

CITIZENS ADVICE SHEFFIELD OUR IMPACT IN 2022-23

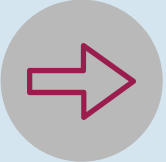
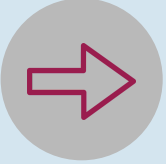
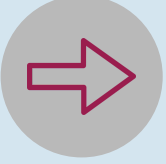
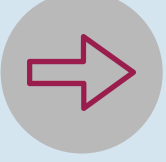
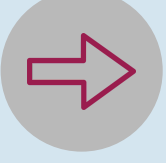
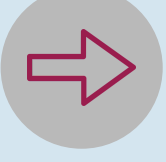
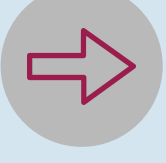

Reflecting on the difference
our Advice Service and Law
Centre makes to Sheffield



Sheffield



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A WORD FROM OUR CHIEF EXEC

I began 22/23 doing something that no-one in my position ever wants to do - concluding a process to make some of our valued and experienced staff redundant. Significant cuts to some of our contracts meant we had no choice but to reduce our costs even though it felt so wrong at a time when the need for our services was increasing.

It was an incredibly difficult time for the organisation and I can only commend the whole staff and volunteer team for their dedication and commitment to their clients. Not only did they continue to help individuals address ever more complex and difficult-to-resolve circumstances, but together they developed more efficient ways of working and ensured that where capacity was limited, the most vulnerable clients received the most in-depth support.



Sylvia Ward, CEO



Throughout the year, we also built on and strengthened our relationships with partners - from large public sector bodies to smaller community organisations, consistently demonstrating our desire to work in genuine partnership for the benefit of those who need advice. The result has been a steady flow of new projects and partnerships and means that we ended the year in a very different position to that in which we started it. We're in the process of once again growing our staff and volunteer team and are launching some exciting initiatives to improve access for people who face additional barriers to using our advice services.

There are huge challenges ahead and the need for advice will inevitably continue to outstrip what we can deliver, however we will continue to evolve, to work with others and do everything we can to provide advice to those who need it most.

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF CAS

2023 marks ten years since Citizens Advice Sheffield was established as the city's largest advice provider, bringing together 12 of the city's neighbourhood and targeted advice services under one unified service. A decade on, much has changed, not least as a result of the pandemic and current cost of living crisis. More of our services are now delivered by phone and email, reflecting the world around us, the preferences of many of our clients and the constant need to do more for less. And our face to face services are now primarily delivered on our partners' premises rather than our own.

Our city has changed too - diversity has increased and sadly so has poverty, with a third of children now living in poverty.

This last year has seen us expand into more locations - we're now providing advice in thirteen food banks across the city, via seven* Community Access Points for digitally excluded clients and through an expanded range of hospital settings for people with specific conditions. We've also seen a dramatic increase in the number of people using email to seek advice as well as ever-increasing demand on Advice Line. Our Deaf Advice and Mental Health Advice services continue to provide specialist support tailored to meet the particular needs of these clients - a provision that simply doesn't exist in many parts of the UK. And as a Law Centre we provide expert legal advice on Immigration, Housing and Employment.

We are a major provider of statutory and non-statutory advocacy services too and you can read more about this work in our separate Advocacy Impact report.

Despite significant challenges this year, we have made a real difference to thousands of households across every part of Sheffield. We've supported our clients to access over £12 million in additional income, helped to prevent homelessness, supported people struggling with debt (including having £700k of debt written off) and assisted refugees with a range of issues. In this report we've shared individual stories as well as the statistics to bring the impact of our work to life. We hope you enjoy reading it.

*At the time of publishing, we will have 11 CAPs. Statistics on child poverty: [End Child Poverty](#).

OUR OBJECTIVES FOR THE YEAR

This year we set out to make the most of our finite resources to provide accessible, holistic advice to as many people as possible with a particular focus on reaching the most vulnerable people in our city.



Ensuring the sustainability of our service was also a key objective which we intended to address through developing staff progression routes, securing new funding and continuing to build on new and existing relationships with partner organisations.

1

Further expand and develop our Sheffield Adviceline service. For people who are able to use the phone but need to speak to an adviser as opposed to reading on-line information, Adviceline is the most convenient and cost-effective way to access support. Our aim this year was to answer more calls and to ensure more people's issues were fully addressed in the initial call.

2

Increase the number of Community Access Points to provide a route to advice for digitally excluded people with a particular focus on communities facing additional barriers to accessing advice.

3

Providing comprehensive casework to the most vulnerable clients in order to support them to resolve their issues across all areas of social welfare law ie welfare benefits, debt, housing, immigration and employment, including court and tribunal representation.

4

To provide targeted face to face advice, in partnership with other voluntary, community and public sector organisations across the city in order to reach the people who need us the most. In particular to expand our provision in foodbanks and in healthcare settings.

5

To provide high quality advice through our nationally funded contracts for debt advice, consumer advice and advice relating to new claims for Universal Credit.



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

In the face of challenging circumstances and reduced funding, the hard work of our staff and volunteers shines brighter than ever.



WE HELPED OVER
220 PEOPLE PER DAY

MORE COMPLEX ISSUES

Our general advice services helped **over 20,853 people** this year and dealt with **73,894 issues**, an average of **3.5 issues per person**.

We've seen that more people are coming to us with multiple and complex issues.

ALMOST
£12 MILLION
INCOME GAINED
FOR OUR
CLIENTS

OVER
£700K CLIENT
DEBT WRITTEN
OFF

207 POSSESSION
ORDERS
PREVENTED



SECURING OUTCOMES

Our clients have gained **£11,995,554*** in income through benefit applications and have had over **£700k** of debt written-off.

We also prevented 207 possession orders.

Our Consumer Service answered 34,474 contacts this year. This service is delivered as part of a national contract through Citizens Advice.

Our Legal Services worked on 242 cases this year. Funded by the Legal Aid Authority, our Legal Services Housing team support people experiencing housing issues and homelessness who are eligible for legal aid.

*Our financial outcomes for people we help are likely to underrepresent the actual value as we don't always hear about the total gains for our clients after we have finished helping them. The reported outcomes are merely those we are witness to.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS



DEVELOPING OUR TEAMS

We introduced new Level 2 adviser roles for improved succession planning and to provide more opportunities for career development.

We created a new Community Trainer position and recruited two new members of staff to this role.

We **increased our presence within the community and across the city** through new Community Access Points and more advice provision in food banks, domestic refuges, and hospital wards

We also continued to deliver **advice in central locations** such as Victoria Hall and Yorkshire Building Society (Fargate branch)

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Our Domestic Abuse contract, in partnership with Sheffield City Council, was renewed for a further five years, enabling us to continue providing targeted support in refuges to victims of domestic abuse.

We've established a new Community Trainers programme to reach out to voluntary and community (VCS) organisations in Sheffield, sharing knowledge and training their volunteers and frontline staff on the provision of first line guidance (e.g. on cost of living support). This has been a collaborative development, with us seeking feedback from VCS organisations on their needs and preferences which have then been integrated in the content of the training.



10,107 calls answered through Adviceline

We also responded to **13,495 email contacts**



New face-to-face advice services were established at the Cystic Fibrosis Unit (Northern General Hospital) and Israac

RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF OUR WORK



We help people to solve their problems. In doing so, we create financial value. This means that we save the Government and society money by stopping problems that cost money. It's impossible to put a £ sign on all of the crucial work that we do, but where we have the evidence to do so, talking about the financial value of our service tells a powerful story.

When people have fewer problems they have higher levels of wellbeing, participation in society and productivity.



For every £1 invested, £2.17 is made in Fiscal Value

This is a total of **£7,068,776** made in financial savings to local and national Government due to fewer payments for out-of-work benefits, costly evictions, re-housing evicted tenants and less demand on the NHS.



For every £1 invested, £17.73 is made in Public Value

This is a total of **£57,727,457**. Our calculation of public value also includes the value of being a volunteer-run service.

We provide financial value to people by:



Supporting clients to make successful claims for benefit back payments



Helping clients to receive new benefit awards and increases to their current benefits



Supporting clients who are in debt to negotiate with creditors and get debts written off



Resolving consumer issues, so our clients often get refunds

RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF OUR WORK

We know that some of our advice has direct financial outcomes for Sheffield City Council:



By preventing homelessness, housing evictions, and reducing the strain on mental health services, we made savings to Sheffield City Council amounting to **£723,091**.



By helping people to make a council tax repayment schedule, we made savings to Sheffield City Council amounting to **£73,470**.

As we only calculate the value of preventing homelessness and council tax repayments, our total savings to Sheffield City Council are expected to be much higher than these figures.

For every £1 invested, £12.24 is added in value to the people we help.
This is a total of **£39,859,858**.

We help individual clients to achieve individual financial outcomes like getting back-dated benefits, writing-off debts and securing refunds for consumer issues.

We know that some of our advice has direct financial outcomes for the NHS:



By reducing use of mental health services and GP services, we made savings to the NHS amounting to **£1,163,783**.



By helping to keep people in work, we made savings to the NHS amounting to **£175,739**.

This is a total saving to the NHS of £1,339,523.



JUSTINE'S STORY

Justine contacted Citizens Advice Sheffield in May 2022 seeking support with a PIP decision that she disagreed with. She was receiving treatment for PTSD and was living alone after the death of her mother and a difficult relationship breakdown. Justine also suffered with OCD, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome. While in receipt of ESA and PIP, she was only getting around £324 per month from PIP, meanwhile her monthly transport costs alone were upwards of £215. She found herself using a credit card most weekends just to pay for food.

As her mental health had deteriorated alongside her physical health, Justine had previously applied for a change of circumstances review of her PIP award. However, they initially refused, and only revised the Daily Living component after a Mandatory Reconsideration was lodged. Justine believed that her Mobility component should be higher and this was the reason she contacted CAS.

We supported Justine to lodge her appeal, helping her to track down supporting evidence from her GP, various therapists, and a police report which provided context to her health problems.

In August, Justine received notice that her appeal had been listed for 31st October. A month later, she heard from them again, this time notifying her that **her appeal had been successful** and that the PIP decision had been revised, awarding her the enhanced rates for both components. They also revised her review period to 5 years due to her health.

Justine received a backpayment award of £3,812.85 and a new award of £627.60 every four weeks.

The review decision specifically referred to the supporting evidence provided by her GP and therapist. She was incredibly grateful to her caseworker and said she “couldn’t thank him enough”.



RECOGNISING THE VALUE OF OUR WORK

Our volunteers come from a wide-range of backgrounds and volunteer for a variety of reasons. Some volunteers want to develop skills that will help them gain paid employment, whereas some want to meet new people and keep busy. Where volunteers do progress to employment, develop skills or achieve greater wellbeing, this can also create public and fiscal savings.



Citizens Advice
Sheffield's **Public Value
of volunteering:**
£167,096



We know that employed people have higher levels of wellbeing, take fewer benefits and contribute more tax.



Volunteering gives people a chance to develop new skills that can help them progress in their career. This can lead to increased tax revenue and lower take up of tax credits as salaries increase.



Volunteering increases confidence and self-esteem. People with higher levels of well-being are more productive, confident and better able to deal with life's problems.



Volunteers who have existing mental health conditions are better able to manage their condition, meaning fewer NHS interventions.



Volunteering creates closer links to their community which can reduce feelings of isolation and increase emotional well-being.

"I never thought I would have ended up being in such an awful situation like I was and being in debt. I want to put this awful painful process behind me and **thanks to you I finally can**. You're an amazing hard worker who is very passionate and dedicated to your job and your clients. Anyone can do a job but being passionate, dedicated, understanding and caring towards your clients is everything and you are all of the above. Once again thank you so, so much for everything, **your clients are very lucky to have a hard worker like you.**"

WHAT OUR CLIENTS HAVE TO SAY



[I] can't express how much relief and support I felt being able to access the service and make [an] active decision on the best way forward for me.
Exceptional service and very much appreciated.

It's taken a long time and hard work to resolve this issue and we would not have been able to do it without your expertise. It really has made a profound difference.
I can't thank you enough.

The adviser has provided an excellent service. Both service users were very difficult to engage. Despite that, she was able to access the information she needed to be able to support them. **She showed tenacity** in working with big corporations that sent limited and unhelpful responses, she has excellent knowledge of where to access information relating to the accounts the debt was incurred against, despite only limited details being provided by the service users.

"The advisor kept me regularly updated and provided advice around how to support the service users to prevent recurrence of these debts and manage their finances in a way to continue to safeguard them."



"It has been an absolute pleasure working with the adviser and her support has been invaluable. **I would not have known how to address half these issues without her**, she has quietly worked away in the background and brought a successful resolution for two vulnerable individuals."

WHAT OUR PARTNERS HAVE TO SAY

The client was incredibly positive about your help when I spoke to him today and was effusive with praise! He described deciding to call the advice centre the best thing he's ever done. He says he wouldn't have been able to take action at all re benefits without your assistance. He then explained while he suffers with aggression, he really enjoys speaking with you as **you treat him like a real human being.**

WHO WE'RE HELPING

We're here for people facing additional barriers and those disproportionately impacted by the cost of living crisis.



Of the people we helped this year, **51% had a disability and/or long-term health condition.**

Of these, 28% reported a mental health condition, 33% reported multiple impairments, and 27% reported physical impairments.



The age profiles of our clients are evenly distributed within the range of 25-69, with this range being the majority of our clients (88%). 6% of our clients were under 25; 6% of our clients were over 69.



"Many, many thanks for all you have done for me. I can't begin to explain how you have not only been there for me and helped and took your time with me but how much you have changed my life and mental health because of it. **You really have been one in a million.**"

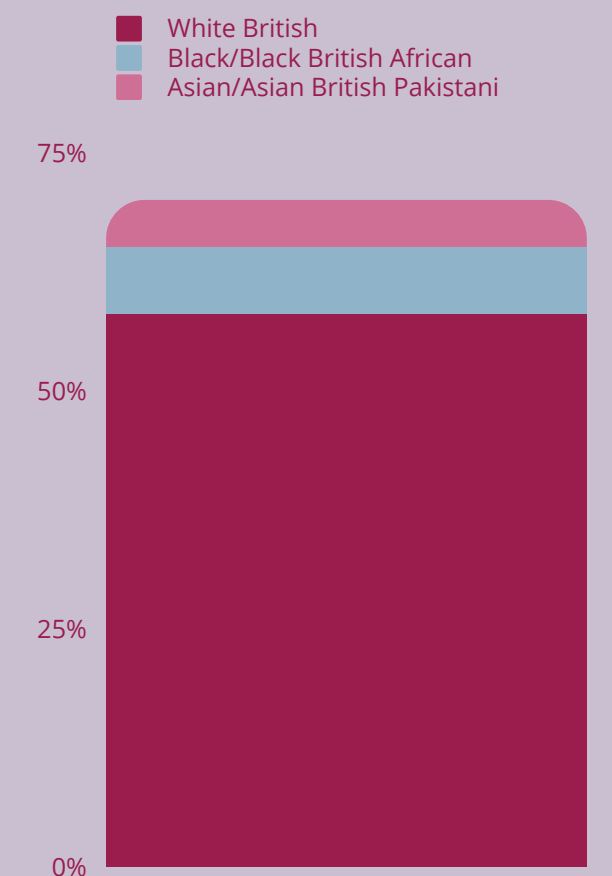
Debt client feedback

Almost a third of our clients do not declare their ethnicity, meaning that our data cannot reflect the true diversity of our client base. Of those who did declare:

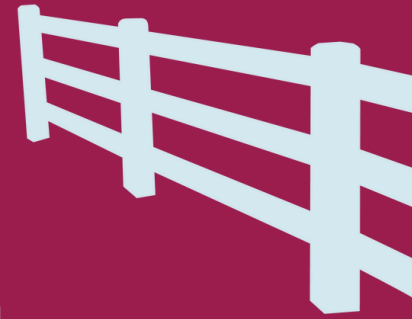
- 64% of our clients identified as White British.
- 7% identified as Black/Black British African.
- 5% identified as Asian/Asian British Pakistani.

ONS data shows that in Sheffield, 74.5% identify as White British, 5% identify as Asian/Asian British Pakistani, and 3.3% identify as Black/Black British African.

[ONS Census data 2021](#)



REMOVING BARRIERS TO ADVICE



Throughout this year, we've remained focused on how to reach people who face additional barriers.

For many people in our community, we know that language can be a barrier to accessing advice.

That's why we've continued to deliver advice in community languages through bi-lingual advisers, ensuring that people are receiving the support that they need directly from the experts. Our community language lines helped **481 people** in Urdu/Punjabi, Arabic, and Somali.

This year, we also introduced a fourth language line for people who speak Cantonese and Mandarin.

Where required, we make extensive use of Language Line interpreting services; in 2022-23, **we supported people in 50 different languages.**

LANGUAGES SPOKEN

Albanian	Nepali
Amharic	Oromo
Arabic	Pashto
Azerbaijani	Polish
Bahdini	Portuguese
Bengali	Punjabi
Bulgarian	Romanian
Burmese	Rundi
Cantonese	Russian
Czech	Slovak
Dari	Somali
Farsi	Sorani
French	Spanish
Greek	Sudanese Arabic
Gujarati	Swahili
Haitian Creole	Sylheti
Hindi	Tamil
Hungarian	Thai
Italian	Tigrigna
Kurmanji	Turkish
Laotian	Ukrainian
Latvian	Urdu
Lingala	Uzbek
Lithuanian	Vietnamese
Mandarin	Yoruba



REMOVING BARRIERS TO ADVICE

Our Deaf Advice Service supports deaf and hard-of-hearing people and their families in Sheffield. Generalist advice is **provided directly in British Sign Language**, meaning that people are receiving the expert advice directly with no third-party interpreters involved. We're proud that Citizens Advice Sheffield's Deaf Advice Service is firmly embedded in the deaf community and we continue to advocate for better BSL provisions in healthcare, welfare and more.

In 2022-23, we delivered two Deaf Awareness sessions and hosted one Deaf Event, where we provided a space for around 35 BSL users to consult on the proposed 'super surgeries' in the North.



Our Community Access Points helped 982 people this year

Community Access Points (CAPs) are aimed at ensuring that those who face digital exclusion have access to advice. Based in confidential spaces within familiar community settings, CAPs enable people to connect in real-time with our advisers over video call - with the simple one-click system requiring no digital skills or knowledge whatsoever. This year saw five CAPs go live in venues across the city: Howden House, Pakistan Muslim Centre, Burngreave Library (Sorby House), Zest and St Mary's Church.

Plans to expand our CAP provision in diversified locations are firmly in place for 2023-24.



SAFIA'S STORY

We first advised Safia about their UC50 form in June. They'd originally received an appointment for a health assessment to take place on 28th September, however this was subsequently cancelled and rescheduled for 11th October. Then, it was cancelled and rescheduled **again** for 23rd November. They then advised Safia to wait for a new appointment letter.

With Safia having still not received an appointment by February, we contacted the health assessment centre to enquire. They informed us that Safia would get an appointment **as soon as one become available** and that they were aware that Safia needed a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter.

Once more, Safia received a letter confirming an appointment for 24th March but again, this was cancelled.

We supported Safia to make a complaint. **In the following months, three more appointments would be offered and cancelled. Each time, the reason cited was a lack of BSL interpreter availability.**

We assisted Safia to escalate the complaint with the Vulnerable Customer Champions team in July, who confirmed that they would look into the matter. In the meantime, yet another appointment was offered and rescinded.

Eventually, Safia was assessed based on the paper assessment only, and was **awarded the Limited Capability for Work-related Activity element, entitling Safia to £7,114.59 in Universal Credit** (half of which was backpay).

It took **seven appointment cancellations over a 13-month period** for this alternative assessment route to be utilised.

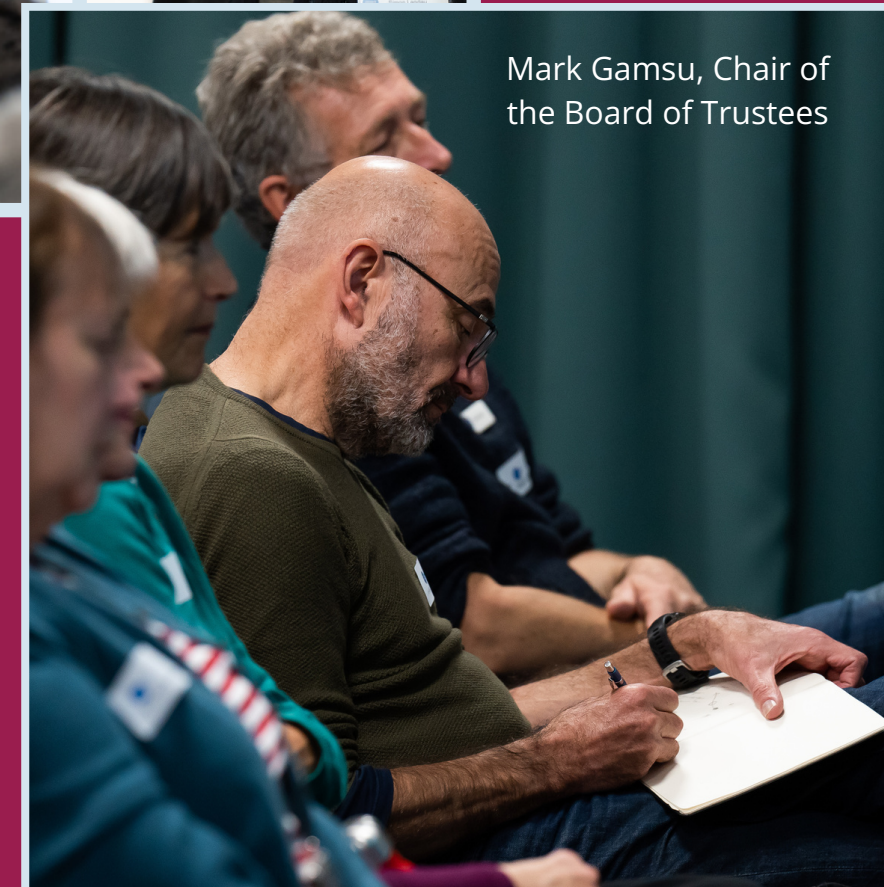
The interpreting service used by the health assessment centre has apologised for failing to meet their service level agreement and for the knock-on effect that this had on Safia.

Our Deaf Advice team supported Safia through the initial UC50 process, several complaints, and to an eventual decision leading to payment, with acknowledgement and an apology from the provider for their unacceptable service.



THE FACES OF CITIZENS ADVICE SHEFFIELD

Our staff and volunteers are the heart and soul of our organisation. Many have been with us since we merged into CAS - over 10 years ago! They are part of the Sheffield community **through and through.**



Mark Gamsu, Chair of the Board of Trustees

I have a personal experience with debt and my motivation comes from knowing what it feels like to feel completely helpless in being able to change your own circumstances - It feels great to know that I am actively helping people get out of the same situation I once faced.

Lizzie, Debt Caseworker

I get immense satisfaction from helping people improve their lives. I've been given gifts of listening, attention to detail, persistence and languages. Citizens Advice is the ideal place to share these.

Peter, Advice Worker



Senior Leadership Team

Sylvia Ward, Chief Executive Officer

Joanne Abdulla, Head of Advice

Peter Brown, Head of Resources and Organisational Development

RESEARCH AND CAMPAIGNS





Our advice helps people to find a way forward, and our research and campaigns work addresses the underlying cause of an issue.

We harness the evidence we get locally to campaign for change and to influence organisations and policy makers.

We know that many of our clients are **struggling to meet their basic needs** and that **the cost of living crisis is having a profound effect on the poorest communities**. More people are asking for help from the Household Support Fund and are relying heavily on food banks and fuel vouchers. We've seen people self-disconnecting from their energy meters and refusing entry for inspections in social properties, unfortunately incurring further fines.

Welfare Benefits continues to be our highest enquiry area, followed by debt and housing. With many of our advisers supporting people with PIP applications and appeals, we've seen the waiting times for decisions continue to be at unacceptable levels. We have consistently raised this with Paul Blomfield MP and he has advocated on this issue during parliamentary questions.



-  **Regular briefings with Sheffield MPs on key issues facing their constituents**
-  **Nurturing strong, productive relationships with civil servants and councillors at Sheffield City Council**
-  **Raising awareness of issues through local media**
-  **Collaborating on national Citizens Advice campaigns**

We collaborated with Sheffield City Council to **drive an uptake in Council Tax Support and Discretionary Housing Payment applications**, creating video campaigns and producing materials that were included with the end-of-year council tax information distributed to all households.

By contributing to the national Citizens Advice campaign for cost of living support, we not only secured media attention for some of our clients' stories but we also secured commitments from two local MPs to write to Jeremy Hunt MP **asking for an uplift in benefits**.

Our Household Support Fund team, as Trusted Assessors, have continuously fed into the work of Sheffield City Council in delivering the fund, raising issues that arise with the application process thus **improving access for our clients**.

We've called for investigation into **potential discrimination** against the Roma community by the DWP Risk & Review team.

Through the DWP Partnership team, we have consistently raised the issue of **debt recovery management which affects thousands of households on Universal Credit** who cannot afford the deductions. As a result, this process is currently being reviewed.

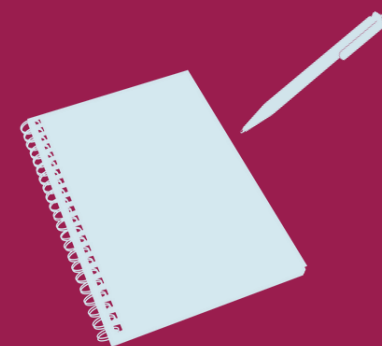
Using our insights from supporting clients with disabilities and health conditions, and through our work in the food banks, we **submitted consultation responses** to the Health and Disability Green Paper and the APPG Cash or Food Inquiry, sharing stories from the frontline.



LOOKING AHEAD →

Our ambition is that everyone in Sheffield should be able to access accurate and reliable information and advice whenever they need it.

This is no small task. Sheffield had barely emerged from the pandemic before the cost of living crisis began to bite, piling more pressure on many of those already struggling from the unequal and disproportionate impact of COVID. More and more people are increasingly unable to make ends meet and it seems unlikely that will change any time soon. With the public sector bodies who provide the majority of our funding, facing their own financial pressures, returning to our pre-pandemic ways of working is not an option. We need to be flexible, innovative and collaborative to ensure we reach everyone who needs us.



We've already got a strong foundation. Our telephone Adviceline effectively identifies those callers who need in-depth support from a case-worker, while fully addressing around 95% of callers' issues in the first call. Community Access Points provide a way for digitally excluded clients to receive this service, while our targeted advice services provide more tailored support to particular vulnerable groups. But we know there is more to do and that some people still face barriers accessing advice. Over the next two years therefore we will:

- 📌 Recruit and train more volunteers to support our advice delivery
- 📌 When funding permits, recruit more paid advisers to enable us to answer more calls on Adviceline
- 📌 Work closely with community organisations to understand the barriers some communities face and to try and reduce or remove these
- 📌 Train frontline staff and volunteers in neighbourhood and community organisations to enable them to deliver basic information and signposting and to spot when specialist advice is needed and refer people to us
- 📌 Increase the number of Community Access Points
- 📌 Launch a new website to make it easier for people to find what they need and encouraging those who can to find the information they need on-line
- 📌 Work with our partners in the NHS and Local Authority to reach more of the most vulnerable people in our city

We also want to strengthen the systems that support this delivery so we will:

- 📌 Provide our staff with opportunities for development and progression where we can
- 📌 Continue our work on cyber security to ensure data is well-protected
- 📌 Work to increase the representation and voice of the communities we serve in our governance structures

These are challenging times but we are, and will remain, absolutely committed to doing everything we can to empower the most vulnerable people in Sheffield to find a way forward from their problems.

THANK YOU

TO OUR SUPPORTERS, FUNDERS AND PARTNERS

We wouldn't be able to do what we do without the generosity, support and collaboration of many individuals and organisations large and small. There's not room to mention everyone here but over the past year this has included:

British Gas Energy Trust

Citizens Advice

Legal Aid Agency

Levelling Up Fund

Northern Powergrid

Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust

Sheffield City Council

Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

South Yorkshire Housing Association

NHS South Yorkshire

Stewarts Law

Trussell Trust

Voluntary Action Sheffield

Weston Park Cancer Support Centre

And thank you to our Advocacy Hub partners Disability Sheffield and Cloverleaf Advocacy.

Look out for the Advocacy Impact Report 2022-23 on our website.

Citizens Advice Sheffield is a charity, and this report has set out how we have helped people in 2022-23. As a charity, we rely on support to provide free, independent and impartial advice to thousands of people in Sheffield every year. There's still a long way to go to get through this crisis, but with continued support, we'll be able to help many more of the people who urgently need us.

You can support us by:

 Making a Donation

 Volunteering with us

Adviceline: 0808 278 7820

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www.citizensadvicesheffield.org.uk

Citizens Advice Sheffield is the operating name of Sheffield Citizens Advice and Law Centre Ltd

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