



15th March 2021

Citizens Advice has helped more than 27,000 people across Oxfordshire during the past year of the pandemic

The charity, which quickly adapted to help more people via the phone, email and webchat, says benefits and universal credit support, employment and debt have been its top pandemic issues.

Between 1 March 2020 and 28 February this year, it has helped 24,000 people with benefits including Universal Credit, and 8,800 people with employment issues.

Citizens Advice across Oxfordshire has seen many worrying cases such as a dad who lost his job due to Coronavirus, fell into in debt and could not feed his three children. *"I didn't know what to do at the end of February. I'd no support. I have three kids and thought OMG what can I do? My cupboards used to be full and the kids were fed. I'd no savings and thought how do I pay the rent? Having debt is horrible.*

I spoke to Citizens Advice every week for five weeks. It was my lifeline and helped me get through five weeks of turmoil. Step by step, and week by week, things got a little better. They calmed me down and helped me get on top of what needed to be done next." Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire client

Around 62% of people were helped over the phone and 29% via email. This compares to the year before when 42% of people were helped face-to-face.

Ongoing research in North Oxfordshire has revealed that in the past year, of those who expressed or were being treated for stress, anxiety and depression almost 50% of those clients were debt clients and 90% felt that their mental health had deteriorated as a result of the pandemic.

Around 95% of the staff and volunteers have been working from their living rooms, dining tables and kitchens to make sure people could still access much-needed help.

Teresa Archer, Chief Officer from Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire said: "We've all been on a rollercoaster of change throughout this pandemic.

We've spoken to people who've never used Citizens Advice before, have never claimed benefits before and have had a steady income for years, if not decades. Suddenly, they feel

as if the rug has been pulled from under them and they don't know what to do. We are finding more and more younger people are seeking our advice too.

We're here to listen, support and then help them find a way forward, and it's a reward to hear the relief in their voices at the end of the call.

I'd like to give a heartfelt thank you to our staff and volunteers who've continued to help people find a way forward, as we face the problems of this pandemic together.

Our advisers have been able to help people check what benefits they're entitled to, navigate the furlough scheme, and ensure they're getting all the help and support that is on offer.

We know people are going to need our help as we begin on the road to recovery, and we urge anyone that needs some support to get in touch as soon as possible."

We give people the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem.

- The four Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire, Oxford, North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire and South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse all exist to provide free, confidential, independent advice in Oxfordshire and they are all members of Citizens Advice, the national charity
- For Citizens Advice general local free telephone advice, visit www.caox.org.co.uk.
- Citizens Advice Freephone Adviceline 0800 144 8848 and Textphone: 0800 144 8884
- Citizens Advice in Oxfordshire are supported by more than 670 trained volunteers and 52 paid staff working across 14 advice centres. In the last year, we helped 27,000 people across Oxfordshire with 78,000 issues.
- Citizens Advice is made up of the national charity Citizens Advice; the network of independent local Citizens Advice charities across England and Wales; the Citizens Advice consumer service; and the Witness Service.
- Citizens Advice helped 2.7 million people face to face, over the phone, by email and web chat in 19-20. We had 3.5 million visits to our national website. For full service statistics see Citizens Advice monthly publication [Advice Trends](#).