

Citizens Advice Gosport Annual Report 2015/16

Celebrating

75

**Years of service to the
community**



Using our Services

We aim to:

- Provide the advice people need for the problems they face
- Improve the policies and practices which affect people's lives.

Our aims and principles:

We value diversity, promote equality and challenge discrimination.

	Drop in	Adviceline 03444 111 306
Monday	9:30am – 3:00pm	9:00am – 5pm
Tuesday	9:30am – 3:00pm	9:00am – 5pm
Wednesday	5:00pm – 7:00pm	9:00am – 6:30pm
Thursday	9:30am – 3:00pm	9:00am – 5pm
Friday	9:30am – 3:00pm	9:00am – 5pm
Saturday		10:00am – 12:00pm

Website: www.gosportcab.org.uk

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Webchat service available at

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/contact-us/web-chat-service/

Chair's Report

Richard Mackay

We continue to find clients have an increasing number of problems which are more complex and take longer to resolve. In particular the changes to benefit entitlements are often confusing and we see many cases of poor decision-making or administration by the authorities.

We are very grateful to our highly trained volunteers who give us their time freely to help local residents. The value of their contribution can be seen in the exceptionally high level of satisfaction reported by clients.

We continue to recruit and train volunteers who not only give their time to help clients but gain from the skills they acquire. A number entered paid employment as a result of the work experience they have obtained.

We really appreciate that despite the financial pressures facing them Gosport Borough Council recognised the value of the service we provide and have continued to grant fund us.

As you will see elsewhere in this report we have been active in Gosport for 75 years. In that time the needs of residents have changed and as a result so have the services we provide. Change will continue and during 2016/17 we will be evaluating all the services that we offer to ensure that they best meet clients' needs and are delivered in the most efficient and effective way.

Operation Manager's Report

Valerie Kelly

This year we are proud to celebrate 75 years of providing advice and information to the community. We would not have been able to reach this milestone without the continued support of our funders and the dedication of our hard working and committed team of volunteers.

Throughout the year we continued to develop our service so as to meet the needs of our clients. We now provide advice using various methods including face to face interviews, telephone, email and webchat. Our ultimate aim is to enable Gosport residents to access our services at a time best suited to themselves and through a service delivery method of their choosing.

On 6th April 2015, the Government's pension reforms came into force giving people approaching retirement the freedom to choose how to use their defined contribution pension pots. To help people understand their options, the Government introduced Pension Wise, funded by central Government, to provide people with free, impartial guidance either online, via telephone or face to face. Gosport Citizens Advice Bureau is one of approximately 500 sites delivering Pension Wise appointments.

2015 also saw us take part in a Homeworking Pilot Scheme which ran from May to December 2015. We were particularly keen to recruit people who would otherwise be unable to volunteer such as those with accessibility or confidence barriers. As this was a trial, there were a number of challenges and unanticipated issues to consider. The service went live on the 12th October 2015. Between us, Basingstoke and Gosport recruited nine homeworkers providing 152 hours of volunteering time and helping more than 170 individuals.

Working with Citizens Advice Hampshire consortia, we have helped develop, roll out and maintain a webchat service. This service is available to members of the community via the public website. This is a live advice service where clients simply click on screen. They are then taken to one of our advisors who provide advice and information in real time.

The webchat service also provides for advice via email. Once again, clients can access this through the website but instead of obtaining advice in real time, advisors respond to clients' enquiries using the email method. During 2015/16 we were able to provide advice and information to 1,185 clients using methods of service delivery other than face to face. This is something we would like to develop further in order to reach as many clients as possible.

Our Core Service

How we've helped our clients

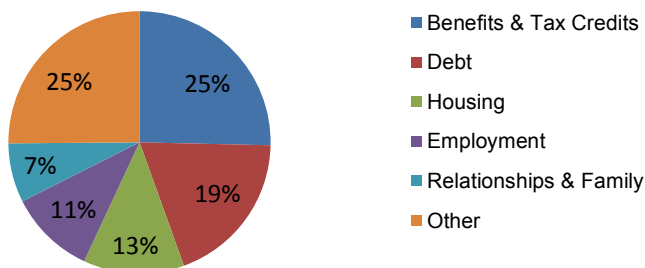
Citizens Advice Gosport has over 70 volunteers and 6 paid staff working hard to provide free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to the community.

Our open door 'drop in' service deals with a variety of issues ranging from debt and benefit to housing and employment. Our trained volunteer assessors offer an initial interview with clients where we make an assessment of their needs and provide information to enable clients to self-help.

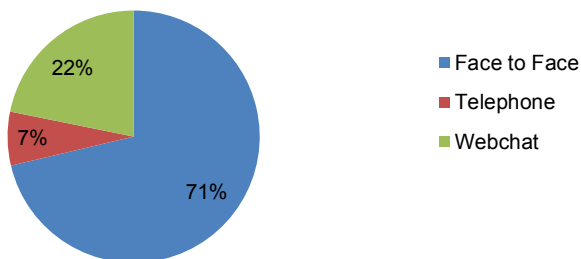
If clients require additional help they are seen by one of our volunteer advisers who will progress the client's issues with a more hands on approach. This could include helping clients writing letters, making phone calls and negotiating with third parties.

The advice we give is subject to on-going audit to verify compliance with the Citizens advice Membership Scheme and ASA Advice Quality Standard.

Top Advice Areas



Accessing Our Service

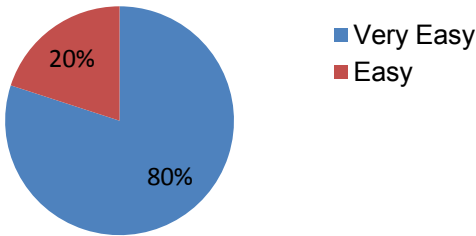


Client Satisfaction for our service

Every year we invite our clients to take part in a satisfaction survey, to ensure Gosport residents are receiving the best possible service.

We asked clients:

How easy was it to access our service?



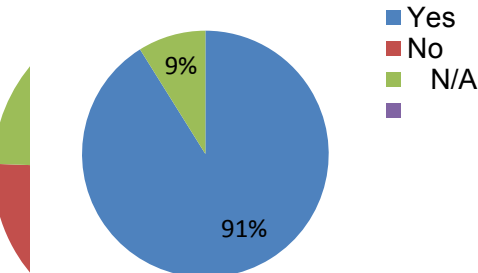
Our client survey evidenced that 76% of our clients said their problem either completely or significantly affected their lives. The same group said they felt either confident

Research and campaign

Citizens Advice aims to help people solve their particular problem, research and campaign to stop it happening to others.

We have been campaigning for fairer treatment for Personal Independence Payments. The Department of Work and Pensions offer was overturned when challenged. It can often be difficult and clients can be left with reduced options. Years have to be returned pending the outcome of a decision. We have been able to help several clients resulting in them regaining their independence and of benefit. We have referred some of our clients and have been gathering qualitative information regarding the assessments. We have set up a local office so that citizens Advice can use

Would you recommend using Citizens Advice Gosport to others?



other Bureau in the country to persuade the Government

Fundraising and Thank You

As a charity, we rely on the kindness of the community we support and the generosity of local businesses.

We would like to publicly acknowledge the generosity of all those who have kindly donated food and toiletries which have been given to members of the community in urgent need.

We would also like to thank our local solicitors who have donated their time and resources to help clients in need of specialist legal advice.

We would like to say a big thank you to the following:

Donnelly & Elliott

Swain & Co

Churchers Solicitors

Biscoes Solicitors

Bill Charlton Solicitors

Waitrose and their customers

Morrisons plc

Gosport Ferry Company Ltd

**Gosport Borough Council, Macmillan and Healthwatch via Citizens
Advice Hampshire**

If you would like to support us, we are able to accept donations via cheque (written out to Gosport Citizens Advice Bureau) or you can visit our Just Giving page at www.justgiving.org.uk



Hampshire Macmillan Citizens Advice Service

**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

This service provides advice and support on non-medical matters for people affected by cancer, including their families and carers. We provide a specialist caseworker to advise clients on a variety of issues including benefits, debt and housing problems. In 2015/2016 the Gosport caseworker helped 146 clients.

"Irene was referred to our service for help with disability benefits and possible charitable grants. Irene lives alone and has suffered cancer since 2010. She was living alone and suffering deafness as well as mobility issues. Our caseworker helped her apply for a supersession of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) which triggered a new claim for Personal Independence Payment. As it was claimed under the special rules for people who are suffering from terminal cancer, it was expected that the benefit would be increased from the date of the request however the DWP "28 day follow on rule" meant that the benefit could not be paid for six weeks whereas a new claim in these circumstances is normally processed and paid within two weeks. Our caseworker felt this was unfair and discriminatory against existing DLA claimants whose condition worsened and they become terminally ill. Our caseworker lodged a complaint with our local DWP partnership manager and then to case managers at the DWP, eventually succeeding in discussing her claim with a casework manager. The manager admitted an error had been made and referred the case for review. The outcome of that review was that Irene was paid £363 lost benefit. However the 28 day follow on rule still applied. Our caseworker continued to campaign and wrote to Irene's MP, her own MP and to the Minister for Disability to highlight the apparent injustice of this rule. In April 2016 the 28 day rule was dropped and from that date existing DLA claimants whose circumstances change in this way will have their claims processed and paid within two weeks. Although Irene did not directly benefit from the removal of the 28 day rule she is pleased that terminally ill claimants will all be treated the same, whether they be new or existing claimants."



Healthwatch Hampshire is an independent consumer champion to gather and represent the views of service users and to influence change.

We are the Healthwatch champion for Gosport providing information, advice and signposting service on local health and care services. We also anonymously report clients' concerns about the quality of NHS health care and services. This enables Gosport residents to have a voice and invaluable support in navigating the complaints procedures should they wish via Healthwatch's Advocacy service.

This year we took Healthwatch to the community by taking part in the Safer Gosport Community day and asked for your thoughts on how you would improve the NHS by asking:

"If you were Health Minister for the day, which would be the top priority for you?"

Responses	No.
Seeing your GP	65
Early access to mental health services	33
Quality Hospital care	21
Quality Care at home	14
Improving the way Health and Social Care services work together	40

The Healthwatch Steering Group awarded Citizens Advice Gosport the prize of £100, to be spent for the benefit of staff and volunteers for achieving the most votes during Healthwatch Week.

More information on Healthwatch can be found at: www.healthwatchhampshire.co.uk



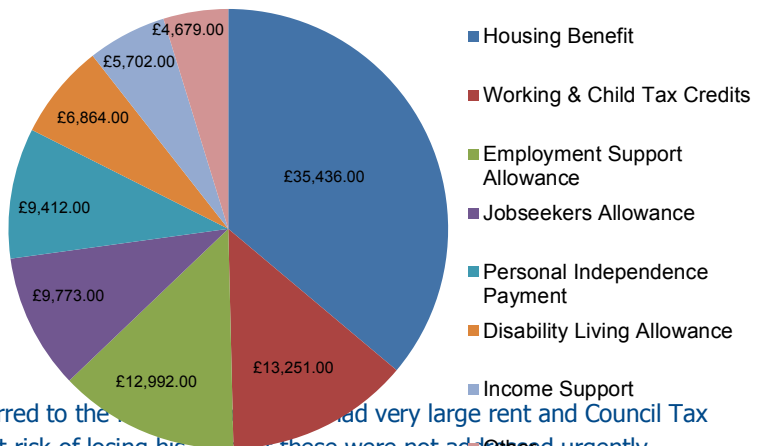
Josie (Name Changed) visited Citizens Advice Gosport to request advice on how to complain about treatment she said she had received at 2 NHS Hampshire Hospitals. She had a broken shoulder and first visited Gosport War Memorial Hospital where she was given an x-ray and her arm was placed in a sling with an appointment made for her to attend QA's outpatient fracture clinic, which she attended and was told the break was fine. 2 weeks after this Josie said she was seen by a consultant at QA who looked through her records and advised her arm should have been immobilised immediately by GWMH and an operation would have been needed. Josie was referred for CT scans and physiotherapy. This situation had left Josie and her family concerned for the future and in financial difficulties. Josie was provided with the steps she would need to follow in order to make a complaint and who to issue the complaint to. She was also provided with contact details for Action against

Money Advice Matters

K
justice.

The Money Advice Matters service is a homelessness prevention project funded by Gosport Borough Council, to support local clients whose debts are affecting their housing options. In 2015-16, the project helped 144 clients with 1,501 issues and £135,021 worth of debt. This is an average of £20,143 per client.

Benefits Gain



George* was referred to the service as he had very large rent and Council Tax arrears and was at risk of losing his home if these were not addressed urgently.

George is partially sighted and was in receipt of Income Support until 2013 when he was asked to switch from IS to Employment and Support Allowance. George had no income since 2013, living off his small savings which had all gone.

George was advised to start a new ESA claim and to ask for that claim to be backdated. George was also advised on how he could complain to the DWP regarding his transition from IS to ESA in 2013. He was also supported with completing a budget so he could put forward a repayment plan to his creditors.

This ESA claim was successful and George received a 3 month backdated payment of £1,169 (Maximum backdated payment). George was also able to negotiate an affordable repayment plan enabling him to pay his debts within a year.

Energy Project

Since 2008, Citizens Advice and energy regulator Ofgem have been involved in the Energy Best Deal (EBD) campaign. We have been providing advice to customers to make sure they are not paying more than they need to for their energy bills.

*Name has been changed

Energy Best deal (EBD)

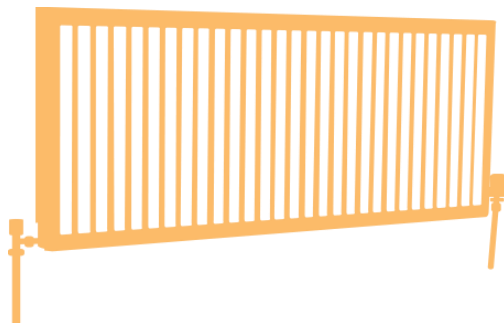
We were successful in obtaining funding to deliver Energy Best Deal sessions aimed at low income consumers and front-line staff who work with people at risk of fuel poverty.

Energy Best Deal Extra (EBDX)

We also received funding to enable us to employ an advisor to help clients compare energy prices, negotiate with providers and cut down the energy they use. Our advisor was able to save clients on average £343 either in the form of a one off saving or in annual costs.

Hitting The Cold Spots (HTCS)

HTCS fund was a project managed by Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Foundation. Its aim was to ensure local people in the community did not struggle with the cost of winter and could survive the cold months with a reasonable level of comfort and dignity. In 2015-16 we were able to secure £300 from the HTCS fund to provide one-off payments to clients who were unable to meet the costs of heating their homes during the winter.





GAIN looking back...moving forward

That was the title of the Gosport Advice & Information Network's (GAIN's) successful End of Project Celebration Event in November 2015. The 2 year Citizens Advice led partnership project has left a clear legacy in Gosport and some of the good connections between local organisations are still in place and growing a year on. The innovative project was cited as a national example of best practice by the Advice Services Alliance and the Big Lottery Fund – the latter flying a colleague in from Newcastle to attend the End of Project Celebration.

In terms of the local community, the GAIN Project supported 15 learners with free 'Make Your Money Go Further' workshops and 150 learners with free Computers for Beginners & Computer Drop-ins sessions. In 2015 it engaged 20 dedicated volunteers who between them learnt new skills and shared their existing skills too. The GAIN volunteers helped local people by volunteering for over 1400 hours - a real testament to their dedication to the project.

At an organisational level, many of the partnerships continue – regionally with Citizens Advice Hampshire's advice & support and more locally - Gosport Borough Council still refer local residents to 'We Can Read' as needed, Citizens Advice Gosport have forged new links with the CentrePeace Hub in the High Street and with Waterside Community Centre and further developed their links with JobCentre Plus and the Wheatsheaf Trust too.

GAIN's volunteers and the GAIN project team have moved into a range of new local volunteer and employment opportunities – some with Citizens Advice Gosport, others with Gosport Voluntary Action, Age Concern Gosport, the Thorngate Halls and Home-Start Gosport & Fareham.

So, although no further funding for the GAIN Project was secured, Citizens Advice Gosport and many of the GAIN partner organisations continue to work closely together. New initiatives have also been developed between Age Concern Gosport and Citizens Advice Gosport, also between Citizens Advice Gosport and the DWP to help unemployed local people. These partnerships will continue to grow – particularly where local bids are successful too – all demonstrating a positive legacy from the project.



Equality

The overall aim of the Stand up for Equality strategy is for the Citizens Advice service to live our principles and challenge discrimination, promote equality and value diversity.

Equality is for you, me and everyone – in society and in our

service. We have focused on 3 target areas of change, with progress in each helping to generate further change.

The target areas are:

One: Challenge discrimination through advice by:

- Identifying discrimination and human rights issues.
- Providing the equality advice people need.
- Empowering clients to act.

Two: Promote equality through advocacy by:

- Telling our clients' stories (where they consent).
- Ensuring those in authority do their job.
- Leading and influencing key policy on equality.

Three: Value diversity through our roles of employer, volunteer agency and contractor by:

- Providing visible and committed leadership.
- Developing a strategic approach to diversity management.
- Implementing equality competences.

The Value Of Our Volunteers.....

In 2015-16 our dedicated team of volunteers gave Citizens advice Gosport £300,336 worth of time. We are extremely grateful to the support of our volunteers without whom we would be unable to deliver the much needed advice service to the local community.

We continue to recruit new volunteers to the team. To enable us to offer the various methods of advice giving, they are trained in face to face advice, webchat and Adviceline. We aim to provide a service where clients can obtain advice at a time and using a method best suited to them. We also have a dedicated team of volunteer receptionists, admin, IT and research and campaigns volunteers.

The Value Of Volunteering.....

Volunteering can give more than the sense of doing something for the community. It can improve job prospects, help train for a new career and allow you to meet new people. One of our current volunteers has said:

"Since volunteering with Citizen's Advice Gosport I have gained valuable skills and abilities needed to increase employability; thanks to volunteering I cope better with interviews and have become successfully employed. I enjoy the varying tasks and responsibilities given to me, all of which have improved my confidence, and I like being valued as part of a team helping the local community. "



Recruitment

We have been advertising for new volunteers in a number of ways this year. These include a poster on the Gosport Ferry pontoon and a vinyl banner outside the office.

Volunteers can express an interest via our website, Do-It website or email and can also drop in or call. Anyone wanting to know more about the various roles on offer is more than welcome to pop in and ask to speak to us on an informal basis.



"A long time ago at a very difficult time in my life I sought help from Citizens Advice Gosport. I was listened to with sympathy and understanding and given some very straightforward advice which set me on the road to dealing with my situation. Now I'm retired and my life is stable I'm really happy to be able to volunteer, working with a wonderful group of people and hopefully helping others in the way I was helped all those years ago". **Linda, Advisor**

The Year Ahead...

What's next for Citizens Advice Gosport?

2016 is a very important year for us as we celebrate 75 years of providing advice and information to the local community. We will be holding a commemorative event later this year to celebrate the work of our volunteers and the support of our funders and local businesses.

We will also be evaluating the services we offer to ensure they best meet the needs of our clients and looking at ways we can enhance our value to the community by engaging in innovative projects.

We will continue to work with other organisations to improve the client journey and will be looking to save costs and resources by collaborative working with others.

There are exciting projects in the year ahead including the migration of our IT system to the Cloud for greater efficiency and cost effectiveness. We will be rolling out the use of QR codes to provide clients with a quick and efficient way of accessing our information systems and will also be developing a project with the DWP to help people back into work.

Although digital service delivery is an integral part of our way of working, we will continue to offer advice by means of our face to face drop in service in order to reach as many members of the community we can.

Contact Us

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