

# A year like no other

Annual Report 2020/21



**citizens  
advice**

**Nottingham  
& District**

## Chair's foreword

I am pleased to make this introduction to our Annual Report for 2020/21. I hope you agree that the report is full of useful information about Citizens Advice Nottingham and District and the value of our services to local citizens and their communities.



Firstly, my thanks to all involved: volunteers, staff and trustees, for their help and support which ensures we continue to provide our vital services to our citizens at times of need. Plus, thanks to our funders and supporters for helping us to deliver our services.

Together we all make it happen.

Whilst the word unprecedented has been widely used in the last year I think it accurately describes 2020/21 for us.

Moving into Maid Marian Way in July 2019 we were still settling in when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. This meant we closed to the public for face-to-face advice and rapidly arranged for staff and, where practical, volunteers to work from home. The movement of IT equipment and telecoms to enable this was significant. The flexibility of all involved and their "can do" attitude were key in ensuring this went smoothly.

These moves meant advice over the telephone became more important and we were able to quickly join Citizens Advice national Adviceline to help cope with the demand.

With people being so dispersed we all relied more on technology, and it was key for internal communications which helped ensure we maintained our identity as an organisation and provided the companionship and support we all needed. Zoom and Teams are now part of our everyday language!

The pandemic meant we took a long hard look at how we delivered our services, and it will be important that we learn

from this and take the best practices identified forward into our new service delivery models. Learning to live and work post-pandemic will be key to our success.

The year also saw a significant change in staff with Trish Eaton moving on from being our Chief Officer after over 25 years in the role. I have said Thank You to Trish many times since she made her decision but am very pleased to use the Annual Report as one more opportunity to do so.

Thank you Trish!

I am pleased to say we successfully recruited our new Chief Officer and in January 2021 Donna Cumberland joined us. Donna has settled in rapidly, coped brilliantly in joining an organisation which was working from home, developed good relationships with our partners and funders, and is leading our recovery planning.

Whilst 2020/21 was an unprecedented year, the next few years will remain very challenging, and we are working hard to ensure we successfully meet these challenges. Our two major income streams are due for renewal in 2021/22 and success here will determine the level of service we can offer.

Our services are needed more than ever. Post-pandemic will see the ending of support and protection in terms of employment, housing and benefits. Plus, at the time of writing, we have an emerging energy crisis, rising inflation and growing concerns over mental health in our communities.

Our track record shows we will help our citizens and communities to meet these challenges.

**Richard Hodge**

**Chair of Trustees**

## Introducing Donna Cumberlidge



I am delighted to be able to introduce myself as the new Chief Officer for Citizens Advice Nottingham and District.

I'd like to thank everyone, both internal and external, for supporting me since January and making the transition and handover with Trish so smooth.

I am very honoured to be part of an organisation with so many dedicated and knowledgeable staff and volunteers. Their commitment to supporting our clients is inspiring. We know more than ever that over the last year the support and advice we provide is a lifeline to many and the demand will continue to increase for the foreseeable future.

As we plan for the future it is vital that we continue to be accessible to everyone in what has become a very digitally connected world. We know that our clients come from a range of backgrounds and now, more than ever, is a time to remember that we are here for everyone, whatever their background or circumstances.

Citizens Advice is a charity dedicated to helping people and funding provided by both local and national organisations is vital in ensuring that we are here tomorrow, next week and next year. My personal thanks to everyone that supports us and I look forward to the year ahead doing what we do best, providing free, confidential and impartial advice to everyone that needs us.

## Impact of COVID

In March 2020, COVID-19 caused unprecedented challenges for our service and the people we help.

People continued to access quality advice through phone, webchat and online channels even when our service stopped delivering face to face support.

During the year advisers at Nottingham advised **8,308** clients.

Since moving our telephone service to the national Adviceline in May 2020, our adviser answered **5,182** calls, a further **2,294** calls for Nottingham were answered elsewhere in the Adviceline network.

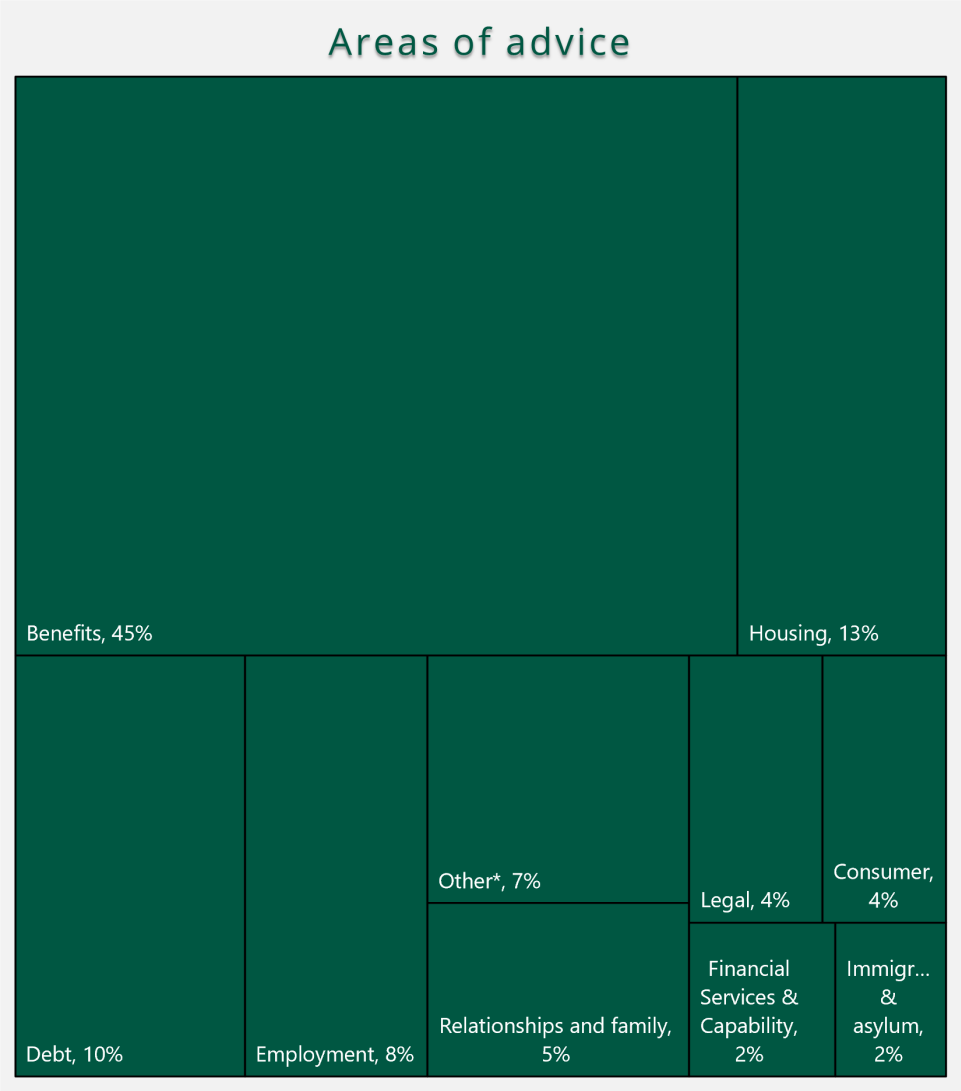
A further **3,876** clients calling our Adviceline chose to be routed directly to specialist services within Citizens Advice such as the consumer helpline, Help to Claim, debt advice or helplines outside of Citizens Advice such as Money Advice Service, the Financial Ombudsman or the Pensions Advisory Service.

During April 2020 to March 2021, the Citizens Advice website recorded over **60 million views** of the self help pages.

During the year our volunteers gave **6,535 hours** of their time to help local people.

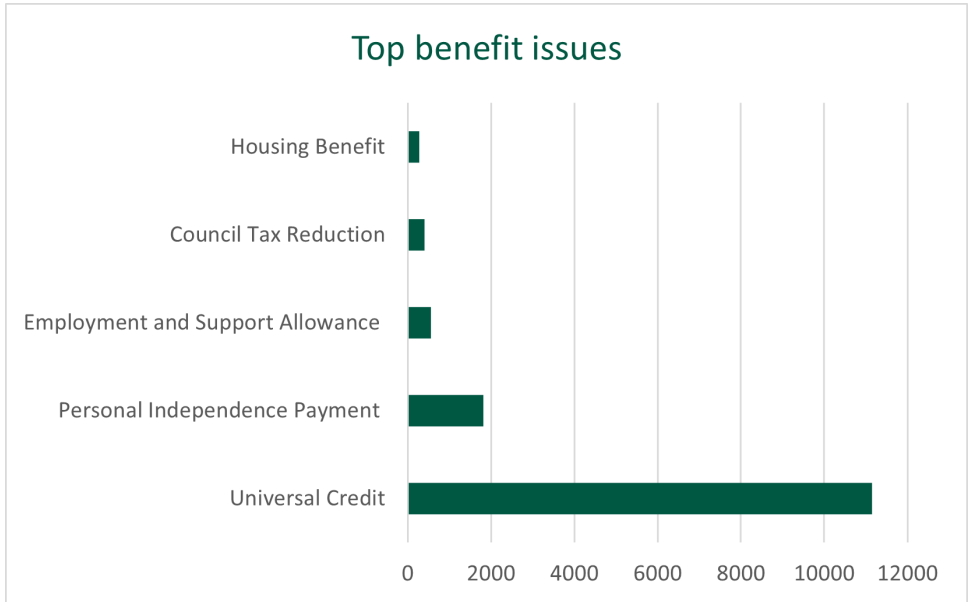


The nature of advice has changed from previous years mainly because of the pandemic, with more people seeking assistance with benefits, housing and employment than previously. Easements for people in arrears has led to less demand for debt advice.

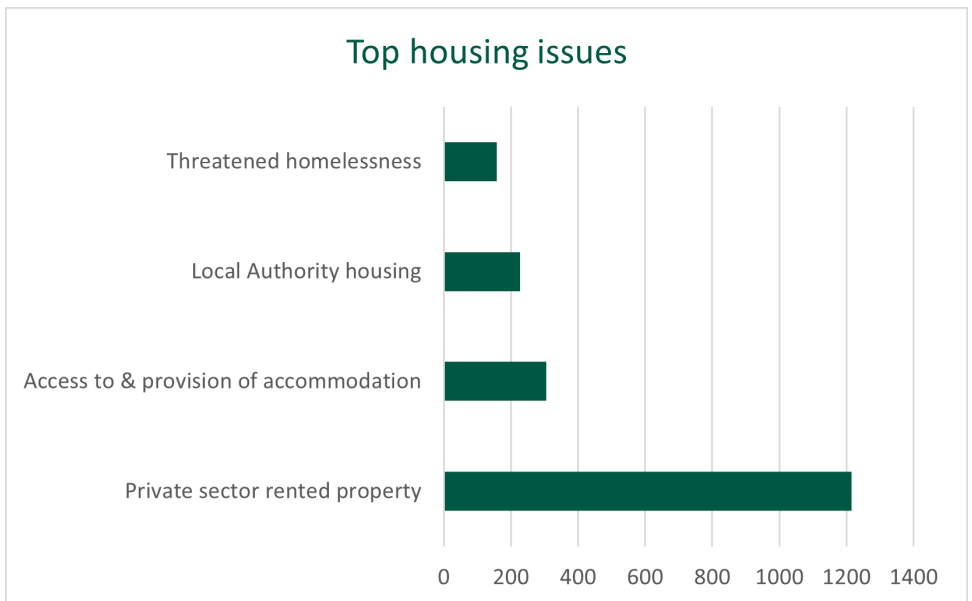


\* Other includes utilities & communication, health and community care, travel, education and discrimination.

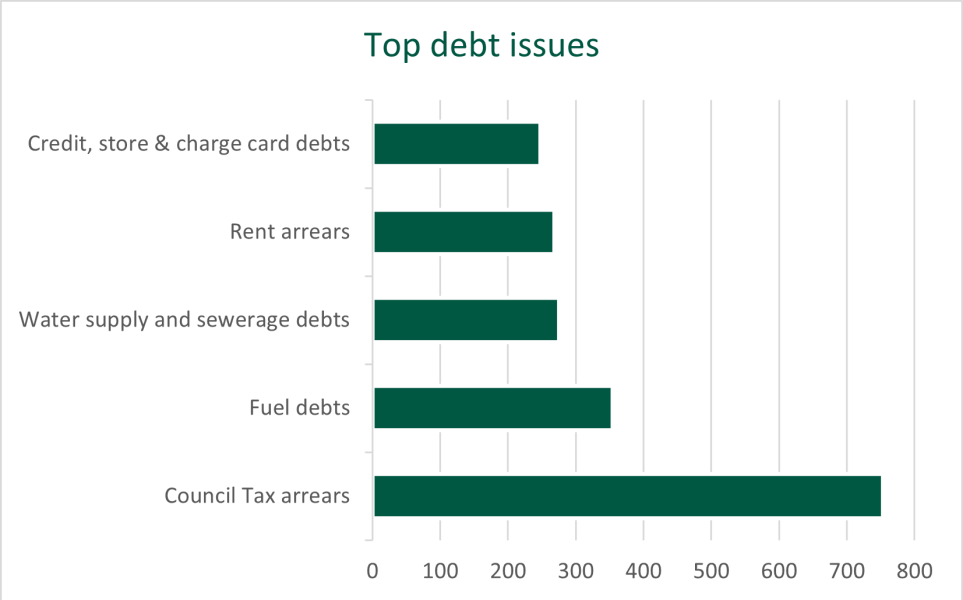
In detail, more people sought help with Universal Credit, the main working age benefit to help with cost of living and rent.



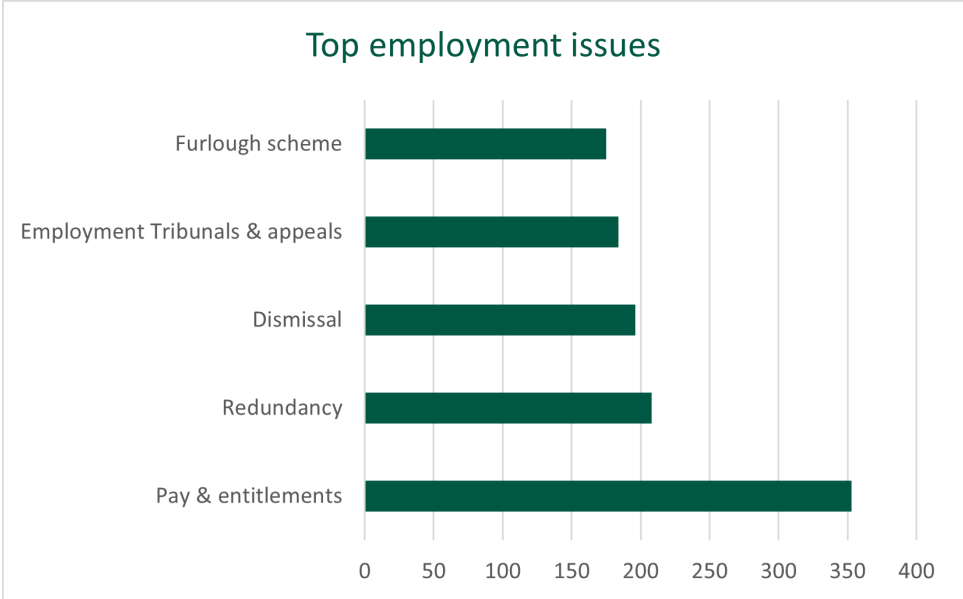
With a ban on evictions for the majority of the year, people were seeking assistance with other problems with their privately rented accommodation.



With easements put in place for people struggling to meet credit agreements, most people approaching us were seeking assistance with household bills.

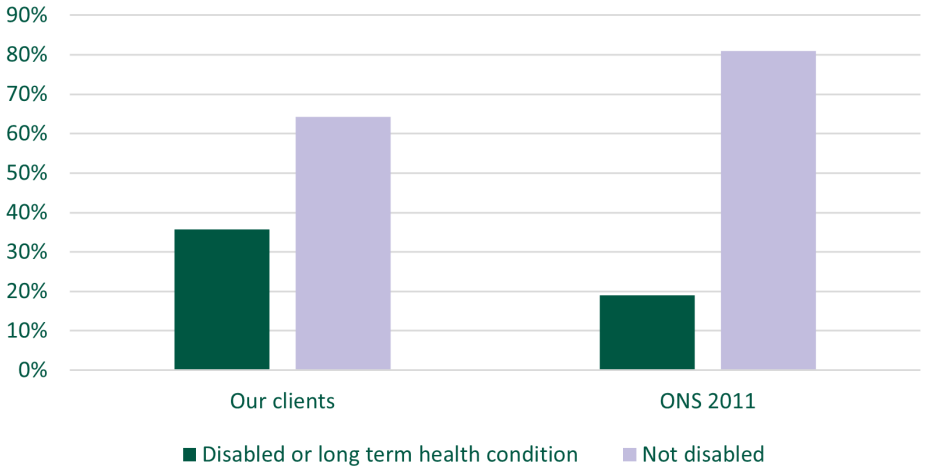


Employment issues were dominated with problems around getting paid, redundancy and dismissal.

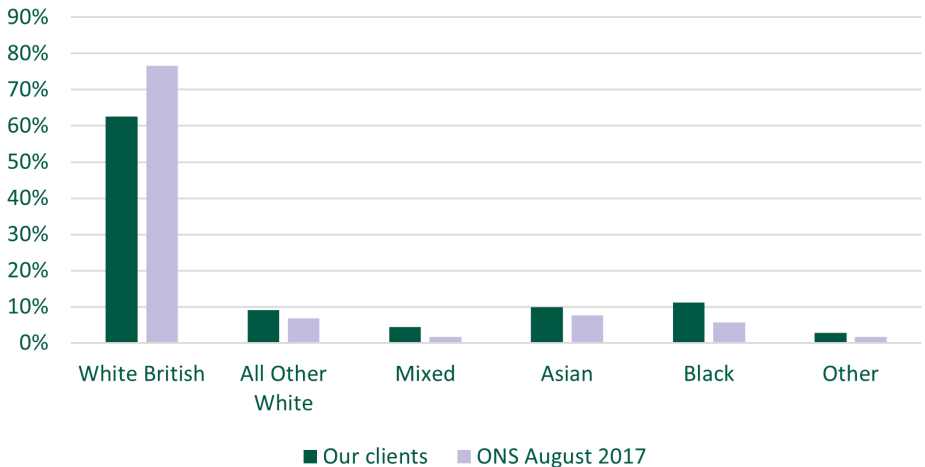




## Health of clients



## Client ethnicity



The latest data available from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the 2011 census for health, and 2017 for ethnicity in our area.

# Putting our clients' needs at the heart of everything we do

We help our clients with whatever problems they face. Our primary objective is to get the best for our clients, and that is what determines the advice we give.

## Our impact

Our Help to Claim team assisted people with their first claim for Universal Credit, dealing with **2,127** clients by phone and **527** webchats.

Our debt team helped people manage a total of **£3,771,401** debt and **£225,333** was written-off with our help.

Across the service we helped people claim **£3,123,550** in benefits that they were entitled to and assisted people gain a further **£173,347** in income other than benefits.

Citizens Advice research (2017) has found that following approaching Citizens Advice

- Nearly 1 in 2 clients had more money or control of their finances
- 2 in 5 clients had a more secure housing situation
- Nearly 1 in 2 clients felt their physical health had improved
- 3 in 10 clients found it easier to do their job or find a job
- Nearly 1 in 2 clients felt they had better relationships with others
- 3 in 5 clients found it easier to manage day-to-day

## Why fixing problems matter

If left unsolved, problems don't just affect the individual – they affect this community. Solving them creates considerable value to society.



9 in 10 people we help say that their problem negatively affected their life



2 in 3 people say they had difficulty knowing who to contact or how systems work before advice



1 in 3 people said their problem was urgent when they came to us

## How we made a difference

Y approached us for assistance with managing their debts. They lived with their partner and 18 month old child and they were also expecting their second child. They had previously managed financially but following a reduction in their hours at work they couldn't make ends meet.

As they had little money for food we provided a foodbank voucher so that the family could eat. We compiled a budget with them and identified benefits that they could claim under their new circumstances.

Using the budget, we identified money available for creditors and made offers of repayment for their Council Tax and rent arrears which were both accepted. We also assisted them to pay less for their water through a scheme run by Severn Trent.

The client was no longer subject to enforcement action and was empowered to deal with their debts in the future.

Z contacted our dedicated housing advice line because they were experiencing long-term issues with damp and mould in their rented accommodation.

Z told their caseworker that they had been reporting the problems for 2 years, and the issues were still not resolved. The client felt the repairs were not being dealt with and they were not being listened to.

Our housing specialist helped the client by issuing a formal complaint to the landlord, and helped them in subsequent communication with the landlord. The caseworker followed up on the case until the repairs were completed. As result of the complaint the landlord also agreed to pay the client compensation for the inconvenience suffered.

## Our funders

Citizens Advice Nottingham and District has a range of contracts, service level agreements, grants and donations and is funded by:

Nottingham City Council

Gedling Borough Council

Nottinghamshire County Council

Rushcliffe Borough Council

Citizens Advice Universal Credit Help to Claim

Money and Pensions Service

Nottingham branch of the MS Society

We also receive donations from local companies and private individuals.

We are thankful for the financial help we receive from all who support us. It enables us to develop innovative projects that make a difference to the community. We always welcome new partners who can help us build on our work.

## Our partners

Advice Nottingham is a consortium of advice organisations established to strengthen the not-for-profit advice sector in Nottingham City.

We hold a contract with Nottingham City Council for the provision of community based and citywide advice services.

Work is subcontracted to our partners:

Bestwood Advice Centre

Clifton Advice Centre

Meadows Advice Group

Nottingham Law Centre

St Anns Advice Group



## **Our aims:**

- To provide the advice people need for the problems they face.
- To improve the policies and practices that affect people's lives.

## **Our services**

Our services are being constantly improved. Full details of all our services, contact details and opening times can be found on our website:

[www.citizensadvicenottingham.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvicenottingham.org.uk)

Citizens Advice Nottingham & District is the operating name of Nottingham & District Citizens Advice Bureau.

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16-18 Maid Marian Way, Nottingham NG1 6HS

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