

**citizens  
advice**

**Southend**



**The Queen's Award  
for Voluntary Service**

**2022 Annual Report**

# Aims & Principles

## We aim to:

### **Provide the advice people need for the problems they face.**

The Citizens Advice service offers information and advice through face-to-face, phone and email services, and online via [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

### **Improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.**

We're not just here for times of crisis - we also use clients' stories anonymously to campaign for policy changes that benefit the population as a whole.

## Our Principles:

### **The four principles to help fulfill our aims are that the service is:**

**Independent** We will always act in the interests of our clients, without influence from any outside bodies.

**Impartial** We don't judge our clients or make assumptions about them. Our service is open to everyone, and we treat everyone equally.

**Confidential** We won't pass on anything a client tells us, or even the fact that they've visited us, without their permission.

**Free** No-one has to pay for any part of the service we provide.

## You can help us by...

**Volunteering** - We are always looking for help in a variety of roles.

**Remembering us in your will** - Legacy gifts are exempt from Inheritance Tax.

**Donating money or services** - To support our volunteer network.

Citizens Advice Southend traces its origins to the founding of the Southend Guild of Help in 1908, and it has been giving advice to local residents since 1939 as a member of the national organisation, Citizens Advice.

Citizens Advice Southend is a registered charity and relies on trained volunteers to provide vital services to our community, helping people resolve problems affecting all areas of their lives.

## How we help people find a way forward:

Advice & Support + Research & Campaigns

### **Solve problems**

7 in 10 people have their problem solved.

### **Change Lives**

82% of people said advice improved their lives

### **Make Society Fairer**

We value diversity, champion equality and challenge discrimination.

## Thanks to our funders & supporters

Southend City Council  
(Housing Team, Public Health, Recovery Team, Social Services & Complex Care Team)

SAVS

Trust Links

Rotary Club - Thorpe Bay

Southend Carers

NatWest (RBS)

Universal Credit

University of Essex

Southend CCG

Southend Essex Community Hub

Southend Against Modern Slavery

South Essex Homes

Dementia Action Alliance

Pension Wise

Essex Mediation

MacMillan Cancer Support

Trussell Trust

MIND

Essex Citizens Advice

Store House

C.A.S.T

Welcome to the UK

Royal Association for Deaf People

Grosvenor Casino Southend

Genting Casino Southend

HARP

SHAN

Nationwide

National Lottery

Prost8

Essec Community Foundation

Fowler, Smith & Jones Trust

**And all clients and supporters who have been generous with donations.**

## The Chair of Trustees

I am pleased to present my annual report to members and colleagues of Citizens Advice Southend which covers the period from April 2021 to March 2022.

It was a very challenging time for everyone particularly dealing with the continuing difficulties of the COVID pandemic. However, there was also cause for celebration with the achievement of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in the summer of July 2021.

Under the outstanding leadership of Riz Awan our Chief Officer supported by the managers and staff, we continued to move from strength to strength in expanding our provision and in our commitment to delivering excellent service to our communities.

In my 2021 annual report I referred to the continuing devastating impact of the COVID 19 pandemic. This continued through to the Spring of 2022. Throughout the period Riz and her team worked hard on reviewing and strengthening systems to enable the service to respond quickly and effectively to its vulnerable clients. As a result, Citizens Advice Southend was one of the very few advice, information and guidance centres that remained operational and offered protection to its client during the most challenging of times.

Work has continued on the new systems, particularly the development of a new, more flexible IT infrastructure which has broadened the methods for providing advice, supported the working from home system, and enabled excellent training opportunities for volunteers and staff. As a result of these developments and the flexibility, dedication and commitment of the staff and volunteers, our clients have access to a fully hybrid approach and genuine choice in how they receive advice.

During the winter of 2021 the pandemic restrictions were easing and it became possible to hold some events that enabled staff to meet together once again. The Christmas lunch and the 'Cake Bake' which was attended by both our MPs, were very popular and ended the year on an optimistic note. Citizens Advice Southend continued to introduce more flexibilities beginning with structured opening to its vulnerable clients in January 2022 and finally by April 2022 the office was once again fully operational.

Funding sources have continued to be expanded which enables us to broaden the services we provide. We are grateful for the continuing support provided by Southend City Council who in March 2022 confirmed our core grant for the next 5 years.

We are very proud of our team of dedicated volunteers who work unceasingly to help and support clients many of whom have to deal with some very difficult challenges. Our volunteers play a leading role in our strategy to widen our outreach provision. The number of volunteers has grown by 40% since the end of COVID which has enabled us to expand our services.

The working group of volunteers that was set up in late 2021 now meets regularly and is developing an action plan to enable the volunteers to have greater influence in the way Citizens Advice is able to support its clients

and enrich the experience of volunteering. The Trustee Board receives regular reports from the Volunteer representative and is very supportive of the progress being made.

Citizens Advice Southend is deeply committed to ensuring its service complies with the Equalities Act and the broader regulatory environment ensuring best practice in everything we do. Our Equalities and Diversity working group of staff, volunteers and trustees meets regularly and is developing a strategy that recognises the diversity of the local communities we serve including stakeholders, staff and volunteers. The fundamental tenet is to build a culture that is collaborative, innovative and inclusive adapting to the changing needs of our clients within the current national context and regulatory environment including setting ourselves challenging diversity and inclusion objective.

Citizens Advice Southend has a strong network of partners within the community including businesses, other charities, and charitable organisations. We are especially proud of the work we do with the Macmillan charity in giving their very vulnerable clients help and support to ensure they receive the benefits they are entitled to.

We work closely with our partners to strengthen the local third sector provision, which is very important in these difficult times, and are grateful to Southend City Council and SAVs for their continued support. We also value the support given by the Mayor of Southend who is a regular supporter of our activities and will represent the Council on our Trustee Board from August 2022

The Research and Campaigns team continue to look into issues of concern that are highlighted initially by our advisors, discussed by the Board of Trustees and then submitted to National Office. Universal Credit and the continuing difficulties caused by the pandemic remain high priority, along with Debt, Benefits, Employment and Housing.

A key focus for all members of Citizens Advice Southend is that the cost of living crisis is creating new challenges and increasing the number of clients who are experiencing serious disadvantage.

Succession planning is very important and the Trustees with Riz are looking at ways of ensuring the service remains prepared for any societal or economic changes that may occur, especially as a result of the impact of the current pandemic and the economic situation.

We believe our future lies in our ability to reach out to all communities in Southend and beyond using a variety of methods that ensures those in need understand the advice, help and support we are able to provide and are able to access it. Our aim is to ensure that Citizens Advice Southend remains at the heart of our communities.

**Paula Whittle**  
**Chair of Trustees**

## Chief Officer

Despite the continuing challenges of Coronavirus during the past years we continue to support the people of Southend City in a way that meets their individual needs. Citizens Advice has been at the heart of the community and we endeavour to serve the people of Southend.

We aid with problem resolution always trying to reduce the impact on our clients lives and attempting to improve client's circumstances and outcomes. We ensure that we are always impartial, independent and diverse in our services to meet the individual needs of the community. Citizens Advice Southend continued to work through the continuing changes with the pandemic and this gave us an insight into the many issues that were affecting our diverse communities; sadly, these concerns are growing as the pandemic restrictions come to an end and other major issues arise around the cost of living.

We continue to convey our services in numerous ways. Our priority is to provide enhanced information, advice and guidance, measuring our individual clients needs and delivering service via digital methods, telephone, email and most importantly face to face for our most vulnerable clients.

We are a growing service and each investment builds into our services to ensure that we can sustain our facilities for the community and longevity. We actively work in partnership with many different organisations ensuring our clients have the level of support they need, such as working with the Afghanistan Resettlement Scheme in conjunction with the Local Authority and the DWP, ensuring that a wraparound support service is in place.

Citizens Advice has a lot to be proud of in this report and we are grateful to everyone that we have worked with throughout the year, we have a tremendous team and have built strong friendships gaining huge satisfaction in the knowledge that all roles have aided the community in such perilous times.

No matter what was going on the pandemic or the "cost of living" crisis we have delivered new services; our work with Macmillan Cancer support we continue over the next three years; Energy Redress work with young families; Housing work supported by the National Lottery and our continual work with the Home Office. We continue to progress our other valued services of Money Advice & Pension Services for debt advice, Welfare Benefits and our Legal Aid Housing Service, all areas which are deemed vital in aiding the community at all times. We have seen an increasing number of clients over the past year with over 25,000 issues being dealt with in 2021 to 2022.

### Do you feel able to help us in your will?

#### Suggested wording of bequest:

*"I hereby bequeath the sum of £..... to Citizens Advice Southend, 1 Church Road, Southend-on-Sea. I direct that the receipt of the Honorary Treasurer shall be good discharge for such legacy."*

However, the work does not stop; we know that 2022 will see an impact on the food and fuel crisis and the effect this will have on communities on low incomes. My pledge is to continue to look for sources of funding and invest in our communities to ensure that we assist.

I wish to place on record our gratitude for all the financial support and recognition we have received from all our funders and supporters.

Lastly, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in Citizens Advice Southend; none of this would be possible without the dedication and hard work of all involved. I would like to express my appreciation for the support, both financially and, in kind, we have received from our wider community in Southend and afar.

**Riz Awan**

## **Treasurer**

Another successful year for Citizens Advice Southend in so many ways.

In financial terms a surplus of £89,163 has been achieved, increasing our Net Assets to £836,338 and Net Current Assets to £486,338. Income has shown a further increase to £703,119.

The year has seen the full benefit of the significantly expanded NatWest Debt Advice Contract and additional funding was received for Immigration Advice work.

The Legal Services Department did not cover its costs this year but new National Lottery Funding from December 2021 and a new Nationwide Building Society advice project from April 2022 will ensure that costs will be covered in the current year.

Income from the very important the Money Advice Service has continued at previous levels.

Income from Energy Saving Projects make up over £40,000 of the Other Fee Earning Activities shown in the Accounts.

Overhead costs remain very much in line with previous years other than Salary costs which show a considerable increase from last year due to the increase in existing and new projects.

As a result of the new five year Contract with Southend Borough Council, Trustees are now confident in respect of the future funding of our Core Activities which are at the heart of what we do. In this respect, heartfelt thanks to our volunteers who make such a considerable contribution to this work.

**Graham Robinson**



## Office Services Manager

This has been a particularly busy year with life returning to 'normal' at the office after Covid. Many of our volunteers have returned to us, many of whom have been working from home during the Pandemic. Some of our volunteers have found other interests during lockdown and are pursuing other avenues and interests; we wish them all well and would like to say a very big Thank You for all their dedication and commitment.

On returning to the office, we have ensured that everything possible has been put in place to continue to keep our staff, volunteers and clients as safe and well as possible.

Our thanks to Talking Newspapers who, due to their amazingly generous support, have enabled us to replace our kitchen which benefits both volunteers and staff.

Maintenance and servicing of equipment in general, such as fire alarms, electrical equipment, air conditioning units and our security alarms are ongoing on an annual basis. We had an inspection by the Fire Brigade this year which formed the basis for our Health and Safety inspection.



After a very challenging year, it is good to see everyone return to the office. We have welcomed new volunteers and staff to our team.

We are all working together delivering essential help and services to the people in the borough of the City of Southend On Sea – it's good to be back!

**Cindy Sayer**

# In 2022 we helped over 9,600 people in the local area

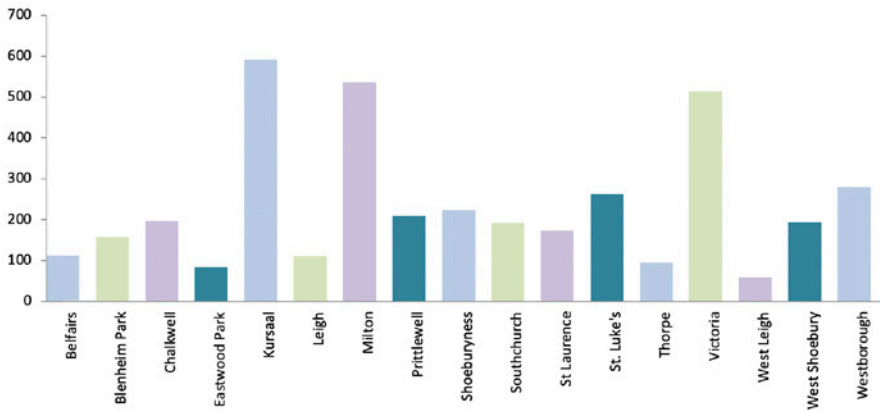
# Exceptional Needs and Almonising (ENA) Committee

The work of our ENA sub-committee is rooted in Citizens Advice Southend's early origins. As for many years past, it has continued to provide grants and loans, as well as food supplies, to those with urgent needs and lacking resources. ENA is funded by donations received from external charity fund raising events, beneficiary from individual Wills, local supermarkets etc

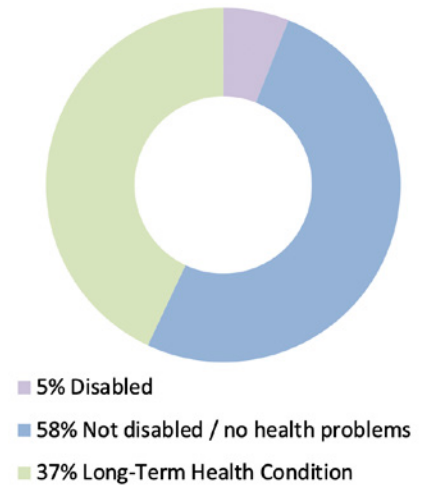
The Fund enables the committee to aid families with the cost of gas and electricity, as well as food, and to tide clients over while awaiting Universal credit payments. Although sums may be small they can prove crucial at times of need.

**Nichola Aris**

## Support By Ward



## Disability & Health





## CABFair

Despite the continuation of Covid the CABFair account has remained stable and has in fact seen a slight increase in funds, £4,980 as of 31st March 2022, in comparison to £4,493 last year.

The CABFair funds continued to improve facilities within the Bureau for staff and volunteers, covering such costs as the hot and cold water facility. With the regular increase in temperatures occurring during the summer months, CABFair are looking to purchase air con units for the training room and upstairs administration office to try and make things more comfortable during these excessive periods

The 100 Club still flourishes, new members continue to be welcomed, if anyone would like to join, please let a member of the committee know.

I would once again like to take this opportunity of thanking the committee for their on-going work, especially considering the continued issues Covid has brought, with grateful thanks to Len Mason, Cindy Sayer, Gillian Sanderson, Sandra Smith and John Cotton.

Fundraising events have continued to be somewhat constrained, however, following limitations decreasing and more confidence in being able to socialise an enjoyable outing to Brighton was able to be arranged on 25th June. We have also once again returned to arranging the much enjoyed annual quiz, due to take place

on Saturday 12th November at Westcliff Tennis Club. We hope to see as many teams as possible taking part, trying to answer complex questions set by our able quiz master Len Mason.

We very much hope to see fundraising events now returning in earnest, which not only raises much needed funds, but enables us all to get together. We would certainly welcome event suggestions and look forward to arranging more sociable events that can be enjoyed by all.

**Julie Cushion**



## The Training & Recruitment Manager

Highlights of the year include: -

- Kickstart (apprenticeship) training program, in collaboration with Southend Borough Council and the Department for Works & Pensions) which was extended for another six months
- Targets for the Adviceline Single Queue project were consistently met
- Summer work experience training for university law students resumed with six students taking part
- We strengthened our Advice team with nine new trainees, one of whom is a certified Financial Adviser
- We gave internship opportunities to three university students, one law student (1 year) and two Social Work students (6 months)
- We continued to support local secondary school students with work experience placements and six of them benefitted this year

My tribute this year goes to two exceptional students, a law student and a medical school student. Tia-Lily, thank you for supporting my training activities and the office during your one year internship with us. And to Leya, I am very grateful that you took a year out of your education and dedicated it to the office and I could count on you any day for support. I wish you both the best of luck as you go back to your various universities to continue with your studies.

The year 2021/2022 came with its numerous challenges, but as always, we did not abandon ship but stood firm and gave the Southend community “the knowledge and confidence they need to find their way forward - whoever they are, and whatever their problem”.

**Ben Apenteng**

# In 2022 we helped solve over 25,000 advice issues

## Advice Service Manager

The aftermath of COVID was, and still is, a very trying time for our clients. We probably had not fully appreciated, within the advice sector, the impact that the pandemic would have on us all until now.

All areas of advice that we offer are seeing a sharp increase in their volumes, with clients having multiple issues and utilising all departments.

The core service valued by our clients is direct face to face contact and we are often their first point of call for obtaining support. We have been proactive in offering initiatives such as House Hold Support Grants, Pre Payment Fuel Vouchers and Food Bank Vouchers, which has been invaluable to our clients.

New crisis areas have presented themselves; Ukrainian and Afghanistan Refugees arriving, the EU Settlement Scheme deadline being reached and, of course, the cost of living crisis that is affecting our entire community.

We are lucky that the vast majority of staff and volunteers have remained with us to help our clients during these difficult times and I can't thank them all enough for the support they give and have given. It is hugely encouraging to see new recruits being trained and new skill sets entering our adviser pool.

Citizens Advice Southend offers an invaluable service to the community and something we should all feel very proud of.

We will continue to work as hard as we always have done, adapting our service to the current climate and the clients' needs.

A big thank you again to all staff and volunteers

**Carla Purkiss**

## The Research & Campaign Process

Client contacts Citizens Advice for practical advice



Problem recorded in evidence database



Policy team identifies a trend and prepares a case



Campaigns team mobilises support



Policy makers lobbied on proposed solutions



Ammended policy comes into force

## Research and Campaigns (Social Policy)

The period since the last annual report has seen an increased pressure on the neediest in our community. Our Research and Campaigns returns to our Head Office have reflected this.

The country stutteringly returned to life as normal following the Corona Virus pandemic. However, there remained many of the same issues that existed previously.

Cases of apparent unfair dismissal and discrimination still featured strongly, as did the non-payment of wages.

As people struggled to make ends meet, problems with responses from the DWP in relation to Universal Credit continued to highlight the complexities of this benefit.

It remains the case that consumer scams where elderly and/or vulnerable clients were targeted; and poor standards of building work with unscrupulous contractors demanding more money to complete agreed work, continued to feature strongly in our reports.

Private renters were faced with eviction for various reasons, but especially with rent arrears; disrepair in rental properties is another issue featuring regularly on our returns.

The expected deluge of enquiries regarding Fuel Poverty materialised in April 2022. Households faced a steep increase in their energy prices due to supply and demand on the global wholesale market. This became a very big issue for our

office. Clients were helped with advice on energy bill problems and how to better manage their fuel usage. Those with pre-paid meters were given Food Bank vouchers and were registered for fuel vouchers. The Household Community Fund was also utilised to assist families for food and fuel.

In a similar vein, the number of clients in hardship directly as a result of the cost-of-living increase (linked to inflation) sharply increased. Our advisers counselled regarding measures to minimise debt and assisted with Food Bank vouchers where appropriate.

We are regularly in receipt of reports from Citizens Advice head office showing the lobbying to government they have undertaken on the topics highlighted. They also highlight occasions where they have been able to mention the current issues to the press and media.

### David Barnes



## Macmillan Project

We offer a range of support, mainly benefit checks and claiming benefits. However, there have been cases where clients have had debt issues and I am able to refer them directly to our Debt Team. With the teams we have internally, we are able to offer a holistic approach to the clients' needs. This also means that the client feels fully supported whilst they are undergoing treatment for cancer.

I alternate between the hospital and CAS every Friday and have felt very welcomed within the Macmillan team at Southend Hospital.

The referral process is good, referrals come from Macmillan and the Breast Clinic. I then phone the client, discuss what their needs are and then direct them with what they need to do. If it is to claim a sickness benefit, I will also help them to apply for it.

There are challenging times when a client has just found out they have cancer and are not expected to live more than six months. This is very hard for people to take in and this is also a very delicate situation between myself and the client. I then speak to the Macmillan team, who issue a certificate called a DS1500. This allows me to get benefits passported for the client, so that they have the extra money needed to help with their treatment.

The referrals are growing, which shows that this is a vital service. I am proud with what we have achieved so far.

### Ruth Mann

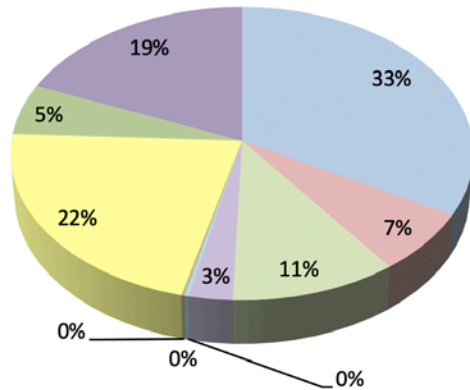
# MACMILLAN CANCER SUPPORT



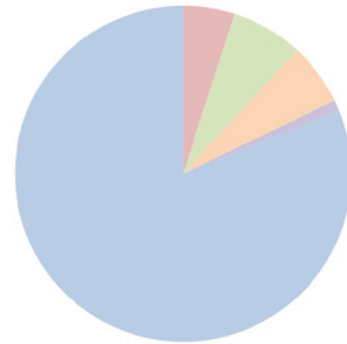


## 2021-2022 Finances

- Income from Local Authority
- Money Advice Service
- Legacies
- Advice Bureau Contributions
- Legal Aid Agency
- Universal Credit
- Donations / Fundraising
- Tax on Gift Aid
- Sundry Income
- NatWest Advice Service

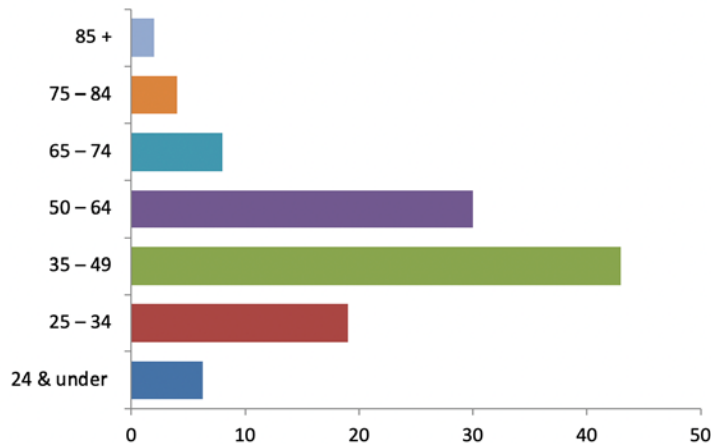


## Ethnic Origins

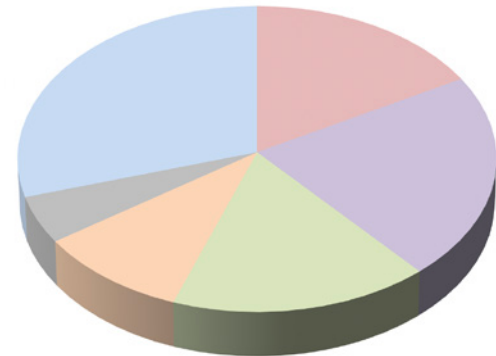


- 5% Asian or Asian British
- 7% Black or Black British
- 6% Mixed
- 1% Other/not recorded
- 82% White

## Age Profile



## Top Advice Categories 2022



- 17% Benefits & Universal Credit
- 22% Debt
- 17% Benefits & Tax Credits
- 10% Housing
- 5% Relationships & Family
- 30% All Other



## Immigration

What a year! Despite the challenges faced with the introduction of the Afghan Relocation Scheme, Homes for Ukraine and the Nationality and Borders Bill (now Act) 2022, changing the current Asylum process, the team has performed exceptionally. As a team, we have managed to assist more than 1,000 clients from September 2021, including our continued work on EU Resettlement cases.

In addition to the increased workload, we have also attended several outreach centres such as the Southend West Constituency for Ukrainian Nationals and the Southend Adult College in the hopes of raising awareness for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and their position with the implementation of the Nationality and Borders Act.

We have continued to support Afghan Nationals residing at the Park Inn Hotel with their immigration status, benefits and housing concerns. The Afghan Pro Bono Initiative was disappointing in progressing cases but we thank Laura Divine for their continued support in assisting Afghan Nationals.

We look forward to the challenges the next year will bring and hope to improve our services whenever possible.

We would also like to take a moment to remember our dear colleague Peter Strickland, who sadly passed away. He was a valued member of the immigration community and he will be dearly missed.

## Immigration Team



## Legal Aid (LA) Franchise

With the courts and bailiffs service getting back to normality, we're also feeling a return to a more normal flow of clients. Southend court still has a backlog of cases and many hearings are still being spaced out in line with the social distancing rules applied last year.

The court help desk is still a bit hit and miss when it comes to helping Defendants with their cases; some days you might see a couple of people in the morning or afternoon, but rarely is it busy all day: some days no one turns up. This might be due to many Defendants feeling that, in a private rented accommodation they've no defence against a mandatory grounds used by the landlord, but where there's a social landlord it's more of a mystery.

Where the court previously used Miles and my direct phone numbers and email addresses, they've stopped now, so it means we're not getting direct contact ahead of the hearing with the client: that said, we sadly didn't get much early contact from Defendants when the details were provided.

Referrals from South Essex Homes have remained constant though it does have quite a high level of clients who won't engage or who fail to attend the appointment despite agreeing to it. This is despite a text being sent to confirm the appointment and a text sent as a reminder, usually the day before the appointment.

We passed our Legal Aid area manager review, our peer review and standard quality mark (SQM) so,

having run the gauntlet of these tests are feeling upbeat about our services.

We've assisted a large number of clients with discretionary housing payment (DHP) claims and most received awards. We've also ensured they claimed their £150 fuel rebate via the council tax scheme: it's been surprising how many people said they weren't aware of it or, felt they couldn't apply for it due to council tax arrears. It's always good to know you've secured help that was intended for clients rather than hearing they missed out.

### Miles Richardson & Sonia Wood



## Natwest / RBS Project

The Nat West/RBS project continues to go from strength to strength and is proving a great success for all those involved. Last year's pilot of the Bank Wide extension to the project was received very well and this is now a rolling contract as with the original scheme. Nat West has extended the contract for another two years which is a mark of their faith in the project.

Citizens Advice Partnership with Nat West (CitA) has researched the Nat West/RBS Project (including client surveys) and published a report.. They found that 48% of clients referred via this initiative had never spoken to Citizens Advice before, demonstrating the support is reaching new customers that need additional support and haven't taken advice before.

Most client's referrals start from a debt stance but our team is trained to give a holistic service, getting to the bottom of clients' issues which constantly lead them into a cycle of debt. It was found that in addition to debt, 51% of clients needed help with benefits but beyond that we were able to assist with all kinds of problems which were affecting all aspects of our clients' lives.

Referrals are mainly taken from Nat West/RBS's vulnerable client team, so unsurprisingly, clients' mental health, physical health or family dynamic are persistent issues and sometimes an immediate solution via Citizens Advice can be difficult, but our team is skilled at finding routes into other agencies, support groups and getting conversations started which will eventually result in a better quality of life for that client.

A huge highlight this year was the showcasing of this project at an event at the House of Commons in March.

The event was entitled "Strengthening the safety net: supporting NatWest Group's most vulnerable customers" and was hosted by Stephen Timms MP. The reception was very well attended and the team was able to meet Directors and staff of the Nat West team who manage the project, as well as colleagues from Citizens Advice Head Office. There were presentations from Nat West and Citizens Advice. After the formalities, our team chatted with several MPs who came in to learn more about the project and to say how much they appreciate the work Citizens Advice does in their constituencies.

A year on from that expansion of the service, the project has successfully supported thousands of customers across the UK with complex financial, health and family issues. The number of referrals has grown month on month over the past years and we have hit all-time highs of over 200 referrals for the FHS team and 100 for Bankwide. With the cost of living crisis, this project is set to get busier and busier.

**Liz Dent**



## Money Advice Services (MAPS)

I have a guilty pleasure, I love Coronation Street. Don't telephone me when it is on because I won't pick up. I know that it is only a Soap but like most Soaps the storylines are current and can be hard hitting. How many times do you see in the rolling credits after airing "If you have been affected by the contents of this programme please call.....for advice".

So how about a storyline about how to get to help with debt to get the message out there?

I am going to use Gemma and Chesney (quads plus one other child) who are constantly struggling to make ends meet living in over occupied housing, made worse because Gemma's mother is also living with them (Bernie).

Gemma: Ches I've been to the food bank again today.

Ches: What not again I wish I could do more but I'm working all the hours I can (Ches works in the local kebab shop).

Gemma: I know that but something has got to give, so this time I spoke to a lady from the Citizens Advice who was at the foodbank.

She asked me why we were struggling and I told her that as well as trying to pay all of our bills we are also repaying money that we have borrowed on credit cards and overdrafts, not to mention that dodgy loan shark that who keeps coming round.

She told me that could help us with our debts and that we could be debt free. She also told me how to report the Lone Shark without the Loan Shark knowing that it was us who had "dobbbed" him in.

But Ches, it got even better. She did a benefit check and she said that we could be entitled to something called Universal Credit and she helped me to claim it. She told me that because Aled (one of the quads) is deaf we can claim DLA for him, and I could claim a carer's allowance.

I told her about mum being disabled (actually this is not true, but I am allowed a bit of writer's licence). She said that she would be able to help mum to claim PIP so that she'd get more money, even a mobility car that I could drive and we could get rid of our wreck of a car and she could then start to "pay her way" as well.

I told her that we are struggling with gas and electricity and could not top up our meters and she has arranged for us to receive fuel vouchers. She even spoke to our water company to get us onto a reduced tariff.

But the best bit Ches... is that she told me that because we are living in overcrowded housing we can apply for social / council housing and she helped me to apply to go on the housing register so that we can get a more suitable property.

With a bit of luck she can do the same for mum and that will solve the problem of her living with us.

Ches: Wow, let's go down the Rovers for a drink to celebrate and to spread the word!"

Sounds too good to be true? It isn't. This is just an average day for a face to face debt adviser and as the Dark Destroyer says (I also watch The Chase) ...It's just another day at the office.

**Linny Redgrave**

## **Specialist Benefits Advice**

As a Specialist Benefits Adviser, I deal with all issues relating to DWP. These include review of benefits, form fills, mandatory reconsideration and appeals. During covid, I was assessing clients over the phone, since covid restrictions have been lifted, I now see people by appointment. The number of clients requesting home visits have increased and I do about 3 visits a week. I am still dealing with a lot of clients by phone and email. The social workers contact me by email or phone if they have a problem.

Our social work students shadow me as part of their placement with Citizens Advice Southend and my door is always open, unless I have client interviews, to help advisers and other colleagues.

In the period up to 31/03/2022 I have won £105,731.24 in increased benefits for our clients. They are still waiting up to 10 months for a tribunal date and unfortunately to receive the correct benefit they still have to go to a tribunal.

**Linda Butcher**

## **Help To Claim**

In the third year of Help to Claim, we saw an increase in the support needed from clients. Very few clients needed support with the claims, but more with benefit issues.

Our service changed from providing face to face support with more focus on the phones and webchat, although we did provide a local Universal Support service and worked in partnership with the local job centre.

At the end of March, the local service ended and a designated support phone service was provided. This did have an impact with our clients that are digitally deprived and those that need a face to face appointment. This also focuses on the need for sustainable funding for the communities that need our help.

I am proud of what we achieved with Help to Claim and the clients that we supported.

**Ruth Mann**

## Essex Warm Start Project

As you can imagine, 2022 has been more important than ever for people seeking support with their energy bills. Due to this Essex Warm Start Project has seen a huge increase of clients assisted. These have been a range of clients of all ages and backgrounds. With a major ongoing energy crisis and an unprecedented rise in gas and electric bills, it has become increasingly evident that all households are financially struggling to keep up with the cost of living. The Essex Warm Start Project has widened its scope this year to help all vulnerable clients in a time of need. This is not only through assisting them with their energy bills or through issuing fuel vouchers. We have seen an increase in Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments, Essential Hardship Payments, Essential Living Fund applications and other income maximisation applications which have all been surprisingly successful.

Since the project launched in December 2020 Southend alone has reached over 500 households. Financial gains have surpassed £100,000. Our project uses multiple services which are tailored to our clients needs including face to face appointments, telephone and home visits which can include a video call.

Overall with everything that is happening at the moment, I really am curious to see how the year pans out including the October price rise and whether there will be any major changes to the energy sector.

**Emily Coombes**

## Website & Social Media

As the world changes around us we look more and more to the internet for help support and advice. Our need for our questions to be answered 24 / 7 is becoming more and more a part of every day life.

Engaging with local and national charities and support networks across the country has become the norm for us here at Citizens Advice Southend and sharing and communicating through Facebook and Twitter to help our clients further their knowledge about issues important to them has become second nature. I think it's nice to be able to engage with our clients and share what we are doing.

We are on Instagram @citizens\_advice\_southend and its great to already have such an amazing following of over 200 followers. Our Twitter page (@SouthendCAB) continues to grow with over 1250 followers and we now have over 500 followers on our Facebook page Citizens Advice Southend.

With our website it is now even easier to access information 24/7 about Citizens Advice Southend you'll find lots of useful information about us including the Specialist Advice Services we offer and options to come and volunteer for us at just the click of a button.

You can also access information on our National Citizens Advice pages so you are able to get answers to questions you may have when we are not open.

If you have Twitter or Facebook feel free to follow us on the above pages, we'd love to hear from you.

**Deborah Smith**



## What Our Volunteers Say

### National Telephone Advice Adviser

Following a career break, I began volunteering at Citizens Advice Southend in April 2021. I rang Citizens Advice to volunteer after finding them on the volunteering section of the Southend City Council website.

During training, I shadowed and worked on reception; shadowed and provided face to face advice and also shadowed and provided advice via the National Adviceline. Although when I initially volunteered, I was looking for face to face work, I quickly discovered how much I enjoyed working on the National Adviceline.

Volunteering on the National Adviceline is a true privilege. It grants a window into people's lives beyond that presented in the press and on national news. The calls taken vary enormously both in the age of the enquirers and the breadth of the enquiries e.g. a call from a 17-year-old asking about possible help with boosting her income or a 94-year-old with an issue involving his hedge. Many of the calls I have taken on the Adviceline have been from Carlisle, Plymouth and also the Midlands. The calls are many and varied from a wide range of areas with a wide range of issues.

The Citizens Advice website is the starting point for all enquiries and gives many other relevant links to other resources such as the gov.uk website. If we are unable to find suitable advice online, we are fortunate in the range of experience we can draw on within Citizens Advice Southend including legal, immigration, benefits and debts specialists; volunteers who come from a range of backgrounds who are able to offer for example HR advice and experienced managers who always find time to help and point volunteers in the right direction; it is a rare occasion when we are unable to provide clients with at least a partial solution to their problems.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year working on the National Adviceline and at Citizens Advice Southend and have learnt something new every day. I would heartily recommend volunteering at Citizens Advice Southend to anyone and would like to commend the welcoming supportive work ethos established by Riz and Cindy which makes volunteering within the organisation a pleasure.

**Suzanne Harrod**



## What Our Volunteers Say:

### **Volunteer Adviser**

I retired six years ago and have worked for various charities during this time. I am still involved with one of those charities – Guide Dogs. I will never lose my passion for cute puppies. However, I felt that I needed to utilise different skills that I had developed in many rolls during my working life.

Having initially thought of joining Citizens Advice as a receptionist, I was immediately convinced to train as an adviser as the knowledge I had developed through various roles in the past was diverse. I started the online training and moved to taking calls on the National Adviceline, then onto reception and moving through the building to meet and get to know the various experts in each area we cover.

The role of adviser is varied and the training is on-going. If legislation changes, we need to know about the variation and the impact on our clients. The role changes constantly; from benefits in one interview to Ukrainian refugees needing help in the next; throw in an employment dispute along the way with a consumer issue and you have only chipped away at the colossal variation of our work in one day!

There are not enough adjectives to describe the work: frustrating, annoying, heart-breaking and joyful but nothing is better than giving a client the information and watch them smile as you empower them to take action on their own. Our role is empowerment – give the client the information and tools they need to succeed.

I have been working at Citizens Advice for ten months and I am now a volunteer supervisor. This role is at a whole new level having to manage the E-mail system; keep an overview of the reception; help both the paid staff and volunteers and liaise between various outside bodies – social services and the council.

Overall though, by far the best aspect; whether I am on reception, advising or supervising – I am never alone. Help is a call away, an expert is a walk up the stairs and there is always a cup of tea and a biscuit if we need a rest.

**Paul Wright**

**Volunteer**

## What Our Volunteers Say:

### Work Placement

During my 12 month placement at Citizens Advice I have gained a whole host of new skills and experienced a vast variety of specialisms such as debt, housing and immigration. I will let you decide which was my favourite. My work has ranged from visa applications, to possession hearings and the National Adviceline. I loved the continuous variety of work and clients that came through our front doors, although some days were better than others.

I was also fortunate enough to attend several outreach centres such as the Trussell Trust Food Banks on a Wednesday, Southend Adult College, Southend West Constituency, SHAN Meetings and many more.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time at Citizens Advice where I have gained invaluable employment experience and skills which I hope to use in my future career. I am sad to be returning to University as I will miss my colleagues without whom I would not have felt as welcomed or up to the task.

I cannot thank everyone enough for the experiences I have been fortunate enough to experience firstly because there are far too many of you to thank and secondly I want your head to fit through the office doors. I have no doubt I will be back in the future and wish you all the best for the upcoming year.

**Tia Lily Murphy**

### Do you feel able to help us in your will?

#### Suggested wording of bequest:

*"I hereby bequeath the sum of £..... to Citizens Advice Southend, 1 Church Road, Southend-on-Sea. I direct that the receipt of the Honorary Treasurer shall be good discharge for such legacy."*



## **Paid staff**

### **Chief Executive Officer**

Riz Awan

### **Office Services Manager**

Cindy Sayer

### **Community Solicitor (Housing)**

Miles Richardson MBE LLB

### **Caseworker (Housing)**

Sonia Wood

### **Advice Services Consultant**

Sandra Smith

### **Advice Services Manager**

Carla Purkiss

### **Training & Recruitment Services Manager**

Ben Apenteng

### **Office Services Assistants**

Debbie Smith

Suzanne Harrod

Gill Sanderson

### **Peripatetic Welfare Benefits Adviser**

Linda Butcher

### **MASDAP Caseworker**

Linda Redgrave

Nichola Aris

### **MASDAP Administrator**

Lesley Clarke

### **Help To Claim**

Ruth Mann

Stephen Maverick

### **Immigration Caseworker**

Derek Edwards

Itayi Garande

Fidelia Enaife

Cassia Lewis

Regan Edwards

Anna Matera

### **Natwest / RBS Project**

Beverley Oakes

Liz Dent

Tracy Nunn

Alison Overton

James Quinn

### **Essex Warm Start Project**

Emily Coombes

### **Macmillian**

Ruth Mann

### **Community Hub Advisor**

Emily Coombes

Samantha Lea

### **Advice Line Advisors**

Tia Lily Murphy

Leya Awan

Renats Elsts

Taylor Brett

James Aris

Jake Baxter

Amber Goodman

Martin Mallin

Georgia Gridley

## **Services using the office**

- Talking Newspapers
- Royal Association for Deaf People

## **External Providers**

### **IT Support**

Brunel Computer Services

### **SAGE Support**

Ann Galvin Business Consultancy

### **Payroll Services**

Devonports

### **Office Cleaner**

Gary Lee

### **Building Services and Maintenance**

Mike Smyth

Sean Chittenden

### **Accountants**

Azets

### **Annual Report printed by**

Solopress

*We would like to wish our volunteers and supporters who are currently unwell a speedy recovery.*

*We would like to thank our paid staff and volunteers who left us during the year, some of whom had been with us for many years, and to welcome those who have joined us since the beginning of April 2020.*

*We were sorry to hear of the illnesses and deaths of a number of former staff members, volunteers, and supporters.*

## President

The Mayor of Southend,  
Margaret Borton

## Vice-Presidents

Sir David Amess MP  
James Duddridge MP  
Ahmad Khwaja  
Paddy Murray  
David Preddy

## Trustee Board

### Chair

Paula Whittle

### Hon. Treasurer

Graham Robinson

### Trustees

David Barnes  
Julie Cushion  
Phil Stepney  
Sue Abrahams  
Alan Gershlick  
Emma Raffan  
Nigel Milner

### Company Secretary

David Barnes

### Paid Staff Representative

Itayi Garande

### Volunteer Representative

Joanne Tierney

### Royal Association for Deaf People

Nichola Ball & Colleagues

## Exceptional Needs and Almonising Committee

### Treasurer

Veronica Moore

### Members

Nichola Aris  
Riz Awan  
Mary Priestley  
Carla Purkiss

**Food, gifts and loans were given to clients in need throughout the year.**

## CABFair

(Citizens Advice Bureau Friends And Interested Relatives)

### Members

John Cotton  
Julie Cushion  
Len Mason  
Cindy Sayer  
Sandra Smith  
Gill Sanderson



# Volunteers

## Power of Attorney Support

David Crabb

## Will Making Service

Emma Raffan

Alan Gershlick

## Form Filling Service

Leya Awan

Terry Grenfell

Ruth Mann

Wayne Bridge

## Research and Campaigns

David Barnes

Amy Brown

Lisa Bowden

Francine Hoenderkamp

Sandra Smith

Callum Ford

## Hon. Treasurer's Department

Gill Sanderson

Suzanne Harrod

## Immigration Specialists

Fidelia Enaife

Itayi Garande

Cassia Lewis

Eunice Chatizembwa

Regan Edwards

## Advisory and/or Assessment roles - including trainees

Belinda Bathurst

Kira Bryenton-Rochar

Adela Dyrmishi

Rumana Chowdhury

Peter Churchill

John Cotton

Linda Crystall

Renats Elsts

Michelle Garratty

Alan Gershlick

Carolyn Griffiths

Deborah Harbison

Phil Harrison

Tony Hopkin

Jamal Hussain

Leya Khadim

Luke Kingsnorth

Steve Larkins

Martin Mallin

Len Mason

Tia Lily Murphy

Murray Page

Lynn Peek

Mary Priestley

Graham Randal

Emma Raffan

Terry Raynor

Andrew St John

Melvyn Sach

Celia Sambrook

Joanne Tierney

Viorica Valter

Paul Wright

## Non-Advisory Roles

Janet Hawkins

Julie Armstrong

Monica Gyseman

Emma Chowdhery

Lynn Peek

Jean Goodson

Samantha Nelson

## Student Work Experience

Frahima Begum

Maisa Chowdhury

Jessica Powrie

Megan Haeger-Smith

Megan Court

Henry Tierney

## Kickstart Scheme

Daniel Evans

Sam Revivo

Roman Reinbach

Jamal Hussain

Bradley Hawton



# Citizens Advice Southend receives The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 2021

**Citizens Advice Southend has been honoured with The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award a voluntary group can receive in the UK.**

Citizens Advice Southend volunteers have worked so hard during the pandemic and kept working to assist the community of Southend to give advice, assistance and support whatever the issue. They have shown the dedication of time and strength to adapt to changing circumstances.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service aims to recognise outstanding work by volunteer groups to benefit their local communities. It was created in 2002 to celebrate The Queen's Golden Jubilee. Recipients are announced each year on 2nd June, the anniversary of The Queen's Coronation. Award winners this year are wonderfully diverse. They include volunteer groups from across the UK, including an inclusive tennis club in Lincolnshire; a children's bereavement charity in London; a support group those living with dementia and their carers in North Yorkshire; a volunteer minibus service in Cumbria; a group supporting young people in Belfast; a community radio station in Inverness and a mountain rescue team in Powys.

Representatives of Citizens Advice Southend received the award crystal and certificate from Mrs Jennifer Tolhurst, Lord-Lieutenant of Essex.

Riz Awan: We are delighted as a voluntary organisation in Southend that our group's work has been recognised and I pay tribute to hard work and commitment of our volunteers."





**@CitizensAdviceSonSea**



**Q Citizens Advice Southend**



**/Citizens\_Advice\_Southend**



**citizensadvicesouthend.org.uk**

Citizens Advice Southend is an operating name of Southend-on-Sea  
Guild of Help and Citizens Advice Bureau

Charity Registration Number 1090600

VAT Number 788 4299 58 Company Limited by Guarantee  
Registered Number 04344100 England

Authorised and Regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority FRN 617746  
Contracted with the Legal Aid Agency

Registered Office: 1 Church Road, Southend-on-Sea, SS1 2AL