

# Supporting people across the New Forest throughout the Covid Pandemic

**citizens  
advice**

New Forest

Annual report 2020-21

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# Introduction from the Chief Officer

It is great to be back in our offices, listening to the buzz and background conversations of the New Forest team as they grapple with the wide range of enquiries and questions posed by local residents from across the Forest. No two days are the same, each day brings a fresh co-hort of volunteers ready and willing to use their skills, expertise and training to help others. And help they do.

Between 1st April 2020 to the 31st March 2021 Citizens Advice New Forest helped **5,600 local people with over 14,000 issues**. Our specialist advice team has handled a wide range of issues ranging from furloughing and business closures to universal credit and benefit advice. Over the period CANF has seen a notable change in the age of our clients with nearly 30% of our clients being under 35 years of

age. Many clients had never needed to access support services before.

It never ceases to amaze me the difference our team can make, the patience they have to listen and really understand people's problems, and the tenacity they show in helping a client through a difficult situation.

Firstly, I must thank everyone in our New Forest team for going the extra mile for our clients across the New Forest. Despite the challenges of the last year our clients are at the forefront of our thinking and we have adapted and changed our service to make sure we have been able to help as many clients as possible.

As our offices were closed and our advice appointments moved to our Freephone telephone service, a big

part of 2020-21 has been developing our outreach services and working with partner organisations to make sure our services were reaching those people who really needed our help.

I would like to say a huge thank you to all the team at Citizens Advice New Forest. 2020 / 2021 has continued to stretch us but we are continuing to rebuild and develop our free, confidential and impartial advice service to be able to keep on helping people in the New Forest find a way forward with their problems.

**Alison Talbot**



# Message from the Chair – Jeremy Ogden

It was a privilege for me to be appointed as Chair of Citizen's Advice New Forest at the end of October and I am honored to be a part of this wonderful charity. It has been another tumultuous year but the staff and volunteers have risen magnificently to all challenges. From being an organisation where the doors have always been open and much of the advice provided face to face, we have had to change our model and switched to providing advice over the phone, via email and web chat.

So we have still been there to help and indeed our advisers and volunteers have gone above and beyond, going out of their way to make sure people could get the advice they needed as the demand for our services increased, and indicators are that this trend will continue. However, life is returning a bit more to normal and we have seen a

return to the offices although flexible working is still an option being used. Our focus has been to maintain the level of service via our Adviceline and outreach services whilst building our capacity and introducing a limited face to face service for very vulnerable clients.

We have worked in partnership with a number of organisations this year by providing our services in conjunction with local food banks and also opened up new offices in Totton, sharing with It's Your Choice, and in New Milton where we are sharing the premises with Mencap. And as part of the Reaching More People project that Hampshire CA are leading, we have been looking at connecting our devices to hard to reach groups which in the New Forest includes the Traveller Community.

Once again I must thank NFDC for their continued support and we received a hugely positive response from their scrutiny panel when we appeared before them in September. I would also extend my huge thanks to Alison our Chief Officer who has provided great leadership throughout this difficult time and the staff and volunteers she leads.

Finally, I would like to thank all trustees for their time and support, not least Claire Brown and Glynne Miles who acted as interim Chair and Vice Chair and who ably steered the charity through this eventful period.

It is an exciting time to be part of CANF as we look at innovative ways of broadening and extending our services. We are still very much open to help.

**Jeremy Ogden**  
Chair

# **We are Citizens Advice New Forest**

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

## **Our goal for 2023 – where we want to be**

Everyone in the New Forest area will be able to access free advice to find a way forward, supported by a strong, representative and influential Citizens Advice New Forest.

We will provide our services through multiple digital channels and enable personal face-to-face involvement with clients at community supported premises.

We will champion equality and diversity while challenging discrimination.

**The pandemic has enabled us to push forward with our strategic priorities outlined in the next sections.**

**"I contacted CANF during lockdown and within 24 hours an adviser phoned me and was very helpful with his advice.**

**He followed that up with a further two calls to see how I was getting along.**

**I now have the confidence to finalise the problem.**

**I will definitely recommend Citizens Advice to anyone needing help.  
Thank You".**

**"I could not have had better more prompt or sensitive advice.**

**Indeed it went beyond that , the advisor concerned organised telephone conversations with the necessary authorities for me.**

**He also invited me to contact him again should I require further help.**

**This for me was a first class service sympathetically delivered."**

## **Strategic Priority 1: Delivery**

2020 saw us move to a different service delivery model as we closed our face to face services and moved to home working, helping most of our clients via telephone or email.

We have kept the service running throughout the pandemic, helping over 5,000 clients last year with over 14,000 issues:

- We introduced a new Freephone New Forest Adviceline and answer 89% of calls.
- We have introduced a text messaging service to remind clients about their appointments.
- We have refurbished our Totton office and secured arrangements for a new office in New Milton with Mencap.
- We have introduced 10 new outreach locations at key locations across the New Forest and recruited an outreach worker.
- We had over 50 staff and volunteers delivering #Advice At Home
- We made all our offices Covid secure working environments and offer face to face appointments for vulnerable clients.

## Strategic Priority 2: Finance

We offer great value for money, nevertheless we rely on the financial support of New Forest District Council and the local Town and Parish Councils to be able to operate our services.

In 2020 we reacted quickly to the Pandemic and investing in laptops and soft phones to enable our service to move onto a home working footing. We were successful in securing a number of grants to help us meet this unexpected cost, and the investments we had already made to make our service more agile proved invaluable.

Although closed to clients we had to invest in our offices to ensure they were Covid safe environments for our staff and volunteers. Again we were successful in securing grants to create Covid secure working environments. The project funding we had secured in 2019 carried through into 2020, but

as services moved online we had to recruit and train specialist advisers to deliver our debt advice project and Help to Claim Universal Credit project. We have taken on more paid staff this year, reacting to the demands on our service and the drop in the numbers of volunteers.

Like many charities, the pandemic put on hold planned fundraising activities, but it didn't stop our intrepid Vice Chair embarking on an epic fundraising challenge to run between all of our New Forest offices raising hundreds of pounds and lifting everyone's spirits!







## Strategic Priority 3: People

Citizens Advice New Forest has been so fortunate in the past on relying on a highly skilled volunteer base to deliver its advice service.

The pandemic effected the number of people who could volunteer with us. We remotely trained and equipped as many advisers as we could and our # Advice at Home service proved an effective and innovative way of continuing to deliver our service. However, it did mean that many volunteers dropped away as remote working, new technology and not seeing people face to face proved challenging. 18 months later (writing this report in October 2021) it has been great to welcome back volunteers who have been away from the service for the pandemic period.

We are rebuilding our volunteer team under the steer of our new training

and development manager and alongside our traditional cohort of retired professionals, we are bringing in young people, people with 'lived experience' and student interns to work on research projects.

### **Quote from Student intern**

**"I am truly honoured to have worked with Citizens Advice and take so much pride in the work I completed over those four weeks and I honestly cannot thank you enough"**

Training continues to be an essential part of our service, both for new recruits and ongoing training to keep advisers up to date with the multitude of changes that we need to keep abreast of in the advice sector.



## Strategic Priority 4: Research & Campaigns

As well as helping individuals with their problems, Citizens Advice tries to improve the conditions that are the cause of the problems. Sometimes we can do this just by spreading useful information. At other times we have persuaded policymakers to make changes. Our policy research at the national level combines an insight into people's problems with analysis of wider social and economic trends. This enables us to set out new ideas to improve policy and delivery for all. This year Citizens Advice have addressed issues including rising energy costs, employment during covid, universal credit, scams and the loyalty penalty.

At the local level, we have taken the lead in an important research project to discover the cost of living in the New Forest area - to see what effect it has on those who have limited means and

what can be done to help. It has been a major investment of effort which will have a strong positive influence on what we can do to help reduce the effects of poverty in the forest area.

The University of Southampton conducted the research which included in depth interviews and analysing data from Citizens Advice, the four New Forest foodbanks, and NFDC. We hosted two student interns to help with the project. Both were funded by the University of Southampton. They carried out much of the underpinning data gathering for the research project including:

- A survey of food prices at different shops and stores across the forest area.
- A study of transport and transport costs in the New Forest.

- A study of housing costs in the New Forest and a comparison with housing benefit.

The results were presented in a report in September. The main findings were that a number of issues made living in the New Forest expensive and particularly difficult for people who are less well off. The report focussed on public transport, housing costs, access to reasonably priced food, employment, community support and childcare. It also looked at the reasons why people had been caught in a poverty trap.

The work is ongoing and we expect the report to be a major catalyst in determining our course of action to help financially disadvantaged people living in the New Forest.



## Strategic Priority 5: Partnership

Partnership has never been so important as in this last year. We have met the challenge of Covid alongside our voluntary sector and Council partners.

We have achieved notable successes:

1. Joint publicity to let people know where to go for help
2. Setting up online referral forms for foodbanks.
3. The setting up of the New Forest foodlarder project with Fareshare
4. The establishment of energy voucher schemes
5. Joint research project on the Cost of Living in the New Forest.

As we have moved out of the pandemic and returned to more usual working practices we have maintained our regular monthly meetings bringing together over 16 local organisations to keep each other updated, connected and working well together to support

our clients. Further projects are at the development stage including an interagency referral system (ReferNet), rolling out Advice First Aid training programme and working together to reach, 'hard to reach' groups such as the New Forest Traveller community.

### Outreach

With our offices closed for so much of the year our outreach services became an important part of keeping in touch with our clients. A key project that emerged from the Covid New Forest Partnership was the development of the New Forest Food Larders. These are pop up food larders that visit 10 sites across New Forest each week. They are targeted at the most deprived communities from Ashley, Totton, and Fordingbridge right across to Calshot. For a small membership fee people receive 3 bags of fresh veg, chilled goods and store cupboard staples.

The larders are run by Fareshare and supported by the four New Forest Foodbanks and NFDC and have provided invaluable support to over 660 households throughout the pandemic.

CANF supported the 'Larders' with outreach workers who helped clients

using the larders access other forms of help and support. They have been an invaluable way of connecting with clients, for example, through the Covid winter grant scheme we helped 165 households to grants worth over £24,255 towards their household energy costs.



**'To be honest, I'm so glad we have that food larder 'cause that's helped a hell of a lot'**  
Carly

**'The best thing that's happened down here I've noticed, in the last sort of six months maybe less, is the food share thing'** Mike, Calshot

**'It's [FareShare food scheme] is the most amazing scheme and I wish every little area had a scheme like that',**  
Tracey



# Our year at Citizens Advice New Forest

## Our Impact in 2020/21

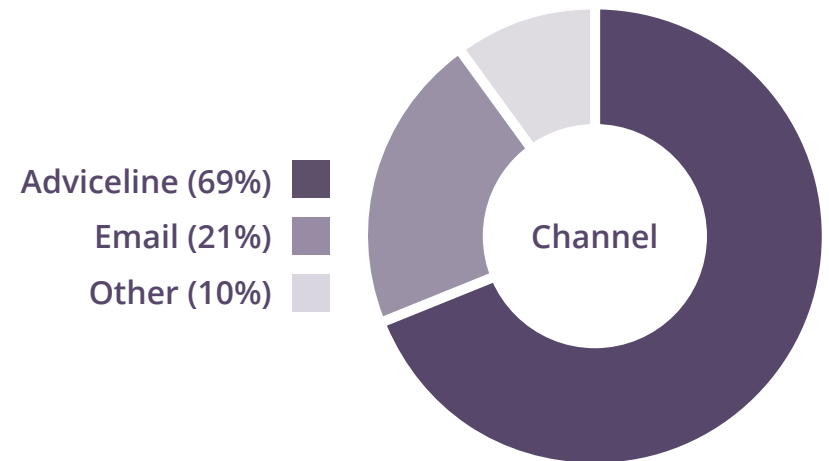


We helped **5,600** people, 35% of our clients were under 40.



We helped clients with over **14,000** issues. Clients are coming to us with an increasingly complex range of problems.

### Top 3 Issues



Our advice to clients is delivered to high standards. We work to AQS standards and achieved green rating in 2020/21. We are a local independent charity. We achieved top audit scores for the way we run our charity and manage our finances.

# Working through the pandemic

## a view from a CANF adviser

I work for Citizens Advice and the Macmillan project. My working week consists of home visits to clients, visits to local hospices and cancer drop-in centres, as well as meetings and talks at local GP surgeries and job centres.

My last day at the Bureau was the 22nd March 2020. Being over 70 (just!) I had to isolate and was not allowed to work from the office. so I had arranged to 'lock down' with my sister in London. For the next 11 weeks I worked via phone, internet and post to try and provide as consistent a service as possible for all our clients.

Confining my interactions with clients to the telephone was challenging, especially with those who were unwell. Around 60% of clients did not have internet access, so much time was

spent on the phone and many more letters written than usual.

For most benefits, supporting medical information is needed and during this period new and better communication developed between GP's, their surgery staff, nursing staff, consultants and Job Centres. Everybody understood the difficulties the lockdown had brought and were keen not to let their patients down. I was able to obtain medical evidence by email and have documents scanned and signed by medical professionals. There was a real feeling of everyone trying to pull together to help those who were in need.

Our helpline extended its hours. There were many difficult cases of vulnerable people who were suffering from loneliness during this period. There

were also many who were very worried as their cancer treatment had stopped during the lockdown.

I returned to the office on the 15th June, and it was lovely to return to a feeling of support and kindness. The lessons learnt in total lockdown have helped us all to work together even better than before. It is good to know we were able to cope and still help all our clients in such difficult times.



'I think there's, you know, the two big industries are tourism and care, and they're both sort of shift patterns... don't really match up with local transport patterns.

So, if you haven't got a car, then you know, you are severely at a disadvantage with accessing employment.'

## Case study

During the pandemic employment has been the top issue that people have come to us for advice. We have specialist employment advisers and have helped 870 clients with 1,935 employment related issues.

### How we helped Mary to understand her employment rights

Mary is an example of one of the people we helped during the pandemic. Mary rang Citizens Advice New Forest seeking help after having problems with her employer. Prior to the pandemic she had been with the company for over 15 years and had no previous problems. She explains. 'It was a total shock, I just didn't know what to do or what my rights were'.

Citizens Advice New Forest have a specialist employment adviser and he was able to work with Mary over several months to help her communicate with

her employer to work out a way forward.

#### **Mary explains**

'Citizens Advice helped me understand my rights and make an appeal against my employer. They gave me the tools I needed and the confidence to use them, and supported me through the appeal process, which resulted in compensation equivalent to one years salary.



# Our year at a glance

## Quarter 1 – April, May, June 2020

The first lockdown. The Business Continuity Plan is activated and we scramble to get IT kit to all # Advisers at home . We don't miss a day of service and keep answering the phone to clients.

We settle into new routines and find different and new ways of working. We hold an online Easter tea party via Zoom for all the staff and volunteers to get together.

## Quarter 2 – July, August, September 2020

We attend our first online council meeting to secure support from our core funders NFDC.- Big Thank You!

We run a recruitment campaign for new Trustees and appoint 5 new Trustees to the CANF Board. Here we are putting



some of the new Trustees through their paces on the Southampton Legal Walk.

## Quarter 3 – October, November, December

In September Glynne Miles, trustee and vicechair, lived up to his name and ran over 50 miles between our 5 offices around the New Forest to raise funds for CANF.

Our New Forest Adviceline becomes a Freephone service making it easier

than ever for our clients across the New Forest to contact us.

## Quarter 4 – January, February, March 2021



The first foodladders start up in the New Forest

We recruit a training and volunteer support manager and start new volunteers on the Hampshire Telephone Assessor Learning Programme.

**‘Going into debt but not on anything extravagant at all, simply on just trying to make ends meet in terms of food’**

# Finance

## Financial Performance

CANF continues to work and plan in a challenging context, we have been successful this year in attracting one off project funding to help the organisation adapt to the pandemic.

Detailed information of the Charity's financial performance in 2020/21 is available in our Statutory Annual Accounts and Trustees Report.

The summary is as follows:  
Incoming resources £429,221 (2020 £397,483) of which £138,044 (2020 £125,247) related to project restricted activities.

## Project Income

In 2020/21 CANF delivered a number of successful projects:

- Money & Pensions Service – debt advice & increasing capacity
- Help to Claim – Universal Credit
- Macmillan – supporting families affected by cancer
- Energy Best Deal
- Citizens Advice Hampshire wide projects – Healthwatch, Hate Crime, Home & Well, U Benefit, Restorative justice
- CAST – National lottery programme for digital support
- Ringwood Foodbank

# Acknowledgments & Thank You

Citizens Advice New Forest thanks all funders, volunteers, staff and other supporters without whose support we could not continue.

Our thanks go to:

## Principal Funder

CANF extends its gratitude to New Forest District Council who continue to support the core operating capacity of the charity as the principle funder.

## Our Funders and Supporters

Esso Petroleum, Southampton Legal Walk, Waitrose, National Lottery, National Citizens Advice (BEIS grant), Catalyst Discovery Grant, The Wyndham Charitable Trust. Tesco's, NFDC discretionary grant for Covid recovery, HCC Supporting families. Wave 105 - Cash for Kids, Hythe quiz.

## The many Town and Parish Councils who continue to support us:

Beaulieu Parish Council, Bramshaw Parish Council, Bransgore Parish Council, Copythorne Parish Council, Fordingbridge Town Council, Hordle Parish Council, Hythe & Dibden Parish Council, Lymington & Pennington Town Council, Marchwood Parish Council, Netley Marsh Parish Council, New Milton Parish Council, Ringwood Town Council, St Leonards & St Ives Parish Council, Totton & Eling Town Council.

"As a volunteer I thoroughly enjoy volunteering with Citizens Advice.

Being able to help people is so rewarding, helping clients with their problems, and making their lives a little easier."



# Our Volunteers

Our volunteers have been amazing, responding to the pandemic by delivering #Advice at Home. We have had a reduced number due to the challenges of the pandemic and would like to say a special thank you to those of you that were able to continue to support the service during these difficult times.

Alan Wilson, Alexia Rees, Andrew Barham, Ann Cox, Ann Mason, Ann Norris, Anne Cullen, Bill Miles, Carolyn Bryant, Carol Hampson, Caroline Duffett, Carol Canning, Celia Cheadle, Colin Smedley, Dafydd Thomas, David Chapman, Dawn Locke, Deborah Griffiths, Dennis Bates, Elizabeth Ralley, Erica Mallon, Francis Turner, Gill Garney, Gillian Devonshire, Heather Graham, Ian Evans, Jennie Worsdale, Jeremy Allin, Jerry Weber, Jill Bansback, Jim Madge, John Barns, John Penfield, John Purves, Kate Miles, Kathy Quinn, Kay Sutton, Ken Hardy, Kevin May, Kirsten Marsh, Laura Ivey, Liz Tuckey, Lynda Chapman, Magdalen Chadbourn, Margot Grimwood, Maria Curle, Maria Santos, Martin Coates, Mick Bennett, Mick Lockwood, Nicholas Walford, Paul Boynton, Pat Brown, Pat Freeman, Paul Longley, Roger Bird, Paul Spargo, Peter Vening,

Rayner Brammell, Rosemary Haley, Rowena Fowler, Roy Bunce, Sahana Goodwin, Sarah Salisbury, Sue Smith, Suzanne Brown, Tina Facey, Tricia Ade & Virginia Curtis.

A special mention to the volunteers that left the service this year, your time with us was very much appreciated and we wish you the very best in your future endeavours.

We would also like to pay tribute to two of our volunteers that sadly passed away this year, Ian Large and Michael Jenkinson.

Thank you all so much for the immeasurably valuable work you have done for Citizens Advice New Forest. Your dedication is essential to the work that we do. We cannot do it without you. We would not want to do it without you!



# Our Staff and Trustees

## Our Trustees

Chair: Claire Brown  
Vice Chair: Glynne Miles  
Treasurer: Geoff Newman  
Jacque Aiken  
Janine Morris  
Jeremy Ogden  
Kevin Loosemore  
Jessica Baldwin  
Phill Jennison

## Company Secretary

Frances Marsden

## Our Staff

Chief Officer: Alison Talbot  
  
Advice Services Managers:  
Justine McMahon, Sandy Negrescu, Emma Absolom, Kath Fletcher  
  
Training & Volunteer Manager: Sallie Southam  
  
Macmillan Adviser: Marilyn Seabrooke  
  
Finance Officer: Karen Smedley  
  
Meetings Secretary: Janine Buchner  
  
Adviceline: Jess Enos  
  
Debt team: Nicky Edwards, Trudi Fanti, Megan Burns  
  
Help to Claim: Aleks Horecka, Rosie Gannaway  
  
Outreach: Sophie Stride  
  
Kickstart Trainees: Amelia Adams, Jamie Dunning  
  
Student Interns: Kate Beeslee, Emily Lanham, Bethany Rutland

# Citizens Advice 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 and consumers on the issues that matter to them.

We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment. We're here for everyone.

If you need Advice please contact our New Forest Advice Line 0808 278 7860.

If you would like to support Citizens Advice New Forest please visit our webpage and click on the donate button.

[newforestcab.org.uk](https://newforestcab.org.uk)



Citizens Advice New Forest is an operating name of New Forest Citizens Advice Bureau, a registered charity No: 1132425. Company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales, No: 06983394. Registered office: Lymington Town Hall, Avenue Road, Lymington SO41 9ZG. Chief Officer: Alison Talbot. Email: [ceo@newforest.cabnet.org.uk](mailto:ceo@newforest.cabnet.org.uk). Tel: 07740 901305.

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