the information security of all personal information of our clients, staff, funders and strategic partners that is processed. The local Citizens Advice office holds joint responsibility for client data that is held in our case management system, with the national Citizens Advice Service. An information assurance management team exists to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal and sensitive data is maintained to a level which is compliant with the requirements the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.





Free Confidential Advice  
Whoever you are

[www.centraldorsetca.org.uk](http://www.centraldorsetca.org.uk)  
Twitter: @westdorsetCAB @wpcab

Citizens Advice Central Dorset is the operating name of Citizens Advice Dorset Limited, a company limited by guarantee and registered in England under Company Registration number 4188591.

**Registered address: 1 Acland Road, Dorchester, Dorset DT1 1JW.**  
**Charity Registration Number 1089018**  
**Authorised & regulated by the FCA FRN: 617586**  
**Publication Date: December 2020**