Kenilworth Outreach Service

Citizens Advice South Warwickshire

1st April 2022 - 31st March 2023

A report for Kenilworth Town Council

Kenilworth Outreach

Funded by Kenilworth United Charities and Kenilworth Town Council. CASW offers six appointments per session, each appointment is an hour-long, every Thursday at Kenilworth Library. There are also telephone appointments with clients across the week so that everyone can receive advice in a timely way. This outreach venue continues to be well utilised and highly appreciated by the people living in Kenilworth.

Running this outreach service is one of our most experienced generalist advisers; Janine Earl. She has worked with us for over 20 years in a variety of different areas of the service and continues to deliver specialist support to the people of Kenilworth on a broad range of advice areas. Janie also works as an outreach adviser at Shire Hall, Warwick.

We are very well connected to our many third and public sector partners across South Warwickshire and work closely and holistically to provide multi-agency support to people with complex issues, offering referrals into other services as required.

Opening up after the Covid19 Pandemic

Last April, Citizens Advice South Warwickshire was once again able to resume community outreach, and open the doors at the offices in Leamington and Stratford Upon Avon. The last 12 months have seen much change in the way in which we deliver our services, not least the launch of the County Telephony Line, which is funded in part by Warwickshire County Council, and which utilises paid Generalist Advisors and volunteers, based in Leamington and Bedworth. The service is run in partnership with Bedworth Rugby and Nuneaton Citizens Advice (BRANCAB) and North Warwickshire Citizens Advice, and has taken a huge number of calls since it launched in April 2023.

Staff and volunteers recruited to the telephony service have embraced the new service and hit the ground running, with a 366% increase in answered calls in the first month of April (723) compared to the previous month of March (155) prior to the launch of the telephony service. Debt Teams and the Specialist Benefits Team support the service where complex issues are encountered. 90% of clients are helped at the point of contact, with the majority receiving full advice. 10% are referred to the relevant local Citizens Advice for more specialised support.

The service is offered Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm. **2,427 calls were answered during Quarter 1 2023/24. This equates to 77% of the total calls taken for the whole of 2022/2023 (3,144), and a 197% increase compared to the same period in 2022 (817).**

Monday to Friday 9.00am -5.00pm

0808 250 5715

Monday 5.00-pm to 7.00pm

0800 995 6047 (out of hours)

In addition, we have closed our office in Stratford, and moved all face to face services to Elizabeth House, the offices of Stratford District Council. This means we are seeing clients every day of the week once again. Our Leamington office is busy too; we have based more staff and volunteers on site, and now offer a drop in service, and appointments across the week. It is also the base for our telephony centre.

We have welcomed many more volunteers onto our training programmes, including a partnership with National Grid, where three staff members have taken a year out to work for us and their support on the service cannot be overstated. Volunteers now undergo a streamlined induction and training pathway with a view to getting them onto the phones within weeks, building their experience and expertise.

All of these developments, at pace, indicate the ways in which we are utilising our funding to meet more demand driven by the cost of living crisis. We have seen a massive uptick in requests for help; in July alone, we helped over 1000 clients with almost 3000 issues. 60% of clients approaching us are female, and 61% have a long term health issue or identify as disabled. Benefits and debt issues are top of the list for clients, with many more people approaching us for help with crisis and hardship payments: for food, essential home items and clothing for example.

Our services have never been more in demand

Outcomes and Performance: 1st April 2022 - 31st March 2023

During this reporting period we have supported a total of **210** residents from Kenilworth wards with **839** issues. Clients often present themselves with multiple issues, which is why this number will often be much higher than the number of clients we have seen. This figure equates to **4 issues**, for every single client. Benefit entitlement, universal credit, hardship and debt were the highest number of issues in which clients needed advice.

Our data indicates **74%** of clients were female, **46%** of clients declared that they had a long term health condition or disability. **92%** of clients were from a white background and the highest number of clients were **50 - 54** years old.

In preparing this report, I have looked at the data for this first quarter of 2023-2024 for context, and so far we have already seen 108 clients with 165 issues - and the age group seeking advice is aged 25-29, with the next highest being the 50-55 age range. We anticipate seeing similar rates over the coming months, meaning that by the time we report on this year, we will have seen in the region of **400 clients.**

Case Studies

Case Study 1

The client lives alone in social housing. She is disabled and in receipt of state benefits. She parked in a private car park in March 2023 but when she went to pay for parking she inadvertently entered the wrong car registration number. She received a parking charge notice (PCN). She appealed to the parking operator on the grounds that she has memory problems. She provided proof of her parking ticket showing she had paid the correct fee. The parking operator accepted her challenge and cancelled the PCN. Unfortunately In April 2023 she made the same error again and entered the incorrect car registration. She appealed again but this time the parking operator refused to accept her error and her appeal was refused. The debt has been passed to a debt collector and the debt amount is £140.

She then parked at the hospital in May 2023. This is a different car park with a different parking operator. She advised that she tried to pay for parking but the machine would not accept her payment. She received another PCN and challenged this via an appeal but her appeal was refused. She has a debt of £100 for this parking charge. The client believes it unfair that the parking operators have refused her appeals and wanted to know if she could challenge this further.

The client was advised that both parking operators are members of the British Parking Association (BPA) so she could take her appeal further to the Parking on Private Land Appeals (POPLA) within 28 days of the refusal of her appeal from the parking operators. Unfortunately she is out of time but if she has good reason she could ask POPLA to consider a late appeal. The client says she has memory problems and brain fog along with mental health problems, and realises that if her appeals to POPLA fail she would need to pay the PCN's. If she has any problems paying the fines she may wish to return for further advice and we could consider a referral for debt advice.

Case Study 2

The client lives alone in property she owns outright. She is retired and in receipt of State Retirement Pension Pension Credit and Council Tax reduction. She has no savings. She does not have any illness or disability.

Last year her very old boiler broke down. She applied to Act on Energy to see if she would be eligible for a free boiler replacement but her application was declined as she did not have any disabilities so was not considered to be vulnerable. She managed to get the boiler repaired but the gas boiler repair company advised it is now difficult to get parts for such an old boiler and recommended boiler replacement. They did check the boiler but were not prepared to issue a safety certificate as they considered the boiler to be too old and inefficient and advised it was unlikely to last much longer. A week ago the boiler broke down again. The client has no hot water or heating but as it is summer she advised she does not need the heating on and can manage with an electric heater. She has been using kettles to boil water for washing up and hygiene purposes. She had spoken to her energy supplier who had suggested equity release as a way of raising funds to pay for a boiler replacement. She obtained a booklet about Equity Release from the Radio Times magazine but after reading this she decided this was not a good option for her as releasing equity is likely to impact on her eligibility for means tested benefit.. She was aware she could sell her property and buy a cheaper one to release equity but again any capital would affect entitlement to means tested benefit. In addition she has lived in the property since 1963 and is very reluctant to move. The client had read an article in the local press about help for homeowners on a low income to replace boilers and wanted to know more about this.

We advised that we were aware of a new scheme for Warwickshire home owners (Essential Home Improvement Grant). This is being administered by HEART Nuneaton and Bedworth. The information stated that the grant is available to people in receipt of means tested benefit so it appears she would be eligible to apply. Printed out the leaflet with the contact details for HEART. The client was happy to contact them herself and advised she would do so as soon as she got home. The client knows how to contact us again should she need assistance with the application to the Essential Home Improvement Grant fund and thanked us for our advice.

We are delighted to continue to work in partnership with Kenilworth Town Council on this project. It is so valuable to be able to provide accessible, convenient support for people in their local area.

Thank you for your continued support to our service and the people of Kenilworth.

citizens advice South Warwickshire

Free, confidential advice. Whoever you are.

We help people overcome their problems and campaign on big issues when their voices need to be heard. We value diversity, champion equality, and challenge discrimination and harassment. We're here for everyone.