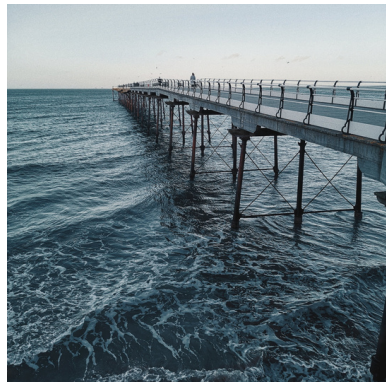


Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland

ANNUAL REPORT

2022
2023



WE ARE CITIZENS ADVICE DARLINGTON, REDCAR AND CLEVELAND

We aim to provide the advice people need for the problems they face and improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

We provide free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities.

We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.



Darlington, Redcar & Cleveland

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CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT

2022 - 23

Some periods in history are remembered as times of significant change. Quite often, this would be as a result of a major conflict. The two world wars for example, when a period of earlier calm and stability is turned on its head. After these traumatic events came unemployment, hardship and uncertainty.

In the 21st century, multiple events have gradually accumulated and combined to also now result in significant change. We survived Brexit and Covid, but following quickly behind came a deteriorating economy, and a cost of living crisis.

Here at Citizens Advice, staff and volunteers have seen a substantial increase in the number of clients who now present themselves at the office, seeking advice with budgeting.

Only a few short years ago, we would be able to provide advice and guidance that would move the client back into a positive cash-flow situation. In simple terms, moving out of the red, and back into the black. In the current environment, this is becoming harder to do. Multiple debts and more complex circumstances are becoming more prevalent. The important message



however, is that we can still improve the personal situation of all clients to some extent.

We are still open for business, and welcome new clients. In this regard, we are noticing an increase in enquiries from new clients who have not previously used our service. This is surely an indicator that prosperity has declined in the last few years. In similar vein, we are also seeing an increase in enquiries from working people. So, we are seeking to help a broader cross section of society; not just the unemployed or those in receipt of benefits. In response to these increases in demand, we are seeking to streamline our service delivery, to see more people, more quickly.

I always make a point to thank our staff and volunteers for their unstinting efforts. This last year has been particularly difficult for them as we face the reality that Citizens Advice does not hold all the answers to the current economic climate in this country.

I often reflect on world history, and have learnt that no situation is really new. History repeats itself, sadly. On a positive note however, this means that things will, again, improve. I can't put a time scale on that, but productivity will increase, and inflation will reduce. At some point.

In the meantime, well done everyone. We are still here, and I know that the staff and volunteers will continue to strive for the best outcome for their clients.

Finally, thanks must also go to all our trustee board, and partner organisations, from local government through to health care, and all those who support us in our shared objectives. Together, we can make our community a better place.

Robert Murphy

Chair of Trustee Board



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

2022 - 23

Looking Back and Looking Forward

A very warm welcome to this year's annual report and as usual we will be looking back and looking forward.

The past year has been a challenging for many people with the cost of living crisis causing hardship and worry for many people and their families. Citizens Advice continues to be a key support for people facing uncertainty and often the first port of call to discuss money issues and navigate a complex network of options, potential solutions and agencies. There is an increase in the number of people with complex problems requiring specialist and ongoing casework intervention to achieve a solution. People with money difficulties are often struggling to cover the basics including paying for their housing costs, food and utilities and situations can spiral quickly. Our message to anyone who is worried about their situation or changing circumstances is to get in touch with us as soon as possible to discuss options. There is help available that can save someone's home and increase household income.



The cost of living crisis shows no signs of slowing down and we are working hard to expand our services to help more people in need of vital advice and support. We continue to operate face-to-face drop in services in Darlington and Redcar and Cleveland and we could not do this without the support of our volunteers. A special word of thanks goes out to our volunteers for their commitment and unwavering support to the service. We may be a larger Citizens Advice service following our merger last year but we continue to have deep roots in the towns we serve and are proud of the local people who volunteer for us.

Looking forward we are excited to be working in formal partnership with Trussell Trust and Redcar's Footprints in the Community supporting people using foodbanks to get out of poverty. A word of thanks goes to Darlington Borough Council, Redcar, and Cleveland Borough Council for their ongoing support and strategic partnership we have with both authorities.

Finally thanks and appreciate goes to my staff; they achieve so much with compassion, purpose and drive. I also thank the Board of Trustees for the support and skills they bring to the charity.

Helen Howson

Chief Executive



Economic value of volunteering at Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland

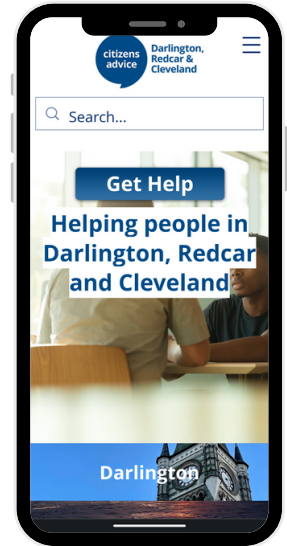
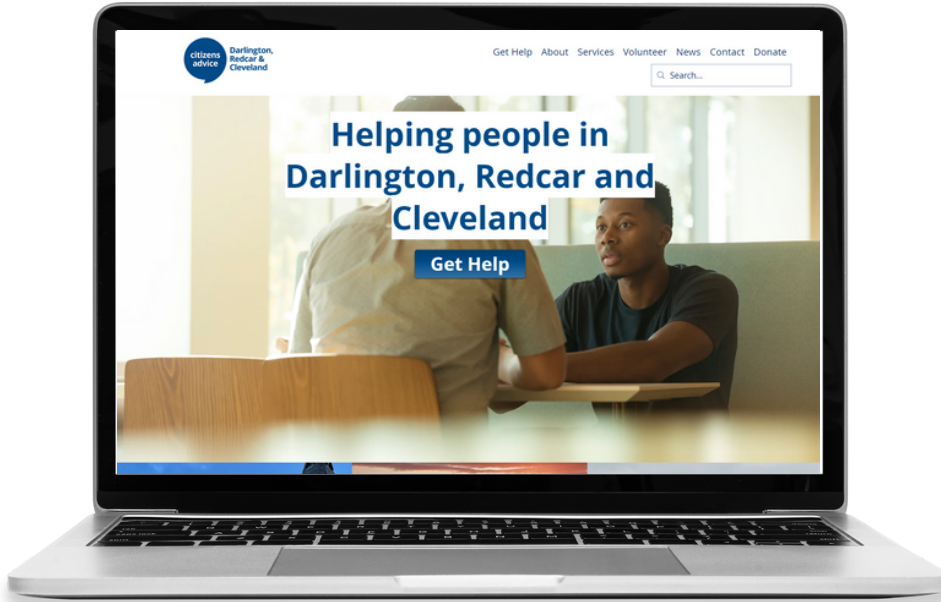
Volunteer Roles	Equivalent paid job - Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings 2021/22	Hourly rate	Annual hours	Annual value
Generalist Adviser	Associate professional and technical occupations	£18.23	7,488	£136,506
Trainee Adviser	Administrative and secretarial occupations	£18.23	12,064	£219,927
Triage Assessor	Associate professional and technical occupations	£18.23	2,080	£37,918
Social Policy worker	Associate professional and technical occupations	£18.23	2080	£37,918
Advice Session Supervisor	Associate professional and technical occupations	£23.30	416	£9,693
Support function	Administrative and secretarial occupations	£13.44	6,240	£83,866
Trustee	Managers and Senior Officials	£26.79	832	£22,289
		Total	29,120	£548,117



Key Events

New Website and domain name representing our merged organisations.

www.citizensadvisedrc.org.uk



Expansion of our outreach services in the Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland areas into organisations, community hubs and food banks at the front lines with tackling the cost of living crisis.



Breaking Through Barriers

WHAT WE DO

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland is an independent not-for-profit local charity, located in the heart of a market town and a seaside town in the Redcar and Cleveland unitary authority. Both sites are run by local people for the benefit of local people and managed by a board of volunteer trustees. It is also a member of Citizens Advice, the national umbrella body that provides a network of advice services without any direct funding to its members.

We provide a broad range of advice services ranging from generalist to our ever expanding, in demand, specialist areas: debt, welfare benefits, employment and financial services.

Each year we endeavour to reach out, with our services, to clients, who can't access us directly, around the Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland area: GP offices, churches, hospitals and partner locations, maximising service coverage, as funding allows.



DARLINGTON



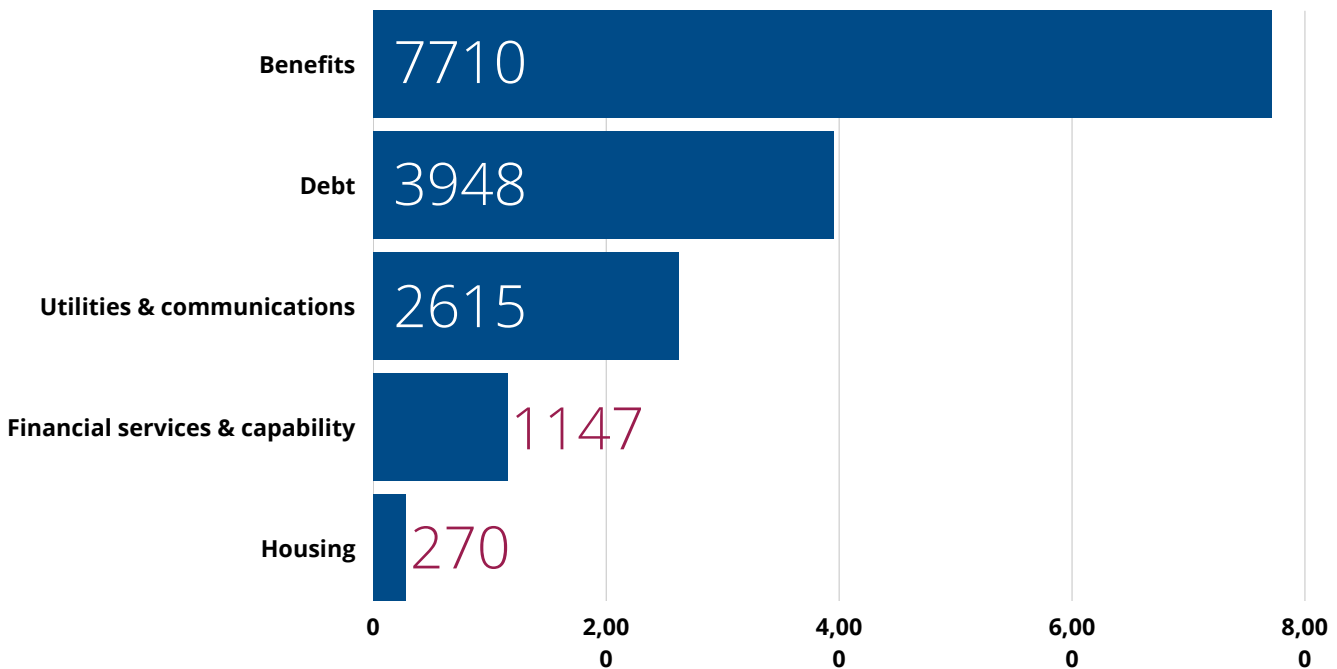
REDCAR



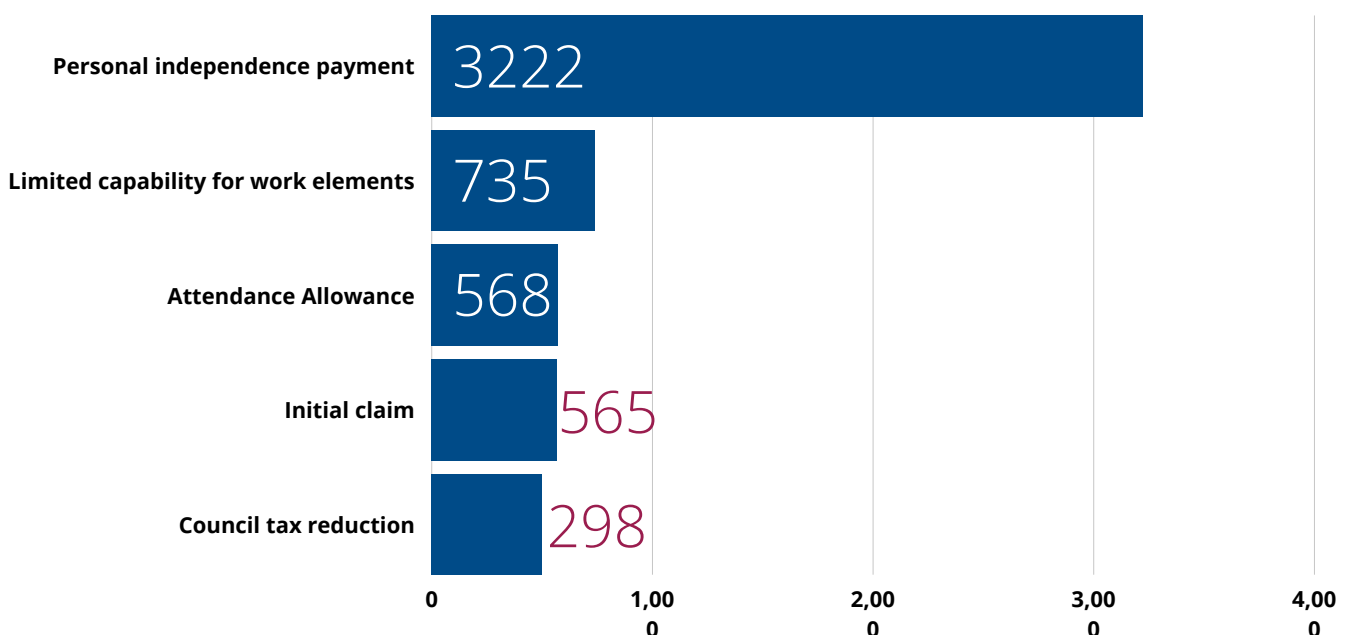
CLEVELAND

OUR IMPACT ON DARLINGTON

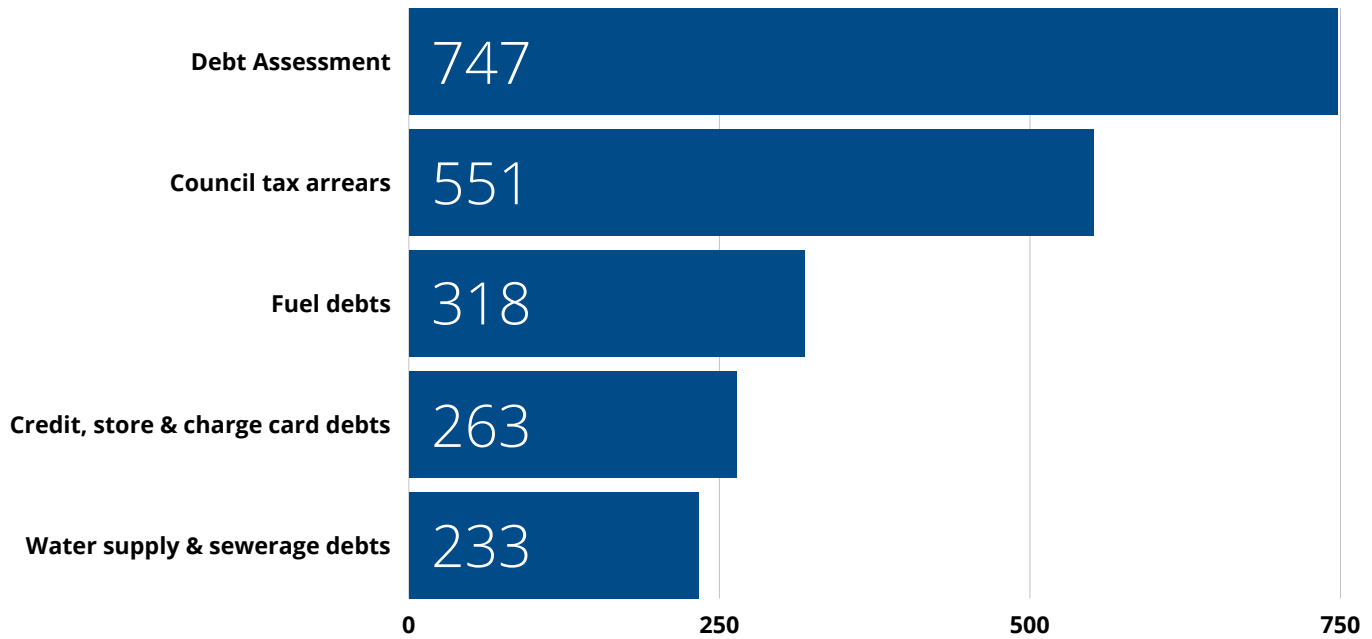
Top 5 Issues



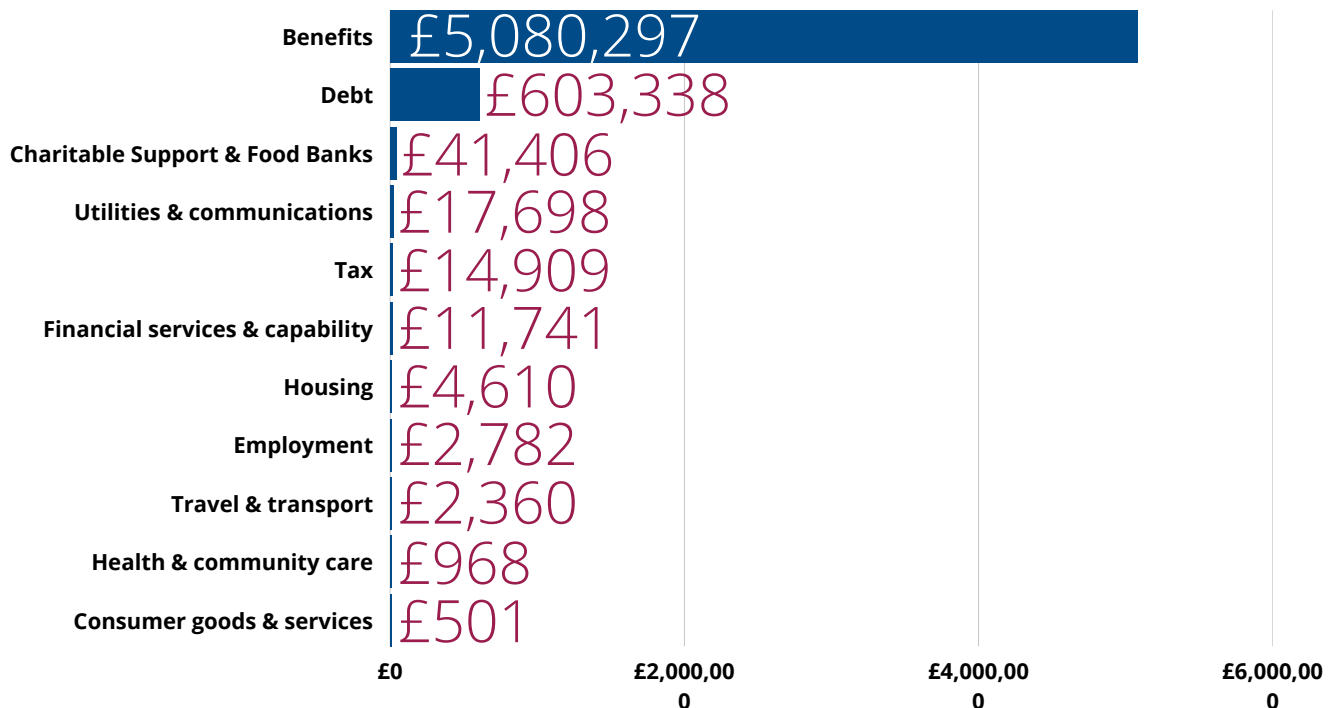
Top 5 Benefit Issues



Top 5 Debt Issues



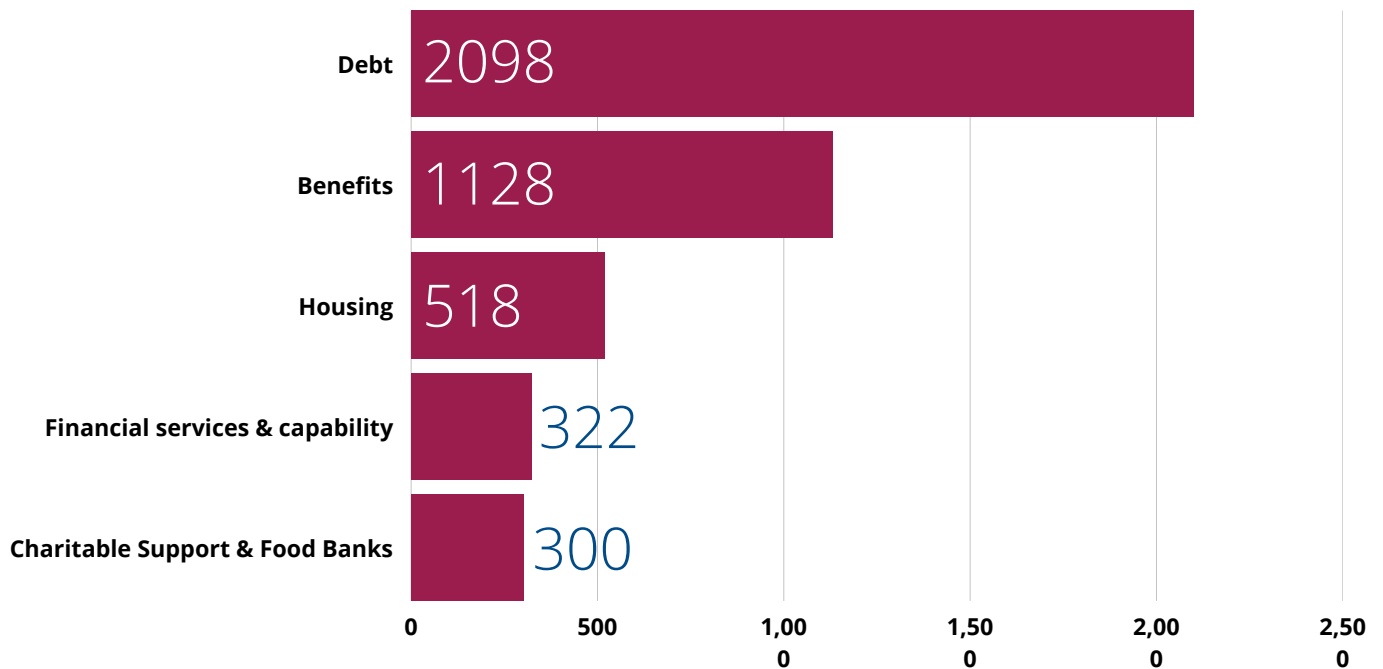
Financial Outcomes



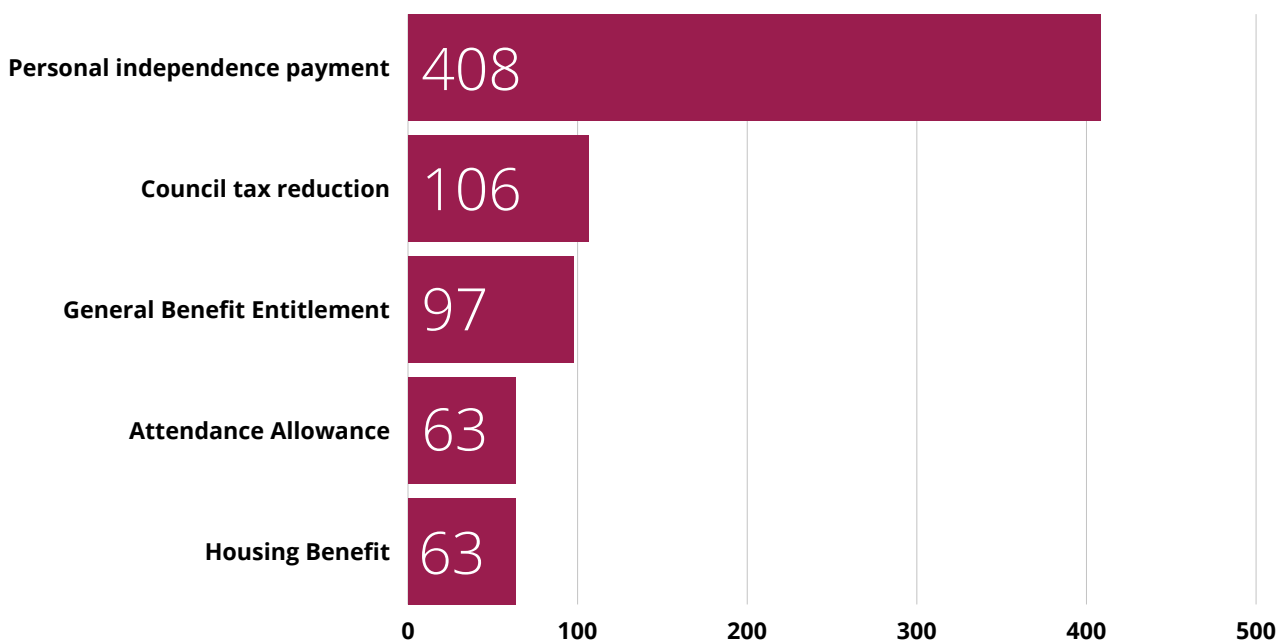
We supported and empowered clients in managing debts in total of £5,811,084. We helped by challenging these debts, negotiating with creditors for affordable, sustainable, repayments and assist with any court actions and insolvency options. The value of our work is in the result of enabling people to pay essential bills such as mortgage and rent payments and relieving stress, increasing wellbeing.

OUR IMPACT ON REDCAR & CLEVELAND

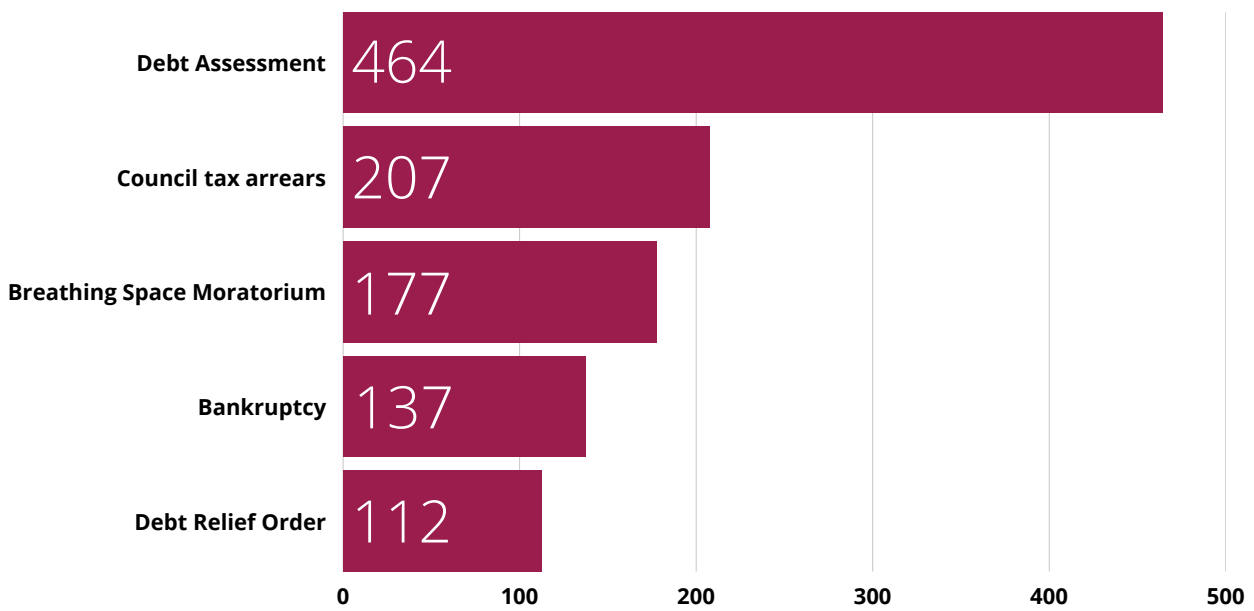
Top 5 Issues



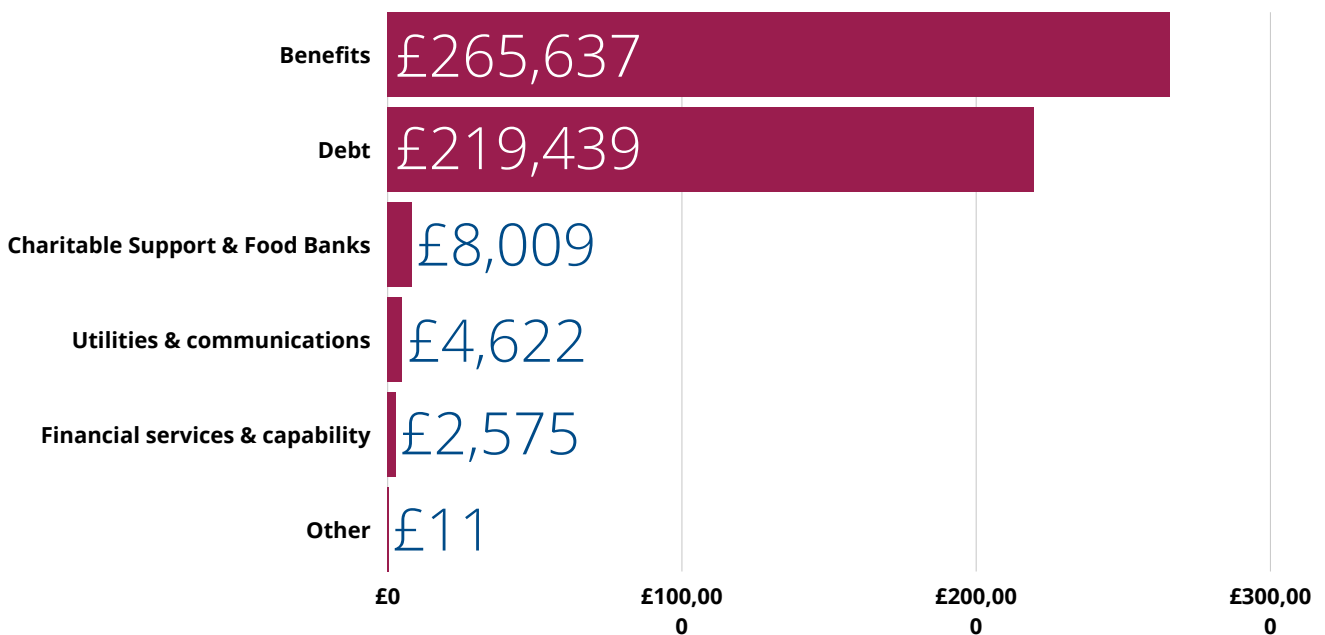
Top 5 Benefit Issues



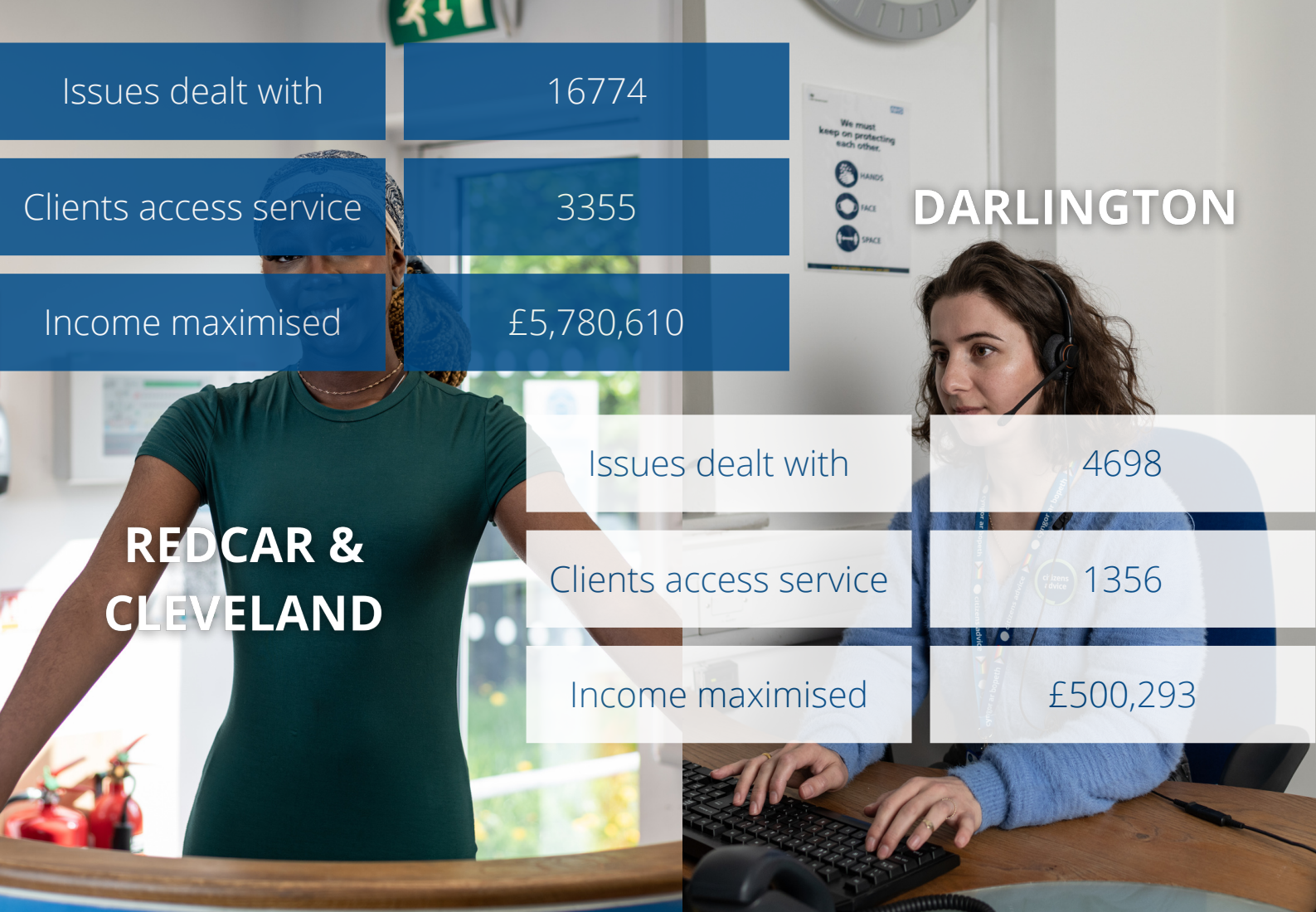
Top 5 Debt Issues



Financial Outcomes



We supported and empowered clients in managing debts in total of £3,516,277. We helped by challenging these debts, negotiating with creditors for affordable, sustainable, repayments and assist with any court actions and insolvency options. The value of our work is in the result of enabling people to pay essential bills such as mortgage and rent payments and relieving stress, increasing wellbeing.



DARLINGTON

Issues dealt with	16774
Clients access service	3355
Income maximised	£5,780,610

REDCAR & CLEVELAND

Issues dealt with	4698
Clients access service	1356
Income maximised	£500,293

OUR SERVICE

Influencing change through Research and Campaigns

The Research and Campaigns team, regularly monitor the issues raised by clients and we note trends locally, regionally and nationally. This enables us to pre-empt advice needs, cascade early information to ensure the local community is aware of any changes to their rights. By engaging with the local community organisations, the local authority, Councillors and the local MP we can ensure any campaign or important information is cascaded to the public for immediate use. Specific information or updates are printed, distributed, displayed with posters or handouts in the reception on our website or via social media.

Regional Research and Campaigns - promoting and sharing local issues

Cost of Living Crisis - 'Living on the edge: the impact of rising costs on people in the North East'

This important piece of work started in August 2022 and involved working in collaboration with the North East Cluster group (all regional Citizens Advice offices) collating information for our area and contributing to a final report that would focus on the current impact of rising costs on people in the North East.

The title was agreed as 'Living on the edge: the impact of rising costs on people in the North East' and the final document in December 22 was submitted to each regional MP for discussion and review. The offices worked on individual allocated topics for example, Child Poverty, Energy and Disability Benefits. We conducted research on crisis support, we created a questionnaire which we sent to all contacts in the local community, collated information and statistics and produced a final report which gave a snapshot of how the cost of living crisis is impacting on the clients that we see on a daily basis.

The Darlington Office was commissioned to allocate the community support scheme. We were able to reference the vital work the team do on a daily basis to support the most vulnerable qualifying residents. The scheme allows us to help people experiencing significant financial hardship, not only on a one-off basis, but on a wider scale because we refer into a number of services within our own service to ensure they can manage going forward. This makes us particularly unique because we can provide ongoing support to people through the specialised services that we offer.

The report was referenced in the National Research & Campaigns Newsletter, and our data was noted at a parliamentary cost of living event. A briefing had been held in Parliament, followed by an MP drop-in session. The event was a great success - 1,180 people attended the panel online (a new record for us) and 70 in person. In addition, 33 parliamentarians came to the drop-in, where in-depth conversations in regards to policy priorities and long-term solutions to the cost of living crisis were discussed.



**To download and view
these reports, scan this
QR Code.**



**Alternatively visit
www.citizensadvisedrc.org.uk/reports**

National Research and Campaigns – awareness and support for the local community

Scam Awareness June 2022

The 2022 campaign focused on scams and the cost-of-living crisis. By working in close collaboration with the Consumer protection partnership, and key partners in the consumer landscape, we were able to identify, prioritise and coordinate collective actions to tackle detriment to our communities.

With many people facing increased financial pressures, it was, and still is, of vital importance to raise awareness and equip consumers within the local community of these scams and be able to protect themselves against any they may receive. The economic crisis has put them into difficult situations, such as being in debt or not being able to afford essential goods and services. We know from first hand that scammers are likely to exploit this, so by empowering the public to protect themselves from scams will have heightened importance.

Research & Campaigns completed a social media and publicity campaign involving all local community organisations as well as local councillors and the local MP to raise public awareness of the type of current scams. We asked them to share the information and publicity with their constituents and received many offers of support going forward. Additionally, we engage with the local media – press and radio submitting press releases to promote this campaign. We also publicise these matters at local events and recently made contact with the Durham Police & Crime Commissioners Office who asked to be involved in promoting this and similar campaigns to their wider group.

It is one subject we regularly hear about as the scams become more sophisticated and as a team we decided it should be an ongoing campaign, albeit on a local level, ensuring any new scams are circulated to staff, volunteers and the wider community to raise awareness.

Don't let them win.
Be #ScamAware.

National Consumer Week November 2022

This annual national campaign aimed to raise people's awareness of specific consumer issues and provide support and advice for those who need it. Each year the subject matter is selected on the information collected throughout the year which has a relevance to the current economic crisis.

This campaign was focussed on promoting how to shop online safely, what to look out for and what to do if things go wrong. Whilst shopping online benefits consumers being able to buy goods at a cheaper price, buying good quality second-hand goods or finding hard to come by items we've seen an increase in the number of clients who are coming to us about fake or faulty goods that they've been sold or bought online. November is usually highlighted as the month to bag a bargain, with Black Friday, Cyber Monday and the festive holidays just around the corner.

As with all campaigns we circulated printed collateral advising of the likely problems of buying online and engaged with our contacts within the local community to promote awareness. A leaflet entitled 'Online Marketplaces How do they work and what do you need to know?' proved invaluable for our clients as it sets out clear information and next steps should they have a problem.

Citizens Advice runs National Consumer Week in close collaboration with the Consumer Protection Partnership and partners include the Trading Standards service and the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS).



Local Community Research and Campaigns

Carers Rights Events Day

As an organisation we were asked to attend a Carers Rights day to provide information and advice on our services within Darlington. It was also an opportunity to promote our services to attendees. We offered our services to continue to provide articles for the Carers Newsletter on national or local campaigns.

Voters requiring photo ID for the first time in the UK

Advising members of the public, in advance, that photo ID will have to be produced to be able to vote at a polling station in the forthcoming local elections in May. These included local council, mayoral and parish elections. Research & campaigns worked with the Electoral Commission at Darlington Borough Council to promote this new requirement to the local community by producing a short guide and poster and circulating to our contacts and local community organisations.

Prepayment meters

Raising awareness that people cannot be forced onto prepayment meters, they have options and rights. Highlighting that Ofgem had asked all energy suppliers to stop the practice of fitting meters without advising clients and gaining access to properties illegally. This is a matter that local & regional offices had been campaigning for due to the escalation of debt collection activity, with suppliers increasingly forcing customers onto prepayment meters so that they stop building up debt and so the supplier can collect a part of the debt every time someone tops up. This resulted in an increase of clients coming into the offices for support and advice in all bureaus across the UK. We continue to raise awareness of smart meters and debt collection procedures, to ensure the energy companies follow the guidelines to arrange repayments and to visit the home to assess personal situations before cutting off the energy remotely. If they don't follow the process a formal complaint should be made.

Joint working with DWP with Ukraine clients/Refugees

We attended the local Job Centre to help DWP staff and Ukrainian clients with benefits advice. Were able to provide advice and organise support for approx. 15 + clients We now have a referral process for the local authority Housing Team and DAR (Darlington Asylum & Refugees) to access services.

Pension Awards & Pensions Credit uptake

We were a key partner to supporting a Pension Credit Campaign in Darlington and in the Redcar Office. We worked alongside the Local Authority, partner organisations, the local MP to publicise Pension Credit and its uptake by older members of the community. We attended partner and forum events and collaborated to producing leaflet setting out who can apply for Pension Credit and the myths associated with clients not applying.

Pension Awards & Pensions Credit uptake - Martin Lewis ITV programme

The programme raised awareness of Pension Credit and we had an influx of clients, those who were not eligible for Pension Credit were advised on Attendance Allowance that wasn't means tested and were able to increase income and care support. Reaching out and engaging with our older community is important and our GOLD project (Growing Older Living in Darlington) was important in reaching other older groups who may not have seen the programme.

Research & Campaigns have ensured they attend partnership meetings and local events to cascade our work, monitor what is happening in the community and to keep an eye on what affects the people in the area to help research and campaign locally regionally and nationally to make changes.

VOLUNTEERS



Doug
Adviser



Amy
Adviser

I have volunteered at the Darlington Citizens Advice office since 2003 for 2 days a week. The time has gone quickly and I have looked forward to every visit. I enjoy working with the other volunteers and helping people understand their rights and next steps to deal with a situation.

I started volunteering when I was made redundant. I was an engineer and wanted to keep my mind active, learn new skills and help others. In 2013 I was also part of the Kings Church community, where I started to help with the Care and Share Group, a drop in for people coping with anxiety and depression.

I would always encourage people to volunteer and help others in any way they can.

I have volunteered at the Darlington Citizens Advice office since 2018. I have done a few different roles and have enjoyed it, because every day is different.

I find great rewards in helping people to solve their problems and meeting people from all areas of the community. We have a great team of volunteers here from an assortment of backgrounds and they are all amazing and we all help each other out.

Volunteering suits me, because I choose when I can volunteer and it fits around my caring responsibilities. I also like to give something back to the community as it makes me feel useful. It's not always easy to find the time but it's always worthwhile





OUR WORK IN THE COMMUNITY

Debt Advice

The debt team are an integral part of the service. They take referrals from other colleagues, partner organisations and they support people in our local community. Clients may experience events that have a negative impact on their finances. The debt team helps the client to consider income maximisations, ways to cut back on expenditure to look at ways to prevent debts accruing, strategies to deal with their debts and they form a plan to repay creditors or consider insolvency options. We are rigorously assessed to meet quality of advice benchmarking by external sources, each member of the team is assessed for their skills, knowledge and the client journey through our services. This year we have continued to work above the funder accumulative target to ensure we support clients within the community to deal with their finances.

GP Surgery Outreach

Patients seek referrals and support from their GP dealing with their condition to help solve the impact of their diagnosis on their everyday life. It may be to gain benefit advice, employment advice, re- housing advice or financial advice to deal with their disability or to support them during time off work due to ill health.

Disabled and ill clients, are much more likely to need help with benefits and finances than those without disability or health problems. They are also less likely to be employed or face losing employment due to their health. In particular, the recent changes in sickness-related benefits are causing problems among these vulnerable groups. The Benefit Team deal with complex cases, because a diagnosis could impact on the patient's ability to work, they may need to maximise income through benefit uptake, help with form filling, understanding the benefit systems and know when and how to claim. The designated worker is there to form a plan to deal with all aspects that may be impacted by the diagnosis. They work alongside the doctors, in- house teams and the patient to alleviate the pressures faced by their health condition to allow the patient to concentrate of treatments, family and recovery.

Macmillan



The Macmillan service is based at Darlington Memorial hospital and they hold the appointments.

The key aim of the service is to minimise financial loss and maximise income as people face the consequences of a cancer diagnosis. The advice pathways are either face to face at the Macmillan centre, home visits or telephone contact to ensure the safeguarding of the client is paramount during their cancer journey. The clients are usually impacted by income changes, claiming the correct benefits, challenging benefit decisions, financial support, employment advice and housing options. The worker demonstrates highly developed listening and communications skills to handle emotional and often complex situations ensure the client is supported in all aspects.

West Park/ Lanchester Road Mental Health Hospitals

The Team works alongside the patients, their family/ carers, ward staff, social workers, doctors and care coordinators to support patients who are due to be discharged back into the community. We support the client on admission to deal with benefits, debt housing, employment, family issues and any underlying or impact issues caused by their deteriorating mental health. They usually present with disengagement from benefits, local authority and finances leaving them in a vulnerable situation. Patients present with multi- complex issues impacted by their ability to cope with everyday life and their Mental Health conditions.

We prepare the patient for discharge and we can give continued support externally for up to 3 months whilst we introduce /refer them to ongoing support services and organisations in the community.

They need to understand what support networks are in the community for food, energy and help with day- to- day issues. This helps relieve the anxiety and pressure of discharge to help them concentrate on recovery and seek ongoing support to prevent re- admission.

Crisis Support & Community Care Support **Community Support Scheme**

This service provides emergency crisis support for the community for heat, clothing, baby products and a phone to ensure they can engage with making claims for benefits or seeking employment.

The service also provides the community care support scheme. The clients are referred from other partner organisations to help someone in a disaster, leaving care, having to move due to ill health or leaving prison. All clients are fully assessed to consider the cause and impact of the situation.

For both these services the worker then considers the use of other in- house services as a preventative measure or to deal with the underlying issue that caused the situation. We refer into the debt team, benefits team and general advice service to give the appropriate support to deal with their situation.



Benefit Entitlement Action Team

The service aims are to support residents in the community to access timely support to organise their finances to live affordably. It is an integral part of the economic recovery from the pandemic, cost of living crisis and increase in fuel, energy and food costs.

We also deliver outreach sessions within deprived areas of the community to ensure the Darlington community can access financial support to maximise their income to help them cope with health and disability issues. The workers maximise income through benefit uptake, in-work benefits, supports them to challenge benefit decisions and access timely debt advice. We continued to exceed targets and raise income that will support the community financially and the local economy, boosting spending in local businesses in the town centre.



Trailblazer- Homelessness

We work in partnership with the 700 Club early intervention project to offer vulnerable clients who had disengaged from services but who are now seeking crisis support. Many of those clients had disengaged from claiming benefits such as Universal Credit as they could not cope with digital engagement or commitments on the claim due to their mental health conditions. This led them to living in poor conditions, in financial distress and or facing eviction. We are able to give them timely benefit advice, challenge benefits decisions, support them with debts and negotiate repayments or utilise insolvency options. This early intervention is a pathway to help them overcome the challenges they faced that were affecting their physical and mental health and enable them to build up trust with other organisations and services to encourage them to reach out for support in the early stages in the future.

Step forward Tees Valley



We work in partnership with the SFTV navigators to take referrals for benefit and debt advice, supporting vulnerable clients who have a barrier to work. The barriers are mental health, gaps in skills, addictions or lack of confidence. The worker works closely with the clients and keeps constant communications to help them progress their issues. Some clients need support to understand the impact on their finances when going into paid work. We complete better off calculations to show how in-work benefits could support them to get ready financially to go into paid work.

Older peoples programme - GOLD



The Gold team works towards providing a brighter, active and more positive future for over 50's helping them to improve their quality of life. They strive to provide a strong voice for people over 50 to allow them to have their say on services provided by Darlington Borough Council and the local health services, working out whether services meet their needs.

The Gold team champions the cause of over 50's and they take actions where possible, they also keep the community updated on scams awareness, energy updates and support.

Alongside all of the hard work they do to allow the over 50's to have a voice, they arrange the yearly tea dance in the market square ensuring they gather the community and partner organisations together to celebrate life.

Living With & Beyond Cancer

#CancerWeCan

This project aims to help clients living with and beyond cancer the opportunity to have a non- medical assessment of their needs, to identify their concerns as they deal with cancer and formulate a care plan to determine additional support networks.

The worker attends the hospice and works with staff, patients their families and carers to seek support from services within the community who could support them to deal with the underlying and impact issues of a cancer diagnosis.

Energy Project

Energy Redress Scheme ended in July 22 This project had fully trained energy workers and aimed to provide energy advice and efficiencies to vulnerable clients. This project was ideal for those clients who found it difficult to access services. It supported the most vulnerable clients to understand their bills, maximise income, deal with fuel debt and fuel poverty. This project was key during the winter and worked in tandem with our other services that offered benefit challenges, full debt advice and fuel vouchers.



European Union
European
Social Fund

Youth employment initiative YEI

The team supports participants with education, training and employability via multiple platforms. They take referrals from jobcentres, local authorities and internally. They offer targeted support, to ensure people are able to achieve a good quality offer of employment, continued education or an apprenticeship/ traineeship. The team continues to ensure support is offered to those who need it at local Jobcentres working with staff and clients or by attending job fairs to ensure eligible people in the community utilised their services.



Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

CASE STUDIES

Crisis Support Awards

Olive is 56 years old and lives alone in a Local Authority rented property. She had been caring for her Dad who sadly passed away recently. Olive had been receiving Carer's Allowance and Income Support which had continued for 8 weeks after her Dad's death but when this ended she had had to make a claim for Universal Credit. Olive was waiting for her 1st payment but there were 4 weeks before she would receive this and she did not know how she would heat her home or feed herself until she received this payment. Olive was grieving for her Father and also having to deal with the financial as well as emotional impact of this loss.

Olive contacted our Crisis Support Scheme and we explained the support we could offer to those who found themselves in a financial crisis. We gathered together information about Olive's situation and walked her through the Crisis Support process so we could top up her gas and electric prepayment meters. We also provided her with details of the available food banks and explained the process for accessing these so she felt comfortable to visit them. We explained that she could apply for an advance of her Universal Credit to help her through this period which she would repay through deductions on her future payments.

As well as providing support to meet Olive's crisis situation we used the information gathered to check she had claimed all the relevant benefits and if support was needed for any other services. Olive was referred to the energy team so further advice could be given on her energy usage, available schemes to assist her and further support was provided by a fuel voucher from the Fuel Bank Foundation to help her during this period.

Olive would fall behind on her rent, council tax and credit card payments while she was waiting for her Universal Credit payment. We confirmed that Olive had contacted the Rent and Council Tax departments at the Council and her credit card provider to advise them of her situation. Olive was confident that she could work with them to resolve her situation. She was made aware of our Money Advice team and encouraged to return if she was unable to negotiate affordable repayments when her benefits came into payment or if any creditors decided to take action.

Olive brought in a card to thank us for our help which said "through all of this you made me feel human, so good at what you do, many thanks".



Community Care Support

Ben is 37 years old and was referred to our Community Support Scheme from Humankind.

Ben has separated from his wife and has now secured a private rented property after a period of homelessness and sofa surfing. He has two children and they will be staying with him at weekends. Ben has long term mental and physical health issues and had been working but has had to stop this due to his health issues which he has found very distressing on top of the breakdown of his marriage and homelessness.

His support worker had requested help with furniture and white goods for his new property so that he can become settled in his new home and have his children over to stay. Ben has made a single claim for Universal Credit and has advised the Job Centre of his health issues and his limited capability for work but this has not been awarded yet.

As part of the application process we checked Ben's benefit entitlement. We discussed Ben's health issues and how they affected him and suggested he apply for Personal Independence Payment. With Ben's agreement we referred him to the Benefits team and he had an appointment with a Benefit Specialist to help complete the Personal Independence Payment form, explain the Personal Independence Payment and Limited Capability for Work application processes and the action that can be taken if the claims are not successful. Based on how his health conditions affected him we estimated he should be entitled to the enhanced rate of the daily living and mobility components of Personal Independence Payment (£172.75 per week).

Ben was awarded a mattress and bedding, wardrobe, washing machine, fridge freezer, crockery and a kitchen essentials starter set. These items will improve Ben's living conditions and prevent a serious deterioration to his health within the home. We also referred Ben to our Crisis Support Scheme for clothing and a mobile phone as he needed clothing after his ex-partner had destroyed his and his mobile phone had broken meaning he was unable to keep in touch with support services. He was also provided information on The Bread and Butter Thing and the foodbanks available.

Ben was very grateful for the support we offered and he now has a clear pathway to becoming resettled in the community with prospects for his income to be increased and the regular contact reinstated with his children which will both have a positive impact on his health and wellbeing.



Benefit Entitlement Action Team

Following the sudden bereavement of his partner, the client and his son contacted us at our Darlington Association on Disability outreach service. Naturally, he was very distressed, confused and did not know where to turn. Since his late partner had dealt with all of the household finances and benefits he therefore did not know where to turn or what to do next.

The bereavement had left him without income as the Income Support they had been receiving, due to being a carer, ended 8 weeks after his late partner died. This had a knock-on effect on Housing and Council Tax Benefits they had been in receipt of.

Though he was also getting Personal Independence Payments in his own right, the payments had been suspended as his payments had been paid into his late wife's bank account. Managing this was difficult due to the impairment of his memory and concentration.

We helped him make an application for Universal Credit, and after assessing his needs we concluded that should also be entitled to extra benefit on Universal Credit due to the extent of his health difficulties. The client was awarded Universal Credit of £1,144 per month and we also assisted to apply for a Bereavement Support Payment of £2,500 and was also be paid in monthly payments of £100.00 for 12 months. The client was also worried about the cost of the funeral so we assisted the client to apply for funeral expenses payment to which a portion of the funeral payments were covered so this eased some of the pressure from the client.

Finally, we assisted the client with re-instating his PIP payments by getting in touch with the DWP to confirm all details were correct to resume payments to his son's bank account.

The client had expressed his gratitude for the support and states he would not have known where to turn if it wasn't for our help.



Health Based Outreach Support

We initially saw the client on the Ward at Darlington Memorial Hospital. As well as cancer she had a life-threatening fistula (an open wound) to her bowels in connection with which she was waiting for an operation. We advised her about a range of problems with her including her relationship and housing issues. We also assessed that she was likely to be entitled to Personal Independence Payment (PIP). We helped her with the claim form. Unfortunately, though it had been hoped that the cancer would be curable, a biopsy during the fistula operation found that she was at the end of life. This allowed us to fast track the award and she was awarded the enhanced rate of both the Care and Mobility components (around £745 a month) backdated several months.

We supported her during the distress of a relationship breakdown and, subsequently with the process of rehousing. We helped her claim Universal Credit of £800 a month and our community care team also helped with household items.

She expressed gratitude that she had the income to be able to do things on her "bucket list" during her final day and that the reduced stress allowed her to be able to support and spend time with her granddaughter.



Health Based Outreach Support

Esha is an individual who claims to be the sole owner and occupier of her residence, where she lives alone. Currently, she is employed and works 30 hours per week, earning a monthly income of £1,235. Additionally, Esha receives Working Tax Credit, Personal Independence Payment at the standard rate for daily living, and is exempt from Council Tax.

Esha is subject to section 113 of the Mental Health Act and receives support from a Community Psychiatric Nurse and Psychiatrist. Recently, she has expressed that her condition has worsened and was advised to apply for a higher rate of Personal Independence Payment. Her diagnosed conditions include rapid cycle Bi-Polar disorder, a right arm movement disorder, high blood pressure, Cushing's disease, fatty pancreas, and a potential diabetes issue. Some of these conditions have arisen as side effects of her medication.

Financially, Esha is facing difficulties and states that she is struggling. She has accumulated several debts, including an overpayment of Working Tax Credit amounting to £2,000, an overpayment of Employment and Support Allowance totaling £4,000, solicitors' fees amounting to £3,000, catalogue expenses of £1,500, a credit card debt of £2,000, and an overdraft of £3,500.

Esha has been referred to the debt team for assistance with her financial situation. The final outcome of her case amounts to £6,059.20.



Health Based Outreach Support

Bertha is a private tenant residing in a 4-bedroom house, where she lives with her two children. One child is 18 months old and has Down Syndrome, and the other child is 4 years old. Bertha herself is currently employed as a sales advisor, working 16 hours per week, with an approximate monthly income of £646.

In addition to her employment, Bertha receives various financial benefits. She receives £1,355 per month from Universal Credit, £35.15 in Child Benefits, and a 25% single person's discount on her Council Tax. It is worth noting that Bertha has a sight impairment.

Bertha states that no one stays overnight with her. In the past, she made a claim for her son, who has a diagnosis of Down Syndrome, but feels that she may not have provided sufficient information during the initial application. Currently, her son has an appointment for a sleep study due to sleep disturbances. Furthermore, Bertha seeks assistance to claim Personal Independence Payment for herself.

Regarding her son, Bertha was awarded the middle rate of care. She was advised to inform both the Universal Credit and the Local Authority about her change in circumstances. In terms of her own application, Bertha was awarded the middle rate for daily living under Personal Independence Payment. She also claimed the carer's element in conjunction with her Universal Credit entitlement.

As a result, Bertha has been awarded a total of £9,488.12.



Health Based Outreach Support

Lance is a private tenant who resides alone. Currently, he is in the assessment phase of Universal Credit, receiving £704.01. Lance has expressed his request to be considered for Working Tax Credit and has submitted a fit note to support his application. Additionally, he benefits from a 25% single person's discount on Council Tax and other unspecified benefits.

Lance has been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, asthma, and arthritis in his left knee, lower spine, and hips, which cause him pain while walking. He also struggles with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. Under the care of the NHS, Lance has an upcoming physiotherapy appointment to address his physical conditions.

Financially, Lance is facing difficulties as he has accumulated several debts. These include several parking fines, car finance payments, and a couple of County Court Judgements. There are other debts that Lance is unsure about.

During the process, Lance was advised on the criteria for Personal Independence Payment and Working Tax Credit as part of his Universal Credit and Carer's Allowance applications. Consequently, he was awarded the Enhanced Rate for daily living under Personal Independence Payment. He was placed in the Work-Related Activity group in terms of his Universal Credit entitlement.

Lance has also applied for Council Tax exemption based on his mental health diagnosis. Furthermore, recognizing his debt situation, Lance has been referred to the Debt Team to receive assistance and guidance in managing his debts effectively.



Health Based Outreach Support

Florence is a Local Authority tenant who lives alone in a one-bedroom residence. Currently, she receives £1,114.64 from Universal Credit, specifically under the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity category. She has also received an advance payment and overpayment of Tax Credits and 20% Council Tax Reduction.

Florence has disclosed that she has been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, severe restless syndrome, and experiences hallucinations due to childhood trauma related to sexual abuse. She had previously applied for Personal Independence Payment over a year ago but was unsuccessful in her attempt. At that time, a friend had completed the application on her behalf. However, her condition has since deteriorated as a result of the trial involving her abuser, who has been sentenced to prison.

Given her worsened mental health condition, Florence was advised to reapply for Personal Independence Payment. It was suggested that she contact the relevant authorities to determine whether her reapplication would be successful. Additionally, she was encouraged to discuss with her General Practitioner the possibility of receiving counseling to address the effects of the sexual abuse, as it has significantly impacted her life.

Subsequently, Florence proceeded to apply for Personal Independence Payment once again, and this time she was awarded the Enhanced Rate for daily living. This leads to a total of £4,804.80 in relation to her Personal Independence Payment entitlement.



Money Management

Roseanne was referred to the Money Advice Team by the Crisis Support Scheme as she was struggling to heat her home due to the creditors who were chasing her for payments. Roseanne is 55 years old and lives alone in a mortgaged property. She had been working and managing her finances but her mental and physical health had deteriorated and she was no longer able to work. The financial commitments she had then became impossible to juggle with a reduced income.

Roseanne received Universal Credit with limited capability for work and work related activity, Council Tax Support and single person discount on her Council Tax bill. She had applied for Personal Independence Payments but her claim had been refused. Our Benefits Team was assisting her to appeal this decision. Roseanne had ensured she had kept up-to-date with her mortgage and all her priority bills. She had 6 years remaining on her mortgage and wanted to continue living in the property.

She had 7 non-priority debts including credit cards, a former bank overdraft and an unsecured loan. We checked that Roseanne agreed that she owed these debts and was aware of the agreements she was entering into at the time. No court action had been taken to date and we explained the importance of dealing with the debts to prevent this from happening, especially as Roseanne owned a property, to avoid further enforcement once a County Court Judgement was granted through a charging order and potentially an order for sale of her property.

We completed a financial statement with Roseanne and she had a deficit of £18 per month. A benefits check was carried out and in addition to the PIP appeal we discussed other ways to increase her income and reduce her outgoings to help Roseanne to balance her budget including schemes to reduce her water and broadband costs, ways to reduce mobile phone and food bills and the Rent a Room Scheme to rent out a room in her house.

We provided advice to Roseanne on all the options available to her and discussed the suitability of each option based on her situation including if her PIP appeal was successful. Roseanne decided that she would like to ask the creditors to write off her debts based on her health and financial situation.

We helped Roseanne to gather medical evidence to support her requests and contacted each creditor to explain Roseanne's position and make the write off request. Some of the creditors requested additional evidence and we supported Roseanne to gather this and provide it to the creditors. We chased decisions from creditors who had not responded and as a result all agreed to write off the amounts owed totalling just over £9000.

Roseanne would not have been able to reach this outcome by herself as she would have been unable to provide the information needed for the creditors to make the write off decisions and would have struggled to manage the correspondence back and forth with creditors. Roseanne thanked us for our advice and support. This would now enable her to focus on her current bills and feel secure in her home.

700 Club

We went to see a client, who was a severely disabled young person, with a colleague from 700 club. She had been living in temporary accommodation since leaving residential care almost 3 months before we saw her. She was claiming Universal Credit but received a much lower level of Personal Independence Payment than she had before going into residential care. Attempts had been made to query the reason for this but we understood these had been unsuccessful.

On checking the figures our worker worked out that the amount of Personal Independence Payment that was in payment was the Mobility Component and realised that it was the Daily Living Component that was not in payment, which would have been suspended while our client was in residential care.

We rang Personal Independence Payment and was told that there was a hold on the case and no Daily Living component could be paid until an issue connected with the home had been resolved. The worker challenged this and had to speak to the supervisor who accepted that there was no reason the Daily Living Payment (over £370 a month) could not go back into payment. This also allowed her father to be supported in his role as a carer by claiming carers allowance which passported him to the carer's addition of around £150 a month to help cover his costs.



West Park Mental Health Hospital

Paul is single, lives in a private tenancy and he claims universal credit as he is unfit for work and Personal Independence Payments. He was referred to the Citizens Advice worker 2 months after admission due to being too ill to engage. He was admitted under a section 2 of the Mental Health Act which after 4 weeks became a section 3 where he could be in hospital for up to 6 months. He had informed Universal Credit of his admission to hospital and they had stopped his housing costs immediately based on the fact he was expected to be away from his home for more than 6 months. We supported the client to challenge that decision based on evidence that he may be discharged earlier than the 6 month period and we also applied for a discretionary housing payment to support him with the shortfall on his rent. Without intervention the client could possibly have lost his home and would have been homeless at the stage of discharge.



West Park Mental Health Hospital

Sandy was admitted to hospital under a section 2 of the Mental Health Act and after 4 weeks a section 3. She had been living with her partner and children on admittance but after 4 weeks he had applied for custody of the children and separation. We supported her with seeking legal advice, helped her understand court documents, made relevant benefits claims in her own name, helped her access arrangements for the children and worked with local housing services & humankind services to arrange a homeless application. In this case Sandy went into supported accommodation on discharge and relevant benefits (Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit) and housing costs we had claimed during admission were paid on discharge.



EMPLOYABILITY CASE STUDIES - YEI

Progression into employment

George was unemployed and awaiting decisions on his capability to work due to his epilepsy. Although George had lots of previous work experience, he felt that the unpredictability of his condition resulted in him letting employers down or him failing at work. George, along with his Learning and Skills Coach did a lot of work exploring the local labour market and his suitability for various posts. We connected George with online epilepsy community groups where he gained a community/network of people with similar experiences who he could talk to and gain insight from.

George was in the process of exploring benefit entitlement based on his disability. We spoke at length about his suitability for some jobs and the benefits of working on a person's mental health. Support was provided to help George with his morale and self-esteem.

Through attending a Job's Fair, George's Learning and Skills Coach made a link with a local employer and we applied for a role that was suitable and the client was invited to an interview. Prior to his interview, he was given interview preparation and technique including advice on how and when to disclose needs relating to a disability.

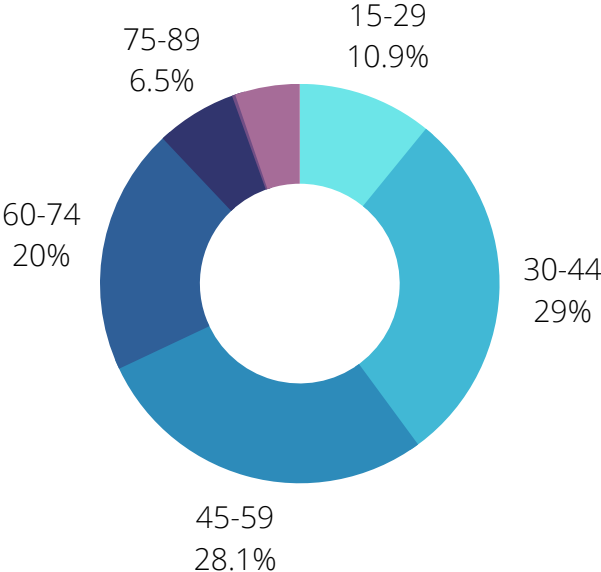
Six months on and George is loving work and comfortable in his new role. He's receiving the support and adjustments he requires from his employer whilst fulfilling his work to a high standard.



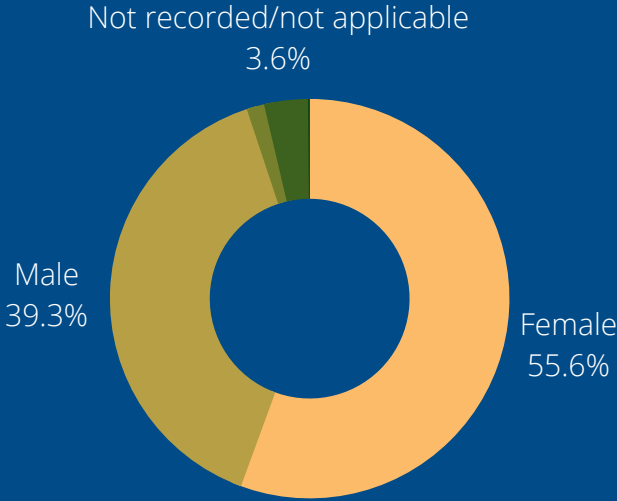
European Union
European
Social Fund

CLIENT PROFILES DARLINGTON

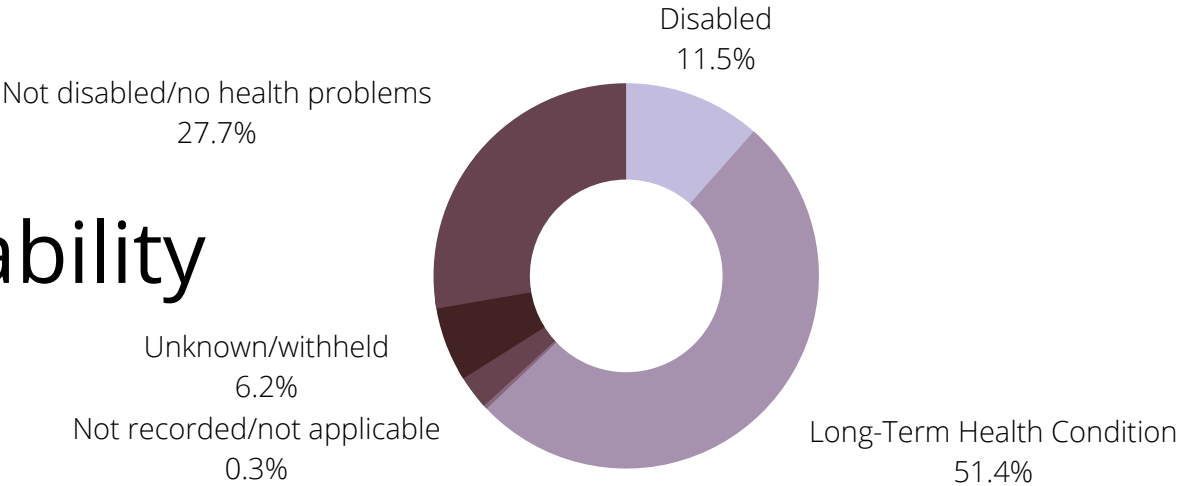
Age



Gender

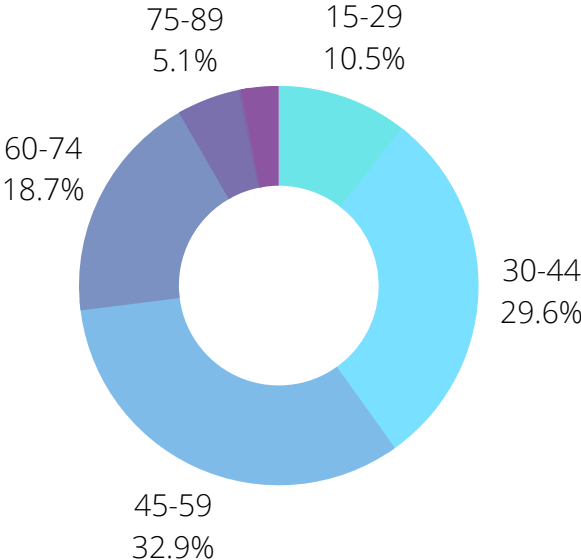


Disability

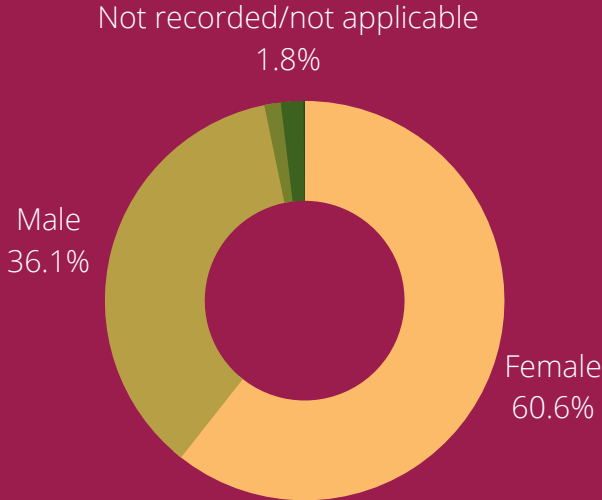


CLIENT PROFILES REDCAR & CLEVELAND

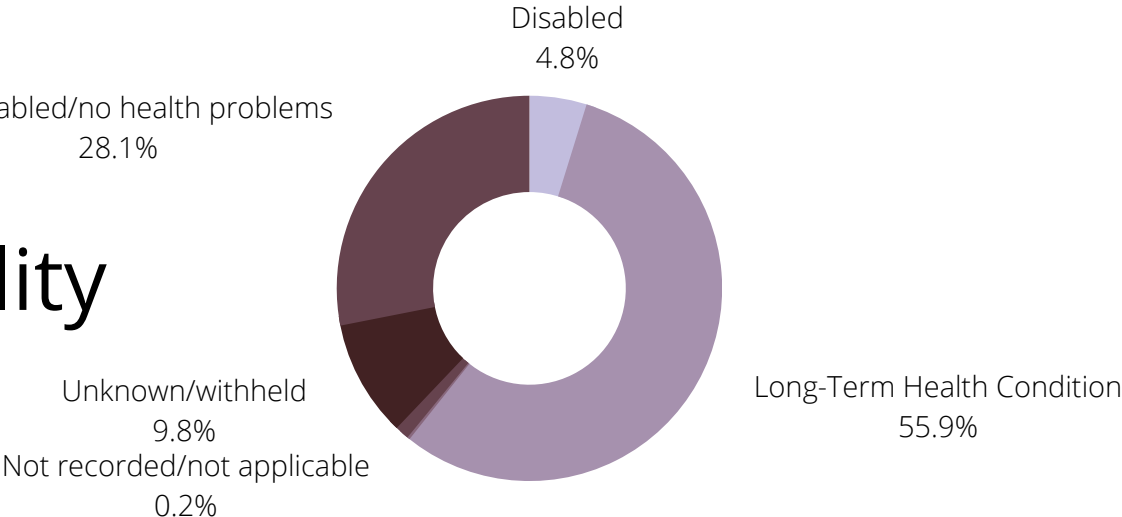
Age



Gender



Disability



CLIENTS COMMENTS

"Sorted debt appointment and organised benefits, something I couldn't myself due to mental health."

"Wonderful service much help where in need. I am elderly and have no support."

"The service provides support for a wide variety of vulnerable people who would otherwise have nowhere else to access such support".

"I could not have made claim without telephone support. I had been putting it off for weeks and now I feel confident to manage."

"We have debts they helped us to sort this out, don't know how we could have coped without help."

"Kept me informed of the whole process, what to expect and how long it could take, as well as helpful suggestions to help my case."



"It helped me sort out all my problems because there are too many things going on and you aren't through them all."

"Make everything as much easier and simpler to get the right advice on accessing the benefits and help needed."

"Good advice to help me to see a way through my finances."

"I was to see the CAB in a depressed state of mind, and I came out of the feeling better, very thankful"

"Support of vulnerable people is vital, cab provide this very well."

"Brilliant service, couldn't of done the forms alone and Sandy is amazing and helped me to complete them."

"I didn't know what I would have done without the help I received."



STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Governing document

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. The maximum liability of each member is limited to £1.00. Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association as amended on 28/03/2013.

Wider network

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland is a member of Citizens Advice, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It adheres to the principles of the national network, and is audited on the quality of advice and its organisational structure.

Risk management

The Board has conducted a review of the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and where possible has established systems to mitigate these. Internal risks are minimised by the development and implementation of policies and procedures, including those on health and safety, cash handling, IT, complaints and grievances. These are reviewed periodically to ensure that they meet the organisation's needs.

Organisational structure

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland has a Board that consists of up to 15 members. This meets quarterly. There is a finance committee and an operations committee, which make up the Board; from time to time, working groups are established to address specific issues: for example, health and safety, tendering, building and equipment. Membership of such groups may include staff, volunteers and others who can assist the organisation. The Board may also establish consultation forums and focus groups. Responsibility for implementing the strategic development of the organisation is delegated to the Chief Executive, who ensures that the organisation delivers the services specified and that it meets its key performance indicators. The Chief Executive manages a team responsible for the day to day running of specialist and generalist advice provision.

Recruitment/appointment of new trustees

The directors of the company are also Charity Trustees for the purposes of Charity Law. Under the requirements of the Memorandum and Articles of Association the

members of the Board are elected to serve for a period of three years after which they must stand for re-election at the next Annual General Meeting. The directors have drawn up a set of role descriptions and person specifications to cover the varied requirements of a balanced board. In order to achieve this broad skill mix, candidates are asked to indicate their areas of expertise and complete a skills assessment. A Board recruitment panel considers all applicants and invites them to a panel interview. Appointments to the Board of Trustees are by co-option or election.

Induction/training of new trustees

The organisation runs a programme of training, which all board members are expected to attend. New Trustees are taken through an 'induction pack' to ensure that they are fully aware of Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland principles and their responsibilities to the organisation.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

Funds held as a custodian

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland also manages a client account for the Local Authority as a custodian.

Public Benefit of Citizens Advice

The charity's aims and achievements set out have been undertaken within this report. The activities set out in this report have been undertaken to further the organisation's charitable purposes for the public benefit. The Trustees have complied with the duty under Section 4 of the Charities Act 2011 to have due regard to public benefit guidance published by the Charities Commission and the Trustees and have paid due regard to this guidance in deciding what activities the charity should undertake. The organisation's main objective is the promotion of any charitable purpose for the benefit of the community in Darlington and surrounding areas by the advancement of education, the protection of health and the relief of poverty, sickness and distress.

Statement of Purpose and Strategic Objectives

The Citizens Advice service provides free, independent, confidential and impartial advice and counsel to everyone on their rights and responsibilities. It values diversity, promotes equality and challenges discrimination.

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland aims to:

- Provide the advice people need for the problems they face;
- Improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives;
- Train all workers to provide an accurate, high quality client centred service;

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland provides services that work to:

- Inform people about the law and how it affects them;
- Advise people of the possible options available to them and the potential consequences of different courses of action;
- Listen to and support people as they consider and decide what to do;
- Assist people in pursuing their chosen course of action;
- Influence those responsible for policies and services by recommending changes based upon people's experiences.

Citizens Advice Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland Key Objectives:

- The maintenance and development of high quality client-centred service
- Increased partnership working as a means of meeting client expectations
- The provision of support and advice, particularly for clients with the greatest needs
- To maintain effective governance and increase the reputation and profile of the organisation in Darlington, Redcar and Cleveland area.
- To build upon the commitment of the staff through effective recognition and personal development strategies
- The development of a finance strategy that supports the aims and aspirations of the organisation and its long-term viability

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Reserves policy

We hold contracts/Service Level Agreements with a range of statutory bodies that recognise the value of advice in improving health and wellbeing. We are grateful for the investment in the charity outreach providers, which continues to ensure that we provide a more co-ordinated service for vulnerable hard to reach clients. The number and range of sources provides us with a diversified financial base to ensure the charity is robust and not over dependent on any one source of funding. We are committed to robust financial planning and to this effect we maintain a projection of income for at least three years ahead and will ensure that this continues to be derived from as wide a variety of sources as possible.

Incoming resources for the year were £986,816 of which £829,466 related to restricted activities. A deficit of £2,371 was generated throughout the year. At 31st March 2023 free reserves were £555,282.

DATA PROTECTION

Information Assurance - Statement of Internal Control

The organisation Trustee Board has approved a new Information Assurance Strategy, having identified the risk presented by the significant amounts of client data held in the organisation. An Information Assurance Management team exists to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of all our sensitive data assets is maintained to a level which is consistent with the requirements of our clients, our funders and our strategic partners.

The organisation aims to achieve an appropriate level of compliance to the Data Protection Act, the Cabinet Office's Security Policy Framework and to industry best practice, as defined by the ISO 27000 series of standards.



BIG THANK YOU

Would like to says a **big thank you** to our supporters and funders:

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

NHS
Darlington
Clinical Commissioning Group



European Union
European
Social Fund

The logo for Northern Cancer Alliance, featuring a stylized 'na' in blue and green. **northern
cancer
alliance**

The logo for The Money Advice Service, featuring a stylized rainbow. **the Money
Advice Service**
Free and impartial money advice

The logo for County Durham Community Foundation, featuring a stylized pink leaf. **County Durham
Community Foundation**



DARLINGTON
Borough Council



Partnership led by Humankind



Step Forward Tees Valley is funded by the European Social Fund and the National Lottery Community Fund



WHO'S WHO

Reference and administrative details

Charity name: Citizens Advice Darlington,
Redcar and Cleveland

Charity Registration: 1112414

Company Registration: 5562437 (England
and Wales)

Registered Office:

The CORE
Church Row
Darlington
Co. Durham
DL1 5QD

Chief Executive: Helen Howson

Company Secretary: Hazel Thompson

Senior statutory auditor

P W Lamb FCA DipPFS

Auditors

Allen Sykes Limited
5 Henson Close
South Church Enterprise Park
Bishop Auckland
Co. Durham
DL14 6WA

Bank

Barclays Bank Plc
27/31 High Row
Darlington
Co. Durham
DL3 7QS

Solicitors

Latimer Hinks
5-8 Priestgate
Darlington
Co Durham
DL1 1NL

Trustee Board

Date of appointment within the given year
(DA)

Date of leaving within the given year (DOL)

Mr. L McLeman (Vice-chairman)
Mr. R Murphy (Chairman)
Mr. D Byers
Mr. P Pimm
Mrs. C Flintoft-Smith
Mrs. B Buckle
Mr. M Redhead
Mr. D Egglestone (DOL) 21/12/2022
Mr. M Head (DA) 23/04/2021
Mr. C Payne (DA) 23/04/2021
Ms. F Harris (DOL) 29/04/2022
Dr. M Betterton (DA) 22/12/2022

WE HAVE VOLUNTEER ROLES IN YOUR AREA

All sort of people volunteer with us and for many different reasons, but one thing that unites them all is that they find it challenging, rewarding and varied.

It's a chance to make an active difference to people's live in your community.

Volunteering with us offers you:

- a chance to meet new people
- new skills
- an opportunity to contribute to your community
- full training
- enhanced employability skills.

We have roles including:

- telephone assessor
- adviser
- charity fundraising
- trusteeship
- customer service
- campaigning
- publicity
- administration

Contact details:

training@citizensadvisedrc.org.uk

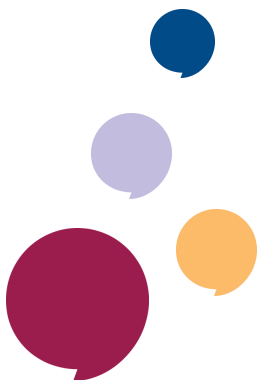




Darlington, Redcar & Cleveland

**We provide free, independent,
confidential and impartial
advice to everyone about their
rights and responsibilities.**

**We value diversity, promote
equality and challenge
discrimination.**



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Authority FRN: 617578

