

Annual Report 2023-24

Citizens Advice
Runnymede and Spelthorne

A dark blue speech bubble containing the text 'citizens advice' in white lowercase letters.

citizens
advice

A photograph of a woman with short grey hair, wearing a brown knitted cardigan over a white t-shirt, sitting in a white chair and holding a white mug with a brown zigzag pattern. She is looking out a window with light-colored curtains, smiling slightly. The entire image has a semi-transparent red overlay.

www.randscab.org.uk

Introduction from the Board of Trustees

Citizens Advice Runnymede & Spelthorne (CARS) remains committed to being a trusted and valued organisation serving our two boroughs. The period between April 23 to March 24 has yet again seen CARS deal with record numbers of clients and client issues, supporting 7,302 clients with a total of 20,078 issues.

One way we are looking to meet this demand, is by collaborating with other local Citizens Advices across Surrey to explore ways, that together, we deliver improved services, operate more efficiently and open up new sources of funding. A key example of this has been the introduction of the Surrey Adviceline service. If all our advisers are busy taking calls clients now calling our help line get to speak with someone from within another Surrey Citizens Advice. If their enquiry needs more local support their details are passed across to CARS who follow up. This has proved a real success and we will continue to operate and refine the service in 24/25.

This year I am stepping down as chair after the AGM having served six years on the Board, the last three as Chair. It has been a privilege to serve on the Board and to work with Becky and her leadership team to drive forward the development of CARS. Over this time, I have seen a massive increase in the demand for our services where our dedicated team of staff and volunteers has worked tirelessly to step up to the challenge. At the same time, the quality of the advice that we provide puts us in the top performers amongst Citizens Advice offices across the country, which is a real achievement. I would like to personally thank the whole team for their commitment to Citizens Advice and to serving the residents of Runnymede and Spelthorne.

I wish CARS the very best for the future and I am confident that we now have an even stronger and more diverse Board in place that will continue to work with Becky and her team to drive CARS on to even greater heights.

Michael Creane Chair,
Board of Trustees

Our **mission** is to give the people of Runnymede and Spelthorne the knowledge and the confidence they need to find their way forward – whoever they are, and whatever their problem

Our **vision** is to deliver a quality service for increasing numbers of clients across our boroughs, adopting an inclusive approach that supports and reflects the diverse communities we serve.



Overview from our Chief Officer

The number of clients we worked with in 23-24 reached a record high of 7302. Some of this is due to the successful introduction of Surrey AdviceLine which has enabled us to advice more clients by phone. The financial gains and outcomes we secured for our clients also surpassed all other years at over £4.5 million. Getting the right advice to maximise people's income, prevent homelessness, address debt and so many other issues really does change lives – as you will see from our client comments later on.

The Cost-of-Living Crisis continues to impact the most vulnerable people in our community. In 23-24 we dealt with 1,252 requests for food bank referrals and charitable payments to help with food, fuel and other essential items. The 50% increase in clients we supported with energy debt in 22-23 continued through 23-24 and remains strong in 24-25.

We proactively work with local Food Bank projects across Runnymede and Spelthorne to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and debt. We are currently urgently seeking funds for these services to continue next year. Please get in touch if you can help.



We met with both our MPs, Kwasi Kwateng and Ben Spencer during the year to discuss the ongoing challenges for our community, as well as many of our local Councillors and both borough's mayors.

Looking forward to 2024 – 25, we have several new projects starting including a new Money and Debt Advice project with the support of The National Lottery Community Fund which starts in Autumn and is funded for 4 years. We also have confirmed funding for Mental Health Advice and Disability Advice Projects alongside a community Advice First Aid Training Project.

Exciting, but as ever, challenging times ahead. None of what we do is possible without the hard work and dedication of our volunteers, staff and trustees who are the heart of our service. My huge thanks goes to all of them and to our funders who make it possible.

The Year at a Glance

7,302 people were helped
through our service across
20,078 issues.

£4,697,141

Total value to our clients.

£3,744,255 Income gain

£82,294 Re-imbursments, services, loans

£124,996 Debts written off

£745,596 Other

62% Telephone



7% Face to Face



31% Other



7 Trustees

30+ Volunteers

17 Employees



25%

Benefits



13%

Housing



20%

Universal
Credit



9%

Debt

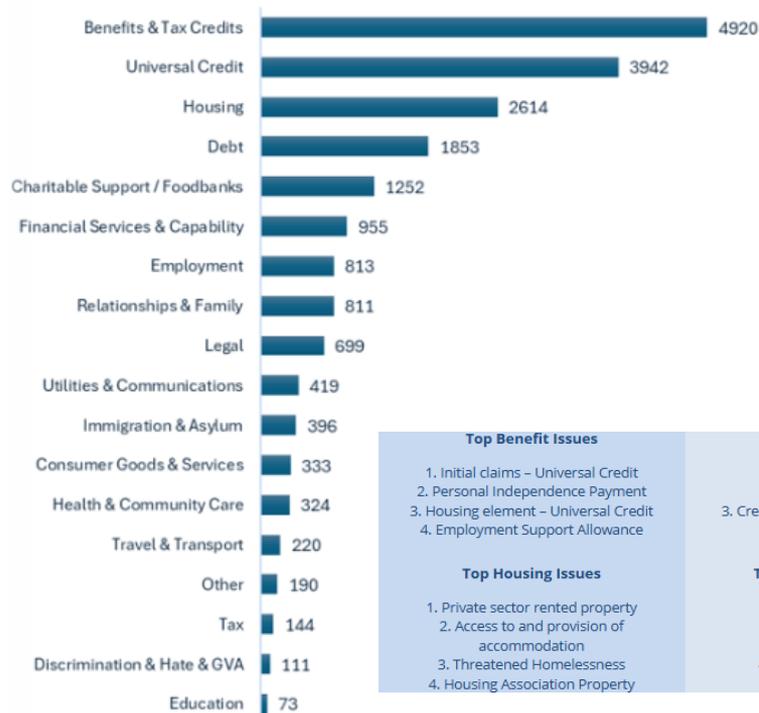
Advice Issues



Along with benefits, debt, housing and employment, we help with a wide variety of other issues, including:

- Small Claims processes
- Applications for foodbanks and charitable support
- What to do after a death
- Liabilities following separation
- Child contact and maintenance
- Blue badge applications
- Power of attorney
- Access to and the costs of social care.

We dealt with 20,078 issues



What We Do:

We change lives by giving people the advice and information they need to find a way forward. This advice and information is free, independent and confidential.

Our Value to Society:

Beyond the value we offer to clients, our work has a wider impact that benefits society at large.

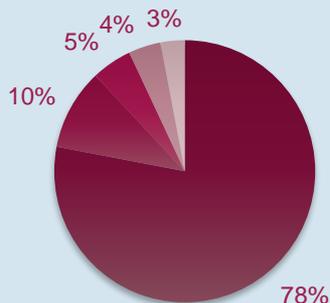
Benefitting Everyone:

At Citizens Advice we challenge discrimination and work to ensure that everyone can access and benefit from our service.

- Supporting working people - clients helped with employment related issues including redundancy, pay and discrimination.
- Keeping people in their homes by supporting clients threatened with homelessness and homeless clients with access to accommodation.
- Giving people peace of mind by assisting clients with priority debts such as rent and council tax.

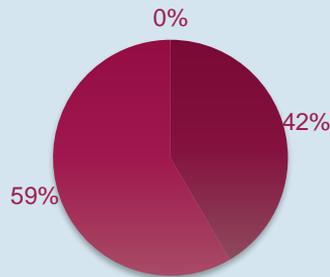
Our Impact 2023-2024

Ethnicity



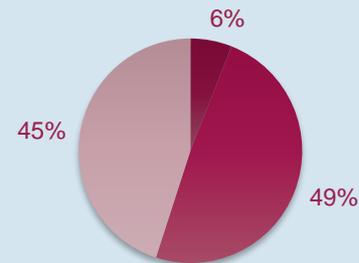
■ White ■ Asian ■ Black
■ Mixed ■ Other

Gender



■ Male ■ Female ■ Other

Health



■ Disabled
■ Long-term Health Condition
■ Not Disabled

In Fiscal Benefits*

Through savings for:

Local authorities (£131,420), the NHS (£200,107), the DWP (£578,102) and Housing Providers (£341,566)

£1,265,247 in total

We save them a total of **£2** for every **£1** invested

In Public Value*

Through wider economic and social benefits. by improving client wellbeing and positive functioning

£6,259,574 in total

We contribute **£13.36** to society for every **£1** invested

*Figures calculated using Treasury approved models

Outreach and Project work

Trussell Trust Outreach Project



This project started in July 2022 and employs 1 FTE working alongside food bank teams to ensure readily available specialist support for those experiencing financial crisis or hardship, maximising the income of people who are referred to the foodbank. In 2023-24 we helped 501 clients and achieved financial outcomes totalling £221,000.

Secondary Mental Health Project



This project supports clients by telephone, online and face to face. In 23-24 our caseworkers supported 172 clients gaining financial outcomes totalling around £301,000. The team work closely with hospital staff and their clients who are often facing multiple challenges.

A recent survey of people we have helped described the support that they received from our advisers. One of our clients who we helped successful apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment to make up their shortfall in rent told us *"I am so grateful for all you do for me and my family. This is such a relief and will make such a difference to my health and happiness."*

Primary Mental Health Project (Pilot)



This service started in April 2022 supporting Spelthorne Primary Care Networks mental health patients with the aim of enhancing quality of life for people with long-term conditions.

The project has built up a strong reputation with the care community for being approachable, responsive and effective at working with people to solve housing, debt and benefits issues that are contributing to poor mental health.

Funding was not renewed at the end of 2024, however, new funding sources have now been identified and will restart in April 2025 and extends to cover Woking.

Surrey County Council – No One Left Behind



No-one Left Behind started in April 2022 supporting vulnerable people with debt, budgeting and benefits advice.

The project has been actively working within the community through Foodbanks in Stanwell and Sunbury, Surrey Library Service. Many of our clients had complex issues to resolve across Housing, Debt and Benefit advice.

In 2023-24 the project helped 478 people with 952 issues and gained £629,000 in financial outcomes.

Court Desk



Our court desk works out of Staines County Court supporting clients threatened with repossession and homelessness. This year we saw 50% more people 144 clients in 2023-24 compared to 2022-23, reflecting the impact of the cost of living crisis resulting in many people falling behind with rent and mortgage payments.

In June our Court Desk team were presented with the Best Volunteer Team Award at the Runnymede Voluntary Awards Ceremony held at Royal Holloway College for their support with people who they meet at Court with advice to help them deal with mainly repossession and eviction orders from landlords and mortgage companies.

Surrey Adviceline



In collaboration with all 11 Citizens Advice offices in Surrey we now offer a Surrey wide telephone service for clients which started in November 2023.

This is already making a positive impact reducing waiting times for clients to speak to advisers with more calls answered and more Runnymede and Spelthorne clients receiving support.

Outreach and Project work New for 2024-25

Household Support Fund - Surrey County Council

To support people in Surrey who are claiming Household Support fund through maximising their income through eligible benefits and reducing debt, this 6 month project started in April 2024.



Work Wise - Department for Work and Pensions and Surrey County Council

The Work Wise Programme aims 'To ensure adults with mental or physical health conditions and/or disabilities, including learning disabilities and neurodivergence, receive the health and wellbeing benefits of accessing and maintaining competitive employment for the longer term'. Our part in the project is to advise and support clients referred to us by employment specialists with benefits advice and providing guidance to empower individuals to manage their finances effectively, including maximising income, reducing debt and building financial resilience.



Reaching Communities, National Lottery Fund - Money Advice

Starting in October 2024, 2 full time specialist debt advisers will work with clients to resolve debt issues. Specifically focusing on working closely with clients including face to face appointments the project aims to drive up engagement of clients with debt and provide an end to end support. With 4 years funding the project will also leave a legacy of improved debt skills and management of debt cases within our Service.



Spelthorne Food Bank Projects - Spelthorne Health and Well-being Board, Community Foundation for Surrey and Councillors Funds

Surrey CC No One Left Behind project enabled us to fund advisers to attend 3 foodbanks in Spelthorne. We are delighted that we can continue this service this year with the support of Spelthorne Health and Well-Being Board, the Community Foundation for Surrey and Councillors who kindly gave from their Better Neighbourhood Funds, *Cllr. Daniel Garaci, Cllr. Malcolm Beecher, Cllr. Rebecca Geach, Cllr. Tony Burrell, Cllr. Sandra Dunn, Cllr. Michele Gibson, Cllr. Darren Clarke, Cllr. Howard Williams, Cllr. John Turner* and from the Surrey County Council Fund, *Cllr. Evans*. Thank You all



Advice First Aid - Southern Gas Network and Surrey County Council

Together with our colleagues at Citizens Advice South West Surrey and Epsom and Ewell, we are delivering Advice First Aid Training to volunteers and staff in warm hubs across Surrey. This training will enable these people to successfully navigate our public website so that they can inform warm hub visitors of our advice, signpost to sources of help and also to refer to our dedicated advisers for more complex advice needs.



Disability Adviser - Catalyst Support

To meet the increasing demand for support with applying for disability benefits we have received funds from Catalyst Support to employ an adviser to help clients to understand what benefits they may be eligible and to help them to apply. The project is expected to commence in January 2025.



A selection of comments from CARS clients 2024

*I would have been lost without your invaluable help and advice.
Thank you for being there.*

There really isn't a word to describe just how much of a difference you have made to my life. I had no idea how to change my benefits to pay my rent, things were getting serious very quickly. I owed rent, I had no food or clean clothes, my life was painful. I had never expected or assumed I would be able to get help with such big problems. You should all be very proud of the time you dedicate to others. Thank you for making the world a better place you really do make a difference to countless lives.

Thank you so much for your help with my PIP application and appeal. I've been awarded support for five years and your assistance over the phone made it possible. I couldn't have filled out the forms without your help.

Citizens Advice is a fantastic organisation and without the constant help from its dedicated volunteers I would have not been able to carry on with my life.

Thank you for being a pillar of strength and for helping me find my way. Your impact on my life is immeasurable. Without you, I would not be where I am. I will forever be grateful for your support.

Thank you - keep up the great work, I am no longer at the risk of homelessness because of your assistance.

A Huge thank you to yourself and Citizens Advice for all your help, this would not have happened without you. I can't stress that enough because I was on the edge of taking my own life, now I want to live it

Case Studies

Client A came to us for support with debt. They work part time as a carer and look after their son who has autism. Their husband has 2 jobs, one full-time and one part-time to make ends meet. We were able to support them to apply for a range of benefits to support their circumstances including Personal Independence Payment, Carers Allowance and council tax support. They were awarded Universal Credit which included child element, housing benefit, child disability benefit and carers element of £17,673 per annum and ongoing additional benefits of £6692 per annum. They were able to clear their debts and the total ongoing annual income improvement as a result of our advice and support was £24,365.

Client B had been living with Grandparents for 2.5 years and had a part time job. They were referred to us for a benefit check and for housing support. We arranged a social care assessment with Adult Social Services which identified that they had ongoing needs that would require supported living accommodation. We supported them to secure suitable accommodation and to claim Personal Independence Payment including backdated payments totaling £8500. They are now successfully living in a supported environment with enough income to cover their needs.

Client C is registered as disabled and came to us to find out if they would be better off remaining in work or claiming Employment Support Allowance (ESA) as their health had recently deteriorated. We advised that the client would be entitled to ESA as a result of their health conditions but the amount they would receive would be much less than their current salary. The client was also concerned their employer could dismiss them on medical grounds. We gave advice on their employment rights and the responsibilities of their employer to exhaust all possibilities for adapting the job. The client was very happy that they understood their position and could make decisions based on this knowledge.

Client D had 2 small children and lived with their parents. The client was on maternity leave and their husband worked. The family was struggling financially. The client wanted to check what benefits they were entitled to. Our adviser was able to assess their financial circumstances and confirm that they were entitled to claim Universal Credit of up to £1,250 per month.



Treasurer's Report

	2023-24 £	2022-23 £
Incoming Resources	635,830	543,213
Outgoing Costs	579,761	573,798
Surplus / (Deficit)	56,069	(30,585)
Unrestricted Reserves	309,423	289,836
Restricted Reserves	152,513	116,031
Reserves	461,936	405,867

We have concluded the year with a surplus of £56,069 compared with a prior year deficit of £30,585.

Income for the year ended 31st March 2024 was £635,830, an increase of £92,617 (17%) on the previous year. All key donors maintained their level of funding and Surrey County Council. Additional funds included a full year of funds received from Runnymede Foodbank (which started part way through 2022/23) and Surrey AdviceLine which commenced in November 2023.

Our Primary Mental Health Projects funding has ended at 31st March 2024 as has Surrey County Council's No One Left Behind although an extension was granted for a further 3 months in 2024/25 along with a short grant from the Household Support Fund.

Total Costs for the year were £579,761 a small increase of £5,963 (1%) as a result of increased staff costs due to increased working days by some staff during the year.

The level of unrestricted reserves held at the year-end has increased by £19,587 in part due to a generous legacy from a former client and improvement in investments performance.

**A big thank
you to all
our partners
and
supporters**



Statement of Internal Control Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens Advice trustee board oversee the information security of all personal information of our clients, staff, funders and strategic partners that is processed. Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens Advice hold joint responsibility for client data that is held in our case management system, with the national Citizens Advice Service. An information assurance management team exists to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all personal and sensitive data is maintained to a level which is compliant with the requirements the General Data Protection Regulation and Data Protection Act 2018.

Charity Number 1128180 Company Number 06754766
Registered office: The Old Library, Church Road, Addlestone KT15 1RW