

**citizens
advice**

**West
Suffolk**

**Annual
Review
2021/22**

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

Our Impact in 2021/22

5,874
clients
helped

Over
£2.3 million
income
gained for
clients

23,145
issues
addressed

'The team who helped me fill out my ESA and PIP paperwork were both amazing, very supportive, knowledgeable and patient, especially as I was at a low point and needed reassurance, as well as their expert support.'

Client feedback

93%
of people would
recommend
the service

89%

of people said
that we helped
them find a way
forward

£799,608

debt
managed

34,539

hours donated
by volunteers

*'It's very satisfying
to know that in some small way
you have made someone's life a
bit easier or helped ease an
anxiety they may have had.'*

Volunteer Adviser

For every

£1

in funding we deliver

£23.57

in public value

Economic
value of
volunteering
£715,117



Chair of the Board of Trustees

Mary Porch

Our 2021/22 year was a blend of consolidation and change. Consolidation largely took the form of capitalising on the new working methods forced upon us by the pandemic. This meant ensuring that our fantastic team of staff and volunteers was able to offer services across our geography, including the most rural areas, in a way that matches the needs of our clients. Many who come to us for help now receive the entirety of their advice over the phone but those who need the support of a face-to-face meeting are able to arrange one, booked in advance to ensure the safety of all. Where possible we also enable staff and volunteers to blend their office and home working time in the way that suits them best.

Consolidation also meant updating and streamlining some of our processes in order to obtain the highest possible score in our annual Citizens Advice audit; reassurance if any were needed about the exemplary way in which our service is provided by Carol and her team.

Change has been most evident at Trustee level, although we do also benefit from strong continuity. Chris Cadman stood down as Chair at last year's AGM having dedicated himself wholeheartedly and effectively to the role for the full nine year term permitted by our Articles of Association. He had led Citizens Advice West Suffolk (CAWS) since the merger with Haverhill in 2011 and subsequently guided us through the integration of Newmarket into the West Suffolk group in 2019. We owe him more than we can easily express here and remain immensely grateful for his leadership. Fortunately he remained on the Board after stepping down and we continued to benefit from his words of wisdom through the rest of the financial year.

Other changes have included the recruitment to the Board of: Barry Peters, best known to many for his role at the Bury Free Press; Annabel Mayer, a partner at Ashtons Legal; Tony Howard, formerly Business Development Manager within CAWS and Jane Wilkie of Rees Pryer Architects. Leaving the Board recently were Judy Lancaster, Judith Hall and Vivienne Steele, all of whom did a superb job and we are particularly grateful to Vivienne for steering our IT development through the pandemic and leaving us well equipped for the future. Thanks go to all of our Trustees for their proactive input and support throughout the year. A special mention is due to Peter Holland who stepped into the role of Vice Chair this year alongside his Treasurer role.

Having coped well with the pandemic, the next challenge facing us is how best to absorb and respond to the increase in enquiries as the cost-of-living crisis bites, affecting many who haven't needed our service before. We continue to recruit and train new volunteers and to try to widen the net in pursuit of additional funding. As always, we would not be able to continue to deliver the service without the support of our funders and in particular the District Councils, County Council, and numerous project funders. Thank you to them all.



Treasurer and Vice Chair

Peter Holland

A positive situation remained during the financial year and we had a surplus to add to our reserves in preparation for the potentially difficult years ahead. The budget was prepared ahead of the pandemic and we are in a positive position due primarily to Covid, which played a part in both the income and expenditure end of year results.

We did not incur the budgeted costs and we reduced the salary bill by 12% compared to the original budget due to changes to the staff structure and major changes in our working practices. This is considered to be a 'one off' year and we need to plan for the years ahead when the reserves may well play a part.

The key points for 2021/22 are:

Income amounted to £685,891 (2020/21: £617,566) including £326,087 (2020/21: £238,458) related to project restricted activities.

Expenditure in the year amounted to £627,646 (2020/21: £620,166).

The highest cost related to salaries for our 24 employed staff amounting to £446,770 (2020/21: £459,330).

This resulted in a surplus of £58,245 (2020/21: deficit of £2,600).

Fundraising Activities and Principal Funding Sources

The Trustees extend their gratitude to our principal funders with whom we share many strategic objectives and who continued to support our core operating capacity:

- West Suffolk Council (30%)
- Suffolk County Council (4%)
- The Clinical Commissioning Groups (6.5%)
- East Cambridgeshire District Council (3.5%).

We also participated in national Citizens Advice projects funded by The Department of Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and received specific support relating to the Covid pandemic.

In addition, project-specific funding was received from the following:

- Suffolk Community Foundation
- Fred Dannatt Trust
- National Lottery Community Fund
- MS Groups in Cambridge, Ely and Newmarket, and Bury St Edmunds.

The charity did not have any borrowings from either a provider of funding or other sources at the Balance Sheet date.



Chief Executive Officer

Carol Eagles

Throughout 2021/22 we continued to deliver the service predominantly by phone and email with face-to-face appointments available for vulnerable clients or those with more complex issues. We adopted a hybrid working model with staff and volunteers working from home and the office. We have found this model works well for us as it reduces costs and our impact on the environment.

In 2021/22 we helped 5,874 clients with 23,145 issues which involved over 26,661 activities. We could not help that number of clients without the sterling support of our team of over 70 volunteers who give their time freely. Last year they donated over 34,500 hours of their time which Citizens Advice calculated had an economic value of £715,117. We would have to double our income to pay them all.

In November 2021 we started the Long Covid Social Prescribing Project to support patients affected by Long Covid. This project is a partnership between the three Local Citizens Advice and hospitals in West Suffolk, Ipswich and Colchester. This is the first time we have been involved in a collaboration with Health and are keen to develop further relationships.

In the autumn of 2021, I joined the Integrated Care System's (ICS) Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Design Panel with 11 other VCSE leaders from across Suffolk and North East Essex (SNEE). We have been working to ensure that the VCSE is an equal partner within the new SNEE ICS and can support the work of the Health and Care system.

Our biggest challenge so far in 2022/23 has been the cost-of-living crisis which is driving up demand for our services. We are seeing more new and also younger clients who would not traditionally have needed our help. We are introducing new volunteer roles to increase our capacity to be able to support those who are going to need our help in the coming months.



Chris Cadman, Carol Eagles and Mary Porch



Business Development Manager

Jo Albini

I joined the charity as Business Development Manager in January 2022. My main role is to secure the funding needed to help us to meet the advice needs in our community. My first task was to complete a review of our service delivery model to ensure we are fully accessible to all those who need our help. Our service model works well and we identified that we needed a specific project to help older people with their benefits, energy and financial issues in their own homes. We are still looking for a funder to make this project possible.

One of Citizens Advice's aims is 'to improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives' which we call research and campaigning. My responsibilities include this area and we have been working with Citizens Advice nationally and locally to bring about change. Recent campaigns have been around benefit uplifts, gambling harm and a renters' reform bill. We have met with both of our local MPs to discuss the issues affecting our clients and most recently to ask for benefits to be increased in line with inflation from April 2023.

I would like to record my thanks to both Tony Howard, my predecessor and Carol, our CEO, for their help and support as I have settled into my new role.

Looking Forward

With the current cost-of-living crisis there will be even more need and demand for our services. It is essential therefore, for us to retain current funding sources and find new ones to enable us to continue to maintain existing and provide new advice services.

Fundraising

2021/22 was a challenging year for fundraising events due to the pandemic. However, there were a couple of successes. Bury Abbey Rotary raised over £6,000 for us via a silent auction and we were also able to take part in the Swimarathon hosted by the Rotary Club of Bury St Edmunds, raising over £1,000 through sponsorship.



Swimarathon Team - Lucy, Carole, Melanie and Karen

**Supported
Advice
Project**

**265
clients
helped**

**£441,855
income
gained**

'She was brilliant, absolutely amazing. I was so relieved I could have cried afterwards. The best! I would never have been able to do it...it meant a lot. ' Client feedback.

The Supported Advice Team (SAT), led by Robin Williams, was created to help people with poor mental health and severe mental illnesses (SMIs) overcome practical problems that have become both sources of stress and obstacles to recovery. We are funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and through Suffolk Community Foundation's 'Equity in Mind' programme.

Clients referred into SAT receive an enhanced level of support over core services. They are allocated an experienced adviser with training in mental health awareness and communication skills. The adviser will coordinate the advice process; provide support and encouragement; liaise with external organisations; and plan onward referrals to appropriate partners. Our objectives are to reduce the stress and duration of the advice process and to minimise disengagement; and thereby give our clients the best chance of overcoming the issues that have become impediments to their wellbeing.

In 2021/22, we supported 265 clients with over 2,500 issues, increased their income by £441,000 and managed £50,000 of debt. We evaluated our clients' wellbeing using ONS4 and, at the end of the advice process, recorded a 36% average improvement in client scores across all four measures.

We are passionate about collaboration and in participating in an integrated network of community-based mental health resources. In 2021/22, over 50% of referrals into SAT were made by 17 external organisations, including local government, primary and secondary NHS services and other charities.

Case Study

Sarah was referred to SAT by (NHS) community mental health services. Her PIP had been removed following a review and she was struggling to cover her daily living expenses. She had accrued rent and council tax arrears and her landlord was threatening her with eviction. Sarah had a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder and psychosis and her support worker said that her symptoms had become much more severe as a result of the financial stress.

We were able to successfully appeal the decision to remove Sarah's PIP. She received a backdated payment sufficient to pay off her rent and council tax arrears; and over £360 per month was restored to her household budget. The eviction did not proceed. Sarah told us that she was 'so happy to put the experience behind' and that she was 'really grateful for the support'. Sarah has now been discharged from mental health services and has been referred to the work preparation programme.

Multiple Sclerosis Project

86
clients
helped

£205,082
income
gained

We were fortunate to be funded by the MS Groups in Cambridge Ely and Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds in 2021/22 to provide casework to people with MS and their families.

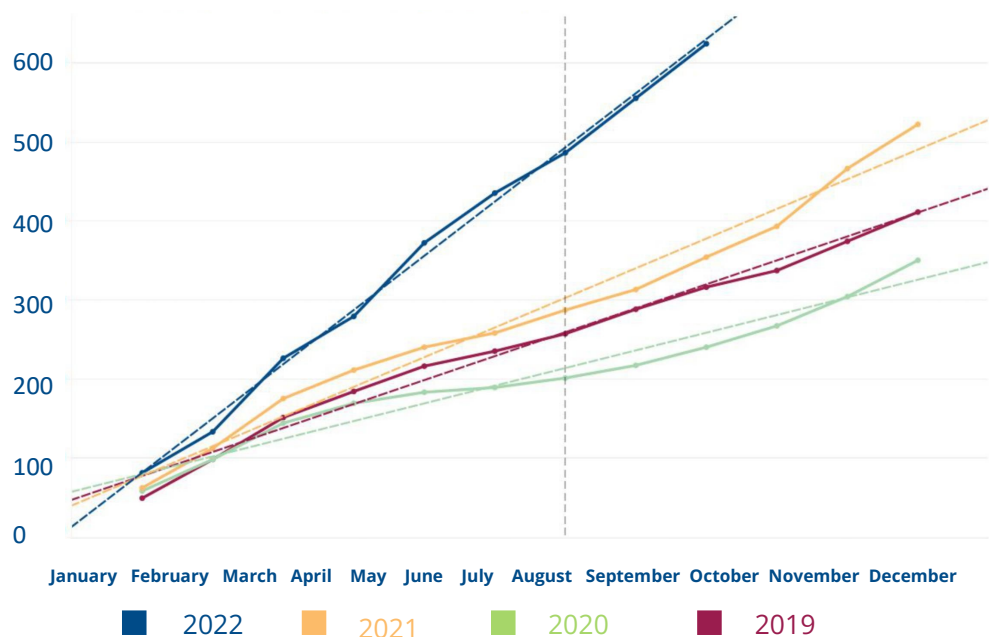
Case Study

Our client was receiving PIP and ESA and had been called into the job centre for an interview with a work coach. Given that the client was in the Support Group, this wasn't necessary and we confirmed this with the vulnerable client department at the DWP who cancelled the appointment. Our client was very grateful as she had been anxious about the appointment and would have struggled to attend. Subsequently the client realised that her ESA payments had stopped, but her UC amount assumed she was still being paid ESA considerably reducing her total income. This was rectified and the client's ESA reinstated. We also completed a PIP form for the client which had a successful outcome.

'The MS team who I dealt with were extremely helpful and took a lot of the stress out of my situation. I was most grateful for their help.' Client feedback

Energy Advice

Cumulative number of people we've helped with energy issues each year



We help clients with their energy issues by:

- Applying for warm home discounts and accessing the priority services register
- Accessing local grants for heating oil and vouchers for pre-payment meters
- Helping to resolve issues with energy companies.

Top issues in 2021/22



Benefits 9,310

Debt 2,666

Housing 2,028

Relationships and family 1,607

Employment 1,578

Other 5,956

Five key cost of living issues

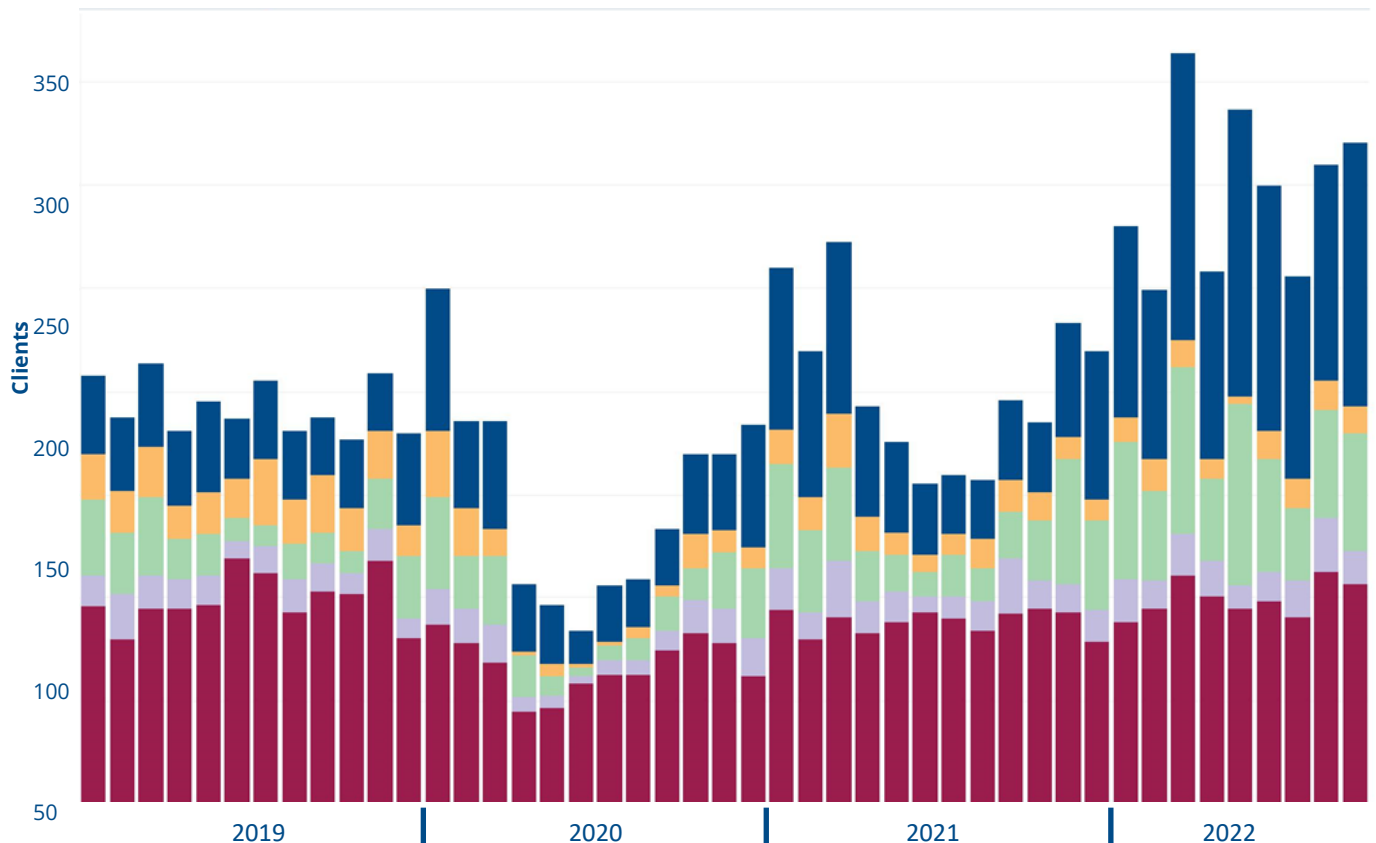
Charitable Support and Food Banks

Council Tax Arrears

Energy

Energy Debt

Personal Independence Payment



Trustees

Mary Porch - Chair of Trustees
Peter Holland - Treasurer and Vice Chair of Trustees
Ray Bolton - Trustee
Chris Cadman - Trustee
Judith Hall - Trustee
Anthony Howard - Trustee (appointed March 2022)
Judith Lancaster - Trustee (resigned September 2021)
Keith Lardner - Trustee
Annabel Mayer - Trustee (appointed January 2022)
Barry Peters - Trustee (appointed January 2022)
Michael Simpkin - Trustee
Vivienne Steele - Trustee
Marc Walker - Trustee
Jane Wilkie - Trustee (appointed July 2021)

Our funders

West Suffolk Council
West Suffolk and Ipswich and East Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Groups
Suffolk County Council
East Cambridgeshire District Council
Mid Suffolk District Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Bury St Edmunds Town Council
Haverhill Town Council
Newmarket Town Council
East Suffolk and North Essex Foundation Trust
National Lottery Community Fund
MS Society - Cambridge, Ely and Newmarket and Bury St Edmunds Groups
Suffolk Community Foundation
Fred Dannatt Memorial Fund
Abbey Rotary Club of Bury St Edmunds
Bury St Edmunds Rotary Club
West Suffolk and Mid Suffolk Parish Councils

Our thanks also go to many others for donations and sponsorship
both financial and in kind!

About Our Charity

Aims and principles

To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.

To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

Citizens Advice West Suffolk provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

Funded independently

Citizens Advice West Suffolk is an independently funded charity. We are reliant on grant funding from local authorities, parish and town councils, commercial organisations and individuals. Project funding allows us to extend our services and helps to cover the costs of our core service.

Contact us



0808 278 7868

Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3.30pm



Use the contact form on our website

www.suffolkwestcab.org.uk



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We're on Instagram

[citizensadvicewestsuffolk](https://www.instagram.com/citizensadvicewestsuffolk)