



# STROUD DISTRICT COUNCIL

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## COMMUNITY SERVICES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

### MEMBER REPORT

<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION/BODY</b>	Citizens Advice
<b>BRIEF REPORT</b>	
<p><b>Statistics for both Stroud and Cotswold Districts – 1 April 2023 to 1 March 2024</b></p> <p>Clients advised: 3,161 Number of issues: 14,442</p> <p>The top five issue areas were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Benefits and tax credits (includes disability benefits, pension credit and council tax support)</li><li>2. Debt</li><li>3. Charitable support and foodbanks</li><li>4. Housing</li><li>5. Universal credit</li></ol> <p>Relationships and families was an extremely close sixth.</p> <p>Personal Independence remains by far the biggest benefits enquiry area. Council tax arrears is the biggest debt enquiry area followed by fuel debts.</p> <p>In terms of client demographics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All age brackets from 15-19 to 100-104 have been advised</li><li>• 62% of clients described themselves as female; 38% as male</li><li>• 59% of clients described themselves as disabled or as having a long term health condition</li><li>• 94% of clients describe their ethnicity as white.</li></ul> <p>In terms of outcomes: Between 1 April 2023 and 1 March 2024 we have achieved an outcome gain of £1,259,194 for clients; written off £372,043 worth of debt and secured reimbursements of £37,410.</p> <p><b>Benefits project information</b></p> <p>A significant part of the income gain is as a result of our benefits appeal successes. Whilst this work is funded largely by projects (ie not core funding), it may well be of interest to members. At 13 February 2024, we had completed 34 appeals during this year, with a success rate of 97% (one borderline case was not successful and we were not able to take this to the Upper Tribunal).</p>	

Out of these 34 appeals 28 were for Personal Independence Payment; 3 were for Universal Credit, 1 for Employment Support Allowance, 1 for Attendance Allowance, 1 for Child Disability Living Allowance.

Total amount of back payments received by our 33 successful clients from 1.4.23 to 13.2.24 = £221,808.01. Average back payment per client £6,721.45

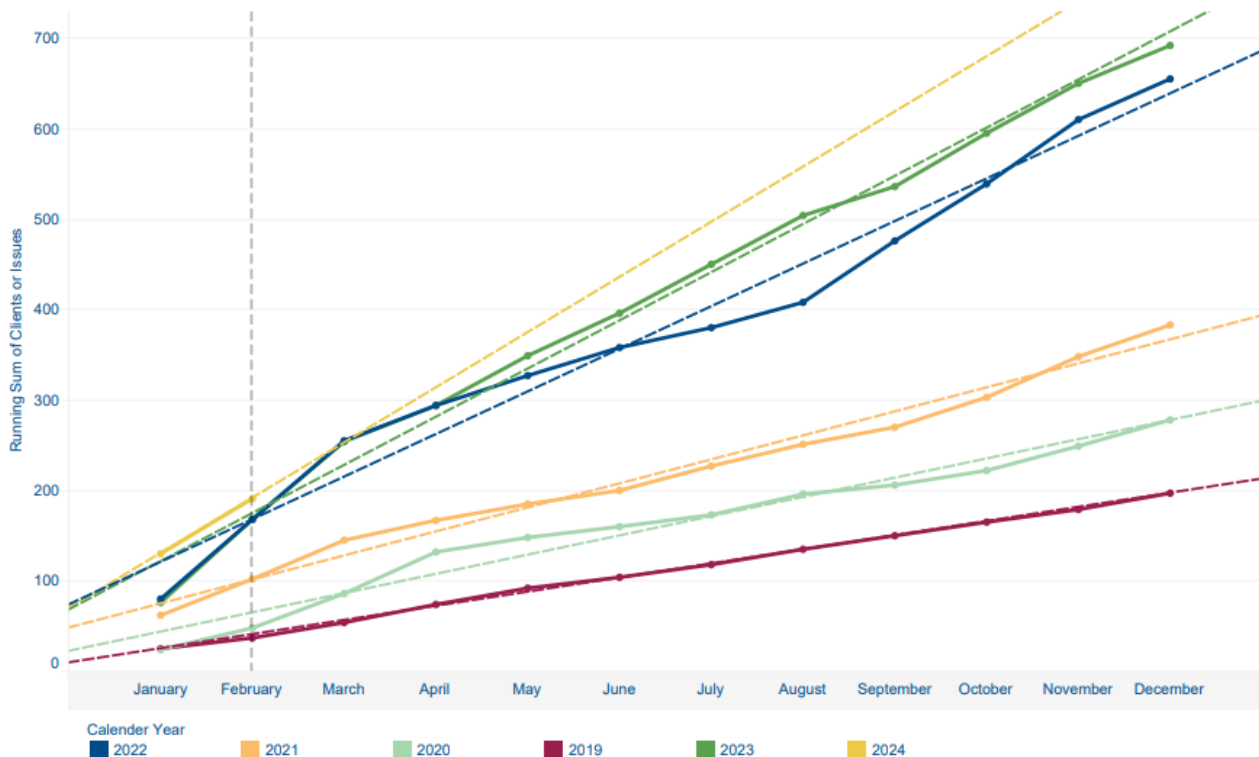
Total amount of **annual** income increases for our 33 successful clients from 1.4.23 to 13.2.24 = £201,505.20. Average annual income gain per client £6,106.21

We have had a small amount of funding from a GCC Thriving Communities Project to trial a project working with families who have a child or children with a disability or long term health condition. Our benefits caseworker/supervisor has had a very high level of interest from lots of organisations. The team on the project have visited The Shrubberies School and are now working with 7 families there and have very recently conducted an information session with families at Allsorts.

### Cost of Living

We saw a significant number of clients in January and February who needed foodbank and fuel voucher support. The graph below shows the anticipated rise in the number of clients who will need crisis support during 2024.

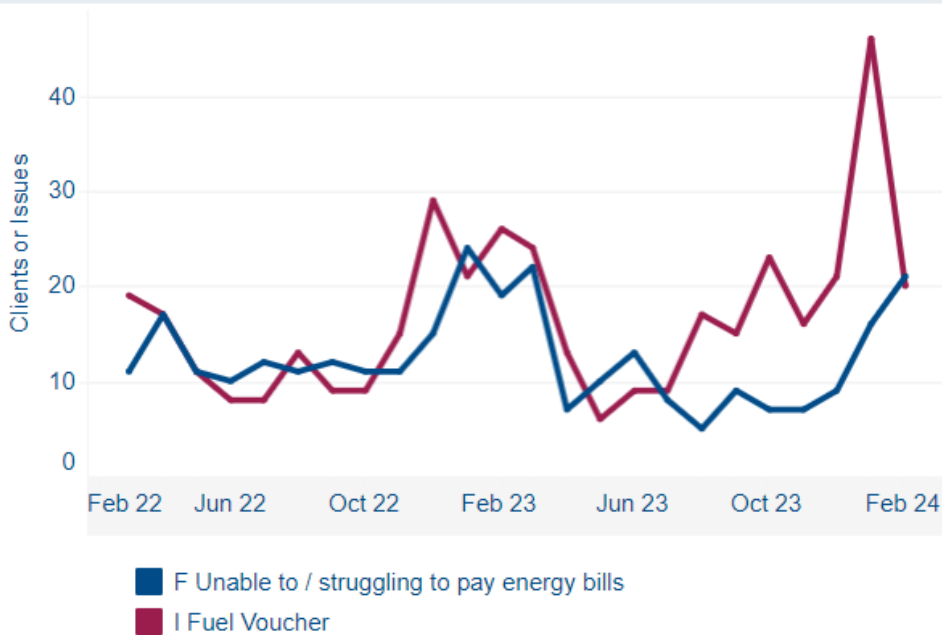
Crisis | Charitable support & foodbanks & Localised social welfare



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

The graph below shows the changes in the number of clients who have come to Citizens Advice, either for fuel vouchers and those who are unable to pay their energy bills.

## Fuel CoL issues



### Staff and Volunteer numbers

We have four new trainee advisers who have just completed supervised interviews and are now on the rota. This cohort started in the Autumn of 2023.

We have a cohort of seven trainees starting adviser training on 13 March. We have recruited two admin volunteers but are continuing to advertise for more.

We have two paid advisers who will become trainee supervisor in the Autumn of 2024 – this is a new “Grow Your Own” programme for us as a result of having difficulties recruiting supervisors who are able to work in person in the District. Their progression will enable us to manage more frontline volunteer advisers.

We are interviewing a call handler candidate in March – this role will enable us to increase the numbers of clients that can be dealt with on the phone.

<b>REPORT SUBMITTED BY</b>	Cllr Gary Luff
<b>DATE</b>	4 March 2024