



STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

MEMBER REPORT

NAME OF ORGANISATION/BODY	Citizens Advice
DATE OF LAST MEETING	Monday 20 th November (next meeting Tuesday 30 th January)

BRIEF REPORT

Statistics for both Stroud and Cotswold Districts – 1 April 2023 to 12 January 2024

Clients advised: 2,731

Number of issues: 11,264

The top five issue areas were:

1. Benefits and tax credits (includes disability benefits, pension credit and council support).
2. Debt
3. Charitable support and foodbanks
4. Housing
5. Universal credit

Personal Independence Payment remains as the biggest benefits enquiry area. We are still seeing long delays in benefits appeals hearings but are having a very high level of success with them.

Council tax arrears are the biggest debt enquiry area, closely followed by fuel debts.

In terms of client demographics:

- All age brackets from 15-19 to 90-94 have been advised
- 62% of clients describe themselves as female; 38% as male
- 59% of clients describe themselves as disabled or having a long term health condition
- 94% of clients describe their ethnicity as white.

In terms of outcomes:

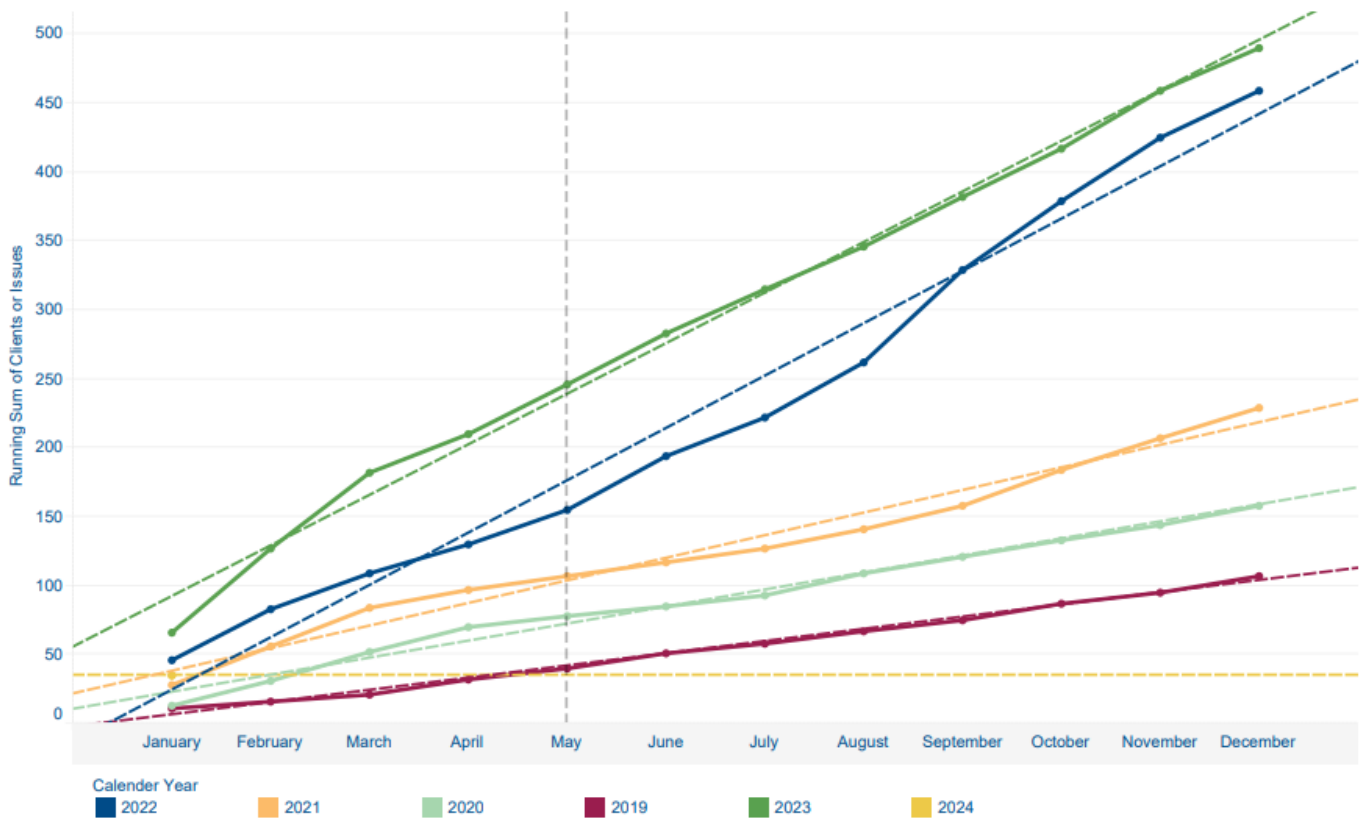
So far we have achieved an outcome gain of £951,903 for clients; written off £292,194 worth of debts; secured reimbursements of £15,725 since 1 April 2023.

A significant part of the income gain is for benefits appeal successes.

There is still a high demand for services that exceeds our resources. Our Foodbank Adviser was also off sick during December and is now on a phased return.

The graph below also shows the increase in the number of clients coming to us over the last five years for crisis support. We have seen a significant number of clients in January who need foodbank and fuel voucher support.

Crisis | Charitable support & foodbanks & Localised social welfare



Figures for crisis support represent the number of people Citizens Advice helps with either referrals to food banks' or other charitable support (covers any emergency financial support or support in kind people need to make ends meet) and localised social welfare

Staff and volunteer numbers

We are sad to see our Learning and Development Officer leave us this week to join Stroud District Council in a new role with the canals project. We are interviewing this week but any candidate will have to train in the role which may well impact on our ability to recruit and train volunteers. A member of staff is going to be seconded over to start the new cohort of trainees but we will be delaying their start until March in order to prepare.

The good news is that our current trainees are giving advice by email and will be going on the rota in February as planned.

Our 2 paid trainee adviser/supervisors are doing really well and we are hoping to be able to repeat this training programme in 2024, funding permitting.

There is still concern re our debt provision but we are recruiting for a debt adviser knowing that one of our caseworkers will be retiring at the end of March. I will be doing the budget in the next few weeks.

We are also recruiting for a call handler in order to increase the number of clients that can be dealt with on the phone.

Other

I have secured some funding for a pilot project for benefits advice for families with disabled children – liaising with special schools and other local organisations who support families. The Shrubberies school are the first school in the pilot.

Our chair resigned on 1st January. Juliet Kilty, a current trustee, is now interim Chair.

REPORT SUBMITTED BY	Cllr Gary Luff
DATE	15 January 2024