



# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Offices • Ebley Mill • Ebley Wharf • Stroud • GL5 4UB  
Telephone 01453 766321 • Facsimile 01453 750932  
www.stroud.gov.uk

## COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE MEMBER REPORT

<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION/BODY</b>	Citizens Advice
<b>DATE OF LAST MEETING</b>	20 <sup>th</sup> November 2023

### BRIEF REPORT

#### **Statistics for Stroud districts - 1 April 2023 to 16 November 2023:**

Clients advised: 1,016.

Number of issues: 4,367.

The top issues were Benefits and Tax Credits (includes disability benefits, pension credit and council tax support); debt; charitable support and foodbanks) housing; Universal Credit.

Personal independence payment was the biggest benefits enquiry as area – this is used as a cost of living crisis indicator for national Citizens Advice.

Council tax support was one of the main enquiry areas too.

In terms of debt council tax arrears was the main debt enquiry area followed by fuel debts.

The cost of living situation is still creating a high demand for the services. The Stroud office is open and clients are being seen there as well as at outreach venues. The foodbank adviser also visits foodbank outlets on a rota agreed with Stroud Foodbank. There has been an 87% increase comparing the current year vs the same period in 2021 before the cost of living crisis fully developed.

Clients across all age groups from 15-19 to 90-94 have been advised. Sixty one percent of clients describe themselves as disabled or having a long term health condition; 63% describe themselves as female and 37% as male; 94% describe their ethnicity as white.

Citizens Advice are receiving and calling the “core service” clients Monday to Thursday. On Fridays, there are a few staff members working including our Stroud foodbank adviser and a volunteer energy caseworker. This has been done as demand for the service is low, there are a high number of “no shows” and volunteers are reluctant to be on the rota on Fridays.

#### **Staff and Volunteer numbers**

Recruitment of session supervisors to supervise the volunteers on the rota has been almost impossible. Two trainee adviser/supervisors have been recruited so that the organisation can “grow its own” supervisor resource.

There is concern about the resources for debt advice – a debt caseworker is planning to retire in 2024 – he is funded significantly by the SDC housing related debt funding. The CEO is speaking

with Emma Keating Clark about the continuity of funding. Debt problems are rising and rising and the organisation needs to increase its capacity – a priority for the CEO in the short term.

There are 2 current trainee cohorts in progress. The first one cohort are nearly all on the rota as trainee advisers (needing lots of support) and the second ones are doing their learning and observations. They are starting email advice soon and should be on the rota in February.

### **Governance**

The organisation has just had its Leadership Self Assessment with national Citizens Advice and has been rated green.

The Chair is stepping down at the end of the year and the next priority will be the election of a new chair or interim chair.

<b>REPORT SUBMITTED BY</b>	Cllr Gary Luff
<b>DATE</b>	20.11.23