

## Local Impact Report: Hinckley & Bosworth 2021/22

October 2022

### 1. Introduction

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire's County generalist services provide free, independent, impartial and confidential advice for the Districts and Boroughs of Blaby, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Melton, North West Leicestershire and Oadby & Wigston (specialist services only in O&W).

We operate a consistent, multi-channel delivery model across the County, with initial assessment via telephone or email as a gateway to a range of options (including telephone, email, video and face-to-face appointments) and services (signpost to self-help, assisted information, full advice and specialist services). This approach ensures a smooth and efficient advice journey for all, with in-depth support and face-to-face channels prioritised for those that need it most.

The service is delivered by seven paid staff and a County-wide team of 44 volunteers, who perform gateway assessment, advice, supervision and research & campaigns roles. In 2021/22, the County service supported 11,392 Leicestershire residents with a total of 33,666 issues, across areas including welfare benefits, debt, housing, employment, family and relationships, immigration, discrimination and community care.

In Hinckley & Bosworth, this equated to 2,494 clients with 7,987 issues. We secured £1,403,974 in additional income for residents, through benefit claims and one-off payments. We also dealt with £652,338 of debt.

### 2. Core services funded by Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire is grateful for the continued support of Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council (the Council) which, for more than fifteen years, has enabled us to provide the vital advice and support that our communities rely on for the problems they face.

In 2021/22, Council funding enabled us to operate the following services:

- **FREE telephone Adviceline (0808 278 7854), 9am - 4.30pm, Monday to Friday.**

The County Adviceline provides signposting to online self-help resources ([www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)), assisted information (support to understand and use self-help), simple advice or signposting to local partners, as well as making appointments for full advice and referral to specialist services.

- **Full advice appointments by telephone and video call (via Attend Anywhere).**

Telephone/video continue to be the fastest and most efficient method of advice delivery and are increasingly requested by clients who work, rural residents and those who would otherwise struggle to travel to a face-to-face appointment.

- **Face-to-face pre-booked appointments, Mondays and Thursdays in Hinckley**

We are delighted to have returned to providing in-person advice following the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions, as this ensures a more accessible service for those with complex advice needs, language barriers or learning difficulties or disabilities. We continue to prioritise these appointments for those that require this type of support.

Hinckley & Bosworth residents can also access face-to-face advice appointments at another County branch (Narborough, Market Harborough or Coalville) if that is more suitable.

- **Email advice via our website ([www.citizensadviceleicestershire.org/get-advice](http://www.citizensadviceleicestershire.org/get-advice)), response within 5 working days.**

This access channel has continued to grow in popularity since the pandemic. While email is best suited to non-urgent enquiries, we are increasingly dealing with more complex cases via long email chains with clients who indicate a preference for email communication.

- **Household Support Fund (HSF) applications.**

The Hinckley & Bosworth service processed 73 local HSF applications during the last round. Additional HSF applications were also dealt with by our Money Max team, meaning an overall total of £9,695 in additional income for low income households in Hinckley and Bosworth.

### **3. Specialist services for Hinckley & Bosworth residents**

In addition to the generalist services listed above, the core funding which the Council provides also enables us to develop, manage and maintain a range of specialist services, which offer significant wider benefit for Hinckley & Bosworth residents at no additional cost to the Council.

- **Hinckley Food Bank Adviser**

This is a new service working in partnership with Hinckley Food Banks and Falcon Support Services, funded for 3 years by the Trussell Trust. The service offers a dedicated adviser to deliver advice to users of food banks situated in Hinckley and Earl Shilton.

- **Macmillan Benefits Advice and Support**

The Macmillan service provides specialist benefits advice and casework, for those affected by cancer, including appeals and representation. We have delivered the service for Macmillan since 2009, covering Leicester and Leicestershire.

- **East Midlands Money Advice (EMMA)**

The EMMA service provides one-off debt advice and specialist casework, funded by the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS). Citizens Advice LeicesterShire has delivered this support across the County since 2007.

- **Money Max**

Money Max launched in summer 2021 and is funded by Leicestershire County Council. The service provides holistic support for people with money issues, including debt and budgeting. Money Max works closely with Citizens Advice LeicesterShire's EMMA service to enhance the support available for clients struggling with a money issue. In its first year, 60% of Money Max clients reported a mental health issue that affected their ability to manage money.

- **Help to Claim**

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire has contributed to the delivery of the DWP-funded national Help to Claim service since it was launched in 2019, working in partnership with local Jobcentre Plus and national Citizens Advice. The service supports new Universal Credit claimants from initial claim through to their first payment.

- **Pension wise**

The Pension wise service is a national government initiative that provides information for over-55s about how they can take money from their pension. Citizens Advice LeicesterShire has delivered this service for Leicester and Leicestershire since it launched in 2015.

- **Meso UK Benefits Advice**

Since 2015, Citizens Advice LeicesterShire has provided welfare benefits advice and casework across Leicester and Leicestershire for clients with a diagnosis of mesothelioma, and also operates a national helpline.

- **Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Advice**

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire has forged a new partnership with the East Midlands Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Network (EMSTN) to provide social welfare support for those affected by these conditions, the vast majority of whom are from minority ethnic backgrounds. We are currently running a 12 month pilot to enable direct referrals from clinicians who are treating patients who also have a social welfare need.

## **4. Achievements**

During 2021/22 we began implementing a County restructure which aims to ensure a consistent, responsive and accessible service for all residents.

Despite significant challenges around volunteer recruitment and retention (for more detail see Section 5: Challenges), increased complexity of client issues and ongoing Covid-19 restrictions, we were able to support a comparable number of clients and gain an additional comparable income, as 2019/20 and 2020/21.

	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
<b>Total clients</b>	2,494	2,488	2,387
<b>Issues dealt with</b>	7,987	7,281	7,563
<b>Complexity<sup>1</sup></b>	3.2	2.9	3.16
<b>Income gained</b>	£1,403,974	£1,558,432	£1,509,031
<b>Debt dealt with</b>	£652,338	£842,970	£1,481,588

In addition, in the first two quarters of 2022/23, we have so far achieved:

<b>Total clients</b>	1,516
<b>Issues dealt with</b>	4,574
<b>Income gained</b>	£490,076

## 5. Challenges

In 2021/22 we overcame significant challenges which arose as a result of external events beyond our control.

- **Volunteering**

In March 2020, we swiftly adapted our advice model to deliver support via remote channels during the Covid-19 pandemic. While this was a success in terms of channel shifting service delivery for staff and many of our volunteers, we unfortunately lost 57% of our most experienced, long-standing volunteers, who were unhappy or struggled volunteering from home, or came to view lockdown as a natural end point for their time with us. We put significant energy into addressing the shortfall, securing a grant from the National Lottery Community Fund to update our training and processes, which enabled us to recruit 55 additional volunteers during lockdown, a momentum which we have maintained since.

However, the nature of volunteering continues to change due to long-term trends accelerated by Covid-19. We are now seeing fewer retired volunteers able to commit regularly long-term, due to the increased need for this cohort to work, provide childcare for grandchildren or other responsibilities. We are continuing active recruitment of volunteers and are fortunate to have attracted many students and younger volunteers who are an asset to the service, however we are feeling the loss of the knowledge and experience of those who left during the pandemic.

We continue to address this ongoing challenge to our traditional volunteer-based delivery model. In 2021/22, we introduced paid Gateway Assessors for the County Adviceline, and began a partnership with the University of Leicester offering work experience placements for second-year Law students. We are currently operating at 77% volunteer capacity for the

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<sup>1</sup> Average issues per client

County service and continue to advertise, recruit and train volunteers to ensure we meet demand.

- **Debt advice recommissioning**

Planned recommissioning for new MaPS-funded specialist debt advice took place during autumn/winter 2021. However, following protracted uncertainty, the commissioning was withdrawn by MaPS shortly before the commencement date of the new contract.

Unfortunately, this led to the loss of skilled debt advisers and the decimation of the debt advice sector across the country, as experienced staff left for more secure employment. In Leicestershire, we also lost our Service Manager. At that time we wrote to our local MPs, setting out our concerns for the impact this situation would have on clients requiring urgent support with complex debt.

We are told that MaPS will repeat the recommissioning exercise soon following consultation. In the meantime, we have been informed that our current contract will be extended until March 2025, albeit with a reduction in funding, and we have managed to replace some of the staff we lost in time to meet the demand created by the cost of living crisis.

## **6. *Cost of living crisis***

Since Citizens Advice LeicesterShire's previous briefing to the Council in May 2022, the cost of living crisis has accelerated, leaving a growing proportion of local residents at risk of significant impacts of destitution, including debt, homelessness, hunger, cold homes and child poverty.

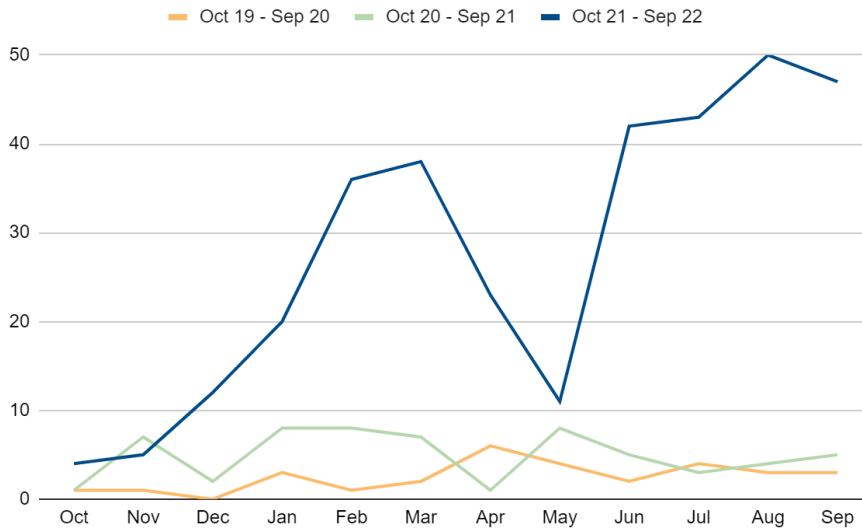
The UK government's energy price guarantee, which caps the average annual household energy bill at £2,500, combined with the £400 energy rebate due this winter, will go a long way to mitigating the very worst predicted effects of the crisis. However, this support is set to end in April, while the cost of energy for a typical household is still £1,000 higher than this time last year. The reality is that many residents are already struggling with the rises we have seen so far, combined as they are with increases in the cost of food, transport and other essentials.

Locally, we are seeing a significant increase in clients presenting with issues which are indicators of hardship, including benefits, utility bills and the need for charitable support.

- **Charitable support and food banks**

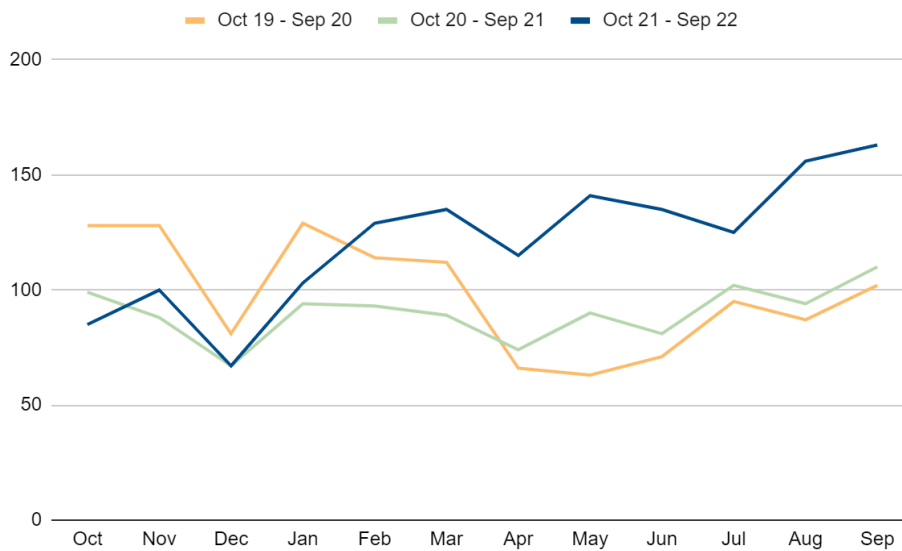
Over the past 12 months we've seen a huge rise in people seeking charitable support through the Household Support Fund and food bank referrals.

Until this year, comparatively few Hinckley & Bosworth clients required this support. However, since January 2022, we have supported an average of 36 clients per month to access food and fuel vouchers and other charitable support.



- **Benefits and Universal Credit**

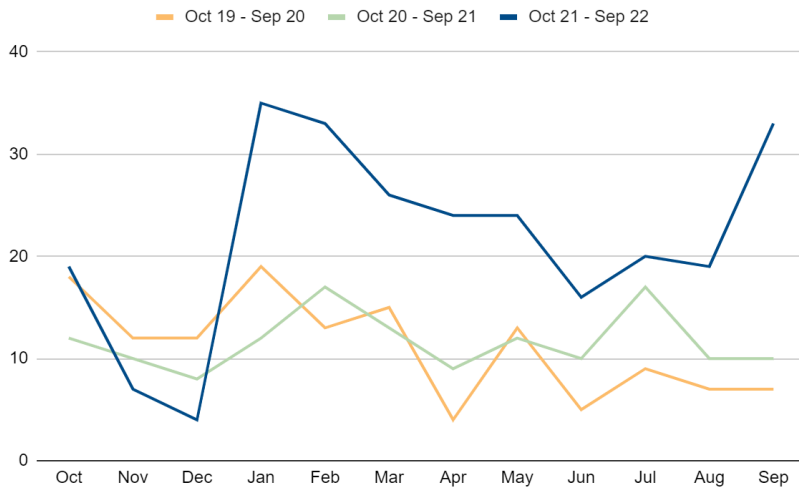
We are seeing a significant increase in demand for support with benefits issues and Universal Credit claims, as residents seek to maximise their income to meet the rising cost of living.



In the year to September 2022, we have helped 24% more people with a benefits or Universal Credit issue compared to 2019/20 and 35% more than 2020/21.

- **Energy and water bills**

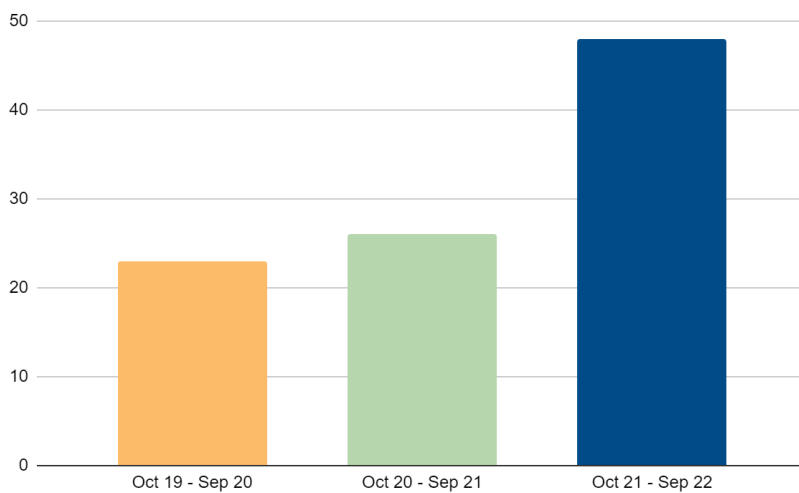
The energy price crisis is unprecedented. Citizens Advice LeicesterShire has helped more Hinckley & Bosworth residents with energy issues than the two previous years.



In the year to October 2022, we have so far helped more people with energy and water issues, compared to the previous two years (2019/20: 134, 2020/21: 140, 2021/22: 260).

- **Homelessness**

Homelessness and the threat of homelessness are issues of significant concern and indicators of crisis. We have supported almost twice more people with homelessness issues this year than in the two previous years, especially with regard to affordability and private sector housing.



## 7. Case study

Clara\* is 87. She lives independently in Hinckley & Bosworth.

Clara was concerned about rising energy prices and was in arrears, however she was unable to read her bills or her meter due to deteriorating eyesight. She was unaware of the options available or if any steps had been taken already to support her with energy costs.

Clara has no telephone or internet access. She requested a face-to-face appointment for advice, however on the day she turned up at the wrong branch. Citizens Advice LeicesterShire was still able to support her by facilitating a three-way telephone call between Clara, the adviser in Hinckley branch and Clara's energy supplier to discuss her needs.

During the call, Clara's health information was updated with her energy supplier and she was entered on to the Priority Services Register. Clara was also offered the choice of paying for energy via direct debit to reduce her bills. She had been unable to do this previously as she could not see well enough to take meter readings, however during the call the supplier offered to fit a Smart meter, which would submit accurate readings automatically. An appointment was made there and then for installation of the Smart meter.

At the same time, Clara was able to deal with her arrears, which would be repaid via the direct debit payments. The supplier also updated their records so that Clara could receive bills in large-print format.

As a result of this appointment, Clara was able to address her issues around paying for energy and take control of her bills. The adviser also signposted Clara to Age UK for further support.

\*name and identifying information has been changed.

## 8. Response to the cost of living crisis

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire is planning a decisive response to the challenges facing our community in Hinckley & Bosworth this winter. This is built on a robust understanding of those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of rising costs and the interventions needed to support them.

- **Responsive workforce**

We are training our new intake of volunteers to be more independent and flexible in approach to both delivery method and volunteering locations. We are also looking at more strategic staffing to ensure that we are agile and can react quickly to the changing needs and circumstances of our clients. This could include increasing capacity on Adviceline or responding to a local need for face-to-face support through community outreach or 'pop-up' advice location.

- **Local partnerships**

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire is working closely with community partners in Hinckley & Bosworth to ensure an effective and coordinated response to the cost of living crisis.



- We have developed a partnership with the Trussell Trust to deliver advice in food banks in Hinckley and Earl Shilton.
- We participated in a Council cost of living event on 1 October.
- We have applied for funding for an outreach-focused Energy Adviser to attend community locations and events.
- We are participating in a fuel voucher scheme coordinated by national Citizens Advice, commencing delivery in October 2022.

## 9. *Supporting Hinckley & Bosworth Corporate Plan 2022 - 25*

In all service delivery and development, Citizens Advice LeicesterShire aims to contribute to Hinckley & Bosworth's priorities, goals and ambitions, as set out in the Council's Corporate Plan.

### • **People**

People and communities are at the heart of Citizens Advice LeicesterShire's local advice services. We will help people to stay healthy, active, in work and protected from harm by:

#### *Maximising people's potential through employment and skills support*

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire offers a number of volunteering opportunities for local residents, including gateway assessor, generalist adviser, supervisor and research and campaigns. All volunteers complete a high-quality programme of core and role-specific training modules, including in GDPR and advice issues. Ongoing training is available, enabling volunteers to continue to develop their skills.

Volunteering is an excellent way for individuals to develop skills for employment, including the workplace environment, use of IT, communication and specialist knowledge. We are seeing an increase in younger volunteers following the pandemic and we are committed to providing opportunities for training and development to maximise the potential of our communities.

#### *Helping people to stay healthy, be active and feel well*

There is a proven link between social welfare advice and health and wellbeing. In 2015, the Low Commission published *The Role of Advice Services in Health Outcomes*, which found that:

"...the right advice at the right time helps people manage their own lives, and promotes better mental and physical health."

Meanwhile, research by Citizens Advice has found that 91% of clients experience at least one negative outcome as a result of an unsolved social welfare problem, including impacts on mental health (82%) and worsening physical health (60%). Furthermore, without an advice intervention, 44% clients required more support from health services, while 34% clients spent more time with clinicians discussing non-health issues.

However, when clients could access timely and appropriate support to address their issues, 70% reported reduced stress, depression and anxiety, while 46% reported improvements to their physical health.

### *Recognising diversity and celebrating what unites us*

The Citizens Advice network is committed to advancing equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in society. We believe we are all equal through our common humanity. We value and embrace the diversity of our clients, staff and volunteers and we work to eliminate discrimination.

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire prides itself on a workforce which is representative of the communities it serves. Our goal is that our advice services will be accessible and relevant to all our diverse clients. We use technology to respond to user needs and will improve access to our services, including face to face. Through our research and campaigns work, we aim to speak up for those who face intense disadvantage, detriment or harm to their wellbeing.

### *Ensuring that vulnerable residents are supported and the capacity of the local voluntary sector is sustained and developed*

Citizens Advice LeicesterShire strives to support the most vulnerable residents of Hinckley & Bosworth. 56% of our clients are disabled or have a long-term health condition. Meanwhile, 60% of clients supported by our Money Max service in its first year reported a mental health condition that impacted their ability to manage money.

We develop local partnerships to sustain and develop the local voluntary sector. We have recently begun a project which places an advice worker in Hinckley food banks, to ensure that clients struggling with the cost of living can access support with income maximisation and budgeting alongside food parcels.