



# 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>Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic Citizens Advice Stroud and Cotswold Districts has continued to provide free, confidential, impartial advice and information to residents of the Stroud District.</p> <p>Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021, they have advised <b>2,331</b> clients about <b>9,615</b> advice issues. The top 5 issues have been benefits; debt; housing; employment and utilities and communications.</p> <p>The top benefits issue has been Personal Independence Payment. In terms of demographics, 46% of clients report that they have a disability or long-term health condition. This percentage is significantly higher than the percentage for the general population of Stroud which is 16.7%. For further profile and statistical information please see the Key Statistics document (Appendix 1).</p> <p>In terms of debt issues, the Covid-19 protection given to clients in debt resulted in an initial drop in clients needing debt advice. Client numbers have since risen sharply and unsurprisingly CA is now seeing a significant increase in the number of clients presenting with fuel debts.</p> <p>For a breakdown of our Stroud District clients by ward please see the table below.</p>	

## Ward

Local Authority Ward	Local Authority	
Stonehouse	Stroud	211
Cainscross	Stroud	205
Dursley	Stroud	157
Nailsworth	Stroud	157
Stroud Slade	Stroud	112
Berkeley Vale	Stroud	109
Stroud Central	Stroud	96
The Stanleys	Stroud	96
Stroud Valley	Stroud	90
Rodborough	Stroud	88
Chalford	Stroud	87
Severn	Stroud	84
Stroud Farmhill and Paganhill	Stroud	84
Wotton-under-Edge	Stroud	80
Cam West	Stroud	79
Minchinhampton	Stroud	76
Stroud Trinity	Stroud	74
Stroud Uplands	Stroud	73
Cam East	Stroud	68
Painswick and Upton	Stroud	62
Hardwicke	Stroud	51
Bisley	Stroud	39
Thrupp	Stroud	38
Randwick, Whiteshill and Ruscombe	Stroud	31
Amberley and Woodchester	Stroud	30
Coaley and Uley	Stroud	27
Kingswood	Stroud	16

During the pandemic it became clear that the ventilation system in the main Stroud office rendered the environment unsafe for face to face client interviews so much of the recent client interaction here has been carried out on the telephone or via e-mail, work is currently ongoing to remedy this situation.

CA is also committed to outreach work as they know that outreach services have a vital role in enabling clients to access support and to overcome difficulties with rural isolation and limited public transport options. One of the strategic aims is to increase the capacity of the specialist and outreach teams. Very useful contact has been made with Miranda Eeles, Emma Keating Clark and Jessie Hoskin regarding further outreach work and how CA might work with Community Hubs to increase community resilience. Dursley outreach is now open for face to face advice one day per week, an adviser attends the Paganhill Community Café once a month to start with. Energy clinics have been run at Cashes Green Community Hub, Trinity Road Community Hub and the Keepers Community Hub in Wotton under Edge. Energy events have been run for Home Start Stroud; Longfield Hospice and Ruscombe Coffee Morning amongst others. Outreach work will resume at Stonehouse APT as soon as their building work allows and at Stonehouse Town Council when resources allow. Plans are also in place to set up the Wotton outreach in the Keepers Hub and Cashes Green Hub is also on the cards. Core Services

Manager, Sharon Bathurst, recently visited the Jenner Community Hub in Berkeley with a view to establishing a presence there when it is ready.

### **Stroud District Foodbank**

CA have continued to work closely with Stroud District Foodbank. Through funding from the Trussell Trust, they have been able to recruit and train a dedicated adviser for Foodbank clients. Rachel may well also attend the Jenner Community Hub in Berkeley when it is opened as there is a plan for a Foodbank presence there too.

### **Research and Campaigns**

As a service CA have a huge amount of insight and data about the problems their clients and their wider communities face.

The local group's priority action areas for the next year includes:

- Welfare Reform, including issues affecting young people and the benefit cap ; Discretionary Housing Payments; appeals for disability benefits; council tax (eg they often see clients who are unaware that Universal Credit does not include Council Tax Support).
- Digital Exclusion – this can be due to capacity/capability; an inability to access suitable hardware and/or the lack of internet access due to cost or geography.
- Housing, including maintenance issues and debt due to arrears in rented accommodation as a result of Covid.
- Post-Covid issues in particular Employment eg redundancy; lost NHS appointments; and the impact of Covid-19 on domestic violence cases

### **Future Needs**

CA is committed to the further opening of its face-to-face work and outreach provision. They also know that the cost of living increase, especially in relation to energy, is going to increase the demand for its service, especially in relation to specialist debt and energy advice.

In order to meet this increased demand they are aware of a need to:

- Resolve the ventilation situation in our Stroud office to reassure clients, volunteers and staff that it is safe to be seen in an interview room.
- Increase the number of outreaches.
- Recruit and train additional supervisors, volunteers and specialist caseworkers (paid and unpaid). When Covid struck, some of the volunteers did not wish to work remotely and so will need retraining in order to return to work. Some volunteers are reluctant to return to any form of face-to-face work whilst Covid is still in circulation or have decided to retire and there is also a need to meet the increased demand.
- To move forward it is important to attract high quality candidates for permanent paid roles.

### **Meeting the future Needs**

Recovering and adapting from Covid to continue to meet the advice and support needs of the community and bring further improvements will be a real challenge in many ways post Covid. It's a challenge that is eased by the continued support of Stroud District Council and quite frankly it couldn't happen without the certainty of the Councils financial backing.

<b>REPORT SUBMITTED BY</b>	Cllr Gordon Craig
<b>DATE</b>	